A black and white photograph of a man in a white shirt and dark vest sitting on a wooden chair. The chair is placed on a wooden platform or rooftop. The man is looking out over a dense cityscape with many buildings and a dome visible in the foreground. The title 'The Book of Jobs' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# The Book of Jobs

Poems About Work

*Edited by* Erin Murphy

## Editor's Note

We received more than 3,600 poetry submissions, which means, yes, this anthology about work was a lot of work! But it has truly been a labor of love to discover new voices along with new poems from familiar voices. We present them to you here alphabetically by author, with the exception of the proem and coda.

In these pages you will find poems about a wide range of jobs, from coal miners to caregivers, farmers to flight attendants, union organizers to Uber drivers, engineers to exterminators, teachers to tech workers, artists to athletes, doctors to dunking booth clowns. You will also find the work of nonhumans—bees, voles, meerkats, birds, earthworms, donkeys, whales, dolphins, and dogs—along with the natural world itself in which “a little earth pushes up/ a little plant life also.”

You'll read about unemployment, discrimination, incarceration, unsafe working conditions, and chattel slavery. You'll also discover humor, tenderness, joy, pride, and appreciation for those who “[show] up/ again/ again/ again.”

This is intended as a soft launch of *The Book of Jobs*. An Open Access edition is forthcoming through the Pennsylvania State University Libraries Open Publishing in 2026. It will be fully accessible and will include easily navigable HTML and PDF versions, making it more convenient for personal and classroom use.

Thank you to all contributors for their “work work.” Thank you also to *ONE ART* editors Mark Danowsky and Louisa Schnaithmann for their labor behind the scenes to bring this project to light.

I will close with these words from Ruben Quesada's “Poetry Is Bourgeois”:

On the way home from work  
On the northbound train  
I heard a young woman say  
Poetry is meant for the rich  
Poetry is for the privileged  
Poetry is for those who can spend  
Time to write words meant for change  
It is a life carelessly spent  
Writing. This is a lie.

This anthology is dedicated to all workers and to the memory of my “Grampa Jim” (1923-2008), who is honored in “Elegy for the 30-Year Career.”

Erin Murphy  
Editor, *The Book of Jobs: Poems About Work*  
[www.erin-murphy.com](http://www.erin-murphy.com)

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\*\*\*

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\*

Zita Murányi

**Painter**

My grandfather was a house painter.  
He rested his ladder against the edge  
of the clouds, dipped our home into the sky  
to paint the walls in soft, fading hues of turquoise.

\*\*\*

Sharon Perkins Ackerman

### **My Grandfather Dug Coal**

To be your granddaughter is to know  
the mountain as torn, plowed,  
blasted down to a darkness  
different than night,  
the kind where you dream  
seams of garnet left by stars.  
Not just a combustible hunk  
of cold, not just one way out,  
and a ceiling of shale ready  
to choke-damp the tunnel  
between you and your seven kids.

Because of you, the sky opens  
into lapis, sun showers the gliding chair  
where I sit and watch beetles  
clamber from small shafts,  
the voles soft ramble toward  
an exit I can never seem to find.  
You didn't know you'd die at thirty-three,  
you just kept  
swinging that big lamp  
toward the outbye at quitting time,  
burrowing up toward light.

\*

Susan Aizenberg

**Triangle Waist Company**

*Emma, aged 16*

I do fine work, my stitches delicate  
as an eyelash. This earns

me a spot by the window. Dirty  
as it is, some light filters

through. Rosie's clumsy, her fingers  
thick and fit only for rough

cloth stitched by gas lamp.  
We buy our own needles, pay

the electric for our machines.  
We rent the backless stools

we sit on. The bosses lock us in  
and we're searched

when we leave. Some girls  
do steal—buttons, ribbons,

even whole shirts. But not Rosie  
and me. Now all I have left

of her is the famous photo.  
She stands unsmiling

beneath hand-lettered signs  
tacked to the wall—

*No back-talk, no stalling in the Ladies.  
Don't come late. Don't leave early.*

*If you're not here Sunday,  
don't come back on Monday—*

beside her, and taller than she,  
towering stacks of unfinished cloth,

her day's quota, endless as the straw  
the miller's daughter had to spin.

\*

Derrick Austin

### **At the Grave of Patrick Kelly**

*I want my clothes to make you smile. —Patrick Kelly*

Bitten by bed bugs, clothes ruined,  
I ache to scorch the catwalk in your dress of Corvette red kisses.  
I'd never seen couture like yours,  
colorful, buoyant, and sage. Don't be sullen in sweet air.  
Strut, cry your buttons! Twirl, cry your bows!  
A swishy boy, I'd spin  
an antique globe my mother bought for me from the thrift store  
and where my finger landed was the place  
I could be happy. You, too,  
gave me a world to imagine without dullness or ignorance.  
Your epitaph is legible and clean.  
Blazing star, a metrocard, chrysanthemum, a pot of mint—  
On this fifth day of the fifth month, I promise not to get lost again  
when I return properly with a gift.

\*

John Peter Beck

### **The Photographer**

Before the Shroud  
of Turin, there was  
the veil of Veronica,  
who gave Jesus her cloth

to wipe his brow  
as he bore the cross.  
He returned the veil, filled  
that instant with the image

of his face. St. Veronica,  
often when I shoot a wedding,  
I think of you, that first  
photograph and your patronage.

I angle to catch all their smiles  
and hopes for future  
happiness. Later, sometimes,  
I must turn the camera

away to make sure I do not  
catch the drunken vacant stares,  
the simmering family arguments,  
or the small signs of infidelity now

or to come. You cannot blame  
the camera for what  
it captures or the film  
for the images now forever

held there. In the staged  
shots at the church,  
the wedding party  
line up and smile.

I tell them to say "sex"  
since it always gets them  
to laugh and smile. Sex works  
better than cheese anytime.

\*

Mihir Bellamkonda

**Volunteer Firefighter, Antigua**

Noon breaks red  
off obsidian cobbles and  
as the mountain smokes my eyes are open to a life  
that demands fire as a sanction for love.

The beer is salted. The sun erupts  
along darkening curves of shoulders. Sweat,  
sweat and sweet peppers to glance against the lips.  
Burning life, I will be as wood—

*perdón, perdón*, I have stumbled against a man  
reclined against the low yellow house,  
yellow bread in his mouth alongside apology  
for my sunblindness.

He pats the earth in welcome. I share  
my water. And for a time we speak as birds,  
our language more sound than definition.  
And there is beauty in the way we look at the ground.

A bull dances in flames  
between two frowning heroes  
on his shirt. Underneath: *Bomberos Voluntarios de Antigua*.  
A long minute, ten, and we companions part.

Evening unites blue  
the heavens and earth;  
there is rain as hummingbirds' wings,  
perceptible only through softness,

and I believe as I believe in uncomprehension  
nothing in this wide green world is on fire.

\*

Joan Bernard

### **My Mother Taking Over My Father's Package Store**

One drink ushering in the next,  
he couldn't see the red in the ledger,  
the stack of bills on the desk.

They had four kids to feed and dress.  
It was up to her to make their lives better.  
One drink ushering in the next

increased her distress  
at meetings with creditors,  
at the stack of bills on the desk.

She ran the store with success,  
hoping he'd stop his surrender  
to one drink ushering in the next.

Long days absent of rest,  
she needed relief from the pressure,  
the stack of bills on the desk.

She wanted to give back his business,  
if only he'd stay sober,  
that each drink ushering in the next,  
wouldn't breed bill after bill on the desk.

\*

Jennifer Blackledge

## Remote Layoffs

When little moons bloomed  
next to names  
in the team chat  
we knew

then we burrowed  
into the directory and  
one by one blindly  
felt our way through  
the company tree.

Signal sent, wait for response,  
either *I'm OK* or  
the automatic boomerang message  
that lodges in your chest:  
*no such account exists.*

In bedrooms and basements,  
we pinged people and  
rechecked our electronic keys.  
Does this portal open?  
Still welcome here?

Then back to names:  
*Are you ok? You there?*  
Furtive and urgent,  
we took stock,  
like a meerkat chirrups  
*Danger, man down* to  
what's left of the colony.

\*

Todd Boss

### The Farmer Speaks to Her Children of Work

And the farmer's children, weary from the fields in the middle of a long, straight windrow, cry:

*Speak to us of work, and why we have to do it,*

And the mother reaches for the appropriate memorized chapter of Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* and clears her throat,

And the angels of that village gather round as she quotes, errorlessly, in the imperious tone she reserves for reciting poetry:

*You work that you may keep pace with the Earth, and the soul of the Earth, etc., as it is written,*

But lo, it does little good, for the kids continue to complain of itching clothes, and their red hay-fevered, watering eyes, with much rending of garments and throwing down of gloves, so vexed are they,

And interrupt her vociferously, refusing to do another lick of a chore not of their choosing in the humid hundred-degree heat of mid-July (their friends all gathered at the river, sprayed by waterfalls), while the John Deere baler kicks dusty 60-pound twine-wrapped hunks of harvest at them where they climb among the others they've already stacked on that flat-bed wagon:

*Why!* they plead through tears—

So she shifts gears, tries a smile, and summons from the cloudless sky a length of Lutheran hymnody they too know by heart by now:

*Hark the voice of Jesus crying, who will go and work today?*

*Fields are ripe and harvests waiting; who will bear the sheaves away?*

Loud and long the mother calleth bundled lines of poetry:

*Who will answer, gladly saying, "Here am I, send me, send me?"*

And thereupon the children settle back into a rhythm not unlike the one that rocks their laden wagonload to the barn's packed-earth approach,

Up which ramp, crookedly, heavily, backwards,

Into the mow's hushed cathedral tent,

The rewards of generations of labors went.

The tractor knocks dead,

And an 80-acre blessing of silence sloshes over the canopies of the farmyard trees, and stays—restorative and sweet on the breeze as the slug from a jug of ice-cold lemonade.

Wordlessly they worship in that barn-swallow-swept shade till the work is done, the weary wooden wagon empty, and another winter month's worth of livestock feed stored away like faith won the hard way. Like money made but saved. Like seed.

\*

Mark Brazaitis

## Laundry

Hector runs the laundry room.  
He speaks to us from behind a counter.  
Machines whirl behind him.  
The room is hot and thick with humidity  
and he's sweating,  
but it's okay, he says,  
because—hey—it's cold outside.  
He likes his job; it's one of the best  
an inmate can have, he says.  
“A lot of times,” he says, “you don't have nothing  
to do.”

He must be thirty-two, thirty-five.  
His face is lined, however,  
and his black, curly hair  
is sprinkled with gray  
or maybe only with lint.

He explains his work:  
He gives each incoming inmate  
a bed roll (a sheet, a blanket, two towels),  
five shirts, five pairs of underwear,  
five pairs of socks,  
five pairs of pants.  
He gives each a “hygiene kit”:  
a disposable razor,  
a tiny can of shaving cream,  
a tube of toothpaste,  
a toothbrush.  
If an inmate wants anything else—floss,  
mouthwash, balm for chapped lips  
or dry hands—  
he has to buy it  
at the commissary.

Over the course of a week,  
Hector and the men he oversees  
wash the entire prison population's clothes,  
each article of which is marked, in black,  
with the inmate's number.

Hector gazes at our group,  
wonders if we have questions.  
I sense he wants to keep his audience,  
so I ask him three.  
He works, he says, eight to ten hours a day.  
He makes 40 cents an hour.  
He spends most of his money on phone calls home.

A phone call, he adds, costs \$3.15  
for fifteen minutes.

I calculate: to make a half an hour call,  
he must work fifteen hours and 45 minutes.

He asks for more questions.  
No one has them. The group  
shuffles out of the room.  
I linger. He catches my eye, says,  
“Every week, if I can, I call my daughter.  
She’s eight. I’ll ask her questions, but  
sometimes we don’t have much to say  
to each other.”

I offer sympathetic words.

“It’s okay, man, it’s okay.  
As long as she’s on the other end,  
I don’t mind paying for silence.  
Besides, every so often,  
I can hear her breathe.”

\*

Gloria Bromberg

**The Addiction Counselor Considers Her Job While Reading *Leaves of Grass* on the Bus**

Last night, two hours overtime, waiting  
for the ambulance, completing admission forms

in hard copy, chart notes online. I check *danger to self*,  
unsure if that refers to the despondent client

or the culture. Or both. So many suicides,  
accidental ODs, each time back from vacation

I ask *Who died?* This morning, so tired  
I could miss my stop & ride all the way

to Fillmore at Broadway, look down  
at the bright & blue Marina glistening

at noon. I could walk to Marina Green,  
sit on the grass, unwrap tuna

on whole wheat, sip my Diet Coke; maybe  
nap in the sunlight, breathe deeply, commune

with the lawn, be at one with every atom  
of every blade of grass, feel deep & abiding

connections with animal, vegetable, mineral,  
then return to my job a little late

but with renewed appreciation  
for the interdependence of all things.

What really happens is, I get off  
at my stop, dodge a dealer

hustling crack in front of McDonald's.  
At my building, I wave a magnetized ID

across a pad & the front door  
buzzes open. I unlock my office door

with a nonreproducible key, and before  
taking off my coat or opening the blinds,

I boot up & log on: dependence  
on the machine, the network, departmental

applications. Incessant information, mechanization,  
lies and half-truths, all reducible

to a microchip—the human element  
once, now twice removed. I can't start

from Paumanok, I can't cross Brooklyn Ferry,  
I don't hear America singing. I hear America

crashing in on itself, shooting up, barfing up,  
living down and out under the freeway, the body

electronic, transmitted via cable, satellite,  
gigabit fiber, a spear of summer grass

on a screen in the privacy  
of our own rooms.

\*

Sarah Browning

### Oh radiant happiness

A large man walks into Zig Zag River Runners on a Thursday afternoon, books a Saturday group trip. *Name? Steve Drown. You're kidding, right? Haha no. Scared of water, too. But—ya know—my conference buddies want to give it a go.*

Saturday morning—as every Saturday morning—I stand by my boat holding my paddle aloft when Steve Drown comes up over the bank and spots me. *Let's get in Sarah's boat!* I just barely shake my head... as they come stumbling down to the muddy shore: six men and one woman, all white, middle aged. We'll have an uneven boat, but that's OK. I'll manage.

On the slow, quiet stretch of the Wenatchee, we practice our strokes and my commands. We sit quietly a moment as the other rafts catch up. *So, what kind of convention are you here for?* Making small talk. A small silence. Then the lone woman chuckles: *They're in underground novelties. What, sex toys?* One of the men: *Haha—no, we're undertakers.* Longer pause—I've got a boat full of undertakers and their leader's name is Steve Drown. I could not make this up. I will dine out on this story—as I do now, writing it—the rest of my life.

*Haha—OK, then!* And we're off. Steve Drown slips off the boat twice—the only one tipped overboard all day—and twice I haul him in. I have grown strong, in this new way.

We stop for lunch above a small dam and as we eat, I learn where they're each from: Des Moines, Minot, San Antonio. After we clean up our sandwich wrappers and chip bags and thank the Zig Zag support staff it's time for portage—carrying the boat a few short yards around the dam, to hit the river once more. *OK, four on each side,* I direct, and grab the rope. *Oh, this we're good at!* They bust out laughing all at once and just like that I get the joke, as they hoist the rubber boat to their broad shoulders—no remains, no burden—just our joy, one more glorious day on the river.

\*

Mary Lou Buschi

### **Today's Objective**

Students will experience *synesthesia* by tasting a birdcall, touching blue with their index fingers, while witnessing language as shape form from the mouths of their classmates. They will accomplish this by memorializing the dead in groups of four. Group A will carve a Chinese jade grave suit with only one verbal prompt. Group B will cut a diamond out of the dead—keeping in mind the importance of facets and how light will enter. Group C will construct a rise of hummingbird wings by following written directions independently. Data will be collected on sheets of origami, while students showcase their projects during a gallery walk where they will practice social skills that are considered “normal.” Students will be able to define *normal*—be it behavior or expected patterns of probability distribution, by solving for “x” within the context of a problem; be it 33, banana, heart, or gun.

\*

Lauren Camp

### **Manifesto**

All afternoon the gilded bees rocket around  
this ozone. Shift fragrance, build heat.  
The bees' sugar-dense eyes, the tease  
of the river bend, the vascular twist through  
tall stems. What do I know of such effort? I get up  
and work. I sleep. I don't save the world.  
The insects tissue velvet marrow.  
They etch a future on their bodies.  
Is it baptism? lust? What takes place  
means the next plant credentialed. Our sating.  
The mouth wants its sweetness, the heart  
its leaf veins. Or the mouth wants its secrets,  
the heart its familiar, its temporary shelter.  
Another summer fizzles from a nozzle.

\*

Gary Ciocco

### **It's Academic**

The student has a one-point-six  
but pipes up, has good things to say,  
you know.

The student has a one-point-six  
and doesn't know who Robert Pirsig  
was, how he said the best students are  
always failing, in a counter-cultural  
classic, and how you're not sure what he  
meant with that line, or the book overall,  
so you don't quote him anymore,  
though you think perhaps you still could  
and perhaps you still should.

The student has a one-point-six  
and has never heard of Route 66,  
which may be for the best, as you are  
not sure whether there are any  
kicks to be had out there anymore.

The student takes a test, gets a grade,  
ups his GPA, and does not protest.  
And you wake up again, and wonder  
why, grades be damned, he does  
not seem to protest anything at all,  
why social justice seems condensed  
into a course now, and what kind  
of humanities professors again go  
gently but fervently into the  
Irish bar, railing to be reborn,  
dying of thirst.

\*

Andrew Collard

### **Fit Check**

Define *uniform*: coveralls, dress blues, apron with pockets  
functionally useless. Our bravest face, our gladiator drag,  
second-hand khakis and a golf shirt stitched with the corporate  
insignia of FYE or Coldstone. Everyday told to be decent, to lose  
our shapes inside of what we didn't ask for, selling movies,  
serving food or cooking it, assembling a car we couldn't afford  
even with our discount, clad in bowties, straight-ties, nylons,  
our scrubs in assorted shades. Somehow, we manage to make it  
look so good, the broken-heel best intention, the scuffed jean  
and secret hole-ridden sock we don as if in protest of  
the daily masquerade. We clear away the leaves, scatter sawdust  
on the schoolroom floor strutting in our worst vest, bodice,  
government issue coat, embroidered. This, our first recital,  
game face, our cover song pitched for someone else's range,  
the title that was never ours to which we must respond—  
an inheritance, the disquiet that inhabits us by dawn or later,  
post-shift, returning to find our children sunk already into sleep.

\*

Geraldine Connolly

### **A Woman's Labor**

I have shopped and cooked,  
wandered long dazzling aisles  
for shiny apples, plump golden  
peaches, cloves to spice the chicken.  
I have chopped and sliced, grated  
and peeled. Here at the counter  
    I mixed and stirred,  
        great chunks of my life falling  
into stews like raw meat,  
great pillows of morning and rafts  
of afternoon floating into the sea  
as I repaired and mended,  
dug and weeded, falling  
on my knees to clip mint and basil.

I nursed and tended,  
cleaned up blood and spit,  
stood and the sink scrubbing.  
I polished and buffed, hemmed  
and basted, folded and stacked.  
Children hung on me like  
small animals pecking and clawing.  
I ruffled my feathers. I flew  
on to the next task. This was  
the work I thought I wanted,  
the good of it always vanishing  
as new work rose up. And the children  
grew into their strength and left  
the family table, trying their wings,  
as they squawked and screamed  
at me, knocked over vases, left  
the door open as they  
flew out into the world.

\*

Ginny Connors

### **Pack Horse Librarian**

*The Pack Horse Library Project was a WPA program that employed women to travel on horseback or mule to deliver library books to folks in remote areas of the Appalachian Mountains.*

They call her The Book Woman. A hundred miles or so each week, she and her horse, Bonny Bee, climb hills, splash through creeks, travel with their load of books over rocky paths. The roadcut rises high, the steep bank eroded by runoff. Eastern Kentucky. Pay is 28 dollars a month. Teacher pauses class when the children begin to shout, *The Book Woman is here! The Book Woman!* Fourteen books handed out, twelve collected back. On horseback, The Book Woman fords Cut Shin Creek, her feet raised high—the water’s bone-chilling. Brings the recipe scrapbook to Katie Block, sixteen years old and newly married. Burboo with Mashed Potatoes. Green Bean Casserole. Stack Cake. Supposing the girl can get the food, she’ll try these out. Visits Hal Barton, laid up with a gunshot wound. Reads to him, leaves him a magazine: *True Detective*. She’s got a copy of *Huckleberry Finn* for Jon McAllister. He’s read two other Twain books—wants more. Book Woman crosses a deer track winding up from the creek bed. Hears the soft whistle of a meadowlark, spies one perched on a twig, feathers ruffled by breeze. Visits Granny Smithers, gives her another reading lesson. Continues on. Pauses to watch a swirl of golden leaves fling themselves to the muddy earth. She stops by Margaret Alred’s cabin, reads bible passages to her. The old woman is half-blind and her cabin’s cold. She’s grateful for company. Book Woman rekindles the stove, shares a bite of cornbread, a sip of huckleberry tea. Must start back.

\*

## The Dunk Tank Clown

Somehow I got roped into being the dunk tank clown at this year's company party. "I thought you guys got Bob from accounting to do this," I said. "That was last year," said Chad. "You're next on the list." "Why do I have to wear a suit?" I said. "It's all part of the fun," said Brad. I sat there in the tank as they lined up the kids. "Why again do I have to talk trash?" I asked. "It's your job as the clown to antagonize a little. Get the kids riled up," said Trent. "I'll try," I said. "That's the spirit," said Brad. "Take your best shot," said Chad, handing balls to all the children. "I thought it was supposed to be one at a time," I said. "Shut up and talk trash," said Trent. "Fine," I said, composing myself. "You'll never hit that target, you gassy fribbles," I yelled at the children. "You're nothing but a bunch of dunderheads and blunderbusses." The balls started flying. "You're all a bunch of frothy milksops, mumpsimus scamps, pediculus lickspittles. You'll never get me." Eventually someone hit the target and I went down, hearing the soft explosion of applause from under water. I opened my eyes expecting the muffled scintillation of sunlight, the idiot faces of children, my coworkers pointing and laughing, but I only saw darkness, vast and incalculable darkness. I quickly attempted to brace myself on the side of the tank and found that there was no tank. In fact, there was absolutely nothing. Instinctually, I swam upward and finally, just as I was beginning to panic, broke the surface. I gasped for air under the flattening gaze of a setting sun. As I treaded water I looked all around me, and noticed a series of small fires and a few makeshift huts on the shore. I swam toward them and when I reached land there was a man in a ravaged suit waiting for me. "Melvin, I thought that was you," he said. I looked closely at him. "Bob?" I asked. "Is that you?" He had lost a substantial amount of weight and was covered in gashes. He held a three-headed rabbit in one hand and extended the other to me. "It's good to see you," he said, shaking my hand. "I was wondering who was going to be next." "HR said you found alternative employment in Des Moines," I said. "More money, better hours." "They'll say the same thing about you," he said, placing his hand on my shoulder. "Now come on, help me collect some more firewood and I'll tell you everything you need to know to survive in this world."

\*

Heather Coughlin

## **Résumé**

Maybe the first poem  
about work  
was a résumé.

Fresh box of ivory linen paper  
specially purposed,  
a blank canvas.

Headliner goals,  
direct but lofty titles,  
designed as colorful fishing lure

to show and tell  
our firsts made seconds,  
promotions, blue ribbon bullets.

Education, embolded  
for impact and allusion,  
inked currency, keep reading

line breaks enjambed,  
left and right  
aligned.

Experience ellipsis,  
we've designed, managed, delivered  
proof points, results.

Active verbs chosen  
for efficiency and imagery,  
our wares to sell.

Passions, a slice of person  
are the postscript,  
which just made the cut.

But today, we resume  
a science of keywords  
fed first to bots

and I worry  
our poems will be lost  
forever to their logic.

\*

Barbara Crooker

### **Patty's Charcoal Drive-In**

First job. In tight black shorts  
and a white bowling shirt, red lipstick  
and bouncing ponytail, I present  
each overflowing tray as if it were a banquet.  
I'm sixteen and college-bound;  
this job's temporary as the summer sun,  
but right now, it's the boundaries of my life.  
After the first few nights of mixed orders  
and missing cars, the work goes easily.  
I take out the silver trays and hook them to the windows,  
inhale the mingled smells of seared meat patties,  
salty ketchup, rich sweet malteds.  
The lure of grease drifts through the thick night air.  
And it's always summer at Patty's Charcoal Drive-In--  
carloads of blonde-and-tan girls  
pull up next to red convertibles,  
boys in black tee shirts and slick hair.  
Everyone knows what they want.  
And I wait on them, hoping for tips,  
loose pieces of silver  
flung carelessly as the stars.  
Doo-wop music streams from the jukebox,  
and each night repeats itself,  
faithful as a steady date.  
Towards 10 p.m., traffic dwindles.  
We police the lot, pick up wrappers.  
The dark pours down, sticky as Coke,  
but the light from the kitchen  
gleams like a beacon.  
A breeze comes up, chasing papers  
in the far corners of the darkened lot,  
as if suddenly a cold wind had started to blow  
straight at me from the future--  
I read that in a Doris Lessing book--  
but right now, purse fat with tips,  
the moon sitting like a cheeseburger on a flat black grill,  
this is enough.  
Your order please.

\*

Jim Daniels

### **Upon Googling My First Job Looking for Evidence**

*Payphone Location Information: Marlinga's Party Store, 21497 Ryan Road, Warren, MI*

Only one result, and it's wrong, unless  
the payphone could be unearthed beneath  
the cracked parking lot of the check-cashing joint  
now on the premises. I lifted that impossibly  
heavy receiver the night we were robbed.  
I wish I could hold it in my hand again, throbbing  
at the front door to tell the operator  
we'd just been robbed—nowhere for nostalgia  
to drape its gaudy curtain, no sepia-toned  
stills of children's hands smudging the glass  
of the candy counter. *Hey*, I shout at my screen,  
*aren't you supposed to save everything?*

I worked there three years and never posed  
for a photo. Even the cops left their camera  
in the car that night I thought I was going  
to die, a pimply kid, my voice changing forever  
under the cold timbre of a gun? My favorite job—  
cute kids, Polish ham, jelly donuts (paczki),  
bakery bread delivered daily from Hamtramck,  
reliably desperate but polite alcoholics,  
sweeping spray of smokers fumbling change  
on the counter, perfect lines of rigid iced soldiers  
of beer in stocked coolers, neighbors with their tabs—  
paper-clipped pieces of scratch paper they rarely  
paid back—stuffed in a cigar box that, like them,  
had seen better days.

C'mon kids, give it up on-line for sweet memories  
of Lucky Suckers, Bit-O-Honeys, Milky Ways,  
blue Satellite bubble gum. I know you're out there  
on your magic screens, your unswallowable  
and swallowable tablets, grandchildren on your laps  
as you tell them about Marlinga's, the sweet, patient boy  
behind the counter who took your sticky change,  
wished you a good day as if you'd just spent real money.

The owner, Ziggy, dead fifty years. He put a quarter away  
for every hour I worked and gave it to me for college  
when I left. What I wouldn't give to get him on the line,  
talking around a hunk of baloney. Would he remember  
when we lay together on the floor, lullaby guns to our heads,  
and the robbers told us to close our eyes?

If only the phone was still there, sturdy  
as an ancient safe at the bottom of one  
of our Great Lakes. Nostalgia drapes  
its curtain, and I light that curtain  
in the burn barrel behind the store  
sending smoke signals into polluted factory skies  
hoping someone gets the message. I burned  
those IOUs in the barrel when he sold the store.

A quarter for every hour versus a gun to my head.  
Calling collect. Accepting charges. Looking through  
binders of mug shots for a clue. Ziggy said  
*Hell yeah, it's an emergency, we've just been  
robbed.* My first one. I walked home  
in the dark, jingling the change left  
in my pocket, no one to call.

\*

Colin Dardis

### **24 Hour Concern**

When two hitmen  
work different shifts,  
you know they are going  
to get you eventually.

The dayshift guy,  
he works in the streets,  
is hidden in the faces  
of strangers and friends  
alike, quick on the draw  
with a sneer.

The nightshift one hides  
under your pillow and waits.  
In the morning you wake  
with a crick in your neck  
from the barrel of his gun.  
His bullets shoot  
into your dreams.

\*

Shira Dentz

**Aubade Again**

Streets shine  
like seal skin.  
I long for a  
handful of  
miscellaneous  
textures &  
shapes,  
though they'd be  
extraneous  
to the elephant  
in the room.  
This is a  
work poem  
yearning  
to be lyric.  
We take small  
steps on pebbles  
laid out to cross the  
lake mirroring a  
boundaryless  
vat of grief.  
Needles plague  
the dock, pink  
linen spills,  
a waterfall of  
blush, an ode  
ahead of time.

\*

Dolo Diaz

### **Wood Harvesting**

He worked for my father.  
Tumbled down the mountain cliff  
in the shovel logger.

He was an only child  
my father had to tell his father.

\*

Mitch Ditkoff

### **My Uber Driver**

My Uber driver, I just found out,  
sings in a Mexican rock band.  
'80s covers. Spanish only.  
That's why he asks me to sit in the front seat with him.  
If I sit in the back, he explains,  
the State Police will impound his grey Toyota  
and he'll never get to gig again.  
They will keep his car for two months behind a barbed wire fence  
next to a field where many dogs bark.  
35,000 pesos it will cost him if he ever wants to see his vehiculo.  
You see, the Regional Governor, owns the local taxi company  
—100 shiny green and white cabs.  
That's why the State Police, in leather boots,  
stop Uber drivers in my little town,  
but only if their passengers are sitting in the back seat.  
Not today, however.  
I am sitting in the front.  
Like his best friend.

\*

Liz Dolan

### **Picking Up Steam**

My father was a car knocker,  
the handmaiden of the locomotive  
as it rested in the Oak Point yard  
enroute to Hartford and New Haven.  
After his callused fingers secured  
her pistons, bolts, and screws,  
he'd rap his iron wrench  
on her corrugated door signaling  
her safety to the engineer.

Royal, magisterial, her black-velvet flanks  
Illuminated by the fat summer moon,  
she'd snort smoke, whistling her high soprano,  
Tirnagog kicking up pebbles,  
looping the American miles.  
And my father, an immigrant,  
ebonized by her grease,  
a part of it, a part of it, a part of it.

\*

Sean Thomas Dougherty

### **Smoking on Break: Diptych: Third Shift**

And there is a full moon, blood red from an eclipse, the earth casting shadows even at 3 AM, and I am cupping my hands against the cold spring wind to light a cigarette, before I open the door and walk back into my facility and walk the hall to make sure everyone is asleep or if anyone needs my help, or woke up not knowing where they are, or even my name. To reassure the lost, to guide them back to bed, and I think what would it be like to be the moon, guiding ships home to shore or harbor, and how during his time stationed on the Korean border my friend Steve told me that he was told to cup his cigarette with his hands, in case some brave sniper might want to take a shot at him. Or the way a priest will light a candle and then cup the flame. Oh, moon who now is cupping their hands around me as I stand in the night wind, who is cupping this earth and sending you her long shadow?

But there is work to do: paperwork, and mopping, prepping breakfast, and then a man has peed his bed. I guide him to the shower as he curses me, I must gather his sheets, and chuck pads and take them to the laundry room. I have to help him dress and ease him back to bed. And I close the door and hear him sigh himself to sleep, speaking in low and wisping tones. I do all this with trained detachment. All of this is labor. Do not be fooled. The moon is a cold lifeless place whose light is an illusion borrowed from the sun. But as I bend to pick up my bucket, I look up and out the hall window. I look across the yard to see a herd of does with fawns. They stand perfectly still. Their hides mottled with moonlight, glistening like apparitions, and for a moment I believe I could die right here happy if they are the last thing I will behold on this holy earth.

\*

Zach Eddy

### **Aluminum Apple**

For thirty years of service, they hand you inedible fruit.  
A mantelpiece memento for the family to remember,  
factory-made, alloyed, and mass-produced offsite  
from recycled scrap aluminum. I wonder what he thought  
when he peered through the metal window frames  
of the Ingot Plant, surrounded by so much tree fruit.  
1977's *Wenatchee World* reads, "Alcoa Cancer  
Studies Show No Cause for Concern at Local Plant."  
Outside, a swallow lands on a metal rooftop.  
His obituary says, "50 years doing what he loved."  
In the hospital, he ripped out his own breathing tube.  
Mike kept his apple by the television. Now Mother takes it out  
on holidays, resting it next to his canned ashes, polished  
so bright a distorted reflection appears, a crystal ball,  
the aluminum apple, a tumor, or a metal heart shining.

\*

E.M. Palitha Edirisooriya

**May 21**

*Translated by samodH Porawagamage and Kasun Pathirage*

Today's first ride was to the courts. A husband's taken a loan, fled abroad and the wife's been served papers. She went with me there. I had to give my ID and pay her bail money too. Such are our priceless services. I only charged her the money for the ride.

NOTE: This poem is from මාවතේ ත්‍රිචල් ජීවිතේ (*Life on Three Wheels*), a collection of poems exploring the subculture of Sri Lankan taxis, known as three-wheelers.

\*

Terri Kirby Erickson

### **Immigration Raid, 1978**

In the Polynesian restaurant where I briefly worked, I was one of two non-Asian servers and as such, of great potential value should the immigration paddy wagon roll around to collect all the Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese employees they could round up, none of whom were supposed to be working anyplace in the U.S.A., and deport them, toot suite. It only happened once when I was there, but Diane and I were left with every table in a restaurant full of hungry patrons, so we divided the room in half while the rest of the waitstaff, all male, scrambled to reach the basement before agents swarmed the building looking for people they referred to as *illegals*. Panic was palpable, even worse than the time Duong, who lost a few of his fingers to some sort of explosive device during the Viet Nam War (when he was just a kid) set one of the fake palm trees (scattered around the dining room) on fire while making bananas flambé at a customer's table. It was pandemonium for about two minutes after all the Asian waiters vanished, but Diane and I managed to settle everybody down by acting like it was no big deal, thankful for mai tais and volcanos that had already been delivered. But as tough as it was up top, it must have been terrifying downstairs with all those hardworking men huddled together in the dark, wondering what would happen to them and their families if they were found, although by some miracle they were not and none of our customers gave them away, either. After all, it was the only eatery in town where they could order flaming desserts and cocktails the size of birdbaths. And sometimes mercy isn't just what we beg for, but something we actually receive.

\*

Yvonne Estrada

### **People Say “I Could Never Do Your Job”**

1.

It's tricky picking people up  
and off the street.  
We double glove, mask,  
and face shield to restrain  
a psychotic, combative spitter  
that doesn't know why  
they don't want to go  
to the hospital.

2.

We watch a triage nurse unwind  
a crusty, lymph-stained gauze  
from a swollen lower extremity.  
Humans can be fragrant,  
not sweet and heady like flowers,  
but body-slam repulsive  
in a gut-wrenching gag kind of way.

3.

We never have to think about what to wear,  
our boots are a tax write-off.  
Sometimes we get a discount at King Taco,  
or Coffee Bean. Little kids wave at us.  
We remember a teacher told us  
you know you are burned out  
when you can't treat a patient  
like your family member.

\*

Leila Farjami

### **The Sower's Lament**

I soak seeds in straw sacks,  
string them from beams.  
Before spring, I plow paddies,  
harrow clods of dung.

Wading in *gaalesh*,  
clay grips my knees.  
My palms blister from weeding,  
I harvest the heavens bare-fingered.  
Moonlets fall into my hands.

I dream of early summer—seedlings lush,  
eels curling through my legs, sun gilding  
my strands, another baby slung at my waist.

All night, my man watches the fields,  
torch raised to wild boars, jackals.

Lonesome, I sing my young  
to sleep, each warm  
as a bread loaf beneath the sheets—

*Far is the land, and far my home.  
Bring me back, O Light's Creator.  
Bring me home, that I may die—  
Die beside my mother and sister.*

No one sees my teardrops,  
hears my cradle-lament, *gaareh-sari*.

No one hushes, pats my back  
but my Mama's ghost.

\*

Arvilla Fee

### **Working Hands**

I stare at Dad's hands  
perched on my teacher's desk  
like two plump pigeons  
and my cheeks flush hot;  
Dad is wearing his best blue shirt  
and a pair of unripped jeans,  
but he couldn't clean his nails?  
Not even for a conference?  
Grease, the labor of a thousand cars,  
lies under each nail, black half moons  
shedding inky light on the lives we lead—  
single trailer, cracked kitchen counters,  
a front door that never shuts  
without a shove from the hip.  
My teacher smiles and shakes Dad's hand,  
her creamy skin like fine silk stockings  
against his burlap palms.  
At home, Dad cooks steaks for dinner,  
and as he cuts the tender pieces,  
he nods to my plate and says,  
*that was a '57 Chevy.*

\*

Gary Fincke

### **Advice, for Men, on Ironing**

Start with the clothes that need the coolest iron.  
For shirts, the collar first, both sides, before  
Pressing the back and front of sleeves, working  
The torso next until it's wrinkle-free.

For pants, the pockets first, then waistband, butt  
And crotch. The legs go last, inseams aligned,  
The material carefully stretched smooth.  
Remember to hang each item quickly,

And always give them space because cooling  
Sets the press. You've worked the wrinkles away,  
Taken all the creases out like Botox.  
So don't, when finished, undo the iron's work.

Still, you'll need to speak with the elderly  
To learn about dampening shirts by hand.  
Women only, of course, alone all day  
In the house, tiny radios playing

The last white crooners who fronted big bands.  
Those widows will explain how they once heard  
The legends of ironing, the flat surface  
Heated on wood-fired stoves, scorching common.

Or the myths of irons warmed by kerosene,  
Appliances like lanterns pressed against  
A husband's shirt sleeve. And just when you think  
You realize what a hundred years can change,

One of those beautiful crones will insist  
There were irons, once, that ran on gasoline,  
Household helpers so dangerous to use  
Those implements, some days, took casualties.

\*

Ann Fisher-Wirth

## Women's Wear Daily

*for my mother*

After her parents die and her sister dies  
and the man she loves ships out  
to she doesn't know where—  
for the Army censors make lace of his letters—

she sells the house in Omaha,  
takes her third-grade daughter out of school,  
moves to New York to study fashion,  
and starts her job at the magazine.

Today, she has stayed late at work. Her scarlet nails  
click on the typewriter keys. It's hot,  
her navy-blue polka-dot *crêpe de chine* dress  
clings to her legs, she smooths her damp hair

away from her forehead. Soon she'll leave,  
take the subway to her daughter  
in White Plains. The landlady will join them,  
they'll have *petits fours* and ice cream.

Suddenly she hears blaring horns  
and shrieks of rapture.  
She rushes to the window. Tickertape  
fills the sky. Below her in the streets

people pour from every building.  
She turns on the radio, listens,  
puts her head on her desk,  
and sobs,

alongside her typed description  
of a bride in Brooklyn,  
the dress of *peau de soie*,  
lilies-of-the-valley the bouquet.

\*

Molly Fisk

## Swimming

*naiad: one of the nymphs who lived in and  
presided over brooks, springs, and fountains*

That story about Diana Nyad someone told me,  
how she occupies her mind on the English Channel swim  
or the hours between Cuba and Key West by singing  
in her head—oh, don't we all?—the entire Beatles *oeuvre*  
in the order those songs appear on their albums,  
and when she gets to The End she starts over, with I Saw Her  
Standing There again, in a shark cage or not, her skin  
puckered with dehydration and salt, the cold slowly creeping  
into her marrow, her lungs working as hard as or harder than  
those of John, Paul, George, and Ringo if they'd stood on stage  
and sung the whole list in a row one after another, too,  
their lives flashing before them as our lives can when we catch  
the first chords of Yellow Submarine or Love Me Do,  
what high school gym we were dancing in and with whom,  
or which brand of rolling papers some hippie dexterously turned  
and licked, and does Diana sometimes pray that a submersible  
will rise from below to buoy her or is she stronger than that,  
does she stay focused on the notes and not let her mind wander  
into kelp fronds and manatees, the deep melodies of blue whales,  
what conviction does it take to lift one hand from the sea:  
wrist, elbow, shoulder, fluid, turning her chin to breathe,  
and then the other hand, in the 47th hour of what will turn out  
to be 53 before her toes in their neoprene grip the edge of Key West  
and she's not hallucinating, or only partly, the voices  
calling her name, the afternoon sun refracted by ten thousand  
pinpricks of white sand, we saw the video, how she waded  
through the crowds, her legs still holding her up, her smile  
a hundred and ten miles, thirty years, and five attempts wide.

\*

Jennifer L. Freed

### **My Student Asks Me How I Know**

that north is north. How,  
if I look at a map of the world, do I decide  
which puzzled shape is home?  
And in the picture book I gave him,  
how can it say pyramids date back four-thousand years  
if all the years we count, each time we write the date,  
are two-thousand twenty-five?

My student is 27, or 25, or 29—he does not know  
for sure. He does not know of dinosaurs  
or Darwin, of Santa or satellites or germs or genes,  
of how his daughter can look like the returned spirit  
of his father, killed  
by army bullets many harvests past,  
when farmers in his village stood accused  
of sharing rice with rebel troops.

But he knows  
how to find the best bamboo,  
how to cut it, carry it, transform it  
into walls and floor and roof to last  
three rainy seasons.  
He knows how to spear a fish,  
how to shroud the dead.  
He knows the language of his people,  
and the language of the government his people fled,  
and the language of the refugee camp  
where he grew from boyhood into marriage.  
He knows how to write a little of all three of these,  
which mattered little, before now,  
because so few of those he knew had ever needed  
written words.

And now he's learned to read  
a third-grade book  
in English,  
how to drive a car, to walk in snow.  
He's learned to live with a silent tongue in a text-rich land  
whose people carry Moses, Medusa, Mars, and the moon  
as lightly as pennies in their pockets.  
He's learned how to stack packages all night  
and go to classes in the day,

and to keep going, day after day,  
in a language that points to holes  
in the world he thought he knew,  
holes through which he hopes to someday  
fit into another life, easier  
than this.

\*

Cal Freeman

### **Elegy for Uncle Christopher**

The day you died the skies opened  
and they canceled the Tigers game.  
I listened to "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald"  
and thought about that morning  
at the Pink Pony in Mackinac,  
how you walked in, called me out,  
and switched me off of coffee.  
You proceeded to get drunk and swear  
so much I had to take the bartender  
aside and explain that you were an ironworker  
from Detroit up here to watch  
a childhood friend you were in love with  
marry a rich guy nobody liked  
to keep us from getting tossed.  
You slept through the wedding,  
staggering out of the bed and breakfast  
in a bathrobe and work boots  
around midnight, swigging from  
a bottle of chianti (she sent one  
to every room of every downstate guest),  
barely avoiding a collision  
with a coach and horse. I guess we get  
the best we can of what we've got.  
Tomorrow's a doubleheader  
with cocktails and Gordon Lightfoot songs  
before the evening game. Those Saturday nights  
in Corktown, you'd throw your money  
like lilies on the Gaelic League stage  
until I sang the song.  
You always reminded me it was to Zug,  
that manmade island in Detroit,  
not Cleveland, where the fated ship  
was headed when it sank.

\*

Monica Fuglei

**On the first day of our nonfiction unit**

We talk ideas big and small: homes and hearts  
broken or mended, we speak of men whose eyes  
rest too long, of school shooting lock down drills  
we didn't know were drills.

From the back she speaks of paint samples:  
the expense of each, of how hard it is to choose,  
how her home's light differs from the store,  
of how small a thing that is next to the others.

I tell her it's not. How human it is to want  
our space to be perfect. How human it is to nest.  
To build ourselves something from white walls  
and a set of keys. How over time home blossoms  
into our imaginings.

My students bond. They trade numbers  
and stories. Offer support. Offer love. We make things,  
together. Some kind of life. Not fiction.

\*

Sanjay Ganesan

## Two Dollars and a Spine of Steel

*for the women who carry more than bricks*

They wake  
before the sky stretches  
its arms,  
feet thick with yesterday's ache  
and mouths dry  
from screaming into pillows  
that never answered back.

A sari tied not for grace  
but to wipe sweat,  
to hush a baby,  
to shield shame.  
Their bangles do not jingle—  
they rattle like chains  
on hands that never stop.

Widows,  
or worse—wives  
to ghosts who drink the rice away.  
Their husbands crumble  
before the bottle does,  
and still,  
she picks the pieces,  
feeds the children  
with fingers cracked  
but never crooked.

They carry sand  
on heads held higher  
than the ones who spit down.  
They mix cement  
with dreams  
they cannot spell,  
for schools  
they cannot enter,  
for futures  
they may never see  
but believe in anyway.

The bosses call them  
amma,  
only when orders are barked.  
They are cows  
without names,  
sheep without pastures—  
counted  
but never seen.

Yet no one builds  
without them.  
No wall, no road,  
no city that gleams  
can rise  
without their broken backs  
bent like prayer  
and just as holy.

\$2 a day.  
Not enough to live.  
Too little to die.  
Still, they rise  
with fists of dust  
and eyes of fire.

Tell me,  
what CEO, what minister,  
what god  
can match  
the muscle  
of a mother  
who earns crumbs  
and still  
makes them a feast?

\*

Katy Giebenhain

**Epidemiology at 5 p.m.**

Bewitched  
by the lemon rind spiraling  
my neighbor's rocks glass  
I think of scurvy.  
I toast the trick of citrus  
and each sailor  
too late to receive it.  
I sip respecting  
that early clinical trial,  
Dr. Lind on the high seas  
and all who stop misery  
through observation,  
all who labor out-of-sight.

In class we learn  
*epi demos logos*  
the study of what befalls  
a population,  
a cocktail of Greek words.  
We learn that when  
public health is working  
we don't notice it.

I toast those who do.

\*

Marissa Glover

### Active Threat Plan

A school-wide announcement over the intercom:  
*Barricade the door. NOW.*

Nothing else is said.  
That's how students and teachers know  
this is *not* a drill. For once, students are silent.  
They do what they're told, pushing  
cabinets in front windows, turning  
desks on their side like shields, dragging  
them to the safest corner, cowering  
on the ground, squeezing  
into closets.

The frantic texting to parents  
begins. Terrified *IDK's* and  
*love you's* fly on crow wings.  
Law enforcement descends  
on campus. Walkies squawk.  
Parents drive to the school, ready  
to run inside like they saw on TV.  
It's mostly mothers, sharing posts  
from social media. Some dads yell  
about action, say we should install  
metal detectors like the big cities do.

The principal robocalls, praising  
police, students, staff for their handling  
of the situation—an anonymous tip and a kid  
who came to school with an Airsoft gun.  
The recorded message: There was never any  
real threat, no one was ever in any real danger,  
everyone followed the ATP perfectly.

Teachers shake as they move  
the desks back into rows and resume  
the lesson. Students are on Snapchat,  
skull emojis and LOLs.  
Some parents sign their kids out—  
let them go home early and play  
shooter games on Xbox: the brain  
triggering a protective barrier  
around itself, shutting down  
what it's too young to process,  
practicing self-defense from the couch.  
Everyone pretends they know what to do.

\*

Emily Goldsmith

## Two Deaths / Deux Mortalités

*In Memory of Greg Guirard*

A houseboat perches atop the sparkle of the Atchafalaya River.  
They call this the land of dead giants, the land of former cypress trees  
that once grew at the Southern end of the swamp here.  
*Why will a fisherman and his family rise well before dawn  
to go out onto the water and do this arduous work day after day?  
When there is no time and no leisure for peacefulness to be acknowledged.*

Seafood markets and whims of nature determine profits. Acknowledging  
its ebb and flow, they have an unexplainable connection to the river.  
When you head out of the swamp '*scraping the bottom bad*,' it's a good day.  
When you grow up in the Bayou, you can tell your time and direction by trees.  
If you understand how the water moves and when fish bite, you enjoy seeing dawn.  
Many men do not want their daughters to marry a fisherman. It's too hard a life here.

Hyacinth in lavender and yellow bloom in small armies here  
and beavers, mink, otters, deer, and bobcats don't acknowledge  
when less men are out seeking buffalofish and gaspergou at dawn.  
They call out mystic in Louisiana French, setting their seines into river.  
Places where you couldn't paddle a pirogue now fill with dying-off trees,  
and somebody's grande-père sings 'em back with, "tomorrow, a new day."

When the oil companies moved themselves in, it was a day  
they would remember. '*Since the pipeline, it will never again be like it was*' here.  
The older folk spend time and salt mourning memories of fishable acres and trees.  
Bayous sanded up and choked with willows while no one else acknowledges  
the lack of plenty, the '*no quarters in the house*,' when destruction of the river  
sends Mama running to her rosary, praying herself up a new dawn.

Back on the water, launched off in high spirits with the dawn,  
to exchange '*L.Y. (those ales wives or salt water trash fish) for crawfish in a day.*'  
'*If the first oil company that ran a pipeline across the Basin would've plugged it at the river,  
there would be an unbelievable difference. You would still have a beautiful swamp here.*'  
'*The outsiders, people born north of Alexandria,*' don't acknowledge  
the water is drying. The Grosbec disappear alongside their homes, the trees.

Some remain in their boats like Monsieur Guirard replanting cypress trees,  
wishing for rebirth of the forest as light comes forth each day with the dawn.  
Louisiana French and Kréyòl dying with the land, under-acknowledged.  
Things were once real plentiful, '*meat with your rice and beans plentiful*,' back in my day  
'*before the old trees were destroyed by levee enlargement operations*' here.  
The pipelines' sands destroyed their profits. They call out to God and their river.

Fantômes of trees sway with the breeze on the sacrée river  
while the echo of fresh dawn is answered by boats pushing off. Here,  
each breath is ceremoniously acknowledged. On the water, it is another day.

NOTE: The italicized lines are from Greg Guirard's *Cajun Families of the Atchafalaya: Their Ways and Words*. Chez L'auteur, 1989.

\*

Susana Gonzales

### **Mother's Earth**

my hands are as soft as my mother's were  
but they don't hold her scars  
scratched by barbs of the cotton bolls she twisted  
and pulled at in the farm fields under a dead  
Delano sun at day's end she earned 87 cents  
bought a hot dog from a vendor parked across the road  
where she sat eating it in the dirt

the lifeline on my mother's palm was as long  
as the row after row of grapes she picked and packed  
stacked and trayed these fruits for clean bright tables  
far from the dust of the camp she sat and slept in  
the land she worked and lived in  
field she gave her back to  
brown soil on my mother's hands  
this dirt of mother's earth

\*

Jessica Greenbaum

### **Time and the Clothes Line**

The vine that grows anywhere  
a drop of sun will water it,  
the line reeled out and back  
from high windows,  
or plucked at from the ground for the dried fruit  
of its labor, you are  
the connecting cord of all  
our habitats, and I can see you from the cable car above  
Mexico City, across apartment patios  
or when a plane flies low  
over subdivisions (which  
you might divide again),  
or from the road outside Canaan  
where a side yard flickers  
with your pennants. My mother  
loved you and defied  
neighborhood ordinances  
for your gift of fresh air,  
her dexterity with the simple  
machine of clothespins  
like a senator reaching for his pen.  
I see her carrying the heavy  
basket of wet clothes  
through the back door of the garage  
to that corner of our Long Island yard  
chorused by lilacs—  
and later, as other mothers knew  
when cakes were done,  
having unpinned them  
with the efficiency of a  
seamstress undoing a hem  
(there in a space her own mother,  
nearly clipped to  
the apartment's kitchen, didn't have)  
then my mother coming back in  
with the dried clothes folded, the  
basket lighter, the lilacs  
with no one to sing with,  
and that was long ago, just now the sky going  
dark, the first drops falling.

\*

Kelle Groom

### **Dad Goes to Work, 1969**

Through the sliding glass I see a mongoose in the hedge  
American Pie on the stereo  
army helmet bumps on my nose  
shadows my eyes  
machine gun slung over sunburn  
rocks on my hip  
I fling myself across the room  
in a dervish dance on Sears carpet  
again and again when he goes

When he goes  
circuit rider on a gray battleship  
I climb the dining room table stand  
screaming arms raised  
a bell calling him home

At night  
I rattle God down  
with my tribal songs perfecting prayers  
a syllable missed could keep him at sea

Mornings I have hula lessons  
in a scratchy grass skirt  
I play war with the boys in bare feet  
smash coconuts open in the street

The lagoon is warm I swim every day

In crowds I keep my arms in close  
afraid of lepers and the swing  
of an ulcerous arm against mine

In mirrors I see myself noseless eyeless  
faceless a red trench  
In giant trees  
I climb high and tremble

Half a year later we drive to the dock  
He gives me a television a typewriter from Japan  
A geisha girl in a glass box  
But it's the smoky smell of his shirt that I want.

\*

Kari Gunter-Seymour

### **Inclinations**

Here in the holler, we tap our mouths  
to warm our hands, a rugged edge of teeth  
exposed between foggy slips of breath.

All winter our joints ache  
and our bodies think of leaving  
in ways only ancestors could understand.

Without a trace of irony or blush of shame,  
we'll pull the pickup over, watch the foothills  
turn russet at sunset, talk to clouds

through February, to the earth come spring,  
sit front and center to a weave of nest  
set to hatch its crooners, press

hellbent into the great why of summer.  
All that matters is the heat, the harvests,  
prayers for rain—little we or the plants can do

but endure. When the mulberries cease  
their fruiting and maples go kamikaze red,  
we plow down the cornfields, gardens, too,

don our flannel, ponder our shrinking  
frames, bones calcifying, same way  
a crusted plow rusts itself back to nature.

\*

Tresha Faye Haefner

**#Best Life**

Go ahead. Quit your job  
or stay. Shuffle papers in a cubicle  
or hang a hammock next to a lake.  
Wherever you go,  
darkness will follow.  
And so will light.  
You can be miserable  
swimming under a waterfall,  
or go into ecstasy  
when someone plays Mozart  
next to the copy machine.  
You beautiful donkey. Dumb angelfish.  
Stop flipping the channel.  
It doesn't matter what you sing about.  
Just open your mouth  
and sing.

\*

Bex Hainsworth

### **Agnodice**

“This one won’t survive.” The doctor hands  
my great-grandfather a four-pound parcel.  
Pale limbs are petals folded shut. She is dwarfed  
by her twin brother, screaming for his mother’s breast.

An all-night vigil begins. Drops of warm milk are coaxed  
between miniscule lips. He will not give her up:  
they have already lost two children.

By dawn, her face is flushed with color, tiny fists  
thumping against her father’s chest. She is named June,  
just as planned, despite her early arrival.

My grandmother has entered this world ready  
to defy expectations, with a will to fight all her life.

\*

1948 and the National Health Service  
is crowning. Shaking off the ashes of war,  
June is eighteen and one of the first midwives  
to qualify in this hopeful era of medicine.

Bobbing over the cobbles of inner-city Bradford,  
she cycles from house to house, from birth to birth.  
Like Agnodice, she is aware of her own legacy:  
she is wise woman, cunning folk, gatekeeper of life.

\*

My childhood was spent holding my gran’s hand  
through busy streets. We never seemed to reach  
our destination without being stopped by unfamiliar faces.  
“Mrs Whitaker!” followed by the clucking of old friends,  
mention of chocolate boxes and money on the mantelpiece.  
Walking away, I would ask, already knowing the answer:  
“No idea, I must have delivered her daughter.”

\*

June is ninety-two when a great-grandchild  
is placed into her arms. Memory is complicated,  
but still she knows the secret to the perfect swaddle:  
the way her father held her through that first night

\*

Marc Harshman

## Sacred

It's the week before Thanksgiving—hog butchering.  
Angst of the angels, the barn pigeons cooing excitedly.  
The ground is slippery with frost and mud.  
The women are baking bread and pies.  
Knives are honed.  
The football game rehashed.  
A single shot between the eyes.  
A twenty-two enough in hands as practiced as Lloyd's.  
I know *Mother Earth* says a blade for dispatch  
    but it's the old ways here, not always the best,  
    but it's what we know  
    and what we know seems to work.  
I vow to be silent and useful.  
The stench when the intestines spill out into the cloudy light  
    unsteadies me but I cling to a slender memory  
    of my father doing these same things a generation ago.  
Like a glistening pile of steaming white snakes,  
    they settle onto the black ground.  
The steady slicing and spillage, the parceling out  
    of organs and trotters, of what's for us, what's for the cats,  
    and what's for the earth  
    is done  
    as it always has been done.  
There are no prayers, and the ritual is habit.  
It's for someone else to decide whether *sacred*.  
We wash at the old pump and go in to sit at table.  
I notice, then, how the white crusts of the pies  
    are vented and steaming.  
I choose the chocolate cake.

\*

Gloria Heffernan

### **Intensive Care**

When the phone rings at ten o'clock at night,  
after she has worked a fourteen-hour shift,  
I know it's not going to be a catching-up chat.  
When I ask "How's it going?"  
I brace myself for any number of answers.

When she was a girl  
there was always something I could do.  
I was good at solving problems  
with some sound advice or  
a late-night trip to the diner  
for sesame bagels and hot chocolate.

Today's problems don't lend themselves  
to such simple solutions.  
When she's had a hard day at work  
it means a patient has died.  
It means she has had to break the news  
to the next of kin.  
It means someone my age,  
who reminded her of me,  
won't get out of bed tomorrow.

An intensive care nurse,  
when her voice is weighed down and weary,  
she wants only one thing from me.  
So I listen with reverence,  
receive each word like a sacred offering.  
And I care...intensively...  
when there is nothing else  
I can do.

\*

Matthew E. Henry

**when asked to read a poem for the Black History Month assembly, again**

this time I have to keep certain things in mind—need to find a balance.  
knowing the pride of being Blackity Black Black scares the red into faces  
clenching fists in their seats. knowing they need to see more than the METCO  
struggle bus stories some of them are expecting. represent something other than  
slavery, reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the white rage backlash to civil rights  
seen in the 60s and 70s, the 80s and 90s, and right now, while still remembering  
some of them think racism doesn't exist because we had a Black president once.

this time I should remind them who invented peanut butter, the gas mask,  
the stop light, air conditioners, performed the first successful open-heart surgery,  
was first to the North Pole, revolutionized blood transfusions, fire extinguishers,  
helicopters, fountain pens, and cell phones. but how many of them will pay attention  
to that partial list or bother to verify later?

this time I have to remember not to mention ms \_\_\_\_\_, a “nice white lady”  
who wears her DEI support like a white durag on Juneteenth, desperately trying  
to impress the Black women in the building, hoping the nearest Brown man  
will think she's “one of the good ones” and invite her {to bed or at least} to the cookout.

this time I have to make sure they celebrate not only Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks,  
and Oprah, but the other “Hidden Figures” untaught in our curriculum: Sojourner Truth,  
Madame C.J. Walker, Shiley Ann Jackson, Ida B Wells, Marie Van Brittan Brown.  
this time I should see if they recognize names other than Crispus Attucks, Malcolm X,  
and Martin Luther King Jr.—you know, Black men who weren't shot down in the street.

this time I should keep mr \_\_\_\_\_'s name out of my mouth, despite how often  
he's made a paper mâché badge and proclaimed himself the “woke police,” defends  
those anti “affordable housing” yard signs sporting a brick monstrosity with angry,  
yellow eyes and a dark, “urban” vibe.

this time I might mention how we cut and bag and sell Blues and Soul and Jazz and  
Funk and Rock and Roll and Reggaeton and Dancehall and R&B and HipHop and  
Queen Bee winning a Grammy for the Best Country Album,  
but some might call that bragging.

this time I should highlight entertainment that doesn't include us running with a ball  
or from the cops. see if they recognize Douglas, Du Bois, Butler, Walker, Wright,  
bell hooks, Brooks, Baldwin, Wilkerson, Ellison, Huston, Hansberry, Adichie,  
Kendi, Toni, Nikki, Ta-Nehisi, Langston, Colson, Lucilie, Roxanne, Maya,  
and many many others as more than the anti-racist homework that make  
their parents' palms sweat.

this time I might put on blast all the examples I'm not allowed to read out loud,  
on a school mic, at a school assembly, but you can catch me later and ask  
in person about all the things they want to keep on the DL.

or maybe this time I should go back to my original idea, and  
read another poem about why squirrels are still vastly superior to dogs.

\*

Donna Hilbert

### **My Dad's Lunch Box**

My dad climbs down  
the telephone pole,  
stretches out under a pepper tree,  
opens his lunch box:  
black metal,  
substantial like a vault,  
or a government building  
in a Balkan country.  
Under its dome  
wire arms  
hold a Thermos of coffee.  
On the bottom floor,  
Vienna sausages on a bed  
of mayonnaise, white bread.  
For dessert, butterscotch  
cream-center cookies.  
Dad unwraps a sandwich, eats.  
He pours coffee into the cup  
his Thermos lid makes,  
dips a cookie, watches it bloat,  
then holds his lips to the rim,  
slips the sweet bits  
into his mouth.

I like to think  
he savors pleasure  
before he stands  
the box on one end,  
touches a forefinger to his tongue,  
his damp fingertip  
gleaning crumbs  
to feed the sparrows who wait  
in slender leaves.  
Then, one foot  
over the other,  
he climbs the pole again.

\*

Le Hinton

**Exit Interview, January 1, 1863**

*Why are you resigning?*

I don't have another job, but isn't no job better than this job?

*What did you like about your work?*

I once heard that it's easier to pick cotton here in Mississippi than tobacco in Virginia. But I don't know.

*What did you dislike about your work?*

I miss my boys, Levi and Leroy. I heard they might be in Texas. They were 14 when they got sold.

*What were the best qualities of your supervisor?*

I guess I appreciated the fact that he didn't kill me, and I only got whipped about twice a year. He let my wife put salve on my back after he finished.

*Did you feel valued within the company?*

I don't know what that means. They wouldn't let me learn to read and write.

*What skills should we look for in the person that replaces you?*

You might want to look for someone who doesn't need to get paid for picking cotton and doesn't mind bloody hands.

*Would you recommend working at our company to a friend.*

No. I can't recommend working here to another soul. I don't hate anyone that much.

\*

Leslie Hodge

***Lucky***

In the Manager's office, second floor,  
glass windows overlooking the grocery store,  
I was given one uniform dress: blue-green  
synthetic, zip-front, a pocket to sport  
the *Lucky* nametag. I hemmed it short,  
just to my fingertips.

There were no scanners then, the register  
an oversized adding machine with dozens  
of buttons. My fingers got fast. I recited  
prices hand-stamped on the stickers,  
weighed the produce, punched the buttons,  
hit the Enter key with the side of my hand.  
Learned how to bag, and how to dodge  
the Assistant Manager lurking in the breakroom  
by the lockers and soda cans.

Coming home after work, I'd slip out of the dress,  
and lean on the washer in my underwear.  
In my sleep, murmur *Wonder Bread*,  
*50 cents. Pork chops, 2.95.*  
*Bananas, 7 cents a pound.*

At the end of my first week, I stood in line  
with the customers, to cash my first paycheck.  
The dollars and cents impossibly small  
for the weight of the fatigue I felt.  
With my thumb, I tried to rub out the logo,  
the *Lucky* on the check.

\*

John Hoppenthaler

### **Busking**

I was playing love songs on a stolen guitar  
when the G string snapped, the few limp  
dollars crumpled with change on the black fuzz  
lining the case. Spring,

Central Park already greening its perennial heart.  
I'd be scratching out blues  
if there was money in it, but city girls  
on the west side want to be honey-

tongued, Motowned, Ah-Angied, Oh Mandyed--  
so that's what they get; they get what they want.  
Then a cop car wheels by, slowly,  
& who could explain the rosewood guitar, the dangling wire?

East side girls want to be Oh Girled, Brown Eyed Girled,  
Beach Boyed till dawn,  
& summer sun bleaches my hair so blonde  
even the suburbs seem possible.

There are girls who'll linger in Nyack, flirt  
through Ossining, & I can act, & I can sing.

\*

T.R. Hummer

## **Employed**

A foggy morning, alarm of the moon ringing  
over the horse pen. Up the road, carpenters return  
To their ripaws, and in the middle distance, a farmer  
takes a wrench to his balky tractor. A crow considers  
The bottom line of a skunk's corpse, while chlorophyll  
wipes green sweat from its vegetable brow.  
Everywhere you look, sentience is picking up its lunchbox,  
glaring at the factory clock, rolling its sleeves  
Above the elbow, punching in. Nobody thinks  
of the beetle doing solitary work in the dark  
Mineshaft of horse dung, crafting a perfect sphere,  
pushing it up the slope toward sunrise.  
How pointless is it all, really? And how lonely  
is this six-legged Sisyphus of shit? He seems  
Not to mind if a rainstorm undoes his morning's labor.  
He returns to the stinking assembly line to begin again.

\*

Kevin James

**[My mom carries me, her child,]**

My mom carries me, her child,  
on one hip,  
the rent in her left hand,  
and tomorrow  
in her chest.  
The job says eight to five,  
but motherhood  
has no punch card.  
No sick leave.  
No weekend.  
She cleans hotel rooms  
we could never afford to sleep in  
scrubbing away other people's lives  
as if hers weren't already  
fading  
into the corners.  
Her back aches from bedsheets,  
from silence,  
from the weight of "just one more year  
and things will be better."  
Sometimes  
she hums lullabies into the mop bucket,  
pretending it's an audience,  
that someone's listening.  
That someone sees.  
She tells me:  
Mama is strong.  
But strength  
isn't always loud.  
Sometimes it's just  
showing up  
again,  
again,  
again.  
And at night  
she eats prayers for dinner,  
folds her hopes between cracked palms,  
anoints my head with oil  
so maybe I dream  
of a softer life.

\*

David Janey

**little things you remember**

In my head I still hear the tune my dad whistled  
every night walking from his car to our front door  
announcing his arrival, announcing the end of his  
workday, announcing the start of our evening.

I remember how he opened mail tearing a quarter  
inch off the edge of the envelope at the end. I always  
wondered why he tore along the short edge and not  
along the long edge. I still wonder why.

In the days before seat belts, sometimes if he had  
to brake unexpectedly, the strength of his reflex-reach  
across to my chest pinned me safely in my passenger  
seat; his love took my breath away.

\*

Ted Jean

### **framing**

aloft in the roof structure, Robert props with  
job-built jacks a 2x8 fir perlin fully twenty feet  
across the span between the gable cripple walls  
to support the rafters, in lieu of trusses, so that  
forty years from now prospective buyers will not  
see a sadly sagging roof line—the presumable  
intent of the cookie-cutter suburban architect

why is our boy simply standing there, like  
a dumbass, 28 oz hammer hanging at his calf  
while the Mexican foreman yells at him to get  
his ass in gear? (truth be told, he is only on the job  
because he understands the math of complex roof  
framing, a token college-educated carpenter, as he  
is otherwise too slow, though not unliked among  
his crew of industrious undocumented amigos)

the answer, perhaps: his little sister Annette has  
died, just this morning, of pancreatic cancer, and he  
is considering, you know, the customary question

\*

Julia Spicher Kasdorf

### **Cognitive Dissonance at a Major Research University**

Once, rushing to dinner with a visiting poet and some donors, I was hit by the odor of charred meat, then the sight of young men in camouflage

and boots, holding rifles beside a grill. Misplaced bar-b-cue? No, those were real guns! I mentioned it to the hotel management student

behind the desk at the inn. *No firearms on campus!* he snapped grabbing a phone, but the campus police told him it's just the ROTC guys guarding

the Lion Shrine before the Michigan game. Once, a faculty wife seated beside me at a donor dinner told me she works in a lab testing non-lethal

weapons. Her lips matched her shell pink sheath. Non-lethal weapons? *Wounded troops make more trouble for the enemy than their dead.*

My mind went to the time I sliced a corner off my knuckle grating slaw: pain, blood almost impossible to stop, supper delayed. Best restaurant

in town, homecoming weekend, she giggled, *Not really table talk, I guess, we test them on cells in petri dishes, not mice, which would be inhumane.*

\*

### Summer Help III

Our county is 837 square miles and yet, we seal cracks in the same road that leads to the first girl I kissed. Liquid asphalt folds onto the road like brownie batter from a spoon. Even the smell has become comforting: sulfur and salt. Heat presses on our parade of fluorescent vests. Our steel-toes shuffle in sync, rubber treads melting with every too-early step on fresh sealant. The foreman has decided he trusts me now. I can't remember what I did to prove I belong here, but I've traded spinning the STOP/SLOW sign to pumping from a five-gallon sprayer, coating the reverse archipelago in a sheen of diluted dish soap. I follow the man filling the cracked road without missing a beat. Both our shoulders dropped: his to aim hot asphalt, mine to wash it clean. If we turn left at the next crossroad, her childhood home will be the first on the right. Facebook tells me she doesn't live there anymore, but her mom still does. Soap bubbles kaleidoscope as they catch the sun. This is the closest I've been to the asphalt melter, its box framed belly rumbling a guttural song to keep us afloat. Only when it chokes, splutters to be refilled do we stop. Disgruntled cars pass us as we slow their morning commute. Jumping down from the hauler, a widower spits brown tobacco over my shoulder, asks if my grandmother is single, says he misses a woman in the kitchen. *and elsewhere*. Grass sticks to my melted boots. I wonder about livers, yellowed eyes creasing as the men laugh. When the melter kicks back on, we fall back to our places. The field we're passing pulls me into its orbit—the oak in the middle echoing the salvation of its shadow. The slow crawl of the hauler creaks under the weight of what I know and my teeth ache with the din of engines. Everything reminds me of her, the girl, my first. I say her name aloud to the wet road, remember how she licked brownie batter from my lips, how we squealed when I dropped her mother's plate in the sink. No one can hear me. A car honks. I don't look. Every soap bubble bursts.

\*

Dorian Elizabeth Knapp

## Retirement

It's like a permanent vacation you have  
to start planning for but never actually  
get to take—cocktails in the shadow

of an active volcano, snorkeling  
the Great Barrier Reef, an infinity  
pool that stretches beyond your

capacity to imagine where the water  
ends & the sky begins—as you grind  
away at the workplace, whittle your bank

account down to a toothpick,  
while simultaneously balancing  
a tuba on your head & juggling jars

of aborted fetuses. Okay, maybe that  
last bit was unnecessary, but you catch  
my drift, or you don't, in which case,

let me poetsplain it to you: retirement  
is a glossy brochure designed to buy us  
out of a system most of us could never

buy our way into, & anyway, by then  
I'll be too old to have sex on the beach,  
so why bother when one can't even live

in the present, let alone the impossibly  
bright future, which remains impossibly  
bright because its purpose is to blind us.

\*

Dorian Kotsiopoulos

### **Learning How Not to Choose a Lover**

Once my father got a job to haul away hundreds  
of cans of no-name soda that had been dumped  
in a piggery. He brought them home.

Nothing wrong with this soda, he'd said, guzzling  
a lemon/lime, so we drank generic soda trampled  
by pigs so he wouldn't accuse us of acting superior.

My father thought he was a landscaper,  
but mostly he carted trash away from businesses  
to the dump when he didn't bring it home to us.

We got past-season lipsticks from Rexall, expired  
Twinkies, plastic holiday wreaths one spring,  
coverless romance novels from Woolworth's.

My sisters and I spent a summer learning how not  
to choose a lover from free steamy novels, fueled  
by sugar, choosing soda cans with the least hoof dents.

\*

Richard Krawiec

### **Famine Roads**

Night pushes away the day.  
Even still, they continue  
to angle their shovels  
into the mucky sod. Sparks  
flare when their blades strike  
granite. Their chins hang down,  
mouths fallen open as if to filter  
life from air. In the congregation  
of dark, the stars go unnoticed.

So the English dealt with famine,  
forcing bodies into ketosis, forcing  
the Irish to raven their own cells;  
hair and nails grow brittle,  
organs fill with toxins, hearts wither  
to faulty pumps; like love twisted  
from joy to doubt, feeding on itself.

And so, too, my dear, we scrape forward,  
lift our spades, plunge exhausted  
towards a ground we can only hope  
to judder against, just as we ask  
the brittle bones of our feet, gauzed  
in cracked skin, to deliver us,  
to finish this road, pray it doesn't  
go nowhere.

NOTE: During the Potato Famine the British, under the 1847 Labour Rate Act, would force starving Irish peasants to build roads that legally could not go anywhere.

\*

Haley Lasché

**[in traffic approaching plain]**

in traffic approaching plain

a little earth pushes up

a little plant life also

an end keeps coming

or a series of endings never resolves

three cranes wear time down

to the bones of the road

it will all go to good use

\*

Viola Lee

### **Cleaning the Floor**

My son and I are cleaning the floor because he has spilled rice cereal again. O, God, breathe. My son asks, "What's the difference between a job and work?" I tell him that one has three letters and the other has four. He replies, "No, really." I explain, "A job is something you do to earn a living wage in the world. But work—work is what we do to satisfy our needs and wants, our purpose, our meaning. And meaning is how we feel worthy of ourselves." My son then asks, "Am I a job or am I work?" I reply, "What we have to do together right now is clean this floor. Here is a bowl of vinegar and water; this is what we call working together. We're good. You and I are good." O, God of wealth, O, God of work, remind me that our bodies are worthy; our brief and beautiful bodies are worthy. O, remind me that to live in this house, which feels like the world, I must love. This is my work; there is only this, there is nothing more.

\*

Jean Liew

### **Peaked T-Waves**

He shows me the EKG  
“These are peaked T-waves”  
The tracing rises up  
Against the orange grid  
“He’s uninsured, undocumented  
The ED is his dialysis”  
I imagine him stumbling out  
Off the bus in Texas summer  
His internal clock brings him  
Says it’s time, but one day  
It will stop—with peaked T-waves

Twelve years, several states later  
In mid-afternoon heat  
The vote is quickly decided

We sit across a speakerphone  
What is one trillion to us  
That, we cannot fathom  
Not when I filled out my FAFSA  
And not even now  
Her eyes count dollars  
Each visit an imposition  
The medicine was a miracle  
While she had it  
And we had the power to care  
But today we’ve lost it

\*

Alison Luterman

### **Vocation**

She asked what is your calling and I said I'm an earthworm.  
I eat traffic noise, overheard conversation, birdsong,  
sadness, elation, revelation, celebrity gossip,  
then poop out poems. I burrow through lush gardens  
of the rich and survival plots of the poor  
chewing everything in my path, making tunnels  
of breathing space between event and its calcification  
into history. I hide out under the sneaker-soles  
of the kid in baggy basketball shorts  
kicking an empty take-out box up the hill by the projects  
whose head is down, who will not meet anyone's eyes.  
I eat his confusion and unanchored longing  
which are the same as my own, and I mix it  
with the color of the sky today, blue gray with a bank of clouds  
and I add some soft bits of my own insides,  
and I make this little word-thing for him, maybe someday  
he'll read it, somewhere down the road

\*

Marjorie Maddox

### **1974: Making the Beds at the Days Inn**

Fifteen and one serious  
corner-tucker, frame-duster,

every-inch-of-the-toilet scrubber,  
I rose at 6:00 a.m. and hitched a ride

with my older neighbor, just sixteen  
and steering her family wagon to the rear

parking lot of Days Inn, where we'd enter  
the Employees Only back door and join

for coffee the other cart pushers  
and apron wearers, all clocking in

for a back-bending, vacuum-vrooming  
morning of We-the-Maids-of-Chain-Motel-USA.

Forty-eight beds to strip and change with only rumors  
of those who stretched the used cotton into

pretend-compliance and skipped the deep-clean routine  
for bathroom counters and corners (now, I check)

long before the Nineties and Go Green  
postcards offered the naked

wrapped in clean towels  
or rolling out of stained sheets

the "choice to make a difference." Naïve,  
my neighbor and I just scooped up and piled in

bags the dirty and discarded, obeying  
at all costs Do Not Disturb signs (except

once walking in on what  
no one should see

at fifteen). Learning to time  
our bed-making to *Family Feud*

or *The Price Is Right* blaring entertainment  
into our boredom, we'd leave for last

the hardest dirt-caked tubs, turn up  
the volume of *The Match Game*.

Sometimes, we'd open doors to broken  
bottles, overflowing toilets,

cigarette stubs lined up on dressers—  
and, annoyed at the aftermath of parties,

stash our \$2 tips in bras. We'd accept  
half-nods in the hallway, outright

stares, under-the-breath comments,  
or no recognition at all. As teens

in the seventies, we were only  
motel maids. Ten years later,

I thought little of who I was  
back then, shocked to hear

of Linda, my almost-forgotten neighbor—  
out of college, married, diagnosed

with leukemia—suddenly quitting  
the day-to-day of living,

stripping clean what she couldn't take  
anymore. A decade later, I remembered

again only when some lawyer wrote  
how, each day, we were cheated

out of pennies: faulty clocks or  
managers rounding down the time

we scrubbed and emptied,  
bent and tucked. "Please

accept the motel's apology and find  
enclosed a check for sixty-two,

dollars and eighty-eight cents,”  
the crisp stationary proclaiming

no sense of timing or justice  
for all the laundered years.

These days, I never make my bed,  
the tangled remaining as it is.

\*

Rachel Mallalieu

## Good Friday, 2020

At night, I no longer kiss my  
children, for fear the errant  
wind of my bedtime prayer  
carries dissolution.

I am dust.  
My particulates hang  
deadly in the room.

I didn't give up anything for Lent,  
and then I gave up everything.  
No ashes on my forehead, but rather  
on my tongue—  
my mouth parched  
behind the mask.  
If this Friday is still good,  
the seal will hold.

I am faceless.  
I stop smiling at patients,  
but I'm close enough to kiss them  
when I place the blade  
in their mouths, and search for  
the pale glisten of cords  
when I pass  
the breathing tube.

Last week, there was still  
time so I let him call his son.  
He wept and said *I love you*  
then swore it wouldn't be long  
before they spoke again.

I never make promises I can't keep.  
It's simpler to say  
he will die.  
And if miraculously he does not,  
no one ever begrudges  
a resurrection.

\*

M.R. Mandell

### Olivia Newton-John Riedell Roller Skates

Forty years later and I still  
dream of them, gliding floors  
of Xanadu. Chalky white boots,  
laces, bedazzled with stars,  
tied in a double bow. Four sleek  
wheels painted hot pink,  
purple pom poms bouncing  
on top. I rabbit eared the page  
in *Roller Girl* magazine, slyly  
slipped it under Mom's biography  
of Lady Di. Every night I'd peek  
into their room, hoping I'd catch her,  
receiver tucked between her shoulder  
and right ear, giving my size five  
to the operator somewhere in Vermont  
or Delaware, requesting gift wrap sprinkled  
with shimmery polka dots or rainbow  
unicorns. FedEx delivery so they'd arrive  
in time for my thirteenth birthday.

So much happened to jinx my plan.  
Another August thunderstorm barreled  
through Galveston Bay, blew down  
our little town, Sugar Land. Dad lost  
his latest contract job, boss tired of tardiness  
and tales of family illnesses and death.  
Spent his days waiting for unemployment checks.  
Mom tried to hold on. Stood in line  
every Monday for our square of Velveeta  
cheese, box of powdered milk, and tin of Spam.  
She pawned her diamond wedding ring, promised  
herself she'd earn enough to buy it back someday.  
Spoonfed mashed potatoes onto trays for thieves  
and drug dealers at the prison a few miles away.  
Stretched a net over her curls, wrapped a grey smock  
over her dress, buckled white pleather shoes  
with rubber soles, so she wouldn't slip  
as she skimmed across floors glazed in slop,  
unaware of the roller skates spinning in my head.

\*

Sandra Marchetti

**Against Seven-Inning Doubleheaders and Starting Runners on Second Base in Extra Innings in Major League Baseball**

When the infielders were tired  
they just dropped their heads,  
one after another, in dust  
plumes along the basepaths

and big innings occurred,  
stroked singles followed  
each other into the dusk,  
infinite batsmen moved  
through their stations.

The sky turned from purple  
to velvet, then a glamour  
of stars. Ballcaps became  
curtains, the fielders sighed  
and woke up again, eyes

raised into the ready position.  
The diamond itself is a galaxy,  
the teams orbiting one another.  
Part of the bargain is  
the never-ending.

\*

Annie Marhefka

**To the bartender who tends to more than just the bar**

*For Jenn*

You think no one notices the way you remember everyone's orders, the Corona (no lime) for the guy with the Zeppelin shirt, the sweet tea vodka iced tea blend with extra fruit for the girl with the blue earrings, the cheap wine in the plastic bottles for the woman in the corner. You think we don't see the way your silhouette dips behind the bar, that your voice is drowned out by the clinking of the bottles and the creaks of the barstools sliding on old hardwood slats, and the locals trilling along to "Up on Cripple Creek."

You think we don't notice the way you tend to our secrets, when I told you I was pregnant before I told my friends, the way you winked and concocted a drink that looked exactly like my regular drink but wasn't, for all those weeks. The way you hugged me when no one was looking, the way you whispered to me that I would be a great mom, as if you had sensed my uncertainty.

The way you tend to the band, too, clearing empty glasses from the ledge near their mic stands, refilling their water glasses, reminding the patrons between sets to tip the musicians.

The way you tend to your fellow bartenders, a gentle hand on the lower back as you scoot behind to clean up a spill, the way you restock the cooler before it's empty, the way you smile.

The way it doesn't even feel like we're in a bar, more like someone's living room, like there should be a recliner in the corner and a colorful macrame rug at our feet. The way you make us forget what we're escaping from.

\*

Steve McCown

### **Paperboy: Special Edition**

It was difficult then,  
even on foot, to keep my balance,  
the yellow carrying bag,  
half my size, bulging with news,

lugged, hoisted, shouldered--  
morning papers too thick at the time  
to fold neatly into themselves  
and to fling from my bike like Frisbees  
over fences and flower beds.

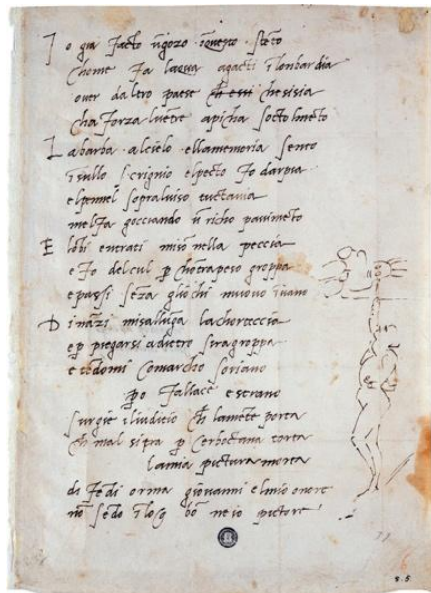
I trudged on. The weight of words  
lessened somewhat. Each delivery eased  
the burden, though not the pain.

Lightly, I laid black headlines  
on neighbors' steps, doormats, porches:  
The Cuban Missile Crisis,  
Kennedy's assassination.

\*

Michelangelo (Translated by John Addington Symonds)

## On the Painting of the Sistine Chapel



### [To Giovanni da Pistoia]

I've already grown a goiter from this torture,  
hunched up here like a cat in Lombardy  
(or anywhere else where the stagnant water's poison).  
My stomach's squashed under my chin, my beard's  
pointing at heaven, my brain's crushed in a casket,  
my breast twists like a harpy's. My brush,  
above me all the time, dribbles paint  
so my face makes a fine floor for droppings!  
My haunches are grinding into my guts,  
my poor ass strains to work as a counterweight,  
every gesture I make is blind and aimless.  
My skin hangs loose below me, my spine's  
all knotted from folding over itself.  
I'm bent taut as a Syrian bow.  
Because I'm stuck like this, my thoughts  
are crazy, perfidious tripe:  
anyone shoots badly through a crooked blowpipe.  
My painting is dead.  
Defend it for me, Giovanni, protect my honor.  
I am not in the right place—I am not a painter.

NOTE: This poem was written to Giovanni da Pistoia in 1509 when Michelangelo was painting the vault of the Sistine Chapel.

\*

Jane C. Miller

### **What the Donkey Knows About Labor**

In stained glass, she looks calm, the baby calm.  
It was nothing like that. Fact: the trip was long,  
sun beating down, sand slipping under hooves.

I followed the slumped back of the man,  
as much an animal as me, who led us  
into pain, known and unknown. Fact:  
delivery comes before deliverance.

Forgotten, her birth water breaking  
that she christened me with, dripping  
down my flanks, drying with my sweat.

She twisted my mane in her hands  
and moaned. What she bore, I bore  
walking, the clench and release  
inside her like a fist on my spine.

When she could, she would lean  
into my rocking, and sleep. Forgotten,  
the splitting open, bone pushed against.

In the barn, I breathed in her screams,  
her blood mixing with home smells  
of mud and dung. When it was done,

the man flashed his knife to sever them.  
Rested the child on her belly, who cried  
once. "Is he dead?" she asked.

"Not yet," he said. Flies came to nurse  
on her afterbirth. Fact: in the stained glass,  
I was so tired, I slept standing up.

\*

Leslie F. Miller

**odd jobs**

now who would count mosquito's teeth,  
give colors names like puce and quince,  
unite two gametes in a tube,  
or hybridize the marmalade plum?

who'd wear a red zucchetto and  
light candles in the mausoleum?  
who'd ride a tightrope on a bike  
or measure skulls of antelopes?

would you beget the zygote, clone  
a sheep, assemble autos, test  
a warhead, chop the onions, add  
some salt, a pinch of this, a dash

of that? could you take the oath  
of oval office, bang the gavel,  
ring that bell that tolls for me,  
that tolls for him? and could you see

the future in a deck of cards?  
and will you take up arms when they  
come knocking at your door? or will  
you hold this pen and write these poems?

you might wake up before the sun  
extinguishes the stars and work  
until the dark has swallowed up  
the sky and then do it again

for little in the pocket or the soul.  
and is this not the oddest job,  
to watch as life slips quickly by,  
to watch, to slip, too quick, goodbye.

\*

Geraldine Mills

## **Butter Stamp**

*for my grandmother Brigid Heveron*

First she let the milk cool until she heard  
the cream rise to the surface, ripen.  
Next she skimmed it off,  
placed it in the churn.

Then tuned to the turn of its sound,  
my grandmother drew the dash  
up and down, up and down the cream,  
listening for the flecks of gild to form.

And then the butter came.

Washed and washed again until all milk traces  
were pressed out, and salted, paddle-slapped it into shape,  
marked it with her stamp, the only solid thing  
passed down from her to me.

Its grip burnished to sheen from all that use,  
my hand folds over the honeyed wood,  
where once her palm pressed it  
into the golden round,

leaving a perfect imprint of chevrons,  
a cluster of strawberry leaves,  
its seeded fruit,  
on the gold-yellow spread,

and in that way, overlaid  
all that had gone before:  
blight blossom, down-lying,  
poorhouse.

\*

Michael Minassian

### **The Sweater**

Today, I notice  
a thread unraveling  
on the sleeve of a shirt.

I think of my grandmother  
and her sewing box  
crammed with needles and thread.

A proud, lifelong member  
of the International Lady  
Garment Workers Union

she kept her membership  
card with her citizenship  
papers and the photo

of my grandfather  
in his hand sewn shirt  
next to her bed.

Yet I knew she worked  
in harsh conditions  
at a time when clothing

was made in the USA,  
and immigrant women  
worked long hours

in poorly lit factories  
with no ventilation.  
America had its own

sweatshops, children  
worked in warehouses  
instead of going to school.

A survivor of the Genocide,  
she walked through the desert  
from Armenia to Lebanon in 1915

before coming to America.  
At her funeral, I sat  
holding her favorite sweater,

a worn wool cardigan  
I brought home  
from the hospital,

the top two buttons  
missing, as absent  
as her voice.

\*

Erik Moyer

### **The Painter**

The painter arrives to my blue bungalow to touch up the living room ceiling with white stain-blocking paint. The previous owner had left six paint cans. I had selected the two heaviest cans to anchor the swivel tray for the lounge chair in my bedroom. I am unhandy

and thus uncertain which can contains the white paint. I show the painter the four paint cans in the laundry room. "That's red," he says. "That's beige. None of these are white." I go to grab the remaining two paint cans. I am unintelligent and thus place the first can on the swivel tray. I remain unintelligent and thus lift

the second can. The swivel tray topples, sending the fully-loaded first can everywhere and anywhere. It kablooeys across the carpeted bedroom floor and uncarpeted bedroom walls. I look at the painter. The painter looks at the carpet, then looks at me. "That's blue."

\*

Wyatt Mischler

**“Sorry I’m Late. I Ran Over a Bug.”**

shouldn’t that be the way it is?  
buddha would’ve said it. jesus would’ve.  
if the christian martyrs were employable  
(their record of anti-government activity  
is a difficult hurdle in interviews) they  
would call out of work if the clouds were too pretty.

translate the chatter of whales and dolphins  
(it is untranslatable only  
to people who have the wrong attitude)  
and you will hear a million ways  
of providing an excuse. they have a baroque skill  
for it. excuses are their poetry.  
it’s their favorite kind of speech.

“sorry. i don’t feel like it today.”  
the platinum-bedecked starlike angels  
have sung that phrase since forever.  
they’re singing it now. since you  
can’t seem to hear it, all I’ve done  
is relay it to you.

you’re welcome.

\*

Simone Muench and Jackie K. White

**Lee Miller Sparks a Solar Flare**

against her assailant, turning the body  
from blue hat to halo, confronting

every camera with the camouflage of bare  
skin—a salute to her own indestructible

eye. Its metronomic vision shifts from atelier  
to field hospital, pearled veil to bullet.

No longer their “modern girl” slipping off  
pavement, she cages the birds of white aprons

and gas masks, plucks blond curls with pink claws,  
hews the catwalk into a buckeye limb and leaps

from pigeonholes, forward into the frontlines declaring  
*I’d rather take a photograph than be one.*

NOTE: This poem is from a series of poems that engage with the artwork, biographies, histories, and writings of women surrealists who have been historically marginalized.

\*

Erin Murphy

### **Elegy for the 30-Year Career**

My mother's father, raised on a farm,  
spent his working years at a helicopter plant.  
He rose at 4 a.m., left home by 5 sharp.  
His lunchbox looked like a metal barn.

Inside: two turkey sandwiches on rye  
slathered with cranberry sauce,  
a banana, and a Thermos of black coffee,  
all packed by my grandmother

when she returned from second shift  
at the factory. For thirty years  
he drove back roads from Pascoag  
across the Connecticut state line.

He had heart bypass surgery in his fifties  
to fix the disease that killed  
his twin. Insurance kicked in, nothing  
out of pocket. He had three weeks'

paid vacation. One spring he used  
his time off to build the wishing well  
my grandmother had always wanted.  
Most summers they visited us down South,

their silver Airstream camper a sideways  
silo in front of our house. When he retired,  
he had a pension, benefits, and more time  
to watch *Judge Judy* and help motorists

who were stranded or lost. And when he died,  
he left his wife a house, some savings,  
and the memory of a man who never had  
a bad word for his company or his boss.

\*

Renée K. Nicholson

### **Curtain Call**

The pain behind the patella radiates  
like light through a diamond, colorless,  
the lock-jawed silence of stillness  
points of princess-cut stone on the soft pulp  
of connective tissue. Remember  
how you were once beautiful, icy,  
like the city after December's decadence &  
finery. The clear cold of lake-effect  
snow, the steel exoskeleton of covered  
over-street crosswalks. Of course, the Pabst,  
drafty cool, plush velvet cushions pillowed  
a thousand glass slippers. Folds of the heavy curtain  
pocket memories like the dust bunnies under  
the couch, the uneven wood floor—  
not home yet. Wings of aches:  
ankles, hips, lower backs. Those old ropes  
maneuver the scenery where hurt &  
love & sweat hover above the pit—  
plucked strings, your ligaments & tendons.  
The snow heaps outside, cold and heat fuse,  
frothy breath like the head on a pint of beer  
bottled in the city's bricked heart. The bus  
lumbers and knee twitches, past  
the family apartments over  
groceries, the smell of halupkis, dance  
hall filled with old-fashioned polka,  
past the closed frozen custard stand,  
skirting the angry, ice-crust lake.  
The smooth vinyl beneath you, scanning  
the flat northern town as if there were  
answers, or even clues. The stars are not  
gems, but the moon's shine cleaves  
the dark swath of sky over this town  
named for natives long gone. So too, your  
last stop, that lamppost where you depart.

\*

Benjamin Niespodziany

### **Simply Following Instructions**

Simply  
following  
corporate  
instructions  
I dump  
stuff  
into  
the machine.

We need  
more stuff,  
my boss yells,  
dumped  
into the machine.

He looks at me  
and when I do not  
respond quickly enough,  
he throws me  
into the machine.

I'm honored,  
really, but I  
barely  
move  
the needle.  
The machine  
needs  
more.

\*

Mark Nowak

[from ...*AGAIN*]

We walked toward the zenith not expecting a new rising sun, but satisfied with the Cheese Whiz, Zebra Cakes, and Zingers at the end of the aisle at Family Dollar. Maybe eat them with Prozac or Zoloft. Later, take in the pine trees rising behind the cinderblock walls of the Dollar Tree. The American alphabet ends like every American factory ends. Zombies wandering around on Zoom. The new zoology. In the Ocean State Job Lot parking lot, I put the words “cheap America lot” into Business Name Generator and got these results: Balaclava America, Zip Cheap, Burb Lot. Nothing much more needs to be said. Maybe there will be more zebras someday. More songs by a reconfigured ZZ Top (you will or will not listen to them on Amazon music). But for now, there are intermezzos, piazzas, and paparazzi for the elites on their mega-yachts, on their spaceship trips into outer space. Meanwhile, the working class orders a pizza delivered by the working class. Zero tolerance for everything and everyone else. Let the Dominoes fall.

\*

Jon Obermeyer

### **Inside (SF Firefighter)**

*Fire tests gold, suffering tests brave men. —Seneca*

There's the slow swivel of the helmet  
before we destroy it: monster, dragon,  
that Bastard Beelzebub, the orange-red  
ogre of every childhood dream.

Ass to elbow, the hallway floor hump  
and spelunk downward into basement;  
you carry half your body weight through  
every blind fog-bend in the labyrinth.  
Dante had no idea of the noise,  
the locomotive's locution of collapse  
and the load-bearing beams failing.

Take a seat, friend, within the Inferno,  
Let the maître d' remove your coat,  
silks and topper; The Rapture Show  
begins shortly. It's the Northern Lights,  
Pink Floyd lasers and the Devil himself  
at 150 decibels, on the back stoop  
of the Lion's mouth. I will attempt

one day to describe the heat to you  
but our language is so inadequate.

\*

Gloria Ogo

### **Ledger of Unseen Hands**

for the ones whose names rarely cross a payroll

& for my mother  
who cleaned motel rooms six-door keys deep,  
folding towel swans no guest remembered  
& my father, nightshift at the bottling plant,  
palms glowing faint with phosphor when he kissed us awake

for Mrs. Salcedo in the cafeteria—  
silver hairnet, hush-voiced Spanish lullabies to the beans,  
who wrote tomorrow's menu on steam

for Ernest the custodian  
who replaced the flag rope at dawn,  
said nothing of his stitched shoulder,  
whistled Dizzy Gillespie to the mop bucket's beat  
& left chalk drawings on night-polished floors  
only the morning janitor ever saw

ode to Grandpa's index finger—  
black-grease half-moon that traced carburetors  
& taught me how engines remember heat

to Auntie Dez, undocumented angel of rooms 3-12B,  
flipping patients, lifting words the nurses dropped,  
whispering Psalms to a monitor's blue pulse

praise the warehouse temp  
who scribbles the weight of each box in a pocket Bible,  
believing numbers are prayers when repeated enough

and the seamstress at the end of Line 4,  
humming needle through denim twelve hours straight,  
leaving secret cross-stitches under belt loops—  
her way of signing the unseen

    \*\*I tally them tonight:\*\*  
all these unpaid gestures,  
time-card blinks no scanner caught—  
steam rising from a plastic dinner,  
the why-are-you-still-awake kiss,  
light left on in an empty hall

let this ledger be overtime,  
back pay issued in breath & ink;  
let it accrue interest in whatever ledger  
heaven keeps for hands that never stop moving  
while no one is looking.

\*

Kathleen Ossip

## The Union

*ACT-UAW 7902  
December 2022*

The tundra was dying while the particular wired gaze  
of administration counted and undercounted,  
never moving past the endpoint or outside the spreadsheet cells.  
Counting is a mean straight line.  
How little can we get away with. How little do they need.

*To the living spirit...thought and scholarship must be free.*

Who knew the ideal would have this long sequel?  
So all we cared about was money,  
said the attorney at \$400/hour. A performance with some shade.  
So money brought us together.  
Well, a communal regard attracts itself to itself

and your concern to my concern  
as drops attracted form a pool.

When the mind's locked, the hands blocked,  
it must be that someone is hoarding a lot of those green paper rectangles.  
I think it's linked  
to bodies that do without time or dry-erase markers.  
We marched.

We wanted a museum, we got a street party.  
From 20 to 90 marched, vivid in our occupation,  
on peanut butter pretzels and smoothies from Liquiteria.  
Aspirational managers baffled:  
Did you ever think you'd be on *that* side?

The side in love with the incalculable.  
We wanted no more unpaid labor we got questions,  
What will we make? Which side on? the longlasting questions  
and that good old companion, the Universe,  
the one who watches and never steps in.

During Zoom lulls, Ella sang "Moonlight in Vermont"  
to the jazz players, the cranky writers, the knitwear heroine.  
For a minute, another world.

That ended in a chorus of thank you's.

Spreadsheet won.

Spreadsheet won and said it lost,

a fine cake to have and eat. Sugary.  
But in the tundra of their beds, they toss in their wrong.  
The sweats start like diabetes. Mom, Preacher:  
Old voices in the head scolding strictly and without stint.  
A rich belly does some to numb it.

Begin an ungowning: puffy tams trashed, poplin ripped, the medieval  
dream of university sullied from the start, when it was  
only the well stuffed, only for themselves.

We want dentists, time, markers, money, and to  
afford to give without stint.

From the start, a contract is a diminished thing.  
What must be demanded is already scrap.  
Apply conviction, still, to every jagged surface.  
If you care about yourself and something bigger,  
you'll fail (guaranteed) but will you be sorry?

If there isn't an archive, start one.

For a while it was the longest adjunct strike in US history.

When you sleep, sleep as dreamers, not dead.

\*

Jimmy Pappas

### Saigon Guard Duty — 1970

I taught English as a second  
language to South Vietnamese  
soldiers before they worked  
with American helicopter pilots.  
The teachers took turns  
walking around the school  
looking for bombs and watching  
out for assaults on the building.

For one week I walked down  
a narrow alley between us  
and an apartment complex.

My first day on guard duty  
I found a dead man on the ground.  
Vietnamese soldiers helped me  
carry the body to a vehicle  
that took him away.

For some, the street was home.  
A few woke up. Others slept.  
A pedicab driver in his vehicle  
snored with his mouth agape.  
Students in traditional uniforms  
set off for school. A young man  
had little luck trying to catch  
a Lambretta bus. He checked  
his watch and shook his head.

Addicts were everywhere. An old  
man passed a hypodermic needle  
filled with a deep purple liquid  
to another man. He held the needle  
up to me as an offer. *Not today,*  
*papa-san.* We both laughed.  
A Vietnamese civilian told me  
it was morphine to kill the pain.

A young boy in a French Catholic  
school uniform sat on the front steps  
of his family's apartment playing  
with pet cockroaches he kept

in empty match boxes.  
Curious to see how he used  
his little living toys in a game,  
I squatted down and smiled  
at him, but that caused him  
to pick up his insects, put them  
away in their small homes, go  
back inside, and leave me  
looking at a closed door.

At the end of the alley, young men  
gathered in a circle playing cards  
for money. A GI squatted among them.  
They spoke in loud voices with much  
laughter. I wished I could join them.

An old man walked by with hand-  
made toys he wanted to sell. He kept  
spinning one of them to make  
a whistling sound that attracted  
children who followed him as if  
he were the ice cream man ringing  
his bell. He never even turned  
around to look at them, just kept  
on walking with his head down  
like a figure on a Greek urn.

\*

Kenneth Pobo

### **Phone Solicitor**

1972. My first job,  
a phone solicitor.  
5-9 p.m. five nights a week.  
I'm the guy who interrupts  
your dinner, who asks you  
to buy a subscription  
to a paper. If you do,  
you'll be helping sick kids.  
Sometimes people answer  
who know little English.  
One woman agrees  
to getting a subscription  
despite not knowing  
what she agreed to.

Boring. My spiel begins with  
"My name is." I weary  
of my name before the end  
of the first night. I say  
I'm Neil Diamond. No one  
challenges me. Who I am  
is a bad connection,  
the slam of a phone  
before I try the next number.

\*

T.R. Poulson

**Letter to a Route Named 2C**

*—confession of a UPS driver*

I love you when you show me slivers  
of Pacific, of San Francisco Bay, when your fog drips through thick  
needles, wild. I love your dogs who wag at gaits—I deliver  
treats to tongues. I love your storms, though they slick  
your driveways muddy and uproot trees. I love your dead  
ends backdropped by distant breakers. I love your calves who slip under  
their mama's bellies to watch me drive. I love your red  
blisters of sunset in gray. I love you, even when you encumber

me with too much of you. When muscles burn  
with every stop. When curved roads darken. When boxes jumble  
on shelves like pain. When I punch  
the clock at nine PM. I fist bump coworkers who taught me turns  
and numbers. Where to park to pick up fallen pieces. I fumble  
love among things other hands have touched.

\*

Stephanie Powell

**Subject: re: maternity leave**

Dear [name here],

Dear [employee number XXXX redacted]

Dear [unhappy pregnant woman]

Your request for [employer-funded paid parental leave] is:  
a worm swallowed but not killed

Your request:  
flips in our bellies like embarrassment

Your request is:  
denied, [the worm is dead]

Thanks for reaching out,  
thanks for getting in touch, thanks  
and hope you are:  
well, that you are  
looking forward to the weekend!  
Thank you for your understanding in advance

Please join us in the kitchen to celebrate *International Women's Day*

Bring cupcakes!

\*

Vivian Faith Prescott

## Boy Crazy

The salmon fisherman hired us 13-year-old  
island girls as deckhands on his troller for the summer—  
Me and my best friend, the fisherman's daughter.

"Gotta keep you girls from going boy crazy,"  
he'd said.

My stepmother had already forewarned me—  
*At thirteen, kids go crazy.* Maybe she was  
thinking of only herself, but I was already

sneak-smoking her cigarette butts and letting  
a boy feel me up. The best way to keep us  
out of trouble, our parents must've figured,

was to send us out on the Alaskan ocean  
to work off all that frenzy. At sea, the fisherman  
joked about our greasy salmon-scaled hair,

how no boy back home among the islands  
would want to chase us and yelled at us  
to clean the coho salmon even faster.

Side by side, my friend and I cleaned  
and iced salmon, and at night we were like  
fish eggs in a skein, snug in our diesel-smelly

sleeping bags tucked up in the bow bunks,  
rocking with a wave-lull on the phosphorescent sea.  
We cleaned hundreds and hundreds of salmon

that summer, until cleaning fish became muscle  
memory—gill the salmon, cut into the anus  
and slice toward belly to throat, pull the guts

and scrape the kidney strip. A week into our trip,  
during a reprieve from rainforest showers,  
we washed our teenage, hormone greased hair

and pimply faces with cold tank water, laid out  
on the boat deck in our halter tops and cutoff  
jeans and slapped horse flies away from each other.

Days and nights we spent splattered in blood,  
with silver scales like falling stars flashing  
throughout our hair, our hoodies caked

with dried slime. And on a rare day with  
a break in fishing, when we couldn't stand  
our own stink any longer, we begged

until the fisherman let us row the dingy to shore.  
Keeping an eye out for bears, we girls hiked  
up the edge of a cold creek, stripped

to our underwear and splashed and laughed  
like river otters, washing our bodies  
with snowmelt and moss. And afterward,

near the shoreline, my best friend and I  
laid out on the rocky beach, our fingers  
reaching toward each other through blades

of shore grass, while the throaty raven cawed  
out waterdrop plunks from the forest.  
And in that sunlit moment, the prophecy sort of

came true—But instead, we'd gone "girl crazy"  
and if someone was looking down at us deckhands  
through a cosmic ship's porthole, some might have  
called us *first love*.

\*

Mike Puican

### 30 Seconds

It doesn't have to make sense. It just has to sell product. *You're not the same person you used to be. Why are you using the same shampoo?* The actress practices her lines as they apply her makeup. Down the street a woman put stones in her pockets and drowned.

Dryer sheets become spring rain, ready-to-bake desserts are cookies in the oven at Grandma's, floor cleaners: pine forests. Over time the lines dissolve like voices blurring to a steady hum. A couple argues somewhere down the block. A funeral procession turns the corner singing "Amazing Grace."

The focus group told us: too much lather, not enough conditioning. It's not what they expected. Neither is this. You start with a clear line of action. It becomes a story but not the one you want. We let the mourners pass, then return to the shoot. Bring more lights, we're losing the sun. Someone cue the pigeons.

\*

Ruben Quesada

**Poetry Is Bourgeois**

On the way home from work  
On the northbound train  
I heard a young woman say  
Poetry is meant for the rich  
Poetry is for the privileged  
Poetry is for those who can spend  
Time to write words meant for change  
It is a life carelessly spent  
Writing. This is a lie.

\*

Susan Rich

**Underage**

Who is she?  
The teenager with a mission

fighting on the battlefield  
of Capitalism

with only babysitting money.

Why does she pause  
on the corner of Harvard & Washington—

at small green-lead windows

above the empty window box.  
The flower shop sign

reads, *under construction*,  
like her.

And suddenly, she becomes

employed. An arranger of orchids  
with pussywillow,

curator of terrariums, and her favorite—  
anthologist of the centerpiece.

She learns the commerce

of water and sand  
as if she knows the ingredients

for an exemplary life.

What she hears of sex, of surrealism  
from the older workers,

women approaching their mid-twenties,  
surprises her.

You can sweet talk your way

into Salvador Dali's suite  
at the Ritz;

or marry a silver-haired Colonel,

to become rich and unhappy.  
But what shocks her most

is when she murmurs, *may I help you?*

and finds she can  
advise afternoon light, more jasmine, a blue planter.

Another world is here—and it is hers.

\*

R. Joseph Rodríguez

**Everyjuan/x**

arises  
before coffee drips  
everywhere  
faces grace hell  
idle justice  
knows limits  
memorizes  
notices  
opportunities  
permanent  
qualification  
restores  
sanity  
thinks  
underdog  
vows  
winning  
xenagogue  
yearns  
zapateo

\*

Christine Rhein

### **In the Dynamometer Lab**

Torque. Speed. Temperature.

I watched red dots  
climb control-panel screens  
while the crew,  
all around me, talked sports—  
teams and wagers.

They asked about my father's  
line of work,  
about my husband's, and why  
a sweet girl like me  
was working as an engineer.

The constant roar  
and rumble: engines, running  
full throttle, bolted  
to their stands, inside metal cages  
and grease-smudged  
safety glass. The guys sat there  
chuckling on that day  
one accused me of stealing  
my job from a man.

Validation & Durability—  
months of testing  
were equal to years on the road,  
and every afternoon  
they piled data for me to gather  
as they waited for  
failure—a sheared timing belt,  
a blown gasket,  
or that deeper damage—  
a broken piston—  
the booming pummels,  
screeching shrapnel.

\*

Sara Rosenberg

### **The Mapmaker**

Tell me about the time  
I shadowed you to work

and climbed up to your drawing table  
with its gems of colored pencils.

Tell me about the crisp, rolled maps  
shaded with your geologist precision

and how we searched the window  
for gulls shearing the mist above the bay.

The receptionist brought me lemon drops.  
You swung closed the heavy door.

One by one, they knocked against  
the wood—colleagues who wanted your advice,

and you had so much to give, a mind as clear as water.  
Tell me how to trace the lines of distance,

to glean richness from the deepest furrow.  
I swung my legs into the office breeze

while in their swift canyons of air,  
birds dove into the blue. Tell me

about the polished desk. The corded phone.  
Tell me that if I rang it, you would answer.

\*

Francine Rubin

**Labor**

I made another person  
in my body.  
I pushed until I shat  
and wasn't sure I  
would make it out  
alive. One doctor told me  
my baby's heart rate was dropping  
so I needed to roll myself  
and my contracting belly-baby  
into a better position.  
None of this is  
a metaphor.

\*

Turab Saiyed

## Once a Year

At twenty-two, I kissed my bride goodbye, her hands trembling with henna under Surat's sun. The plane to Dubai groaned like my heart, carrying me to scaffolds and sandstorms, a construction site where cranes claw the sky. Each brick I lay is a promise—roti for her table, books for her dreams. One year, I'll return, I swear, clutching a year's wages in a plastic bag.

The foreman's whistle splits my days, sun scalding my neck, rebar bruising my hands. In the barracks, I trace her letters—"Zainab's first word was Abbu." I wasn't there. I'm never there. Eid comes, and I fly home, a stranger to my daughter's toddling steps. Her eyes don't know me, and my wife's smile hides a new crease.

Years stack like the towers I build. At thirty, I miss Zainab's first day of school, her dupatta brighter than the desert noon. At forty, I send money for her nikah, watching grainy videos on a cracked phone, her joda swaying without me. My wife writes, "The house is bigger now," but her words feel hollow, like the concrete shells I pour.

The flights home blur—once a year, a visa's mercy, a thief of time. I'm a guest in my own life, missing birthdays, fevers, fights. My son, born when I was sweating in July, calls me "Chacha" by mistake. I laugh it off, but the ache settles, heavy as the steel beams I haul.

At fifty-five, my back creaks like old wood. Zainab's married now, her husband's face a stranger's in photos sent by text. My wife's hair is gray, her voice softer, as if she's speaking to a ghost. I sit at our table, one week a year, and the silence asks, Was it worth it? The money built their lives, but I'm outside their stories.

Now sixty, I shuffle through the site, dust in my lungs, my hands gnarled knots. The young workers call me Nana, not knowing I've missed my own grandchildren's names. I send rupees still, wired to a home that's grown without me. Each year, I land in Surat, older, smaller, a shadow at the gate, watching my family live a life I bought but never lived.

\*

David Salner

### **Prophet of Furnaces and Dust**

*I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley,  
bones that were very dry. —Ezekiel 37*

After Vietnam, he came home to fight  
with the dust, went wild with the injustice,  
waged war with everyone and lost. He cried  
and drank himself raving each night,  
but a revelation saved him, of Jesus  
in a furnace room, drifting  
above the dust, Jesus—and the meds  
a Clarksburg doctor gave him. Mood adjusters,  
which could dissolve his burnt-out eyes  
into a sheepish grin.

An Old Testament  
fury crackled in his face  
when he guessed I was not only a Jew  
but an atheist. Still, he treated me  
with the utmost kindness.  
He was Ezekiel—  
we were the Captives of Babylon,  
laboring all midnight shift  
amid clouds of dried pitch, death itself,  
shouldering plates of cold steel,  
threading nuts large as a fist,  
clattering them tight with an impact,  
working so slowly, so slowly  
every move became a deliberation,  
because, as he revealed—“Look what this company  
did to Bhopal. Don’t bust your ass for it.”

I accepted his revelations but not his Lord,  
and he accepted that.

After so many layoffs, we were left  
to walk in the shadow of furnaces  
caked with snow, shattered ribs of concrete,  
crumbling walls of refractory, warped crane rails,  
buckets with iron jaws rusted shut,  
a shambles of dead pigeons, feathers  
packed with carbon, ancient temples half buried  
in deserts of desiccated greed, revelations of dust.

I showered—  
couldn't wash off the dust.  
Then I walked away,  
leaving him in a valley of dry bones  
that would rise and live.

\*

Moudi Sbeity

### **Something Useful**

My grandmother has known war as a staple  
in the pantry you never run out of,  
like jasmine rice or green lentils,  
or the thick viscous olive oil she harvests  
which doubles as ointment for deep wounds.  
She kept the blood at bay on her gashed ankle  
by slathering the slimy blessing, placed a torn  
piece of pita, wrapped it all in thin gauze.  
Don't ask me what the properties are and how  
she knew. All I know is that it worked.  
All I know is that when war is a staple in  
your pantry, you learn what to do with it,  
how to preserve it, how to turn it into  
something necessary, into something useful.

\*

Jeff Schwartz

### **All the Empty Spaces**

I grew up in a house filled with teeth  
crammed into crawl spaces & attic eaves,  
strangers' molars, incisors, & gaps

where the rotten tooth was pulled or  
a gold crown went missing. Look  
at that classic overbite, my father

would say, gripping the plaster cast  
he took of Mrs. M's mouth before  
depositing it gently into a shoebox

with a dozen others from the M family.  
The timbers of our house yawned &  
realigned with each generation of teeth.

I hate to think where they are now  
having outlasted my father, Mrs. M,  
& the house itself.

\*

Sean Sexton

### **Day's Work**

After he was brought into his room,  
we split a cowboy shirt down the back, eased  
his bruised arms through the sleeves  
and he assumed the appearance of a sleepy  
rancher, taking his noonday nap.

He went to death as to a day's work,  
got his shoulder into it as when he was thirteen  
working at the dairy, milking a man's worth  
of cows before school. He said no to the feeding  
tubes in quiet disappointment, having failed

the second swallowing test in the hospital.  
Without news secreted among us he'd been  
disabled by a stroke and any idea of which direction  
to head, he closed his eyes, last words already spoken.  
A mineral patience entered his face, same as

the afternoon he sat his horse, tied to the caught  
heifer—hung up with a deformed calf I had to puzzle  
out of her in the hour and a half it took, and there  
he stayed, his pain subsumed as a forest into mist.  
Through five days struggle crossing oceans of breath,

he journeyed between realms, the occult mastery  
of heart and human tide at work in slow surcease.  
The wait, the pain and distance, all he traversed  
to overcome himself as we kept vigil, until  
he found the narrow, difficult way out.

\*

Marcus Silcock

### **Salad Bar**

In America, he worked at Sizzler. Washing dishes, but he wanted to move up to salad bar. It was hard to meet Salad Bar. Salad Bar was slick. Salad Bar was on his toes. Salad Bar aged his wrinkled fingers for 2 years washing dishes before becoming Salad Bar. Good eyes and quick fingers, he said, sliding the shoelace of beets down the slick counter. Also stealthy. You had to look like all the rest of them. Dropping your ear into conversations. His sticky fingers on the pulse of the diners. Slipping something creamy or tangy into the bounties. Salad Bar sometimes popped into the backroom where Tatra was washing dishes with floating cigarette butts and yolky bottoms. His hands wrinkling into baby steps. Keep trying, said Salad Bar. By the midnight glow of his refrigerator, Tatra dipped his hands into crisp lettuce. Salad fingers salad fingers salad fingers, he said. When you say something three times, magic happens.

\*

Michael Simms

### **The Rock Garden**

After my father died  
I remembered the rock garden  
we built years ago

in the backyard. I was fourteen.  
From the backs of trucks  
poured tons of gray gabbro,

black andesite, turbidite  
forged with ancient animal faces,  
pocked pumice, starry porphyry,

obsidian like the night sky,  
pebbly granite, creased tuff,  
flat gray basalt, bauxite,

marlstone, feldspar,  
pyrite, flint, graphite, and iron slag  
heavy as an ancient obsession.

Backs and arms burning  
we stacked the rock in a ring,  
filled it with soil, another ring,

another wall of rock  
we O'Slaviens called  
a *fairy fort* to hold our garden.

Each rock was solid as a fact  
but fragile. I dropped a slab of granite  
on a round black stone

and it cracked like an egg  
with red crystal surrounding white crystal  
surrounding a hole waiting a million years

for my mind to tumble in. I traveled far  
in that moment until my father yelled  
*Start digging! The roses have arrived!*

Each concentric layer of our hill fort  
held a world of its own. First the native grasses  
lantana and muhly grass, then the monkey grass,

the heat-loving salvia, star flowers  
and the trumpet-shaped flowers  
of hope named *Esperanza*,

beautyberry, yellow bells, and above them  
yaupon holly, red yucca, purple passionflower,  
blue daze, fragrant plumeria, hearty zinnia and azalea,

and finally, crowning the garden,  
three crape myrtles with black foliage  
and scarlet blossoms.

And decades later, as my family gathered  
beside the Llano River in high summer  
beneath red oak and yellow cedar

in the music of warblers and chickadees  
I remembered the rock garden, far away  
in miles and years. My brother stood

on the shelf of pink and blue limestone  
and poured the ashes of our parents  
into the river that plunges over

marble falls and granite shoals  
and empties everything we've ever held  
into the sea.

\*

Ashleigh Smith

### **The Labor of Existing Here**

It's been one of those days,  
the kind I've had entirely too many of.  
When I don't want to die necessarily,  
but living this existence isn't a torch  
I want to carry.  
I've had just about  
enough.

Dingy cellblock walls.  
I can smell the cheap metals of the beds and desks  
even in my dreams.  
Aggression and hate about to drown  
me in their wave. I'm not trying to give  
up on life's experiment, but this is  
8,000 and something Groundhog's Days.

My shoulders feel so bowed and heavy  
I'm doubled up on years lived versus  
life contained. My end is in sight  
but I can only get there  
if I can withstand the weight of each day  
living  
inside of here.

\*

Anna Egan Smucker

### **Who He Was**

Too often, as a worker at the foundry pounded  
the iron out of a mold, a sliver would arc  
and lodge in one of his unprotected eyes.

Unable to afford a doctor,  
the man would arrive in the evening,  
cap in hand, at my grandfather's kitchen door.

Although my grandad was his foreman, he was still  
one of them. He'd paid his dues—lost his ring finger  
in the foundry to a press still in use.

Carrying a chair out from the kitchen, he'd place  
it in a spot of waning sunlight, ask the man  
to please sit, and using a toothpick, he'd gently, gently,

roll the man's eyelid back,  
and with his clean handkerchief  
he'd flick that speck out.

Cradling an eye cup filled with warm water,  
he'd tilt the man's head back, slowly pouring  
the water to clean and soothe that bloodshot eye.

If, when the man was ready to leave,  
he began to reach into his pocket,  
Grandad would shake his head and touch his arm.

The man, shy, uncertain,  
would tip his cap—  
perhaps grateful  
that my grandad  
was who we was.

\*

Jennifer Sutherland

## Privilege

The Westvaco plant in Williamsport  
is closing. You wouldn't know that,  
it's something the poem tells you,

just as the poem will have to explain  
why it matters. The expectation being,  
of course, that this is an unqualified

good, the factory shutting down means  
the river runs clear again, not that  
anyone will notice, filling out

the unemployment forms, in a living  
room if they're lucky, or in a church  
basement. Then the men will gather

at Luke's. I've been there, I ordered  
a Stella I think it was and the bartender  
winked and handed me a Budweiser.

I spent a week there in 1994, the biggest  
asbestos trial in local history gearing up  
to start, and I interviewed most of the men

and quite a few of the women. The difference  
was the men were either dying or they  
were too young to have worked the mills

when it was still in use. The women  
got it from the laundry, husbands  
and fathers brought the dust home

on their overalls, even in their lunch  
pails. You shook it out, one of them told  
me, while we were taking a break

and she was catching her breath, collapsed  
a little in her floral wingback chair.  
Twenty other lawyers milling around

on the porch, waiting for her lungs to dry  
out enough to continue. We kept a clean  
house, she tells me and leans back.

A week later she was dead. I got good  
at guessing how much time they had, all  
based on the angle of the shoulders.

As the cancer thickened the mesothelium  
it made them throw their shoulders back.  
Some of them felt around behind them

like there might be wings back there,  
like the wings were too heavy  
and when they found nothing

on their backs they looked surprised. I was there  
to gather what they knew so it didn't die  
with them and I did my job, even when one

of the good ol' boys slid a bar napkin down  
the marled oak bar to where I was sitting:  
BITCH, somebody wrote, in black marker.

I left a \$20 on it. Once, after a very long afternoon,  
lawyers all around an old man's bedroom, Ernie –  
that was his name, his real one, no point

altering it now because what good would that  
do, either you tell the truth or you don't,  
if you understand at all what the truth is –

Ernie started choking on the fluid in his lungs.  
Everybody left the room fast. His daughter  
dialed 911 on a slimline

phone. He turned to me and looked  
and he told me something and I don't owe it  
to you or anyone to tell you about it.

\*

Dustin Triplett

### **The God of Small Deaths**

I am the guy who got the call  
when something skittered behind drywall—  
a noise too fast to be remembered,  
too slow to be ignored.

They let me in  
like a priest with a crucifix full of poison.  
I didn't bless the space,  
just pulled the fridge back,  
found a nest of roaches huddled like secrets.

I saw what people live with  
when they think no one's watching—  
grease-caked counters,  
a sticky residue above the sink,  
cat shit in a shoebox,  
old birthday balloons clinging to the ceiling  
like ghosts that forgot the date.

There's a rhythm to the kill:  
spray, bait, dust, repeat.  
You learn to walk quiet.  
You learn where they hide.  
You learn what sugar means.

And still—  
the crawlspace never dries,  
the attic always breathes,  
and every wall hums like it's waiting  
to be torn open.

I used to count the bodies.  
Now I just wash my hands  
and try not to think  
about what's still moving  
after I leave.

\*

Rabelani Tshidino

### **The Union Organizer**

I do not knock—I march.  
Not with weapons, but with worn-out boots  
and the rage of those who've waited too long for justice.  
I've seen miners cough blood into silence,  
nurses cradle death on double shifts,  
clerks weep behind their counters  
because school fees don't wait for wage negotiations.  
They call me trouble.  
I carry that word like a badge,  
because I've made the arrogant sweat  
at the sound of a worker's united voice.  
I've spoken in tongues—Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tsonga—  
but the language of hunger needs no translation.  
I've slept in union offices, on floors with flyers for pillows,  
because a strike doesn't pause for comfort.  
There are days I am so tired  
even my dreams need rest.  
But I go on.  
Because someone must hold the line.  
Because someone must say *no more*.  
I do this for my father,  
whose spine bowed in a factory so mine could rise.  
I do this for the cashier who smiled through tears,  
for the cleaner who scrubs Parliament's floors  
yet eats her lunch outside like she doesn't belong.  
I am not just a union organizer.  
I am the echo of a struggle still unfolding.  
And I am not afraid.

\*

Veronica Tucker

**Coffee, Lipstick, Turbulence**

*for my mother, flight attendant, 1974*

She wore heels  
to serve coffee at thirty thousand feet.  
Reapplied lipstick  
after every passenger passed judgment.  
Her hair was a helmet  
of style and survival.  
They called her honey,  
sweetheart,  
asked her to smile  
as if they'd bought it  
with the ticket.  
She knew the evacuation routes  
better than her own street.  
Could pop open an emergency slide  
in under ten seconds  
but wasn't allowed  
to gain five pounds  
or speak her mind.  
She used to say  
the sky felt freer  
than the ground ever did,  
though she also said  
her ankles always ached.  
It was work that looked like leisure,  
grace on a deadline,  
beauty required.  
Now, when my daughters fly,  
they see women in flats,  
commanding the cabin  
like it's a vessel of possibility.  
And I see my mother,  
still somewhere up there,  
carving space  
in a world just beginning to change.

\*

Cindy Veach

### **How a Community of Women**

*Resolved, That we will not go back into the mills to work unless our wages are continued...as they have been.*

*Resolved, That none of us will go back, unless they receive us all as one.*

*Resolved, That if any have not money enough to carry them home, they shall be supplied.*

*—Boston Evening Transcript, February 18, 1834*

How my French Canadian great grandmother and great, great aunts toiled thirteen hours a day in the textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts. How weak the light when they left the boarding house each morning. How screaming starlings flash mobbed them along the way. How they sucked thread through the eye of their foot long wooden shuttles that fed the cotton to the looms. How they called that quick motion of their lips “the kiss of death.” How they could not converse over the cacophonic, clickety-click, clickety-clack of five hundred howling looms. How they walked back in ear-ringing darkness, had dinner, then took up their needlework—crochet, crewel, cross stitch, knitting, mending, quilting, darning—close work, women’s work. My mother taught me, her mother taught her, her mother taught her.

\*

Ryan Vine

## KFC

*You know what work is—if you're  
old enough to read this you know what  
work is, although you may not do it.  
Forget you.*

—Philip Levine

I slice and dump vacuum-packed bags of raw chicken  
into a waist-high aluminum drum—a kind of barrel  
on its side—gut the plastic flavor pack, squeeze it in  
and wash with water from the swan's-neck tap whatever's  
left of both bags then splash that in there, too. I shut  
the hatch, spin the squeaky drum, chant 1 3 5 bingo  
bango bongo fifteen times and slap the side when it's done.  
Kyle's propped the receiving door open. He's smoking.  
The snowy wind blows the smoke back in.

After  
I've spun the drum and the seasoning has become  
inextricable from chicken skin, I give it one last  
rotation, aim the hatch at the wheels, roll the catching  
cart into position and pull the sticky, ringed pin. Imagine  
disemboweling an aluminum pony: all the raw, wet  
noises unraveling. Cold air slides across the floor  
like a cast spell and Kyle's stopped even trying  
to blow his smoke out the door.

I'm only sixteen  
but when I drop the pieces of dead bird into the batter box  
I understand it's not much bigger than the boxes  
these poor birds lived their short lives in. Still, I coat the slippery  
chicken in just enough flavored dust, pick ten pieces for a meal  
toss them into a rectangular wire basket the size of a bread pan  
and lower it into one of the four dirty fryers that Kyle  
was supposed to clean. They lean against the wall behind us  
smoking like they're on break.

In the middle of what becomes  
my last shift, I slam a bottle of Robitussin and within minutes  
I can't even stand. I push my foot through the floor and watch it  
in the basement knock the white buckets around, down by where  
we keep the huge American flags washed and folded. *You should go*

Kyle says. But I don't want to. Even as he bows by the back door  
and I'm sucked into the street, even out here where everything  
is sparkling snow—and not the falling kind but the finer stuff  
the wind pulls from empty parking lots or apartment rooftops—  
I don't feel like leaving. I'm not bothered by the boulder  
my mind's become, rolling down the hills I'm trying to climb.

\*

## Word Problems

1. Suppose that worker *I*, who has \$7  
in their bank account, uses a combination  
of cash and credit to pay the \$40  
monthly phone bill. *I* then metes out their 10  
gigabytes of data, app by app, until one bounces  
back a task that *I* completes in 19  
minutes on the way to their temp job.  
For completing the task, *I* receives a \$5.03  
transfer of funds (after taxes and fees), of which \$4.19  
will eventually be used to pay for gas and the  
long-term maintenance of *I*'s car. *I* earns \$32.00  
(after taxes and deductions) for working 3  
hours at the temp job, though will not receive  
that money for approximately 8  
months, which is how long it will take for  
the labor ministry to investigate *I*'s 15  
page claim and issue a 25  
page order requiring wages to,  
in fact, be paid, as per section 22  
of the *Employees Are Not Volunteers Act*.  
After work, *I* spends \$0.31  
on fuel getting to the grocery store.  
Once there, will *I* have  
enough credibility to  
trade for tender  
cuts of prime meat  
and bright green  
pippin apples *I* can  
really bite into?

\*

Jennifer Elise Wang

### **Being Roommates with a Stripper**

When your roommate is a stripper,  
You discover who makes  
The teeniest thong  
You can legally get away with  
And that 7-inch Pleasers  
Are not too bad to walk in.  
When your roommate is a stripper,  
You start going to the gym more,  
Not to have her body exactly  
But to have the same gluteal control  
In order to twerk along with her  
In your at-home dance parties.  
When your roommate is a stripper,  
You see the stacks of 1s,  
But not the 5s, 10s, or 20s  
She has given to the house and staff.  
When your roommate is a stripper,  
You stop laughing at jokes about her job  
Because her colleague was stalked  
And another was threatened  
While the bartender laughed  
At the image of her possible demise.  
Every night, it's a flip of the coin  
As to whether she'll be assaulted.  
When your roommate is a stripper,  
You learn about misogynoir,  
TERFs and SWERFs,  
Labor rights and union-busting tactics,  
And that it's always "sex worker"  
And never "prostitute" or the other word  
That sounds more apropos for fishing.  
When your roommate is a stripper,  
You get advice on how to set boundaries  
While still smiling at the customer.  
When your roommate is a stripper  
And getting ready for a night of picketing  
While you've come home after overtime  
And drink a beer with some Tylenol  
For your Carpal tunnel and plantar fasciitis  
And blink away your dry eyes,  
You realize you are selling your body too.

\*

James Washington

**I'm from a Time**

of department store  
elevator operators.  
Black women seated  
on fold-out stools  
in white gloves refrain:

*Eighth floor,  
women's and petite.  
Watch your step now,  
please watch your step!*  
All those miles,  
traveled up and down.  
Politely going nowhere.

\*

Susan Weaver

### **The Makeover**

It's late when I come in.  
Most shelter residents have gone to bed,  
but in the dining room Lena lights  
a cigarette. She's cut her hair  
and colored it. I tell her I like it  
with her freckles and snub nose.  
"Always wanted to be a blonde," she says.  
"Anyways, if he sees me from the back,  
he'll never know it's me."

She's taken a new name,  
given one to Cammy too.  
"I won't use it till we're on the train.  
Some day, when she's old enough,  
I'll tell her what her real name is."  
I think, "If you live so long"  
and bite my lip. I don't let on  
I plan to hide my mattress  
behind a desk tonight.

\*

Sean Webb

**To Colleen, for Whom no Elegy Will Suffice**

*Colleen Quinn, 11/19/1969 – 1/18/2025*

It was the harshest winter in years. Another  
snowstorm encompassed us and our valley.  
An unrelenting season, nearly all pall and dirge.  
You were unconscious for days, slowly dying.  
I did all I could in keeping you comfortable,  
rubbed your feet and legs, arms and hands,  
adjusted covers, swabbed your mouth and lips,  
applied cold compresses to keep fevers down.  
I filled pages of a notebook with meds given,  
bodily reactions, moments you tried to speak.  
Before the next doses of morphine and lorazepam,  
I stood in the doorway, leaning against the frame  
arms crossed, watching you breathe, your breaths  
labored, then slow. When you died, the gray walls  
washed away and the room rose in a golden aura.  
So little was left. I gathered you in my arms,  
kissed your lips, your face, your closed eyes.  
I anticipated your body growing cold quickly,  
but warmth stayed a long time, passing into me  
each time I pulled you close. I held your hand  
that had gone cold, my warmth passed into you.  
It took hours for the hospice nurse to arrive,  
her travel hindered by the storm. I looked on  
as she undressed your body and prepared  
your skin with oils. Purple pools gathered  
in your back, your skin clung to your joints,  
your thin extremities. The nurse dressed you  
in clothes I knew you liked. A man serving  
in place of Charon arrived in a black van.  
He carried your body out in a worn sling.  
I stayed with you every moment there was  
before he closed the doors and drove away,  
leaving me breathing in the dark. Pillows  
of snow collecting on everything I could see.

\*

William Webb

**Working (not working) from home**

Turnip does not want me  
to type  
she paws the keyboard and  
wants to be scratched and rubbed  
of course  
me too

I tell her, *I have to work*  
right now she has dropped  
a stuffed toy  
on the keyboard

the one she is destroying, a lamb  
once a unicorn?

Her work is better  
ripping apart, sleeping, waiting to be loved  
treats  
walks with company  
I am jealous  
laptop open  
a deadline  
no bones

\*

Gabriel Welsch

### **Jimmy John's in the Jackhammer Street**

Eyes the hue of horizon at sea,  
He talks in the jackhammer street,  
Handing me a sack of sandwich.

At the first cool of fall the bricks  
Around us finally not hot to the touch,  
I say *nice to be out on a bike, huh?*

The traffic still snarls, but happy in the sun  
the way weather makes a mood. Orange vests  
lunch on the curb as the bus hisses by.

*My mother's down there*, he says, pointing  
toward where we imagine Florida must be,  
in a hurricane path, sustained

winds, storm surge, category number. *She's*  
*anchored*, he says, still gazing to Uptown  
and the hills between the rivers

*in the double wide in her retirement place.*  
I start to talk but he still has yet  
to look at me. *I haven't spoken to her for years.*

The lunching vests laugh and a bike bell  
rings us back in a rush, just missing  
a messenger wreck. He waves, bikes away.

His backpack heaves side to side  
As his legs pedal and he veers  
Between orange cones

like handwriting, a stutter on a post card,  
his legs working to get to what's next,  
carrying it all on his back.

\*

Ed Werstein

### **Dangling in Mid-Air**

I suppose once you are ten feet off the ground,  
another hundred feet or so doesn't make a big difference,  
but how do they get to that, these iron workers  
I watch high above the sidewalk, welders and riveters  
trusting the crane operator's ability to place  
the girder exactly where they need it  
without knocking them from their catwalk,  
wrangling the girders into place,  
standing on yesterday's work and trusting  
its worth with their lives?

At break time some sit up there,  
lunch pail beside them on the girder,  
feet dangling in mid-air. Down on the street  
life goes on, oblivious to the show above them.  
For those that do stop and look up  
it's like watching a circus act for free.

*Step right up! See the death-defying iron workers  
high above you, taming and shaping  
the wild flying girders into a new skyline.  
Watch the hard-hatted men and women perform  
on the girders and catwalks in a coordinated sky dance!*

Iron workers risk their lives, architects take the credit.  
Architects plan, iron workers execute.  
Architects are seldom killed on the job,  
iron workers die every day.

I'm ashamed that I can name several architects,  
but don't know the names of the iron workers  
who died building the baseball park I attend.

A statue of the team's owner stands at the main gate.  
The ironworkers memorial, like an afterthought,  
is out near the parking lot.

\*

Dick Westheimer

**What I Should Have Said on a Dark Sky Excursion with My High School Physics Teacher**

*in memory of David Laird*

The cool kids thought David was a dork,  
bucktoothed and meeting us at the door  
of his classroom, his lab coat buttoned to the neck,  
his brow-line glasses, coke-bottle-thick,

perched on the beak of his nose. His blackboard  
bloomed with formulas and tracks  
of point-plots and sketches showing planetary  
motion in formulas and lines, with explanatory

notes, flow charts and graphs—he was  
a preacher possessed, his religion and cause:  
the gods of gravity & maths. I was a parishioner  
transported, him talking in tongues, me under

the spell of such things. But mostly, his whole being  
teemed with stars and how they precessed. He let me see  
what he saw, deep sky dreams by day then going out with him  
under the sequined night. He'd find a place wholly dimmed

of city lights, free of smog and haze. We'd set up our scopes  
and note exactly the moment when a star would pass so close  
to the mountains of the moon that we'd see it graze,  
pulse off and on like a lighthouse beam. We'd take surveys

for NASA noted in 10 hertz time. Such joy when this good work  
was done. We packed up all but our scopes and the astronomer/  
teacher pointed up and smiled, *We've one more treat, Mars*, he said.  
I went to my eyepiece and he to his and there as if on a thread

the red planet slid into sight, then closer—like an old old friend—  
leaned in and then it was quickly hidden from view as if to spend  
some time alone before emerging from behind the half  
lit moon. I felt so large and small at once, gasped

at the thought of these orbs themselves, dwelling in that  
emptiness so full of light and dark, a realm  
that, with my basement-made scope, I visited as much as it was  
visited on me. I, illuminated by more than the lunar light,

paused and said, quiet as I should under the spangled spell of stars,  
*Thank you.*

\*

Karen J. Weyant

### **Reflections on the Waitress Barbie**

*The Waitress Barbie doll designed by Robert Best, celebrates the working woman.*  
—from *BarbiePedia*

Her pink uniform is too perky,  
the buttons against her breasts,  
a bit too snug. The white apron  
and matching hat are too clean.  
There are no stains anywhere, not  
a spot of mustard or splatter of ketchup.  
No drops of gravy, no spaghetti sauce smears.  
Her nose is too cute, her blue eyes  
shiny but heavy with mascara  
that never runs. Her hair is pulled  
back but too many strands are loose,  
waving dangerously close to every dish.  
Her arched feet slip into heels  
no waitress would ever wear.  
The coffee pot dangling from her fingers  
is clear, with no evidence of grinds.  
The only thing that is right is her arms.  
Permanently bent at the elbow,  
they are perfect for balancing trays  
and plates, checkbooks and bills,  
double shifts when someone  
quits at the very last minute.

\*

Corrie Lynn White

### **Elegy for Driving Around**

I take a tech job in trucking,  
calculate “dwell time,”  
the minutes truck drivers  
sit with idling engines.  
My boss tracks people  
tracking packages at home  
or wandering Walmart aisles  
for seaweed extract  
or colostrum supplements,  
because no one wants  
to be dead in the future.  
Truck driving looks  
a lot like freedom,  
but oil resources are finite  
and folks sit on the couch to shop,  
so cameras are installed  
to track productivity.  
As a teen, I drove my Saturn  
down the cornfield’s asphalt seam.  
Burning tobacco in my fingers  
I breathed alongside cut  
Bermuda and exhaust.  
I hoped God didn’t see  
how much I loved leaving.  
*Here* kept changing.  
It was a place and it wasn’t.  
I could file my life into folders,  
and the wind would swirl them  
or the combustion engine  
would burn them or the ditches  
would gather them as thistle.

\*

André Le Mont Wilson

**Body**

your body  
my memory  
of its weight  
when I carried you  
from your  
wheelchair  
to the toilet and back  
lingers in my arms  
long after  
your  
death

\*

**Assignment For My Post-Pandemic High School Students, Who are So Very Careful**

1. After school, take a bus to the end of the line. Tell no one where you are going. Wear a woolen hat and big glasses. Dodge the imaginary cameras that follow you everywhere. Bring a paper map and read it badly.
2. As the day dips toward dusk, find a creekbed with bullfrogs and get mud on the hems of your frayed jeans. Forget your date with your fear of failure.
3. Walk back alleys in weather that falls like confetti. Let your hair get wet and fingers cold.
4. Sneak through darkening streets and abandoned factories with dusty windows and metal drums filled with secrets. Be shocked by silence. Watch the shape of your own shadow in the streetlights, how it shrinks and stretches and follows you everywhere.
5. Make a plan to change your hair: be gaudy one day and mossy the next. You're not playing yourself in the scene and owe us no consistency. Remember your ancestors—far enough back, we all have at least one brave traveler to a new land.
6. At night, make a shelter out of bottle caps and fishing line. Get paint on your hands. We've taught you control; now learn to unravel. Teeter. Falter. Don't open your gratitude journal: you're too young for that. Be open-eyed and sensing like an animal.
7. The prom dress in your backpack? Shred it. Reassemble it with wool scraps and pages from abandoned telephone books.
8. Toss the invitation to the wedding of your gradebook to your future.
9. And this: Don't let your bitterness be petty. Not yet, not yet.
10. Many starry years from now, you'll connect your dots, name your constellation, maybe call it fate. For now, glitter in the darkness.

\*

Francine Witte

### **The Mover's Wife**

Tired of her husband in other  
bedrooms all day, she starts to dream.  
How simple would it be to wrap up  
a life and move it out one fragile  
item at a time. First the heart, then  
memories tissue up and boxed. She  
dreams this over coffee late afternoon,  
before her solo dinner on the  
wedding china she uses every day.

At night, her husband comes home, sinewy  
and smudged, drops himself down  
on the couch like a heavy carton.  
Of course, he is taped shut, but she  
can't help but wonder what's inside.  
Thoughts of other women, purchase orders,  
back supports, or maybe a flash of their  
first night together here, him cradling her over  
the threshold when the future stared back  
at them like a blank, unfurnished room.

\*

Carolyn Wright

### A Truth, a Lie, and a Photo

of my grandfather Harry as a young swell  
in knickerbockers and high collar  
lounging under the shoeshine parlor  
awning, by the barber's striped pole.

East Saint Louis, 1910. But that was only  
one lie twinkling in my granddad's blue eyes  
with their hazel flecks as giveaways.  
He never was in Southern Illinois

and he wasn't born in Pensacola  
either. The only Louis was the *Pater Israelita*  
fingered on his birth certificate  
who Englished the names of his *shtetl* forepapa  
under the Lower East Side *chuppa*.

And Louise, his *shiksa* South German mother  
who took Jesus' name in vain when young Harry  
sauntered out of his P.S. and crawled under  
the chassis of yellow cabs in Far Rockaway

and later the dirt-disking John Deere  
curry-combing the track at Belmont.  
Which is where he took yours truly  
one Sunday afternoon of my eleventh summer  
--hazel-blue squint in his eyes from the stogie

poking from his bristle-brush moustache. "Kiddo,"  
he chuckled as he dropped me at my Aunt Mabel's  
brownstone in Queens. "I never shined shoes or cut  
hair in my life. And your grandmother" (who was

peering with my mother through Aunt Mabel's louvered  
blinds) "polished the numbers on my taxi driver's  
badge and counted every fare as I circled  
the avenues from 42nd Street to Union Square."

\*

Allison Zaczynski

### **Grocery Store Seafood Ice Case**

The art of it all –

smoothing the ice  
with the back of the shovel,  
sweeping my arms  
to create a slope –  
the perfect slope –

a midpoint between gravity and eyes –  
where the fish can rest on its side  
without sliding to a slump.

The exact degree I do not know,  
that knowledge instead is stored  
in my arms, shoulders,  
in my back –  
in the muscles.

I patchwork them all  
like a patterned graveyard –  
white flesh among  
the pink, the orange,  
the red, the grayish  
until the display is assembled.

\*\*\*

Erin Wilson

**Pewter**

I want to hold you gently  
and assure you, you have failed.

I want you to hold me gently  
and attest that I have.

With the pregnant light,  
the moon tenderly wipes  
the delicate feet of the heron.

Put down your sorry complaints.  
There is much work to do.

\*

## Contributors' Notes

**Sharon Perkins Ackerman** has published poems in *Southern Humanities Review*, *Appalachian Places*, *Atlanta Review*, *Broad River Review*, *Kestrel*, and elsewhere. Her second poetry collection is *A Legacy of Birds* (Kelsay Books, 2025). She is poetry editor for *Streetlight Magazine*.

**Susan Aizenberg** is the author of three full-length collections of poetry: *A Walk with Frank O'Hara* (UNMP/Mary Burritt Christiansen Poetry Series, 2024), *Quiet City* (BkMk, 2015), and *Muse* (Crab Orchard Poetry Series, 2002). Her awards include the VCU Levis Prize and the Nebraska Book Award in Poetry. [www.susanaizenberg.com](http://www.susanaizenberg.com)

**Derrick Austin** is the author of *Tenderness* (BOA Editions, 2021), winner of the 2020 Isabella Gardner Poetry Award, and *Trouble the Water* (BOA Editions, 2016), a finalist for the Kate Tufts Discovery Award and Lambda Literary Award for Gay Poetry. *This Elegance* is forthcoming from BOA Editions in spring 2026. Poem first published in *Dilettante Army*.

**John Peter Beck** was raised in a mill town on Lake Michigan in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. He is a recently retired professor in the labor education program at Michigan State University where he still co-directs Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives, a program that focuses on labor history and the culture of the workplace.

**Mihir Bellamkonda** is a DC-based poet. They were a finalist for Black Lawrence Press's St. Lawrence Book Award and have work published or forthcoming in *Variant Lit*, *The Offing*, and the *Nashville Review*, among other journals. @MihirWords.

**Joan Bernard** has published her work in the *Abandoned Mine*, *Amethyst Review*, *The Main Street Rag*, *the Aurorean*, *Connecticut River Review Journal*, *The North American Review*, and others. She lives in Boston, Mass.

**Jennifer Blackledge** is a poet who works for a global automotive company and lives just south of Detroit. She is the recipient of the 2025 Zocalo Public Square Poetry Prize, and her work has appeared in *JAMA*, *Rattle*, *I-70 Review*, *Kestrel*, and other places. [www.jenniferblackledge.com](http://www.jenniferblackledge.com).

**Todd Boss** is a poet, Emmy-winning librettist, and film producer working on a series of novels. He hosts the podcast *There's a Poem in That*, on which he writes healing poems for total strangers.

**Mark Brazaitis** is the author of nine books, including *The River of Lost Voices: Stories from Guatemala*, winner of the 1998 Iowa Short Fiction Award. A former Peace Corps Volunteer and technical trainer, he is a professor of English at West Virginia University, where he directs the Creative Writing Program and the West Virginia Writers' Workshop. [www.markbrazaitis.com](http://www.markbrazaitis.com)

**Gloria Bromberg** has published poetry in *Feral Poetry*, *Brawl Lit*, *Hobo Camp Review*, and elsewhere. They attend the Rainier Writing Workshop, Pacific Lutheran University's low-residency MFA program. Retired from a varied work life as a bookstore clerk, artists' model, sex educator, drug counselor, and psychotherapist, they live in Berkeley. Poem first published in *Feral Poetry*.

**Sarah Browning** is the author of *Call Me Yes* (FlowerSong Press, forthcoming), *Killing Summer* (Sibling Rivalry) and *Whiskey in the Garden of Eden* (The Word Works). Co-curator and co-host of Wild Indigo Poetry, she also teaches with Writers in Progress and coaches writers one-on-one. She lives in Philadelphia. [www.sarahbrowning.net](http://www.sarahbrowning.net)

**Mary Lou Buschi** (she/her) authored three poetry collections. Her most recent, *Blue Physics*, 2024 (Lily Poetry Review), was a finalist for Contemporary Poetry in The International Book Awards and a distinguished favorite for Independent Press Award. Her poems appear in *Glacier*, *Ploughshares*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere. Poem was first published in *Red Lightbulbs*.

**Lauren Camp** is the author of eight books, including *In Old Sky* (Grand Canyon Conservancy, 2024), which grew from her experience as Astronomer-in-Residence at Grand Canyon National Park. She received a Dorset Prize and was an Arab American Book Award finalist. Camp served as the second Poet Laureate of New Mexico. [www.laurencamp.com](http://www.laurencamp.com). Poem was first published in *Funicular Magazine*.

**Gary Ciocco** grew up near the Rolling Rock brewery and worked there during two summers of college. He lives south of Pittsburgh and teaches for Carlow University and West Virginia University. He has published poetry in several journals, and reviews poetry and philosophy books for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

**Andrew Collard** is the author of *Sprawl* (Ohio University Press, 2023), winner of the Hollis Summers Poetry Prize. His poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *AGNI*, *Kenyon Review*, and elsewhere. He lives with his son in Grand Rapids, Mich. Poem was first published in *Another Chicago Magazine*.

**Geraldine Connolly** has published five poetry collections and received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Maryland Arts Council, and Breadloaf Writers Conference. Her work appears in *Poetry 180: A Poem A Day for High School Students* and other anthologies. Her latest book is *Instructions at Sunset* (Terrapin Books, 2025).

**Ginny Lowe Connors** is the author of six poetry collections, including *White Sail at Midnight* (*The Poetry Box*, 2024). As publisher of her own press, Grayson Books, Connors has edited several poetry anthologies. She earned an MFA in poetry from Vermont College of Fine Arts. A Board Member of the Connecticut Poetry Society, Connors is Managing Editor of *Connecticut River Review*. Poem first published in the *Rappahannock Review*.

**Joseph Cooper** is the author of six collections, most recently *Splash Fields* (VA Press, 2024). His latest works have appeared in *DMQ Review*, *Scud*, and *Assignment Literary Magazine*. He lives in Lewisburg, W.Va.

**Heather Coughlin** earned an MBA, not an MFA. She is an executive and entrepreneur whose 30-year career has spanned Wall Street to Main Street, while raising two kids. Her inaugural collection, *Out of Office*, documents the work/life emotions found within lifecycles of employees, products, clients, corporations, technology, and human beings.

**Barbara Crooker** is author of ten poetry books, most recently *Slow Wreckage* (Grayson Books, 2024); *Some Glad Morning* (Pitt Poetry Series), longlisted for the Julie Suk award, and *The Book of Kells* (Cascade Books), winner of Best Poetry Book of 2019 from Poetry by the Sea. Poem first published in *The Devil's Millhopper* (1990).

**Jim Daniels** comes from a family of Detroit autoworkers. His grandfather worked for Packard, his father worked for Ford's, his brother worked for Chrysler's. He also worked at Ford's—it paid for college. A retired educator, he tries to honor this history, and these lives, in his writing.

**Colin Dardis** most recent collection is *with the lakes* (above/ground press, 2023). A neurodivergent poet, editor, and sound artist, he is co-host of Belfast's long-running open mic night "Purely Poetry" and editor of the poetry blog, *Poem Alone*.

**Shira Dentz** is the author of five books, including *Sisyphusina* (Astrophil Press), winner of the Eugene Paul Nassar Prize, and two chapbooks. Her writing appears in *Poetry*, *APR*, *Iowa Review*, *Blackbird*, *Colorado Review*, [Poets.org](https://Poets.org), and NPR. She's received awards from the Academy of American Poets and Poetry Society of America.

**Dolo Diaz** is a poet with roots in Spain, currently residing in California. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *ONE ART*, *Rogue Agent*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Star\*Line*, *Humana Obscura*, and *Book of Matches*, among others. Her debut chapbook, *Defiant Devotion*, was published by Bottlecap Press.

**Mitch Ditkoff** is a writer, poet, President of Idea Champions, Founder of "Portal to Possibility," Content Creator for PremRawat.com, and host of the monthly Gift of Poetry Zoom gatherings. He is also the author of eight books. He lives in Catskill, NY. [www.mitchditkoff.com](http://www.mitchditkoff.com)

**Liz Dolan** is the author of *They Abide*, a The Robert McGovern Prize nominee. Her second collection, *A Secret of Long Life*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She taught English in New York City. A proud grandmother of nine grandkids, she lives in Rehoboth Beach, Del.

**Sean Thomas Dougherty** works the nightshift as a Medtech and Caregiver in Erie, PA. His most recent book is *Death Prefers the Minor Keys* (BOA Editions).

**Zach Eddy** is a former aluminum worker. His writing has appeared in *Northwest Review*, *High Desert Journal*, *Terrain.org*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Confluence*, and elsewhere. He currently teaches English composition and creative writing at Wenatchee Valley College and teaches historical fiction workshops for the Wenatchee Valley Museum & Cultural Center. Poem first published in *Outskirts: A Literary Journal*.

**E.M. Palitha Edirisooriya** works as a farmer and a three-wheeler driver. He has been a columnist and contributor for several national newspapers. His publications include a book on gammadu, a traditional ritual of rural Sri Lanka. Poem first published in his book මාවතේ ත්‍රිවිල් ජීවිතේ (*Life on Three Wheels*).

**Terri Kirby Erickson** is the author of seven collections of poetry. Her work has appeared in “American Life in Poetry,” *ONE ART*, *Rattle*, *The SUN*, *The Writer’s Almanac*, and elsewhere. Her awards include the Joy Harjo Poetry Prize, Nautilus Silver Book Award, and the International Book Award for Poetry.

**Yvonne M. Estrada** is the author of *My Name on Top of Yours*, a crown of sonnets accompanied by original photographs. Her poems have appeared in *Talking Writing* and *Pratik: The Ghosts of Paradise* and several anthologies, including *The Coiled Serpent: Poets Arising from the Cultural Quakes and Shifts of Los Angeles*.

**Leila Farjami** is an Iranian-American poet, translator, and psychotherapist. A recipient of awards from *The Iowa Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, and PEN America, her work appears in *Ploughshares*, *AGNI*, *Pleiades*, *The Iowa Review*, and more. She lives in Los Angeles and has been a finalist for multiple book prizes.

**Arvilla Fee** is from Dayton, Ohio, and is the author of *The Human Side*, *This is Life*, and *Mosaic: A Million Little Pieces*. <https://soulpoetry7.com/>

**Molly Fisk** is author of *The More Difficult Beauty*, *Listening to Winter*, and five volumes of radio commentary, and edited *California Fire & Water*, *A Climate Crisis Anthology*. Her book of linked historical poems, *Walking Wheel*, is forthcoming from Red Hen Press in 2026. Poem first published in *Terrain*.

**Gary Fincke** is the author of sixteen collections of poetry published by Ohio State UP, Michigan State UP, the University of Arkansas Press, BkMk, Lynx House, Slant, Jacar, and others. His newest book is *The Necessary Going On: Selected Poems 1980-2025* (Press 53, 2025).

**Ann Fisher-Wirth** has published eight books of poems, most recently *Into the Chalice of Your Thoughts* and *Paradise Is Jagged*. She is coeditor, with Laura-Gray Street, of *The Ecopoetry Anthology* and *Attached to the Living World: A New Ecopoetry Anthology*. She is Poet Laureate of Mississippi for 2025-2029.

**Jennifer L. Freed** is the author of *When Light Shifts*, which explores themes of identity, body, and caregiving and was a finalist for the 2022 Sheila Motton Book Prize and the 2025 Medal Provocateur. Recent work appears in *Atlanta Review*, *One Art*, *Rust and Moth*, and *Vox Populi*. She lives in Massachusetts. [Jfreed.weebly.com](http://jfreed.weebly.com) Poem was first published in *Off The Coast*, Fall 2015.

**Cal Freeman** (he/him) is the author of the books *Fight Songs* and *Poolside at the Dearborn Inn* and the chapbook *Yelping the Tegmine*. His work appears in *The Glacier*, *Potomac Review*, *Panoply*, *North American Review*, and elsewhere. His book *The Weather of Our Names* is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press.

**Monica Fuglei** teaches in the Department of Composition, Creative Writing and Journalism at Arapahoe Community College in Littleton, Col. A 2019 Pushcart Prize nominee, she has published recent work in *Progenitor* and *Mason Street*. When she's not writing or teaching, she's usually knitting or tweeting on #AcademicTwitter.

**Sanjay Ganesan** is a writer from Vanduvanchery, a village near Kumbakonam in southern India. His poetry reflects his deep care for nature, people, and social justice. He writes with compassion and conviction, often addressing political and human struggles in everyday life.

**Katy Giebenhain** is a poet and occupational health tech. She is interested in writing and visual art that speaks to themes of public health. She is the author of *Sharps Cabaret* (Mercer University Press). Recent poems appear in *American Journal of Nursing*, *Poetry Wales* and *Keystone Poetry: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania*.

**Marissa Glover** lives in Florida, where she's busy swatting bugs and dodging storms. Her poetry collections, *Let Go of the Hands You Hold* and *Box Office Gospel*, are published by Mercer University Press. Recent work is found in *Whale Road Review* and *Halfway Down the Stairs*.

**Emily M Goldsmith** (they/them) is a queer Louisiana Creole poet originally from S. Louisiana. Emily received their MFA from the University of Kentucky and their PhD from the University of Southern Mississippi. Their work can be found in or forthcoming from *Midway Journal*, *Gnashing Teeth Publishing*, *The Penn Review*, and elsewhere.

**Susana Gonzales** has published her work in numerous literary anthologies and journals, including *The Power of the Feminine I*, *Sheila Na Gig*, *Gyroscope Review*, *One Art*, *The Santa Fe Literary Review*, and *Mobius*. Her poetry explores her Mexican American roots and the lesbian feminist experience. Poem first published in *Red Headed Stepchild* Spring 2024.

**Jessica Greenbaum** is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *Spilled and Gone*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), which was named best book of the year in the *Boston Globe*. Her work has appeared in *Best American Poetry*, the Pushcart Prize anthology, and *A Century of Poetry in The New Yorker*.

**Kelle Groom** is the author of four poetry collections including, *Spill* (Anhinga), a memoir: *I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl* (Simon & Schuster), and essays: *How to Live* (Tupelo Press). Groom's work appears in *AGNI*, *American Poetry Review*, *Best American Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, and *Ploughshares*.

**Kari Gunter-Seymour**, Poet Laureate of Ohio, is the author of three award winning collections of poetry, including *DIRT SONGS*. Her work has been featured in a variety of journals and periodicals including the *American Book Review*, *World Literature Today*, *Poem-a-Day*, and *The New York Times*. [www.kariguterseymourpoet.com](http://www.kariguterseymourpoet.com). Poem was first published in *About Place Journal*.

**Tresha Faye Haefner** is an award-winning poet and founder of The Poetry Salon Online. Her first book, *When the Moon Had Antlers* (Pine Row Press, 2023) was a finalist for the Glass Lyre Poetry Prize. [thepoetrysalonstack.substack.com](http://thepoetrysalonstack.substack.com).

**Bex Hainsworth** is a poet and teacher based in Leicester, UK. Her work has appeared in *The Rialto*, *Prole*, *Honest Ulsterman*, *bath magg*, and *Poetry Wales*. *Walrussey*, her debut collection of ecopoetry, is published by The Black Cat Poetry Press.

**Marc Harshman** is the author of *Dispatch from the Mountain State* (WVU Press), *Woman in Red Anorak*, winner of the Blue Lynx Prize (Lynx House Press), *Believe What You Can* (WVU Press), winner of the Weatherford Award, and *Following the Silence* from Press 53, as well as multiple award-winning children's books. Poem was first published in *Woman in Red Anorak*, Lynx House Press, 2018. Reprinted with permission of the press.

**Gloria Heffernan** is the author of three poetry books, most recently *Fused* (Shanti Arts Publishing). Her collection *Exploring Poetry of Presence* (Back Porch Productions) won the CNY Book Award (Nonfiction). Her earlier collections are *What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List*, (NYQ Books) and *Peregrinatio: Poems for Antarctica* (Kelsay Books).

**Matthew E. Henry (MEH)** is an educator, prose dabbler, and the author of six poetry collections. MEH's editor-in-chief of *The Weight Journal*, creative nonfiction editor at *Porcupine Literary*, and an associate editor at *Rise Up Review*. He writes about education, race, religion, and burning oppressive systems to the ground. [www.MEHPoeting.com](http://www.MEHPoeting.com). Poem first published in *Cultural Daily*.

**Donna Hilbert** is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *Enormous Blue Umbrella* (Moon Tide Press, 2025). Her work has appeared in *Eclectica*, *Gyroscope*, *Rattle*, *ONE ART*, *Verse Daily*, *Vox Populi*, *The Writer's Almanac*, and numerous anthologies. She writes and leads workshops from her home base in Long Beach, Cal. Poem first published in *Traveler in Paradise: New and Selected Poems* (Pearl Editions, 2004). Reprinted with permission of the author.

**Le Hinton** is the author of seven poetry collections, most recently *Elegies for an Empire* (Iris G. Press, 2023). His work has appeared in *Pleiades*, *The Best American Poetry 2014*, *The Progressive*, *Little Patuxent Review*, and outside Penn Medicine Park in Lancaster, Pa., incorporated into Derek Parker's sculpture Common Thread.

**Leslie Hodge** lives in San Diego. Her poems appear in *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *ONE ART*, *Whale Road Review*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, and elsewhere. Her debut chapbook, *Escape and other poems*, was published by Kelsay Books in 2024. Currently she is reading for *The Adroit Journal*. [www.lesliehodgepoet.com](http://www.lesliehodgepoet.com). Poem first published in *The Main Street Rag*.

**John Hoppenthaler** has published four collections of poetry with Carnegie Mellon UP, most recently *Night Wing Over Metropolitan Area* and *Domestic Garden*. His poems appear in *Ploughshares*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Southern Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Southeast Review*, *Blackbird*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and many other journals, anthologies, and textbooks.

**T. R. Hummer** is the author of thirteen poetry collections, most recently *Eon* (LSU Press, 2018) and *After the Afterlife* (Acre Books, 2018).

**Kevin James** is a Nigerian poet, tech creative, and theatre arts student who tells stories that live between survival and hope. His poems often echo the struggles of life, pain and mental healing. Whether on stage or behind a screen, he crafts worlds where resilience quietly blooms.

**David W. Janey** is a Boston-based African American poet and essayist. He writes about racial justice, social change, personal memory/growth, and lessons learned from nature. A recently retired university administrator, he has published his work in the *Solstice Magazine* Features Blog, WBUR's *Cognoscenti*, *Wordpeace Journal*, *Pride and a Paycheck*, and *Pangyrus*.

**Ted Jean** is a carpenter who writes, paints, plays tennis with Amy Lee. His work appears in *32 Poems*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *PANK*, *DIAGRAM*, *North American Review*, *Blue Earth Review*, and elsewhere.

**Julia Spicker Kasdorf** received the Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize, a Pushcart Prize, and an NEA Fellowship. Her most recent books are *As Is* (Pitt Poetry Series) and *Shale Play: Poems and Photographs from the Fracking Fields*. As Liberal Arts Professor of English at Penn State University, she directs the creative writing program.

**Emilee Kinney** hails from the small farm-town of Kenockee, Michigan. She received her MFA in poetry at SIU Carbondale and currently teaches at the University of Southern Mississippi while pursuing her PhD. Her work has been published in *Passages North*, *West Trestle Review*, *THE SHORE*, *SWWIM*, and elsewhere. <https://www.emileekinneypoetry.com/>

**Dorian Elizabeth Knapp** is the author of three poetry collections: *Causa Sui* (forthcoming), winner of the Three Mile Harbor Book Award; *Requiem with an Amulet in Its Beak* (2019); and *The Spite House* (2011). She is the founding director of the Low-Residency MFA in Creative Writing at Hood College. <https://elizabeth-knapp.com/>

**Dorian Kotsiopoulos** has published her work in various literary and medical journals, including *Poet Lore*, *Salamander*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *JAMA*, *On the Seawall*, *Smartish Pace*, and *The Westchester Review*. She is a reviewer for the *Bellevue Literary Review*.

**Richard Krawiec** has published poetry, essays, plays, and five novels in France, most recently *Croiere en Quoi?* (Tusitala Press), winner of the Libr'à Nous 2025 Award for Best Foreign Novel. He directs Jacar Press, a Community Active poetry publisher. His awards include an NEA grant and two North Carolina Arts Council grants.

**Haley Lasché** is the co-owner, co-founder and co-editor of Beauty School Editions and the founder, editor, and designer of *Concision Poetry Journal*. She teaches college writing and literature and has two chapbooks: *Where It Leads* and *Blood and Survivor*. Her debut poetry collection *ONE* was published in 2023. Poem first published in *ONE* (Beauty School Editions, 2023). Reprinted with permission of the author.

**Viola Lee** received her MFA in Poetry from NYU and is the author of *Lightening after the Echo* (Another New Calligraphy). Recent poems appear in *Barrow Street*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Mississippi Review*, and elsewhere. She lives in Chicago and teaches 4th, 5th and 6th graders at Near North Montessori School in Chicago.

**Jean Liew** is a rheumatologist and clinical researcher at Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine and Boston Medical Center.

**Alison Luterman** writes poems, plays, song lyrics, and personal essays. Her latest books are *In the Time of Great Fires* and *Hard Listening*. She has taught at New College, The Writing Salon, Catamaran, and workshops around the country, and has worked as a California poet in the schools. [www.alisonluterman.net](http://www.alisonluterman.net)

**Marjorie Maddox** is Commonwealth University Professor Emerita of English, *Presence* assistant editor, and host of WPSU-FM's *Poetry Moment*. She has published seventeen collections of poetry, most recently *Small Earthly Space* and *Seeing Things*, as well as a story collection, four children's books, and the anthologies *Common Wealth* and *Keystone Poetry* (co-editor). [www.marjoriemaddox.com](http://www.marjoriemaddox.com). Poem first published in *Topology Magazine*.

**Rachel Mallalieu** is an emergency physician and mother of five. She is the author of the chapbook *A History of Resurrection* (Alien Buddha Press 2022). Some of her recent work is featured in *Rattle*, *Chestnut Review*, *Westwind* and *Whale Road Review*.

**M.R. Mandell** is a poet based in Los Angeles. You can find her words in *The McNeese Review*, *HAD*, and others. She is the author of *Don't Worry About Me* (Bottlecap Press) and *The Last Girl*, forthcoming in September 2025 (Finishing Line Press). She is a Pushcart nominee. Poem first published in *SWWIM*.

**Sandra Marchetti** is the author of three books of poetry—*DIORAMA* (Stephen F. Austin State UP, 2025), *Aisle 228* (SFA UP, 2023), *Confluence* (Sundress Publications, 2015)—and four chapbooks. Her poetry appears in *Ecotone*, *Poet Lore*, *Southwest Review*, *Subtropics*, and elsewhere. She is Poetry Editor Emerita for *River Styx Magazine*. Poem first published in *Blackbird*.

**Annie Marhefka** is Executive Director at Yellow Arrow Publishing. She has a BA in English/creative writing from Washington College and an MBA. She is currently an MFA candidate at the University of Baltimore. When not writing, she is usually trying to find her way back to the water. [www.anniemarhefka.com](http://www.anniemarhefka.com). Poem was first published in *Door is a Jar*, was featured on The Slowdown, and is forthcoming in *Strangers We Know* (Garden Party Collective, 2025). Reprinted with permission of the author.

**Steve McCown** has published multiple books of poetry, including a collaborative anthology called *We Look West*. After teaching English in California and Arizona, he now resides in Northfield, Minn., where five of his poems are stamped in the sidewalks.

**Michelangelo Buonarroti** (1475-1564), known as “Michelangelo,” was an Italian sculptor, painter, poet, and architect whose most notable works include the sculpture “David” and scenes painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. This translation by John Addington Symonds is from 1904 (*The Sonnets of Michel Angelo Buonarroti*, Smith, Elder & Co., 2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Readers may also be interested in a contemporary translation by Gale Mazur in *Zeppo’s First Wife* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

**Jane C. Miller** is the author of *Canticle for Remnant Days* (2024) and coauthor of *Walking the Sunken Boards* (2019). Her poetry has appeared in *RHINO*, *Colorado Review*, *UCity Review*, and *Bear Review*, among others. She co-edits the online poetry journal, *Quartet* and lives in Wilmington, Del. [www.janecmiller.com](http://www.janecmiller.com)

**Leslie F. Miller** is a lifelong poet who lives in an “ingredients house.” She likes to break things and put them back together in a random, yet tasteful, order. Her first nonfiction book was published by Simon & Schuster; it’s about cake.

**Geraldine Mills** is a poet and short story writer who lives on the west coast of Ireland. She has published six collections of poetry, three of short stories and two children's novels. She has won numerous awards and fellowships. She is currently working on her next short story collection.

**Michael Minassian** is a Contributing Editor for *Verse-Virtual*, an online poetry journal. His poetry collections are *Time is Not a River*, *Morning Calm*, *A Matter of Timing*, and *Jack Pays a Visit*. His collection *A Thousand Pieces of Time* will be released this year by Sheila-Na-Gig, Inc. <https://michaelminassian.com>

**Erik Moyer** is a teaching fellow and doctoral candidate in creative writing at the University of North Texas. He holds an MFA from the University of California, Irvine, and a BS from the University of Virginia. His work appears in *Arts & Letters*, *Epiphany*, *Oxford Poetry*, *The Pinch*, and elsewhere. Poem first published in *The Summerset Review*.

**Wyatt Mischler** is the 26-year-old janitor of a gay sex club.

**Simone Muench** is a recipient of an NEA Fellowship and the author of seven full-length books, including *Lampblack & Ash* (Sarabande; Kathryn A. Morton Prize) and *Wolf Centos* (Sarabande). She is faculty advisor for *Jet Fuel Review*, a senior poetry editor for *Tupelo Quarterly*, and poetry editor for Jackleg Press. [www.simonemuench.com](http://www.simonemuench.com)

**Zita Murányi** is a Hungarian writer. She graduated from the University of Szeged with a degree in communication. She is the author of three books of poems and four novels, including *Mirrorpalace (Tükörpalota)*, winner of the Sandor Bródy Prize, and *On Mr. Darcy's Sofa*.

**Erin Murphy** (Contributing Editor) is the author or editor of more than a dozen books, most recently *Human Resources* (2025). Two of her previous anthologies received Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Awards. She is professor of English at Penn State Altoona and poetry editor of *The Summerset Review*. [www.erin-murphy.com](http://www.erin-murphy.com) Poem first published in *Human Resources* (Grayson Books). Reprinted with permission of the author.

**Renée K. Nicholson** is a writer based in Morgantown, W.Va. She is the author of *Fierce and Delicate: Essays on Dance and Illness* and three books of poems. [www.reneenicholson.com](http://www.reneenicholson.com).

**Benjamin Niespodziany** is a Chicago-based writer whose work has appeared in *Indiana Review*, *Fence*, *Booth*, *Conduit*, *Bennington Review*, and elsewhere. His writing has been featured in the Wigleaf Top 50 and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, *Best Microfiction*, and Best of the Net. [neonpajamas.com](http://neonpajamas.com).

**Mark Nowak** is the author of *Shut Up Shut Down*, *Coal Mountain Elementary*, *Social Poetics*, and *...AGAIN* (forthcoming), all from Coffee House Press. He has been awarded fellowships from the Guggenheim, Lannan, and Creative Capital foundations. He is founding director of the Worker Writers School. Poem first published in the Academy of American Poets' Poem-A-Day series.

**Jon Obermeyer** has published fourteen poetry collections and is a three-time finalist for the Applewhite Poetry Prize. He earned an MFA from UNC Greensboro. His poems have appeared in *The Greensboro Review*, *NC Literary Review*, *Northern Virginia Review*, and elsewhere. <https://jonobermeyer.wixsite.com/mysite>

**Gloria Ogo** is an American-based Nigerian writer with multiple published novels and poetry collections. Her work has appeared in *Brittle Paper*, *Metastellar*, *The Easterner*, *Daily Trust*, and elsewhere. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from Old Dominion University and was the winner of the Brigitte Poirson 2024 Literature Prize. <https://glriaogo.wixsite.com/gloria-ogo>

**Kathleen Ossip** teaches at The New School and at Princeton University and has been a fellow at Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute. Her most recent collections of poetry include *July*, one of NPR's best books of 2021, and *Little Poems*, a chapbook.

**Jimmy Pappas** won the *Rattle* Chapbook Contest with *Falling off the Empire State Building* and won the *Rattle* Readers' Choice Award for "Bobby's Story." A multiple Pushcart Prize nominee, he moderates a weekly, themed Zoom event called "A Conversation with Jimmy and Friends" that encourages audience participation.

**Kasun Pathirage** (translator) is a freelance writer and translator based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He is currently working on his first book, a collection of Lovecraftian horror with a Sri Lankan twist.

**Kenneth Pobo** (he/him) is the author of twenty-one chapbooks and nine full-length collections, most recently *Bend of Quiet* (Blue Light Press), *Loplop in a Red City* (Circling Rivers), and *At The Window, Silence* (Fernwood Press). His work has appeared in *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Nimrod*, *Hawaii Review*, and elsewhere.

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**Moudi Sbeity** is a first-generation graduate student from Lebanon studying Transpersonal Counseling at Naropa University. Prior to Naropa, they operated a restaurant in Salt Lake City, which served as a queer safe space. As a person who stutters, they are as passionate about writing and poetry as practices in self-expression and relational healing. Poem first published in *LEON Literary Review*.

**Jeff Schwartz** grew up in Ohio and lives in Connecticut, where he taught for 35 years. His first book was published by Alice James Books and his next will appear in 2025. He has also written for books and journals on student-centered learning, including his co-edited *Students Teaching, Teachers Learning*.

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**Jennifer A. Sutherland** is the author of *Bullet Points: A Lyric*, finalist for the Eric Hoffer Medal Provocateur and Foreword Indies Poetry Book of the Year, and *House of Myth and Necessity* (forthcoming). Her work has appeared in *Plume*, *Hopkins Review*, *Best New Poets*, *Denver Quarterly*, and elsewhere. She lives in Baltimore.

**Dustin Triplett** is a poet whose work scrapes against the grime of labor, memory, and survival, blending grit with lyricism. He writes from the Midwest, where the walls hum, the belts never stop, and something's always crawling just out of view.

**Rabelani Tshidino** is a South African trade unionist, poet, and final-year LLB student. Based in Soweto, he writes poetry rooted in working-class struggle, African identity, and justice. His work weaves law, labor, and lived experience into lyrical resistance. He believes in the dignity of both word and worker.

**Veronica Tucker** is a lifelong New Englander, physician, and mother of three whose poetry explores the intersections of medicine, family, and being human. Her work appears in *redrosethorns*, *Pulse*, and *Paddler Press*, and elsewhere.

**Cindy Veach** is the author of three poetry collections: *Monster Galaxy* (MoonPath Press); *Her Kind* (CavanKerry Press), an Eric Hoffer Montaigne Medal finalist; and *Gloved Against Blood* (CavanKerry Press), a Paterson Poetry Prize finalist and Massachusetts Center for the Book “Must Read.” She is poetry co-editor of *MER*. Poem originally published in *Sou’wester*. From *Gloved Against Blood* (CavanKerry Press, 2017). Reprinted with permission of CavanKerry Press.

**Ryan Vine** is the author of *The Cave* and *To Keep Him Hidden*, winner of the Northeastern Minnesota Book Award, and two chapbooks. His poems have appeared in the *American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Daily*, and *The Writer’s Almanac*. He is professor of English at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, MN.

**Jade Wallace** (they/them) is a queer and disabled poet, novelist, and critic. Their most recent books include a genderless novel, *ANOMIA*, and a collaborative poetry collection, *ZZOO*, both from Palimpsest Press. Wallace's poetry collection *The Work Is Done When We Are Dead* will be out with Guernica Editions in 2025.

**Jennifer Elise Wang** (they/she) is a nonbinary femme in STEM and punk rock pretty boi poet from Dallas, Texas. When they’re not in lab or writing, they enjoy action sports, cosplay, dancing, and volunteering at the animal shelter. Their work has appeared in *FERAL*, *Penumbric*, and *Bethlehem Writers Roundtable*. Poem first published in *The New Verse News*.

**Jim Washington** lives in Hanover, NH, with his wife, MaryLucille. His poetry was inspired by Countee Cullen’s “Incident.” His mentors include Charles Simic, Rena Mosteirín, and Vievee Francis. His poems have appeared in *The Anthology of New England Writers*, *Evansville Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Obsidian*, *Rattle*, *Touchstone*, and elsewhere.

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**Gabriel Welsch** writes fiction and poetry and is the author of four collections of poems, most recently *The Four Horsepersons of a Disappointing Apocalypse*. His first collection of short stories, *Groundscratchers*, was published in October 2021. He lives in Pittsburgh, Pa., with his family and works at Duquesne University.

**Ed Werstein**, a member of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, spent his working career in manufacturing, workforce development, and union activity. He published his first poem at the age of sixty when his muse awoke and dragged herself out of bed. [edwerstein.com](http://edwerstein.com)

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**Corrie Lynn White** has published poetry and nonfiction in *Oxford American*, *Arkansas International*, and *Terrain.org*, and elsewhere. Her poetry collection *Gold Hill Family Audio* won the 2021 Cowles Poetry Prize and is distributed through *Bull City Press*. She lives in Chattanooga with her husband and son.

**Jackie K. White** is the co-author, with Simone Muench, of *Hex & Howl* (Black Lawrence Press, 2021), a Society of Midland Authors Honoree, and *The Under Hum* (Black Lawrence Press, 2024). Her collaborations have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Bennington Review*, *Ecotone*, *Salamander*, *Pleiades*, *Shenandoah*, *Phoebe*, and elsewhere.

**André Le Mont Wilson** is a Black Queer poet whose poems on essential workers have appeared in *Workers Write! Literary Journal*, *Rattle*, and *Quiet Lightning* (a Pushcart Prize nominee). He teaches the Ability Write Now writers' workshop for adults with developmental and physical disabilities at Ability Now Bay Area, Oakland.

**Erin Wilson** has published poems in *Atlanta Review*, *Lake Effect*, *BODY, EVENT*, *Fiddlehead*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere internationally. She has won a Pushcart, a Silver Medal with the *National Magazine Awards* in Canada, and will appear in *Best Canadian Poetry 2026*. She lives a small life in Northern Ontario, Canada.

**Tarn Wilson** is the author of *The Slow Farm*, *In Praise of Inadequate Gifts* (Wandering Aengus Book Award), and *5-Minute Daily Writing Prompts*. She is taking a break from prose and shamelessly flirting with poetry. She has been published in *Only Poems*, *Pedestal*, *Potomac Review*, and *Sweet Lit*, and elsewhere. [www.tarnwilson.com](http://www.tarnwilson.com)

**Francine Witte** is the author of *Café Crazy* and *The Theory of Flesh* (Kelsay Books), along with several award-winning chapbooks. Her full-length poetry collection, *Some Distant Pin of Light*, is forthcoming from Červená Barva Press. She lives in New York City and is also widely published in flash fiction. Poem first published in *The Indiana Review*.

**Carolyn Wright** received a 2022-2024 Fulbright fellowship to Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. Her latest books are *Masquerade: A Memoir in Poetry* (Lost Horse Press, 2021) and *This Dream the World: New & Selected Poems* (Lost Horse Press, 2017), whose title poem received a Pushcart Prize and appeared in *The Best American Poetry*.

**Allison Zaczynski** (she/her) is a deaf poet. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Lesley University. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Epistemic Lit*, *SWWIM*, *Yoga Journal*, and *Freshwater Poetry Journal*. She placed in the Asnuntuck Community College Student Poetry Contest in 2011 and 2012.