

## Letter From the Editor

This issue is fairly sparse. BUT it's so Fucking GOOD. My own taste in art has changed recently — or I guess it's been happening for a while, a few months now maybe. Anyway, it's different, I'm different, you're different. Everything's changed, all right? But one thing that will never change is my pride in the work we publish. I'm so happy to have Sam on the team now. You know, she's the one that read a lot of you guys' work, so thank her for this issue. And Mag for the awesome cover. I saw it and immediately fell in love with it. You all be sure to say hello to Alexandra on Twitter, too! She's much better at the whole interaction thing than I ever was. Anyway, until next time, sweet babies.

All the best,

Mark. ♡

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# POETRY

“I am walking at a speed of 4.5 miles an hour.  
You start after ten minutes and walk  
At a speed of 7.24 km. How long will it take  
For you to overtake me?” Those sums  
Were your favourites. Along with the tank  
That rarely got filled, and sometimes  
Overflowed. How I hated that morning ritual  
Waiting for you to give me problems to solve.  
Maths was everything, you said.  
I dared not argue, quietly adding numbers  
Till I gave it up. I tried to pass on  
The love for numbers but failed.

Not everything in life adds up,  
Not every  $x$  has a solution, sometimes integers  
Need be expressed in decimals.  
I still tried. To live life by your rules  
To play the game in hexagonal bubbles  
To live within concentric circles,  
But nothing adds up. If there is one thing  
I learnt, it's that there are no whole numbers  
In Life. Like that tank that never gets filled,  
There is a tap to bleed it dry. And how much?  
How much further must I walk?  
Till I finally catch up with you?

I wake up with longing, unruly, sweet  
like nectar in wildflower,  
deliciousness at the base  
of the throat of the scarlet gilia,  
the hot-pink tiny fairy trumpets  
that the kids licked at when they were little,  
so that they mislabeled the slender beauties “honeysuckle.”

I wake with longing like a signal flare  
shot into darkness, like an unanswered message,  
like an unanswerable message;  
it pops right out of my broken heart,  
(a chemical exchange between neurons),  
it springs full from my soul,  
(synecdoche for the whole of me,  
emergent property of process.)

How can life not be one great longing?  
And I know  
this call has no response;  
fireworks on a summer night are not a puzzle,  
a bird’s song is not a solution to anything.  
To feel the longing, knowing this,  
its wildness, its sweetness, is the heart of the matter,  
the heart of matter. To inhabit it,  
to taste the nectar altered into honey.

Awakening abruptly  
from falling asleep,  
my mind jerks and spasms  
with my limbs,

and a doom falls upon me,  
the doom of truth, probably,

I hear the click and tock of the universe,  
the factory of physics to chemistry  
to biology – to us – and the whole  
ruined beautiful shebang.

No comfort, no justice,  
just inexorableness, process,

so much purpose  
but no meaning in it,  
The meaning of wood  
to fire.

And I spread arms and legs, fingers splayed,  
the human starfish open to the ontologic tide.

I accept this huge weight  
rushing and pushing  
over and through  
me, I am of it,

I'll absorb it, whatever bits  
allotted me, nutrients,

I'll dissolve  
with all the others  
back into time,  
merge into the mystery.



Driving you home  
In a car I will drive for eight more years  
Before the memories catch up with it  
And it dies  
I am wanting you to put your hand on my knee  
With a desire like a sunbeam in the woods  
Lighting up a copse of birches  
That kind of warmth that spreads like an exit wound.

I made you a mixtape  
And now I realize you didn't have anywhere to play it  
Except in my car  
Which is dead  
Like you probably are.

I remember waiting in the car  
While you deposited your paycheck  
This song playing low in the dark.  
A song of hearts and wind  
And harmonica and holding two red hands  
Across a canyon.  
I thought it suited you;  
You were waiting to be free like that stupid black bird  
And I thought we'd be that together  
Two stupid black birds  
But you're gone now  
And the car is gone;  
The only thing I had left of you  
In my cold peach pit of a heart.

The mixtape doesn't exist anymore.  
It's lost on an old hard drive somewhere  
In the void  
Where you're saving me a seat.

I want all your encroachments, petty wisdoms  
make me a pot of your tea  
my body is open like a cup  
play for me all your  
damned instruments  
broken into place  
a ukulele, a lyre, then  
part ways with your favorite books for me

your life, a thing we try to get the most from  
your body, a tube of toothpaste squeezed from  
the bottom up - *al di sotto in su* -  
Italian ceilings, paint them indigo with god for me  
fresco me in egg-based experiment  
preserve me in lake-hardened fossil

I want to watch you shift glaciers  
pound meat into good behavior  
I will sit for you, as in portraits  
watch you hold a paintbrush, now as a cigarette  
now as a quill  
I don't require eating, I feed off your yellow  
I won't even breathe until  
you turn, with earth imploding,  
into a stem

here's the part where I tell you: la vérité sans nom  
we took a cab off campus, to the city of Binghamton, to the clinic  
in the year of the dragon, of my commencement, in the  
year of broken things, bad endings, send-offs and  
I needed to know if I'd played wrongly, if I'd messed up  
ma mère: elle m'a dit, (à l'imparfait): "you used to play with his razors"  
I didn't know that yet, that happened later  
when you are neat, and organize your life well,  
even to the point of picking lint off the rug,  
even to the point of cleaning your hairbrushes every day after you use them,  
parce-que mon papá, il était propre, (à plus-que-parfait): "he always had it"

I rolled up my sleeve, gazed at watered down  
photocopied walls of watered down, water-colored Monet,  
he waved, faceless, from his boat, to me on the shore  
left me two weeks to wonder what my blood might do

here's the part: where I tell you, it wasn't my first time  
quand j'avais neuf ans, (à l'imparfait),  
quand je ne savais pas: "the truth: some lies protect you,"  
in the year of the goat, and of palindrome numbers, the year of lying about homework, the year  
of the training bra, the year of why didn't you go to work today? the year of  
il m'a dit (au passé composé): "I went, I'll go." mais non, la clandestinité!

here's the part where I tell you, what I didn't know then:

il a toujours eu... il a toujours eu...

*how-are-you how-are-we how-am-I going to get out of this poem now?*

there is nothing worse than cancer,  
there is nothing worse than cancer.  
did you know, my name autocorrects to Loss?  
some things are too hard to say in English – here's the part –  
c'est pas vrai, c'est pas vrai, le SIDA c'est le pire, le SIDA c'est le pire,  
ma mère: elle m'a dit la vérité, et elle a utilisé tous les temps – where I tell you –  
because we survived, et j'ai trouvé les mensonges  
and then I knew

William Doreski  
**Black Dog, White Dog / White Dog, Black Dog**

A black dog and a white dog,  
happy mixed-breed littermates.  
Shampooing at the groomer's  
washes off the dye their owner  
applied merely to amuse us.  
The black dog becomes white,  
the white dog becomes black.  
Their tails still wag in the same  
direction, their joy unabated.

We laugh off this omen,  
a harmless prank, but the news  
is bad: storms are shouldering  
over the mountains to the west,  
murders spike in Chicago  
and New York, right-wing senators  
rant and foam at the mouth,  
the army is on full alert  
with unnamed enemies massing  
along the Canadian border.

The dogs don't notice that one  
was white and is now black,  
the other black and now white.  
Despite being freshly bathed,  
they want to play in the mud  
by the river, where last year  
the corpse of a child washed up.  
No one claimed her, no one  
had reported her missing, no one  
fainted at the sight of her face.

We observe the dogs rolling  
by the river, then splashing  
into the iron current, their smiles  
infectious and indiscriminate.  
We sip our coffee and discuss  
the latest political dramas.  
After a while the two dogs  
approach us for pets and praise  
and to shake half a river's worth  
of fish-stink all over us,  
completing the morning critique.

the phenomenon of your voice with my laughter (abrupt, girlish, self-conscious, sexy)

cutting into it  
like an axe i have tried and tried again to differentiate  
myself from you

the light at dawn reminds me of what you told me last February  
that sadness was the greatest feeling in the world  
and that sex only ruined your relationships  
and that you wanted me to make your mother's chicken soup sometime

that night we shared a bottle of cough syrup and dreamt  
the dreams of loving angels

the sound of the axe  
like when i peel back my fingernail  
and you're screaming at the wall  
is more comforting to me than  
this old blanket

what gives something harmony?  
i want to rip it all apart like i  
did last summer  
things are hazy now, far from  
the harmony of when i draw  
back the axe and wet my lips  
close your eyes, push a penny  
underneath your tongue, pinch  
a bit of skin  
see here: you only get one life

I wanted so often to scratch something real on the sheet in front of me.  
I was never all that good at halting the launch pad  
And learning how to taste the morning light as it creaked open.  
Instead, wrapped in our shared books and garments, I emerge at noon,  
Perfumer turned the stale warmth of the night's sleep pungent,  
But I think I smell more like you.  
I wonder who saw when you kissed the side of my head in public,  
Or if any other person not-in-love fit so easily into your negative space.

I wish my rhythm was a better match or that my mouth  
Gnawed less at the bits of myself that are already fraying.  
I've been here once or twice before, although not in this light.  
The room is less scary with that lamp spilling out across the table  
In bright / yellow / slashes.

All the ghouls living out the false back of the wardrobe are rooting for us.  
And look! I am so sick of coordinating our mutual ending.  
Trust me! Humour me! Let me remove the dusty safety glass  
And press my face right up against yours for now.  
Look right into that ruinous, burning sun, let the colours bleed out  
And dance in front of your eyes,  
And along your golden limbs,  
And down the front of your torso and back.  
Sit silently at the dinner table with the plates and the silver  
You, in short lived-fullness, me with short-lived absolutes.

One day I will be wise. This summer cannot last forever.  
But right now, it is straining in through that open window,  
Calling out, like a hand outstretched, like the caw of some giant city bird.  
Right now, I am standing in front of you, lurching forward, close enough to touch/taste  
Smudged and pink and for the moment.

Instead of me dying, why don't you come over?  
We can try to get to know each other again.  
I've given the place a once over, so can you can  
Wipe your feet upon re-entry and take off your shoes.

Let's get this show on the road.  
Pull that door there shut, we can't let them see.  
I'll grab my old costume and we'll take it from the top.  
Do not look disappointed. We used to be so good at this.

Class act, starring me as glassy-eyed, ribless woman  
Draped in ribbons and full bouncing skirts.  
This is the part where I dance over hot coals, dragging entrails,  
Where you smear pretty paint across my always-swollen cheeks.

Remember I used to sit at this table and crunch down gravel?

Let all my teeth fall out and proceeded to  
Brush bleeding gums in the hope of  
Impressing you with some great gesture.  
I'd be spitting clots for days, leaving  
Little splayed constellations of haemoglobin  
On the concrete.

Let me make room for you again.  
I've lapsed into the space you left behind.  
And what do you mean you're not hungry anymore?  
Come here and I'll tell you;  
I've made a list of new things I know you'll like  
Taught myself about black holes in the Super-sargasso sea

And that caramel tastes better when it snaps in three.  
I want to tell you about my idea for communal umbrellas  
And that I went to the art gallery the first Saturday in March.  
How I am scared I will forget to pay my taxes and about  
That wolfhound I saw in the pub last year who had a heart too big  
to pump for more than seven years -

*(Re-entry, continued, no stanza break)*

And how most days now, I love my old boot of a face  
And how, despite my best efforts, my shoulders still slouch  
And I still force my feet into my shoes without unlacing them first.

I'll sit down on the concrete and write a note to the pigeons  
And I'll smudge the ink when I lean on the paper.  
I'll sit under the open window, legs pressed flush against the radiator  
And waste the heat in order to feel two things at once.

The smells are new now and horrible  
And isn't that wonderful?  
Visitor, are you listening, I finally get it.  
I am so bored of writing poetry that doesn't smell like flowers.



Jessa J. Grave  
**If my Patchwork were a Blanket**

If my patchwork were a blanket  
I would give all of it to you  
my frays and holes and cigarette ash marks  
never left quite long enough to burn me completely  
just enough to hurt  
enough to let me know I was forgotten

Every flawed thing about me  
I would give up to keep you  
just a little warmer  
just a little comfort  
just a little safe  
from everything that has created these frays and stains  
I would unwind to nothing for you  
All my tattered pieces  
held together by how much  
I want to protect you with them

Is this strand of thread strong enough  
to keep me together  
to keep you warm  
to protect you from the things  
I was never blanketed from  
or am I designed to unravel  
Until there is nothing left  
but an empty bobbin  
spinning on a broken winder

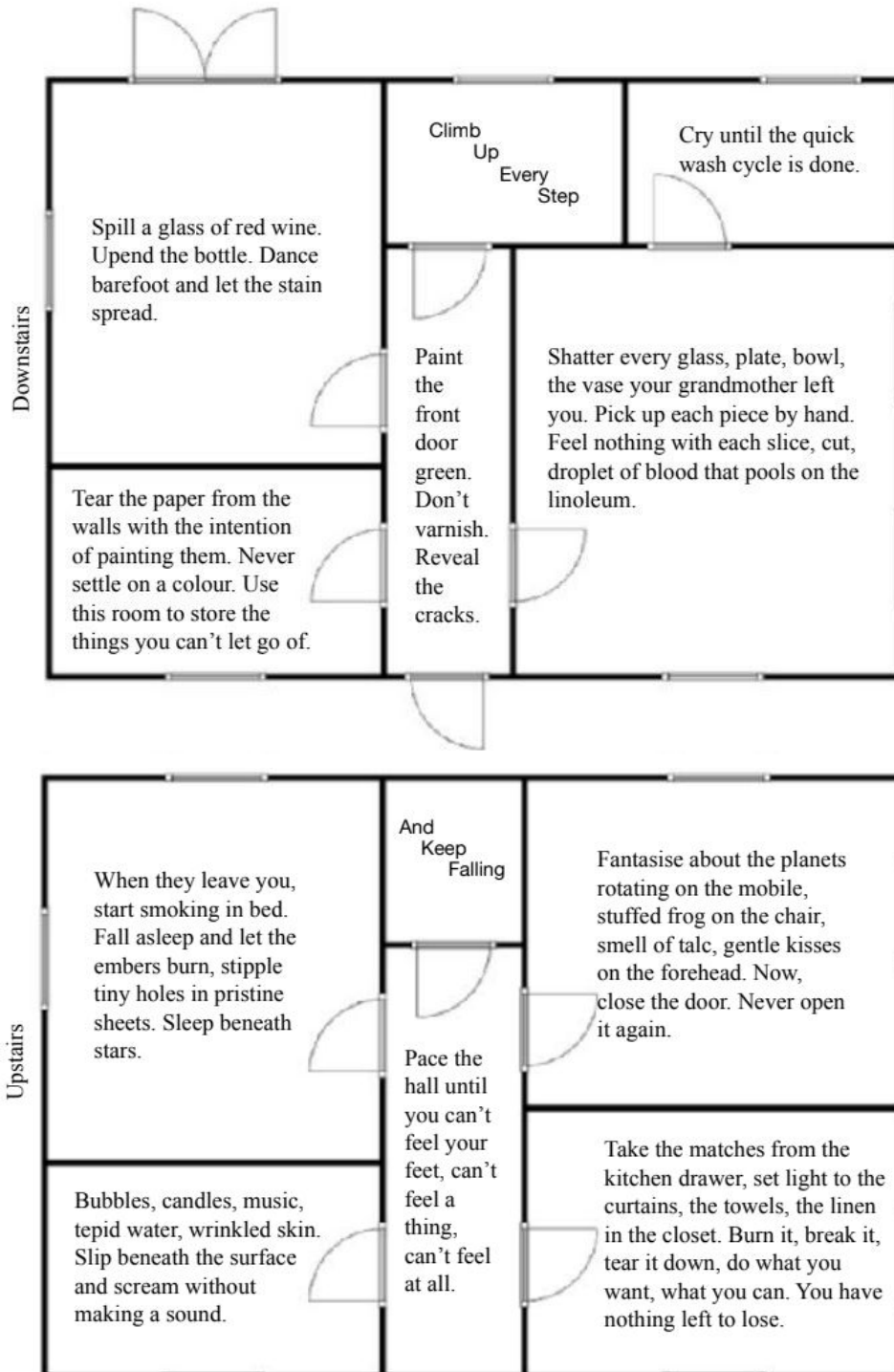
a jewel swaying  
an owl imploding  
a mountain climbing itself  
    from within

a heart & a reef  
an ocean of finality  
giggling laughing moon  
growling  
    wind-whacked clouds

fate thin as sleeves  
half-human hunters of the night  
red & yellow leaves  
have so few  
    nights together

Cheap beer in a cheaper apartment  
Where your pong partners turn to lovers turn to ghosts  
Victory is sweet  
    a pale ale kiss  
bittersweet,  
    stale in the morning  
You're not sure which part of the night was a dream  
    How've you been?  
I've been drinking about you  
dreaming you back into reality  
drinking you back into  
oblivion  
but I always dive back in  
    always drown myself  
dragging the weight of your memory back to my consciousness  
I'll never let you leave my bloodstream  
    infected with all-consuming affection  
a plague on my soul  
  
and I can't let go of the idea of you  
    (either of you)  
my music man-artist-writer-bartenders  
and me  
    your ever-present muse  
sitting pretty, sitting still on a stool in the shadows  
fingering the rim of an empty glass – knowing full well you might  
never fill me up again  
that I might never catch the light I once did  
    the light that made you write about me,  
that started a fire in your soul

**Blueprints for Domestic Destruction and Disarray**



they remind me of nothing more  
than endless drives with my Dad  
in our station wagon reeking of fish,  
windows rolled up except for a  
crack at the top like it was some  
magic exhaust fan that would suck  
all the smoke out of the car;  
newsradio endlessly repeating  
until we were out of range then  
reggae or Armenian music until we  
reached the marina, my eyes burning  
from the acrid fumes.

Royal Jamaicas, Macanudos, Davidoffs,  
in wooden boxes and cool aluminum  
tubes with finely threaded caps  
as if the beautiful packaging would  
make them stink less when they were lit.  
The boat was filled with those  
boxes that smelled sweetly of cedar,  
now jammed with hooks and swivels and lures.

Dad would start the engines  
we would pull out of the slip  
head out to the open water and  
he would light up yet another cigar  
my head already dizzy from diesel  
exhaust and anticipating the  
upcoming ocean swells would get  
another blast of tobacco smoke that  
would almost put me over the railing.

So many weekends on the water  
probably thousands of cigars  
hours of near nausea and yet  
I miss him every day.  
God, I hate cigars.

it streaks across the night sky  
boiling away in the solar heat  
hurtling at cosmic speeds yet  
to my vision standing still  
a frozen firework in the  
evening sky a sign a portent  
a good omen that somewhere  
beyond all of this there is  
beauty and mystery and wonder  
and while living in the moment  
is important sometimes that  
moment is so black or bleak  
it sucks the life right out  
of me and I have to stop and  
look to the horizon and think  
of that comet circling and  
cycling and dazzling us with  
its luminous self-sacrifice.

Reading poetry in the  
deconsecrated church I  
wonder why I don't feel  
different in this space  
from which God has been  
evicted, forced out into  
the street in his robe,  
meager belongings borne  
by angels carrying tattered  
cardboard boxes reclaimed  
from the supermarket. No,

this place still contains  
plenty of spirit trapped in  
the oak of its honeyed pews  
and the yellow and blue  
stained glass windows that  
cast checkerboards upon  
the worshippers sitting  
quietly. Words hang in the  
air like incense as readers  
recite verses not from  
the bible but from their  
own holy testaments.

Craig Kittner  
**interlude in the wind**

in the car with clouds  
piled high and fierce  
with light in the windshield,  
the thump and throb of music  
with the windows down  
and the half-formed thought  
that the next song might  
take me where I want to go

and

the storm

when it comes

is a blessing

its wind releasing the trees'  
inner spirits to dance  
with light that turns leaves  
into silver prayer flags  
that invoke the rain  
that dispels the world  
that keeps trying to turn  
us against each other



Once the cold gets in,  
It's in. Like damp that rots  
The floor from under your feet.  
Like the negative weight  
Where she used to sit but can't anymore  
And won't again. The cold

Comes in quiet so you don't catch it,  
Becomes your bones and your  
Skin. Becomes the better part of you in your  
Waking day and your cloistered  
Sleep. Holds your heart closed  
Where once it used to open.

Once the cold sets into your bones  
No fire can move it back out.  
No photograph, black and white to show her age;  
Not the kindest or the most well intentioned  
Wishes. Not the thought of a better place  
When you know no place could be better than here.

I don't have any cure and if you're seeking it,  
I'm sorry. Because once the cold gets in,  
I hardly know how to stand it or even  
Find where it first crept through. Like someone  
Opened a window in the night but they're not around  
To close it anymore. No matter how long you look.

I wanted more words than these  
Which is nothing new or original.  
We all wanted something else and where others  
Missed trips and birthdays,  
Condemned to their living rooms  
To teach and entertain, I sit by a window

Above skeletal streets, where everyone  
Out after curfew, seems like a criminal.  
Maybe the promise was too much:  
So many months of utter freedom  
To write what you want, no distractions,  
No possibility of escape;

A prison without the punishment.  
The gift seems so great it has its own gravity,  
Which might explain why setting sail  
Keeps meaning running in the wrong direction.  
But maybe it isn't that at all.  
Charybdis dragged all sailors down

Without discrimination and what it didn't destroy,  
Scylla ate. Whole crews wiped off the page  
Like their names had never been written  
To begin with. The original rock and a hard place.  
So perhaps, despite appearances,  
A blank page might be so severe after all.

How did it come to this?  
The breathless anxiety  
I am powerless to defy  
With shards of glass  
I climb  
To rest at your feet  
I have nothing to say

I have birthed you, I have drawn you  
so well, each line is a matchstick. Each line deserves its own poem.  
I fiddled under the balcony and played god.  
Perhaps two days ago, I'd have left  
your cheeks milky, unburied  
the ticking chest grenade, polished  
it out of its own skin. Climbed up  
a stairwell, dangling. Playing god.  
Only now, there's a quietness  
about you. Your chin just skims  
above the rubble. I promise, out  
there, all of it—green.

and the cake was the right shade of warm.  
The knot tied with an onion ring, breath  
yellowing with chicken grease through  
paper plates. Guests, the world strung  
decorations using only teeth, no hands.  
No frivolous placeholders, confetti-choked  
photographs, slick fingers  
to our name. Later, we honeymooned  
in the grocery store, finally able to count  
out cash in time, the kind of world  
heavy as fruit or the word 'pudding.'  
I kept the receipt in the corner of a mirror.

the toes are always the last to forget how much love you had at birth when no one could hurt you but the god you lay your food for and your family would gather to pray around the crackle of the radio static the window pane a second away from flinching again for the third time that night your mother with her maiden hair lined with silver whose hands did well to keep firm around you how she was able to be in the places you tried so hard to be in but in her home country who is there to hold her blood in place away from the flinching every time another animal is pressed to a board when they form circles of open mouths for a seed growing snug in its own skin and maybe this is what it is like to love all you have close wrap it around you when you sleep at night and for the next two hundred and seventy-four days love it until it opens its eyes for the first time when the thrashing at the window becomes the blood rocketing behind your ears you are the only one left in that front-row sunrise of an acorn becoming an oak tree that splinters at its own pace because sometimes to love is to be hurt and to hurt is to be alive breathing in the scent of another's hands around the spine of a tree taking home the splinter that night that massacre of what was a thumb— you who refused to believe that the crackle of the radio was never the warning sign.

My room was so fresh to me;  
there was nothing on the  
barren walls. I had been  
given a small bookshelf to place  
a few belongings on.  
I had very few-- just a book  
of Browning and a book of  
Revelations. That was all.

The first day I spent here,  
my mother sent me flowers.  
There was a card that simpered  
a few words, "Life is not as  
bad as you believe. Love,  
Mom and Dad."

The flowers were beautiful,  
and they showered their  
corals and pinks and violets  
into the blank, white room.

But flowers, like people,  
are not meant for forever.  
Oh so slowly, the petals  
began to fall. They  
shivered and quaked and tumbled  
From their stems in the vase.  
They fell to the table and  
they sauntered to the floor.  
My room has color no more.

do you still love me

when meteors roll off my tongue  
like bon-bons coated in salt /  
detrital words ablaze / foul  
remnants of the girl you  
greeted at dawn /

do you still love me

when you brace for impact /  
a barrage of cosmic debris  
catapulted from aching uvula  
soon to cause craterous wounds  
to eardrums so tender /

do you still love me

when fury threatens to puncture  
your membrane / fracture a  
brittle husk to blight golden  
nectar lying within / even  
the bravest hive would  
scurry for cover / but you,  
you embrace the inferno  
with limbs outstretched / tie  
your wrists to the stake / your  
hands to the small of my back  
a soothing beat / your chest  
my cheek / in time these fickle  
flames recede to a stable glow  
and I ask through drizzle  
of salt and celestial ash  
even now,

do you still love me



Staring at the ceiling in my room seems to be  
my favorite thing to do these days. I don't know why  
that is, it's not tiled so I can't count anything, and  
it's not textured at all. It's just smooth and unaltered.  
I like it. But, I think it is without whatever real is.  
When I look up at it, I am neither here nor there—I  
am zero; lacking some feeling

slipping by

emulating existence

bemoaning

the concept itself  
without reach.

desperately trying to recall how to sleep.

the tile freezing  
as if you're in the center  
of a never-ending Antarctic -

its polar ice piercing, but you can't feel it;  
just as numb as everyone else.

you see your reflection  
mirrored against the oven's glass;  
a replica at best, to remind you of what once was -

prompting another drink.

preserved there  
catatonic  
receding into  
the world's  
shimmering  
Antarctic

you realize:

the problem wasn't  
that you didn't feel anything at all,  
but rather, that you felt too much.

Diana Raab  
**Patterns of Our Lives**  
*previously published with Poets Unlimited*

If you laid out a tapestry  
of places you've visited in your life  
would your pattern  
be plaid, flowery, striped,  
triangular or circular,  
with no beginning or ending or all boxed in?  
Perhaps one is better than the other—  
linear with no start or finish  
but then again, there might  
not be a survival pattern  
like those purple pajamas  
caressing this body which once was.

A mosaic of holms  
stocked in the stream  
of lives

See, sometimes even the waters  
are hindered

an ordinary thing  
snagged along the days,  
pouring the abundance of  
their return

In the lullabies of children ill-advised  
hide the smiles of the unloved  
stripped off,  
barefoot,  
of their memories.

So, I play it on repeat,  
your name to my ears  
too afraid it might disappear  
and every day reborn  
changes its meaning.

A distant fortune  
visiting us where  
two oceans meet

A resonance,  
only I can read  
in the chasms of unspoken tears

I ink my feelings in  
a sea with no shore  
only to recall the path  
leading to you,  
Until my very last night dies off  
to the first light of its habit  
I will preserve the memory of you.

I am going to collapse.  
Warp convex then concave  
in my rib cage.  
Like when earth buckles  
to make room for a body  
of water, I want to clear  
out a ditch for myself.  
I am a pond— no, a puddle,  
but so much smaller.  
It can't be difficult to break  
down weeds and shells  
and carve out a cavern  
and keep digging and  
digging as I flood, hoping  
someday I might be sea again.

Elena Rielinger  
**bathroom puddles**

ask me what is wrong / & if i'm honest i'll tell you i'm tired / of reading of literary deaths / & the metaphors they create because / in a book a miniscule nothing is God / but i'm starting to believe / god is the miniscule nothing / just a symbol some scholar created / to hide what we cannot understand / i am only half-honest / as most people are / so i tell you i am tired / as most people do / and we both leave it at that / when i run out of words to describe grief, i stand beneath the shower head and wash my hair / over & over & over & / i watch the suds bubble over my feet & down the drain / no matter how tight i wrap the towel around my body / i feel naked / my sixth-grade teacher said we were lucky / because our hometown was an oasis / storms fall / everywhere except on our vanilla sand / we learn about tragedies from newspapers & shakespeare, she said / but years later a girl i knew was found dead / & i wanted the metaphors to fall from the faucet / cover me / fill the bathtub / fill the bathroom / fill the house / i stood beneath the shower head & washed my hair & / i couldn't stop the water from going down the drain / i couldn't stop the cold air from touching my skin / even as i pulled the damp towel close around my body / take a quiet look at us / our despair turned us into wet rags / hanging from the hook attached to the bathroom wall / dripping puddles onto the tile floor / turning the white grout line gray / & we are always tired / because death is not a metaphor.

Leonie Rowland  
**walton-on-thames**

*previously published with BlueHouse Journal*

*for brontë, who was across the river*

it is summer, and we are walking along the river where your favourite writer said the houses are posh /  
*a three-and-a-half-million riverbank house in walton-on-thames*, but she puts it so beautifully / that  
you don't mind, even though you campaigned for labour

one of the houses on the other side belonged to kate winslet, who was forced into the water /  
temporarily for the sake of tragedy, which looks like love when the tides are right / while her boyfriend  
sank to the bottom of the sea, she thought of walton-on-thames / which she was also separated from  
by a body of water

if I knew then what I know now / I would have thought of walton as I caught buses on the other side  
of the river / instead of letting them take me where they were already going

we watched a film where a woman on a boat drops her canvas overboard and follows it in / skirts  
blooming like flowers, shoes kicking madly / *swans are my favourite*, you say, *because they swim like  
that* / there are things I would follow in, and from where we are now the river that connects this side  
and that / is fine because I would have a chance to sink

but there are blackberries here, and you are taking photos / three to capture the narrative: scrambling  
through thorns / a ripe blackberry, tender hands / it tastes sour, but I smile so that when you are  
scrolling through your phone / you will understand that I was happy / we pick them thoroughly and  
do not go / until the heat is gone and it is nearly dark

don't worry, i already know  
i don't have a *home-home*  
like my friend from kathmandu or my friend from cebu know  
that, is the color of return:  
brown  
earth and all, from where things bloom  
and bodies build  
up to wilt  
in each other's  
arms.

this will not be your diaspora poem:  
we have enough milk & honey  
at the grocery store  
and golden nubian gap-toothed queens who long for mother  
africa  
while chewing on the meat of leftover  
languages

enough.  
my poem is  
a bad rap and abandoned  
my poem is  
a lost toothbrush and suicidal  
my poem is  
gentrification and in love  
with the wrong place-person  
my poem is

a year of buildings  
erupting across cityscapes  
of body, self, me  
like a row of teeth  
browned from smoke –  
the pollution  
the age



*(HOME, continued, no stanza break)*

the growth

my poem is  
a bunch of planes –  
i flew  
to spit my-self out like  
a hard landing  
into womanhood  
my poem is  
my poem is  
my poem is  
not for you.

Vamika Sinha  
**mint tea: a summertime lyric**  
*Rabat, Morocco*

that summer in rabat, i thought  
about visas. so i thought  
about paperweights – breakable  
glass meant to  
hold you down, paper  
woman. i try to be

one of those that stay  
living like the slow  
pour of jade tea into a glass, which is to say  
green & at rest  
for a dear long while, stirred  
sometimes: for taste.

that summer i murdered  
baguettes on the countertop  
after taking the train back from work.  
in the morning, the policeman had called me  
'priyanka chopra' & i had  
laughed, thinking  
if i let him  
hold me there like the paper  
weight on his desk,  
i would be able to  
fly away freely

& a visa is as small as a crumb  
on my breakfast table. temporary  
thing to confirm  
i am a temporary thing  
too.

that summer in rabat, i helped  
my students fix their mistakes:  
minor, like  $2x$  is not  $x$  squared &  
i may look it but i couldn't be

*(mint tea: a summertime lyric, continued, no stanza break)*

from here anyway.

“so what are you”  
but always in flight, a moving  
photograph: flâneuse perched awhile  
on your window. i love the air  
here, for once it feels so  
good to breathe, slow & deep  
for as long as you’ll let me  
root in your soil, delicate  
as mint leaf.

america – that band-aid full of promises to fix you.  
join the queue, dizzied  
by the piles and piles  
of rainbows lying  
at the end of the aisle.  
juice boxes, chocolates, gluten-free pasta, and  
shampoos of a thousand kinds.  
there are 50 ways to touch the hair on your head.  
there are 50 ways to choose a magazine, where  
there are 50 ways to please your man, written code red.  
i spin from the choices – regular, organic, soy.  
cold-pressed and cool  
priced. my dream lies  
in that carton of red and white,  
like toothpaste or the fourth of july.  
my ID is stuck  
in that carton, preservative  
-free, no added sugar,  
to be processed, still.

america – that carton  
of promises to keep  
your belly full. whoever you may be,  
there is always an option:  
almond milks for the lactose intolerant,  
agave syrups for the glucose intolerant,  
9mm guns for the racially intolerant.  
no other  
nation has so much of Goodwill  
for the things we can  
not tolerate.  
the hate you give is always accepted  
for donation, indeed all types are welcome. we take  
sweatshirts in every color or kind. we take  
bodies of every color and kind.

*(whole foods, continued, stanza break)*

america – that superpower  
disguised as a supermarket, promising  
to make you whole.  
it urges like a mother demanding  
to over-achieve, you bend backwards.  
it nags: eat your greens.  
your farm-fresh kale, your kombucha tea,  
your crisp dollar bills, your illegal weed,  
your residence visa, your statue of liberty.

america – the crown  
cutting into your head, young lady  
liberty. trying and  
wanting, working and hurting  
hard for a better myth of a better  
life, rising roof high,  
up the vents to stranger skies.

# FICTION

He lies there, belly swollen from ever-guilty handouts at my table. Although not old, he has the shopworn shab of a much-loved sweater passed hand-to-hand. His muzzle, now grey, bears hard iron bristles where once only soft velvet bloomed. It is his eyes, though, that are forever young, limpid pools of chocolate that well in perfect, precise pain.

Before, he was treated rough - a young woman beat him for his toilet mistakes; the new family with small children troubled by his rambunctious charm; the kill-shelter he was rescued from as his last owner looked only to profit from his snaggle-toothed smile.

Stretched on the chenille couch cover, his legs kick in sleep-jerk staccato memory. I wonder what he remembers of his life before us, the times before the perfect meeting of July the Fourth? It was his own true Independence Day having waited for us and our move out from the city where we could never truly love him properly. The hard clamor dirty streets, marred by shrieking police sirens and too-small parks filled with needles, were no place for such strong-willed passion. Once he deemed us worthy, I took him alone for the first walk to test our new friendship with one another, hoping to enjoy the company of new master and freshly-found companion.

We walked sunbaked gardens skirted by the tussled hillocks bracing the manicured parkland.

We clambered over paths still flitting with the sand lizards intent on avoiding the blazing sun.

We gamboled by the lakeside, our feet baked by sand and blackened by the melting blacktop.

As day stretched ever-long, we trundled home with no recollection of time spent, the day melting in hazed first honeysuckle memory as we passed the milestone together.

Yet when we crossed the shaded crossroads, he stumbled, rolling onto the patchy grass, his locomotive panting muffled in stupor, though his eyes still shined in glazed adoration.

I carried him home that sun-blasted day, bitter tears wet on my face as I chanted apologies, that I hadn't meant to hurt him, how sorry I was, to keep on breathing, please, please, to keep breathing. My wife met us at the door, icy shock rippling as my heart keened when she wrapped him in fresh kitchen towels wetted from the sink, an eyedropper of water teasing water out as we lay together on the tiled floor. I wept in prayer and shame as my wife brought him back to us.

We do not speak of that first day and he has the graciousness of his kind not to remind me of my near-fatal love. As he sleeps, curled in deer-like fashion, I wonder if I too have joined that list of cruel first loves?

**What We Talk About When We Talk About Talking**

You, Dad, and older sister Nancy talk at dinner. Three of you, four chairs.

The fourth chair gapes, cold, elegant.

You speak of John F. Kennedy, weather, Paul Newman movies, Richard Yates novels.

Instead of love, you talk of plots. Tension. You don't speak of people incapable of love, people who couldn't pretend; you speak of the Kennedys' smiles.

Some nights, you move the fourth chair an inch. Another.

You wait for Dad to yell, Nancy to call you a slob.

Dad jokes about Nixon sweating. Nancy offers to take you to the movies.

You laugh.

You forgot how to cry.



Anuja came out of the locker room and joined the line-up of women, her armpits still damp from the wipe-down. She clutched her gown closed since the waist-tie had ripped off. Their assigned group leader wore a green vest and held a clipboard close to her chest, as if afraid that Anuja and the others were contagious via some kind of breast-to-breast transmission.

As the volunteer walked Anuja and the others to the waiting room, she pointed out a basket full of multi-coloured yarn on the windowsill, "If you know how to knit, feel free." Anuja did know how to knit, but she didn't believe that a bunch of random women could create something uniform out of mere scraps - let alone something beautiful.

She carefully sat down in a single empty chair tucked in between two other women. Across from her was an older woman leaning heavily forward, one hand on top of the other on top of the knobbed handle of a cane.

"Why, hello! A newcomer! Welcome! I'm Sarah."

Sarah was holding court as the others listened - or pretended to - while flipping through the outdated ladies' magazines from the wire rack in the corner. "God knows how long they've all been waiting here," Anuja thought as she smiled and nodded shyly in greeting.

"As I was saying, my sister here and I were surfing the channels last night in the hotel," Sarah gestured to the quiet woman sitting next to her in a thick wool sweater and seemed to lose her train of thought.

"It's quite a drive down here from Wasaga, so we stayed over in the city last night. Oh, as I was saying, so we came across this movie. It's dark but gorgeous. And the heroine, she is gorgeous too, a brunette. But then, picture it: she goes into this room and there's a creature there, a monster really, in a tank..."

Anuja closed her eyes and tried to meditate, repeating her mantra silently, waiting to be called for the results of last week's test.

But Sarah's voice yammered on about the movie, causing Anuja to open her eyes again. She now felt inspired to add stitches to the mess of yarn in the basket, but felt too awkward about getting up in front of everyone. She had already embarrassed herself once by crying on the subway that morning. A woman in front of her had reached out and mouthed the words, "It's going to be okay..." This only made Anuja cry even harder as the rest of the crowd on the subway car tried to shift away from her.

She visualized the knitting in the basket and added line by line of mental stitches. The stitches lifted up, shimmering in gold. Each stitch was unique but somehow fit together perfectly. She felt a flash of something and her shoulders started to relax.

Anuja opened her eyes again at Sarah's voice rising, louder and faster, almost shrieking now. Sarah's sister softly reached over to pat Sarah's knee, but this couldn't calm her down.

“So I said to my sister, ‘I think she’s gonna fuck a fish!’ I mean, this man has no legs, I think he has a tail. He was handsome, but I mean, I couldn’t fuck a FISH! Do you hear me? Do any of you hear me? SHE FUCKED A FISH!”

Anuja spotted a nurse in the hallway and widened her eyes, begging silently for her to come over. The nurse looked into the waiting room but quickly retreated back to her station. Anuja closed her eyes again, trying to tap into that well of peace that she knew was just over the horizon.

Okay, let's try again, she thought to herself. Slowly, she pressed each mantra, each stitch, and each breath together. A multi-coloured cashmere shawl emerged from the blackness and descended upon her shoulders. Sarah's voice receded into the distance. Feathery and warm, she felt the shawl block out the sound and distraction.

“Anuja Jayaram? Is Anuja here?”

As she rose, Anuja felt her fingers clutch the shawl together in front where the gown wouldn't close, and pictured stitch after stitch lining up to protect her.

*Guilt is the final centimeter of lead in an automatic pencil. Needed, but useless.*

I heard Bellatrix's familiar thumping footfalls just before she toddled from her bedroom into the kitchen. Even then, I reacted too slowly. As I always did.

"Mommy!" She came in at a near-run, right into my knees—that was her affectionate habit. I ought to have foreseen it. The collision jolted the glass vase from the crook of my arm. Down it fell.

My hands were full with what I'd scooped from the table—books and plates and things—so in that instant I could only watch. The vase nearly grazed her head, landing upended on the tile floor, spilling both flower and water. The rose lost enough petals to warrant throwing out, and when I picked up the vase I found a long, straight crack in its mouth.

By then, Bellatrix was back in her room, stifling wretched sobs. I must have shouted.

CREATIVE NONFICTION  
&  
VISUAL ART

I scheduled an appointment only after the ache felt as if a construction worker was hammering his nail into the rigid plank of my knee. The doctor simply smiled at the wood chips. She explained this was natural: because females possess wider hips, their femurs intersect with their patellae at an angle rather than straight-on, typically causing discomfort in young women—especially soccer players like myself. She showed me out the door while advising me to stretch. I had no response to give her, just a question I did not voice: Where do I put this pain?

And she was right, by the way—experts and internet searches all agree. But that didn't stop the uninsured X-ray I received the next week from showing a broken patella.

—

When I was ten, during a standard league match, I leapt up for a header and smashed skulls with another girl doing the same. My jaw clipped upward and then all the machinery inside of it went numb. I stumbled toward the team bench with my fingers clamped over my mouth.

“It hurth, it hurth,” I said to my coach as she brushed her palms across my cheeks. I asked her what she was wiping off my face.

“Your teeth,” she told me, and then: “We need you on the field. Get ready to go back.”

I ran my tongue over the jagged headstones of the cemetery behind my lips, and my shoulders started to shake. My coach withdrew her hands and frowned at me. “Why are you crying?”

—

Once it was time to pull the pins out of my knee—a pair of thick, six-inch metal rods, construction hardware if I've ever seen it—I was permitted to take two ibuprofen pills and nothing more. The surgeon who slid the pins through my skin in the first place gestured for me to lay down on a metal table.

My father told me to be brave; I slung my arm across my mouth and took the sleeve between my porcelain-crowned teeth. The arm was in the process of earthquake-demolition, trembling uncontrollably, but I measured my breaths evenly—until the surgeon leaned over me with what looked like massive pliers in his hands.

His brow furrowed because my sleeve did not cover my eyes. “Why are you crying?”

—

Now I skip-jog onto the wiry-grassed field for my first game in months. I will slide-tackle, if I have to, with the hope that I don't end up skidding on my kneecaps like last time.

The hitch in my step will slow me down some, but now I know something those other girls do not: There is no one for us to give our pain to. It is not something we are supposed to take out and show around; it is meant to be stored where it came from, to be carried, tucked away in the zippered pouch of our purse, right next to the sanitary products.

In this way, I have a leg up on those girls, a special understanding—but they, too, will come to know it soon enough.

Darius Janczewski  
**Entering from the Sun LR**







