

the BICOASTAL REVIEW



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Edited by

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Erasure of that which is neglected can emerge in art by way of seemingly dark images.

In some ways, this issue holds expected (bicoastal) localities and classic autumnal elements: storms, pine forests, cats, spirits. Treasures, artifacts, jewels. But these are props, constructed from the ether and will of the relationships within their poems. Speakers and characters wield power over these physical extensions—they shatter them, fix them, wash them, bury them, dig them back up again.

And in the season of the witch, there is time for bad behavior. “I Ghengis Khan my animus, “ writes Annie Lure of a secret self. “I serry Assyrian warriors, Stalin, and the Me-Too women./My fingers gobble my grandmother’s pomegranate orchard.” Archetypes and symbols also glow in Joanne Yu Yan Chan’s short story, “The Gift,” which explores expectations of the dark feminine.

We have chosen poems which convey, beyond traditional themes of fallen leaves and horror, a poet’s understanding that humans can coexist with useful darkness, drinking from its cathartic depths. We cohabitate, never satiated. Those of our species who found the most success in probing history, the psyche, art, and even space, made permanent peace, I think, with shadow—staring down death on their own road, as in Faith Allington’s poem, “On the Cusp.”

In autumn, we reunite with the cold yet can still turn to the last of the year’s overripeness, excess, and access to earth. In these pages, light falls into rooms as onto graves: always with care, always with some entanglement long since unraveling there. “Sometimes I think the things I say/are what you think,” writes Brian McCabe. “Sometimes the things you think/I mean, I don’t. Wanted you to wake in a room/on cool pale sheets and be what’s missing.” This preoccupation with memory cannot be avoided. Our collective, “symphonic will/to live, now breathes into these moments” of searching, remembering, and settling (Rikki Santer).

When we look up at a clouded sky, it is the darkest shapes that hold the most water. In the sockets of a skull, darkness is proof of history and growth, of calcium and minerals. The animal half of us, beyond fear of loss, makes no qualms about its transformation. The corpse is a vessel of elements. and more. In M. Cynthia Cheung’s “The Sand-People of Sutton Hoo,” the dead are simultaneously idle and interrupted. They are us if we laid down; and us, acted upon and gone beyond.

Death in autumn garb, without spring’s activity of birth, can also allow for rest in ritual; “our lives seeking no more/than the seal to our afterlives” (Max Lasky). Bodies ease out of controls finally completed, becoming physical symbols that subsume. This will happen whether we yield to or try to spurn the “worms—/who would wither sacred flesh” and “swallow river stones./everything to preserve this/vessel/from the ravages of/impermanence” (Aimee Lim).

There is so much that a poem can be for us. A letter. An open casket. An animal drawn close. A river stone in the throat, working its journey through you; that later gleams out from among your pelvic bones. That later rests alone. For now, we are here. I hope that you enjoy these poems.

Marina Brown

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Zach Bernstein

Coral Tree Tea House, Rainy Afternoon

Bent indefinitely on pinching violets
out of the maple's bark,
you wind-wrestle an umbrella,
your waistcoat flaps fluttering:
the mind shifting
its temperature with the change
of season. You pirouette
in the sodden soot, faltering
before the fountain's edge—

as when a leaf-bunch gathers
in a swirl, lathering the corners
of a pool before the air relieves
a single leaf to break off
and float alone:
utterly beautiful, utterly unaware.

Faith Allington

On the Cusp

North on the 101, the trees
amazed us most.
Coming from desert,
such deep drinking thirst
felt wasteful and dangerous.

The van shuddered to a stop
and when the stranger stopped
to help us, my sister and I
crouched in the back
like fox kits.

He helped fix the tire,
gave us a gourd,
invited us up dirt slopes
for dinner. I held my breath,
thought they might say yes,
those hippie parents of mine.
I saw them consider it.

Maybe he wasn't dangerous,
but all I could think was
don't don't
because for the first time
I could see under my skin
and right down to the bones.

Rosalind Shoopmann

Homebody

Last night, my wife mistook me for a ghost.
She said: “Spirit, why do you haunt this house?”
Mind you, we’ve been married for years, and not
in one of those states where you are allowed
to marry a ghost. But I understand.
I could get out more than I do. That’s fair
to say, although I am alive, and so
“to haunt” is not exactly right, I think,
in terms of verb. But when I point this out,
when I protest her choice of language, it’s
too late—she’s called the exorcist.

Natalie Ezelle

looking for ghosts: 2007

when the moon hangs brightly, bone-white
my grandpa slides the glass door wide. wind

in chimes—wind in chimes—we sneak outside
to look for ghosts. *now don't be fooled*, he whispers,

them ghosts are good at hiding. then, he lowers
his lips and blows—his whistle a rope pulled

tighter, taut—four fingers on my shoulder,
white. he lost his fifth inside a foxhole.

we gotta outsmart 'em now. let's go long.

i nod—the back gate groans—opens
to a field of ticking—ribbons in me turn

to knots, i drop, my knees scraping earth,
its pulsing—breathing—then i see it—

a bird. the head slacked. the eyes gone
black like marbles. *grandpa, is it—?*

and then his eyes went distant, like he ate
a sad song, like blue was pooling in him.

he takes a cigarette, lights the head on fire.
mhm, dead. looks like someone nabbed the sucker.

—the cricketing louder.

my grandpa's embers burning brighter, brighter.

Max Lasky

Swimming

Off a cold cloud into the sea
 we dove, a swan dive trailed by
 the tensioning line tethered

to our spines, what made us
 scale the endless ladder, the ladder
 bending out of sight? We're still not

impressed, we're still not sure
 what exists, whether negation's list
 and listserv and bliss—never mind,

the masters won't allow it.
 No weariness will drag us
 to a chest, even if it brims

with gems, the hearts once ours
 and ours again if we wield
 a crowbar, some strength, if

opened—no weariness will drag us
 now that the sunset's been made
 a suspect, now that the suspects reversed

the roles, no weariness now that
 the guideline's been severed
 by a gloved hand clutching

a bone handled knife, the knife
 dropped into the night sea, and us,
 flashlights between our teeth,

lost in the wreck of who we are
 and who we set out to be.
 We, the suspects, no different

from any master except in that
we're masterless, watched the sun
set on the east coast under the sea,

watched the world's end
descend in a blueprint, the cut
guideline snaking away like a snake

escaping to the surface, sea and sky,
slithering through water, through air
as if slithering through drying leaves.

When we say the sea is endless
we don't mean in terms of space,
but power, as in the sea devastates.

We're not tired, we're not weary,
we drain our hearts of the hurt
every night, we open our mouths

to roar, even here, underwater,
we let out the pockets of air
that rise above and dissipate

before ever reaching the surface.
As the saltwater floods our lungs
we breathe on, breathe deeper,

our lives seeking no more
than the seal to our afterlives.

Aimee Lim

Flesh Body Bodhisattva

the first one thousand days, eat nothing
but seeds and berries, yet
uphold monastery duties.
chop wood, wash robes, break stones—
this strips the fat from the body, so after
i am gone, there is less to rot.

the next one thousand days, eat less.
pine needles, bark, roots. strip
the body of moisture. drink
tea from the sap of the urushi tree—
used to lacquer bowls—
highly poisonous, this induces vomiting, and kills
those—maggots, bacteria, worms—
who would wither sacred flesh.

some days, swallow river stones.
everything to preserve this
vessel
from the ravages of
impermanence.

pray. chant. raise
the bell every day, until one day,
no bell.
then the stone tomb, just
enough for the lotus position,
is sealed
for the last one thousand days.

M. Cynthia Cheung

The Sand-People of Sutton Hoo

Adjacent to the royal barrows,
archeologists find another burial ground.
Each grave opened is a squared off pit
where the dead seem idle,
or interrupted. For instance,
that one, his skull—separate
from his neck—grins
between his knees. Here, a woman
appears the way I might look
if I laid down quietly
and died. If a warm hand
then pressed closed my eyes
and wiped everything else away.
To be forgiven.
I lean in for a closer inspection.
No, her head is also unlatched,
carefully turned
facedown, facing hell.

Terminus

After the thaw, I come across a twisted
sinew in the grass. Silently, sun rips
open the muck, cracks the remains
into strange letters. And what
should I read in them?

Nothing seems familiar this spring.
I find my way down the roadside ditches,
to the slack water where whole
petty kingdoms once scabbed the shore. And there,
when the moon opens its cold eye,
I find the river god who has died
a thousand times. His voice scrapes
along the edge: *I believe in my
abandonment...it is what I have.*¹
My reflection drains; his shadow
lifts itself from the ground. I can still see
the small shred of pelt—gray-brown, anonymous—
rippling as if under another god's hand.

¹ *from Geoffrey Hill's "Funeral Music"*

Annie Lure

Will I Consummate My Writing?

The desert labors like a postmenstrual woman.
Its gatekeeper ties his bandana into a nuchal cord.
I stroke a phallus as if a comb. It pulses with a poem.
I peek through the thicket of phalli.
The sky licks itself like a contented cat.
I split the pod of a phallus.
It ejaculates a poem in the shape of a baby foot stump.

I Ghengis Khan¹ my animus.
I serry Assyrian warriors, Stalin, and the Me-Too women.
My fingers gobble my grandmother's pomegranate orchard.
I pottery-wheel a pomegranate into a womb-well.
In it, I fish for folktales, which I then hook onto personae.
I fire pentacles of poems:
Nineveh encrypted my gypsum.
Stalin boards their brains the way a schoolboy boards candy.
The TV gapes vagina-like on the living room wall.
My writing hand is attached to a phallus strongarm.
Genial light helmets my head. My blood armors my body.
Critics lance my poem-heads.
I birth my agonism as poetry.
I oblate it in the corpus of a nubile woman.

The queen sits on a throne legged in phalli.
Two buffalo-black cats flank her like Do Kamissa's² doublets.
She wields a phallus as if Lachesis³ measuring rod.
She fans herself with my animus:
There was once an anemic girl, she recounts.
Amid the milk crusts of her room,
she penned stylized poems
of ribs rocking airy children
and indigents quaking on the eye's shore.
Echo⁴ called out to Echo ad nauseum.
Then she read in IEEE Spectrum of a Lamassu's expropriation.
In it, she recognized her own displacement.
So, she lent her voice to the Lamassu.
The Lamassu's mourning mourned her mourning.

*A mouth emptied itself into a navel ad nauseum.
A navel emptied itself into a mouth ad nauseum.
The girl visited Zimmerli Art Museum
and interpenetrated with a Russian nonconformist painting.
She severed all these exchanges from their present times
and overlaid them onto her present time.
The Lamassu brushed its woes onto
Stalin's brainless masses.
A reader corresponded them to a kidnapped friend.
Thus, a coterie of itinerants grew into a settled tribe,
which grew into a town, which grew into
a state, which grew into an empire.
Priapic,⁵ the queen tips her penis, a scroll of poems, into a set of scales.
My poems counterbalance a pile of gold.*

The answer is hastened maturation perishes.

[1] Mongol warlord and emperor of largest contiguous empire

[2] *Epic of Sunjata* from the Malian Empire: Do Kamissa transmogrifies into a buffalo to ravage her brother Diarra's land for his ungratefulness.

[3] The middle sister of the Three Fates in the Greek pantheon, she measures the length of each life and appoints lots.

[4] Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Echo and Narcissus. Hera, Zeus' wife, curses Echo, Zeus' adulteress, who protects his licentiousness, with speaking only by repeating the last few words of another's utterance.

[5] Ithyphallic Roman god of fertility. Fresco of House of Vettii in Pompei shows Priapus weighing his penis on scales counterbalanced with gold. A basket of fruit flanks his feet. Possibly apotropaic.

Erick Verran

Untitled

*In this collector's gallery, the large skulls
of early Britons debate in an airless glass*

rectangle.

*It is a musty reliquary of stuff:
the charcoal study of a kidney, the horse*

*dissected across a flush of cabinet cards,
a beautiful cross section of a chanterelle*

*under magnification (to show the funnel
of gills, yellow as turmeric), a tall carpet*

*thought to be Moroccan in origin, colors
rotted away by the sun's infernal rounds,*

*and a boxy, six-stringed crwth, the kind
of lyre one bowed, innovated by a Celtic*

*tradesman dead for centuries, but hung
casually, as though it remained playable.*

The Gift

By Joanne Yu Yan Chan

*"Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do.
I'm half crazy, all for the love of you.
It won't be a stylish marriage.
I can't afford a carriage.
But you'll look sweet upon the seat.
Of a bicycle built for two."*

Harry Dacre (1892). "Daisy Bell (Bicycle Built for Two)"

Tucked away within an overlooked nation's niche, Somerville—a quaint town—seemed to slumber. Its buildings, puncturing the meandering cobblestone paths, were imbued with earthy charm. Among the quaint village backdrop, on a cobbled street corner where ivy clung to aged brickwork, an unusual storefront bore a name—*Daisy's Treasures*. The shop's dim lighting seemed to mirror the demure nature of its owner.

A small woman, her garments reflecting her love for eras long past, Daisy moved gracefully amidst the narrow aisles of her shop. Beams of sunlight played tricks in the corners, where relics ensconced tales of their previous owners. A sea of bric-a-brac lay in organized disarray, each piece holding its own history and potential. Her fingers would dance on the worn-out edges of keepsakes, crafting a ballet of shadows against the fading wallpaper. Gossip about her charm and eccentricity swirled around Somerville like a constant wind.

These whispered rumors formed a shroud of mystery around Daisy, deterring many, yet drawing a few brave or reckless souls. Among those undeterred by the circulating hearsay was Edgar—a young man known for his mechanical skills. He possessed a vast assortment of tools and blueprints detailing the village's layouts and designs, and his stolid demeanor usually contrasted with Daisy's offbeat charms. His heart ached with hunger, but his possessions paled compared to her elaborate relics and gold trinkets. Yet, in the deepest recesses of his heart, he nurtured an offering to Daisy.

Under the canvas of a sky charged with the brewing tension of an impending storm, Edgar unveiled his first gift to Daisy: a tandem bicycle. The sight of the bike stirred something within her, and she delicately mounted the back saddle. Her ethereal form against the backdrop of the summer dusk was like an artist's rendition of serene chaos.

The wheels began their dance with the cobblestones as a cold wind swept into Somerville. Edgar's pedaling initiated a transformation; the town around him began to alter. Familiar structures stretched into the sky, merging with the base of the lowest clouds, casting thin shadows that seemed to reach out, hungry for familiarity.

Throughout this unsettling shift, there wasn't even a hint of Daisy's breathing quickening. Her quietude created a sharp juxtaposition to Edgar's accelerating heartbeats, as if they were two sides of the same distorted coin. As he pedaled harder against the escalating gusts of wind, he glanced backward. Daisy's hair streamed wildly around her face, yet her eyes sparkled, and a faint smile touched her lips, urging him on.

They left behind Daisy's storefront—a dot in the horizon of the town's shrinking landscape. The charm of the once delightful village had faded, giving way to a strange tableau tinted with unease. As the road narrowed into a thin trail, rain drizzled, dotting Daisy's face. Yet she remained undeterred, gazing forward with intense focus.

As the tandem bicycle carried them further into the outskirts of the town, the edges of civilization started to blur, giving way to an untouched woodland. As they wove through the countryside, a serenade of nocturnal creatures filled the air, punctuated by the soft patter of rain. With each passing moment, the familiar chorus of their surroundings gave way to a tranquility punctuated only by the mossy whispers of the sparse oaks and pines that were becoming denser around them. Despite the change in scenery, Edgar led their path, his actions dictated by instinct.

From a distance, the trees had appeared as mere outlines. But as they drew near, they transformed into writhing figures with bark resembling ancient, etched skin. The sky darkened to an unnatural shade of violet, casting eerie shimmers. The path ahead seemed a passage into an older, more primordial realm, their only companions the moon's glow and the shadows thrown by the trees across the fields.

Through their strenuous pedaling, time seemed to warp and twist around them. Suddenly, an otherworldly din filled the air—a chorus resonating from the very marrow of Somerville. The tandem bicycle abruptly jolted to a stop as Edgar slammed down his shaking legs and stared with alarm into the sky. He dared not turn back to look at Daisy.

Above, the wind-whipped clouds darkened momentarily, hinting at a distant lightning's flash. After a moment, Edgar resumed their journey with renewed caution. The rhythmic creaking of the bicycle chain kept time with his racing heart. Every turn of the pedal drove them deeper into the abyss, their tale transforming into a fragment of Sommerville's whispered folklore.

The farther into the woods they got, the more apparent Daisy's apprehension became. Her silent façade crumbled as quiet gasps began to escape her lips like symphonies of fear the forest breathed. Edgar could no longer ignore the unsettling chill grazing his spine. A thick canopy now covered them, the knotty branches interlacing to blot out the stars' brilliance. The path ahead was shrouded in shadows that seemed to devour any stray beam of light daring to penetrate their depth.

The bicycle built for two had transformed into a spectral chariot navigating a sea of darkness.

The forest floor undulated more violently beneath them, the path rising and falling under the tires. Soon, an unfamiliar shape could be made out behind the thick screen of trees: a solitary, sharp-edged structure that seemed alien in this long since untouched wilderness. The seemingly abandoned house stood with gaping holes in its shingle roof, its wood siding contorted with moss and ivy winding up its walls.

As they approached, it loomed like an ancient beast rising from lumber. They slowed to a stop, gazing up at it. Edgar reached out, his fingers gently touching the small of Daisy's back, guiding her as she stepped off the bike. Though her hair and dress were drenched with rain, she felt the intimacy of the gesture—how it hinted at unsaid promises.

Edgar began walking toward the door, his steps imbued with certainty. Daisy watched him with wide eyes. The further away he got, the more she was conscious of a newfound vulnerability. The throb of

blood in her ears made it hard to pinpoint any sound from among the trees, and she hoped that there was nothing, and no one, out there with them in the woods.

The bicycle stood forgotten, a hushed spectator to their contemplation of the time-ravaged façade. Edgar stood before the house, his shadow dancing like the leaves above them. He glanced back at Daisy. The growing distance between them and the moon's luminous cast created a halolike effect over her body. He felt a strange calm settle over him. It was as though he was an actor in a play, his role predestined and immutable.

His hand trembled as he reached for the worn door, yet his resolve remained.

As the rusted handle turned and the heavy door creaked open, a musty draught seeped into the night, wrapping Edgar in its clammy grasp. The crunching sound of dried leaves under his feet broke the house's decades-long sleep as he stepped into the front hallway. Daisy lingered a few steps behind, her posture more relaxed. Edgar staggered inside over the uneven floor, leaving her momentarily alone. The unlit interior of the house, a void of inky blackness, swallowed him whole as he took a few steps inside, leaving only the sound of his muffled footfalls as proof of his existence.

Edgar's feet hesitated with every creak of the ancient floorboards. The interior of the pinewood house was dusty and humid. Moonbeams glimmered through large, bare, dirty windows along its main hall. The dim light caught a sporadic twitch in Edgar's eye. His fingers drummed a restless beat against his thigh. Beads of sweat perled on his forehead, betraying the veneer of his earlier composure. As she came up beside him, Daisy's eyes traveled slowly from an amphora vase to an ornate clock that rested on a fireplace mantle. Clearly, no one had been inside this house to plunder its antiques. Edgar, meanwhile, began to move swiftly from one room to the next, his pulse resounding within the larger heart-valves of the forest.

Daisy brushed her fingers against the faded wallpaper, feeling its textured history beneath her fingertips. Memories whispered through the aged fabric—once a symbol of affluence, it now hung in tatters. The damp scent of mold mixed with a faint hint of old books. A grand staircase that had once welcomed guests with extravagance now bore broken steps, and small rodents scuttled in the dim light across the scratched, worn floor. The house, full of its own sounds, seemed to have absorbed all the murmurs of the forest.

Daisy's wavering footsteps echoed amidst the intermittent patter of slowing raindrops. Though the brief storm outside was ending, they continued on. Each step seemed to awaken muted whispers within the dormant structure as their exploration, laden with unspoken curiosity and caution, unfolded in tandem. They stirred up dust, the air dense with black spores of forgotten years. Wandering the corridor, Daisy paused at an entrance to a room, her gaze drawn to the climbing vines that invaded through shattered windows. Inside, an ornate chandelier, its crystals cocooned by cobwebs, hung precariously.

Daisy's attention shifted as a subtle noise caught her ear. Turning, she realized that their separate wanderings had serendipitously led them back to the same hallway. Edgar stood at the other end, the weight of the house's secrets evident in his stance. Abruptly, they were poised across from one another. A glow from a cracked window draped sinuous, ghostly shadows across Edgar.

Suddenly, his shoulders sagged, and his eyes darted wildly, his hands trembling as if grasped by an unseen force. Daisy stared, backing up into a wall, her breath hitching as the weight of her fear pressed down on her chest.

As her gaze met his, she felt a jolt of adrenaline sending her swiftly turning on her heel. Edgar, fueled by frenetic energy, followed. What ensued was a dreadful chase through the gnarled innards of the house. Even the mice and bats stilled, making way for the enveloping silence. The rooms became a maze, the deafening quiet punctuated only by the pounding of their footsteps and Edgar's manic proclamations.

"Daisy, Daisy!" he shrieked, the pitch of his voice mirroring the intensity of his frenzy. "Don't you see? It's always been you! I would do anything for you!"

With a mix of fear and determination, Daisy navigated through the winding rooms, her heart's frantic beats mirroring the man's relentless pursuit. "Edgar, you've lost your mind!" she cried, her voice breaking.

Rushing down the hallway, its wood reflecting a hue reminiscent of her rich auburn hair, Daisy felt an irresistible pull towards a tarnished mirror. Behind her alarmed reflection, the backdrop subtly shifted to display an ancient tablet, its surface inscribed with hieroglyphs—a relic she recognized from her own collection, revered for its protective powers. The house's whispered secrets seemed to harmonize with the beating of her heart. The memories associated with that runestone surged within her, reminding her of her own vast knowledge and innate strength. This momentary link fortified her spirit, even as Edgar, unaware of her introspection, hastened onward, widening the gap between them. The terror in her eyes evolved, replaced by a simmering intensity. The moment by the mirror seemed to fortify her, imbuing her with mystic poise.

Unexpectedly, Edgar stumbled into a room he hadn't yet seen. It was unlike any other in the house. Dust-covered shelves lined the walls, filled with books with titles in a cryptic language and bottles of various sizes, their contents shimmering in the mottled starlight that filtered through the cracked windows.

From the shadows of the corridor, Daisy inched closer, the deliberate silence of her steps betraying her intent. From the bent doorway, she observed Edgar pick up a bottle of *Amor Cantatio*. "What is this, Daisy?" he asked. Before he could parse out the depth of his predicament, Daisy raised her hand, gesturing words that seemed to seep into the air around them, unwinding it with their warning.

She whose image had adorned his dreams now stood before him, revealing a stern side that alienated his recollections. She seemed to have a celestial command, making him move and react as if the universe itself willed it.

Edgar's heart pounded against his ribcage as an icy dread bled into his veins. The room spiraled into a surreal vortex of disarray and shifting shadows as a single glimmer of light illuminated Daisy's face, drawing his gaze irresistibly to her. Amidst the turmoil, a moment of clarity blossomed, and she stood resolute, her beauty reminiscent of cold marble.

As the potion's effect deepened in his blood, Edgar's emotions weaved in a whirlwind of love, lust, and madness when he looked into her hardened eyes, which had once held warmth for him.

Daisy's eyes. They reflected the myriad emotions raging within him: betrayal and fascination, and a sinking realization that he was bound to her. His world dwindled to this vision of her—a culmination of his love turned lethal.

Watching Edgar unraveling with detached satisfaction, Daisy took a deliberate step forward. "You think you're the only one with secrets?" Her voice, a sibilant whisper, seemed to slide through the air, enveloping him with its chilling embrace.

Edgar tried to speak, but his throat constricted. His mind raced to find a semblance of understanding surrounded by the onslaught of feelings as he hoarsely muttered, "Why, Daisy? Why lead me here? Why this...deception?"

A moment of silence ossified between them before she replied, "The house wouldn't open its doors to just anyone, Edgar. It needed someone with...a connection. And who better than you?" A smirk crept onto her face as his mouth went dry. "You believe you know me. You see what you want to see: a frail creature needing protection. But have you ever wondered about my treasures? The power held in ancient relics?"

Edgar's vision began to tunnel and blur. The weight of Daisy's betrayal and the essence of his own folly pressed down on him as if he were in a nightmare. He slumped to the floor, the potency of her magic rendering him immobile.

Daisy knelt beside him, her fingers caressing his face. "Sleep now," she murmured.

The black tendrils of persuasion tying themselves around his fading consciousness. In the midst of the churning chaos of his thoughts, a singular image emerged: a portrait of Daisy, framed in ornate gold, contrasting starkly with the surrounding faded artworks. It captured her with an ethereal glow, her eyes holding the same depth and mystery that had always ensnared him. Bursting to the surface of his mind, figments of an eternity with her surged. *You could stay here forever...as long as you see her face,* a voice crooned inside his head, lighting a beacon in the tumultuous sea of his emotions. These desperate musings—genuine yearning mixed with affection—replayed like a dark revelation.

Who knew that love, in all its innocence and purity, could be such a sinister orchestration?

The question lingered in the air—a dirge to his fate.

Brian McCabe

Not One but Another

As when a truck rolls past the house and you look
up. Thrushes, the soft pacing of someone preparing
to leave. A number of things you hear
before you see. For a while everything is green
expanse. Moments plunge into air and air.

Sometimes I think the things I say
are what you think. Sometimes the things you think
I mean, I don't. Wanted you to wake in a room
on cool pale sheets and be what's missing.
For light to fall through tall pines, jagged leaves,

to a square of dust on hardwood. The thunder
already a memory: rain on the roof
was sitcom applause, you dressed in dark cloth.
With each day's arrival your life was becoming
something far off, drawn close.

Rikki Santer

Dew Point in Big Sur

At sunrise a condor soars above us,
wind courses past its wingtips, a dozen
swords swinging through the air, said
the wildlife photographer—a bird's ancient
job to clean the carcass. Pearly gems
of dew glisten atop my camp tent, another
hymn for fleeting, and the fresh grammar
of deer hoofprints along with low growls
of thunder. Through my ear buds defiance
and sorrow swells from handwritten scores
composed by inmates of Terezin—their
symphonic will to live now breathes into
these moments of dew point, accompanied
by a first quarter moon still lingering.

Bethany Jarmul

Autumn Meditation

after Mary Oliver

I.

The earth's tilted
spin stirs the trees.
They sway, arms

lifted in praise.
Swirled in holy
invisible vapor.

Oak, maple, & sycamore
trees drop papery
doubloons from their

fingertips until
the grassy ground
is glorified in gold.

II.

I barter with my toddler,
paying eleven leaf-coins
for seven seashell shards.

Perhaps, Mother Earth
herself is a customer
of the Creator, exchanging one

season for another, offering
six sunny days for two
tornadoes.

But no, surely only
humans see *glory*
and think *transaction*.

Alex Carrigan

It was the cat you wanted

After Judith Hansen's "you've been so quiet"

Near the end, it was the cat you wanted near you most.
You wanted to feel its weight on your chest as you slept.

You always slept with your back rigid, afraid to stir
it awake and force it off you and to sleep on the floor.

The floor is no place for your companion, even with
the cat bed and toys for it down there. It had to stay with you tonight.

Tonight, you had a feeling this would be when
it finally ended, and the orange tabby was the only one left.

It was the only one left after the others decided to leave first, leaving
you to savor how it brushed against your legs or licked your fingertips.

It's licking your fingertips now, wanting to join you on
your bed for one last night together. So you pulled it up.

You pulled it up and scratched its ears, thanking it, for
near the end, it was the cat you wanted near you most.

CONTRIBUTORS

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