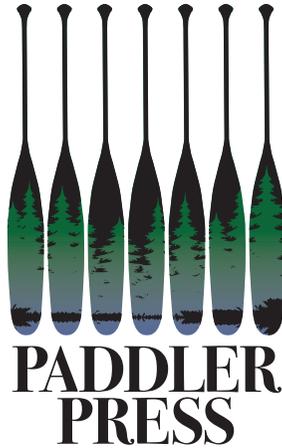




# Light

Paddler Press Volume 4

**Paddler Press**  
Volume 4 - *Light*



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*Rise* by Sarah Wang.  
Watercolor and acrylic, 20” x 15”

Sarah Wang is a writer from Vancouver, B.C, most of her pieces are based on her own emotions and relatable situations people go through. She also loves to draw and paint, specifically watercolor, and of course, reading is another one of her hobbies. She likes a wide range of genres in books and is a huge empath, especially towards side characters. Drawing and painting inspire Sarah to new, unique ideas to write about, and it is also a very relaxing warm-up she does every morning. Her goal is to become a children’s book author and bring joy to children’s education.

## **Foreword**

Our fourth volume signals the end of our first publishing year. What began as a one-off publication has blossomed into something beyond what I could have imagined a few months ago thanks to the contributors and supporters of our small press. At a time in our world where many are still facing the effects of the pandemic and wars continue to rage, the need for light has, perhaps, never been greater. I trust the pieces in this volume will shine through and make our world a little brighter.

Best Regards and Happy Paddling!

Deryck N. Robertson, Editor-in-Chief, Paddler Press

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# **We Used to Be Hunter Gathers at Hancock. We Used to Stalk the Silk and Satins. We Used to Wear Garments Fit for a Queen.**

Exodus Oktavia Brownlow

-2003-

At Hancock Fabrics, mama would stalk the aisles of silk, cheetah plush, and sateen. Pick out the most beautiful hides to take to the cutting counter, where the fabric-butcher would grab the meaty calves—husky and thick slices of fabric wrapped and swirled around a cardboard bone box. The fabric-butcher would hold it with a rough grip, and quickly unfold it against the ruler.

---

Flip-Thud. Flip-Thud. Flip-Thud.

*One yard.*

Flip-Thud. Flip-Thud. Flip-Thud.

*Two yards.*

Flip-Thud. Flip-Thud. Flip-Thud.

*Three yards, and on to seven.*

A divine number. A perfect number. A holy number, for holy women.

The fabric-butcher glided through the fabric with sharp, soundless scissors. Tendons became broken-off from their meaty calves, their cardboard bone boxes, where end-strings wisp-waved up and down, saying goodbye to what they had once been a part of, and whole to.

The slices, now all bagged up and weighted, dropped Mama's shoulder's down.

She placed the bags in the car's back-belly, a heavy hunt to feed the outside of our bodies, to sheath our skin.

---

At home, on the bed, the slices laid against the bedsheets.

When mama obtained so many cuts, it meant that she needed enough to serve for gathers in a garment, for the lengths of a glorious gown to be stitched, soon.

To be a woman in the Nation of Islam meant to be fully covered, always.

Head to toes to hands.

The fabric, resting against the bed, glowed so golden that it compelled me to look more closely, and not away. There were pearls etched into its hide, iridescent crystal sequins, and hand-embroidered flowers.

Mama took the golden hide, flicked the end of it up to catch the underlying air so that it floated towards the bedroom's light, and blossomed and bubbled like a pregnant sun. "You can't camouflage in gold," Mama said, "Only gleam. Like a proud Queen on her coronation debut."

Exodus Oktavia Brownlow is a Blackhawk, Ms native. She is a graduate of Mississippi Valley State University with a BA in English, and Mississippi University for Women with an MFA in Creative Writing. Exodus has been published or has forthcoming work with *Electric Lit*, *West Branch*, *Denver Quarterly*, *F(r)iction* and more. She has been nominated for Best of The Net, Best MicroFiction, Best Small Fictions and a Pushcart Prize. Her piece *Chicken-Girls and Chicken-Ladies and All the Possibility of Pillowcases* will be included in Best MicroFiction 2022. Her debut fiction chapbook—*Look at All The Little Hurts of These Newly-Broken Lives and The Bittersweet, Sweet and Bitter Loves*—is set for publication with *Ethel Zine and Press* in April 2023.

# Midnight at the Petrol Pump

Steve Denehan

Pump in hand  
trigger pulled  
I breathe it in  
the fumes  
the forecourt  
an illuminated box  
of cold light  
the faces, few, tired  
Muzak plays  
sounding far away  
I see him then  
an old colleague  
from an old job  
he looks much the same  
a little greyer  
a little rounder  
the usual  
I wait for him to turn  
for us to catch eyes  
he doesn't  
we don't  
I see my face reflected in the car window  
a little greyer  
a little rounder  
the usual  
the slam of his car door  
takes me from my trance  
and I watch him drive away  
into all that dark

# Light Show

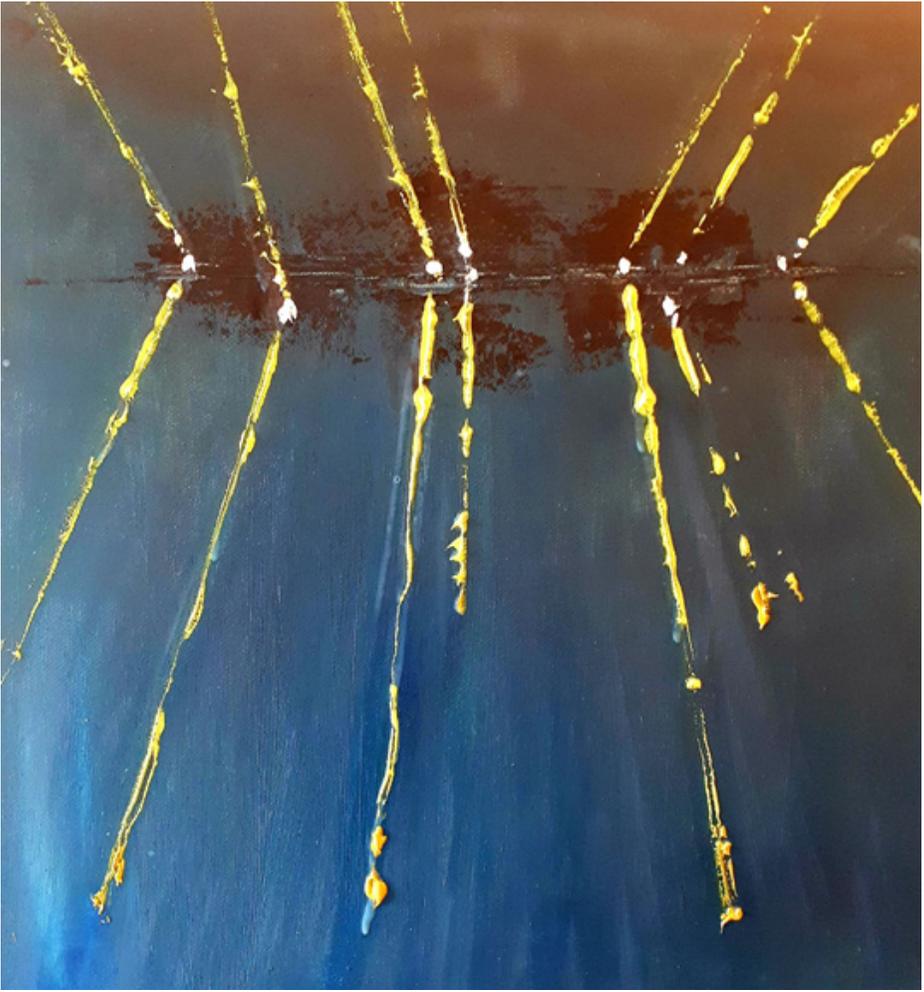
Steve Denehan

We stand in the kitchen  
looking through the patio door  
the solar light, a gift from my father  
to my daughter  
pulls dreams from the daytime sky  
to paint them on the night-time shed wall

in the glass I see the ghost of myself  
a translucent me, my daughter at my side  
I am fatter  
balder  
bearded  
middle-aged

she, what I used to be, not long ago  
smiling, wide-eyed, through the glass  
does not see herself, not really  
not yet  
sees only  
is entranced by  
the light

we stand in the kitchen  
the future  
the present  
the past  
and I look through myself  
at stars and rainbows



*Flashlights* by Steve Denehan  
Acrylic on canvas, 16" x 16"

Steve Denehan lives in Kildare, Ireland with his wife, Eimear, and daughter, Robin. He is the author of two chapbooks and three poetry collections. Winner of the Anthony Cronin Poetry Award and twice winner of Irish Times' New Irish Writing, his numerous publication credits include *Poetry Ireland Review* and *Westerly*.

# Skyglow

Nick Dix

The heavens are a haze  
Perpetually kept in sunset glow,  
Replacing nightfall with a deathless dusk.

The stars are raging on.  
Blazes that shall not fade for eons fail  
To lance through twilight's luminescent blush.

Our lurid neon burns,  
Ignites the nimbus drifting through the sky  
And sparks the atmosphere to hide the stars.

Uranium is split  
By fission, imitating suns to fuel  
The lights that conquer night and cosmos both.

The Milky Way is gone,  
Occluded by such tiny filaments.  
Each time we flip a switch, we challenge heaven.

Nick Dix is a poet residing in north Texas. He graduated from Trinity University with a BA in English and a minor in Creative Writing. Besides reading and writing poetry, he enjoys hiking and kayaking when he finds time to escape the city. He also loves movies. Don't ask him about movies; he has terrible taste. Nick Dix has been published in *The Adirondack Review* and *Hearth & Coffin*. He can be found on Twitter @NickDixWrites.

# Towards

Amanda Karch

Heel, toe. Heel, toe. Rhythmic mantra of boots on pavement  
juxtapose leaves crunching, wind whistling, my breath. Always in a  
hurry to get nowhere in particular: empty kitchen, impatient coffee  
growing colder, empty office. Heel, toe. Heel, toe.

tapping and always  
moving, even in its place --  
journey to nowhere

Heel, toe. Heel, toe. Chilled sky catching breath, stumbling over lost  
air, then regaining stride once more. Always pushing forward, never  
looking back at what has been, what was, unless hidden under  
shadows of the moon and stars that glisten in darkness.  
Overthinking less and less as days crest and nights fall. Heel, toe.  
Heel, toe.

mind of a dreamer  
in a poet's body asks  
for more than I have

Heel, toe. Heel, toe. For someone so afraid of the unknown, never  
slowing down, never breaking stride, always moving faster. Wishing  
away the present and dreaming of the future, but not too far. Fine  
lines drawn in invisible ink, tendrils trailing from heart to mind to  
tear ducts that open unknowingly when lines are crossed. Heel, toe.  
Heel, toe.

destiny decides  
when breaths cease to exist, yet  
always moving towards

Amanda Karch is a Babson College alum, honing her entrepreneurship skills through her journey as a poet and author. She self-published a poetry collection, *Her Favorite Color Was Sunshine Yellow*, selling almost 200 copies in its first print year. Her debut nonfiction book, *Poetic Potential: Sparking Change & Empowerment Through Poetry*, was released in December 2021 through New Degree Press, and it is her hope to spread the power of poetry and of female voices to the world. You can find her on social media (Instagram & Twitter) @akkwriting



*Air, Earth, Fire, Water* by Dan Farkas  
Digital Image, 21” x 16”

Dan Farkas is an itinerant New Yorker currently exiled in Cleveland. His creative outlets include creative writing & photography. His latest published pieces are *Summer’s End on Erie* in *The Birdseed Magazine* & *Ascension Song* & *The Wedding Toast* in *The Prompt Magazine*. His photo library numbers over 50K images, both digital and film. He spends entirely too much time manipulating iPhone images using the SnapSeed app.  
@DNARNADan, IG: dan.farkas, FB: Dan Farkas

# A Long Portage

Karin Hedetniemi

North Saskatchewan's going to freeze  
soon, might as well go now  
jump in the water, drag my  
canoe on the muddy shore  
hoist it on my shoulders, start walking  
make it to Jasper before dark  
hard to sleep with all those trains  
get an early start over the border  
stop for a coffee in Valemount  
no birds at Cranberry Marsh  
guess migration's almost over  
follow the Yellowhead to Clearwater  
stop to paddle in the lake  
get some Chinese take-out, crack my fortune  
The colour red will be important to you  
keep going down through Hope  
some man says, why don't you take the Fraser  
no thanks, I say, I'm doing this the hard way  
get in line for the ferry  
four other canoes ahead of me  
but I get on without a reservation  
lucky, I guess, except the cafeteria line-up  
is too long, they're scraping the bottom  
of the clam chowder soup pot  
hike down Pat Bay Highway  
Blanshard takes you all the way to the park  
past the duck pond, past the goats,  
through a parched field of trampled  
spear grass, stones, echoes of drums

couple of tents, some new bicycle counter  
958, 959, stick library for the dogs  
down the stairwell, drop my canoe on cold  
pebbles, low tide, smoldering beach fire  
no one there, just some prairie moon  
moored to the sky

Karin Hedetniemi is a writer, poet, and street photographer from Vancouver Island. Her creative work appears in *Prairie Fire*, *Hinterland*, *CutBank*, *Pithead Chapel*, and other literary journals. In 2020, Karin won the nonfiction contest from the Royal City Literary Arts Society. Her photo cover art has been nominated for Best of the Net. Find her at [AGoldenHour.com](http://AGoldenHour.com) or on Twitter/Instagram @karinhedet.

## Daily Walk (Winter Edition)

Paula Aamli

Another sunrise. Another sunset.  
Now I am ambling, distracted –  
now attentive, anxious, brisk.

Another sunrise. Another sunset.  
Yellow light. Grey sky. Dark.  
Buffeting wind. Rain. Again.

I walk the edges of my life,  
/to /from /through/ between.  
Time un/spools s-l-o-w-ly.

Another. Another. Another.  
Walking. Walking. I am –  
every day – most blessed.

# The Moon is Courting

Paula Aamli

The Moon is courting Jupiter tonight.  
She trails her garment lightly through the waves,  
and shrugs off nightfall with the white-blue light  
of her full unveiled face. The stars are slaves

as we are, to the universal laws,  
but dance towards their ends at different pace.  
They seem serene, eternal, free, unforced  
and I take comfort at their slow-spun grace.

I know the Moon and Jupiter won't meet –  
that it would be disaster if they did –  
yet when they pass, I hope they will complete  
their courtship, which the laws of space forbid.

The Moon, the stars – and I – will perish soon,  
impermanent, imperfect... Still, the Moon...!

Dr Paula Aamli is a Humanities graduate, writer, and poet, with a day job in financial services. Her thesis, “Working through climate grief: A poetic inquiry”, explores individual and institutional responses to the emerging climate crisis, using arts-based research and poetry. Paula has had poems published in *The Lindenwood Review*, *The Tiger Moth Review*, *FreezeRay Poetry*, and *Paddler Press*, among others. One of Paula's poems in *Paddler Press* was selected for their Pushcart Prize nominations in 2021.

Instagram: @peaamli Twitter: @paulettya Soundcloud: Paula Aamli  
Tumblr: <https://peaamlipoetrydoctor.tumblr.com/>

# In Time I Will Be Spring Again

Claire Taylor

an orchid goes dormant, I learned  
it's not my fault when it loses

itself, sheds all beauty  
and shrivels into

something resembling death  
I know what it is to need

sunlight, rest  
to crave

rebirth. wait for me  
like so many times before

I will blossom  
a garden germinates in

these limbs  
you thought I abandoned

come see

the seeds I've spread  
the weeds I've pulled

look at this life  
I'll grow

# While My Child Naps I Read a Book in the Sun

Claire Taylor

and it feels like a rebirth  
the soul of me  
sprung from my body like a seedling  
pushing through earth  
what good is survival, I ask  
on the shortest days  
the darkest nights  
the answer a faraway echo  
of birdsong, the robin waking  
to greet the morning light

Claire Taylor is a writer in Baltimore, Maryland. Her work has appeared in a variety of publications. She is the author of a children's literature collection, *Little Thoughts*, as well as two micro-chapbooks: *A History of Rats* (Ghost City Press, 2021) and *As Long as We Got Each Other* (ELJ Editions, 2022). You can find her online at [clairemtaylor.com](http://clairemtaylor.com) and Twitter @ClaireM\_Taylor.

# Petoskey Sun Set, 4 July 2010

Andre F. Peltier

Sands blown in  
from Lake Michigan  
since the Pleistocene thaw.  
Those dunes welcomed Anishnaabek  
home from hunts,  
home from celebrations of  
The Three Fires  
in Leelenau, Keweenaw,  
Mackinaw.  
They rowed from St. Joseph,  
Manitoulin, Wikwemikong  
to rest at the mouth of  
The Bear River.  
They netted salmon  
at the falls where those rays of light  
met the great inland sea.  
Later, the train came  
bringing settlers and farmers  
from the dread white south.  
Overlooking those falls  
from The City Park Grill,  
Ernest drank his Death  
in the Afternoon.  
He shipped out to Europe  
and injury from the base  
of those dunes.  
And on those dunes,  
my son sat, among the grass  
and rugosa pebbles.

He nursed his lemonade  
leaning on his lawn chair.  
He awaited the fireworks  
as the golden sun  
turned pink and red  
through western twilight haze.  
Like Hemingway  
and the early hunters  
who made those pine woods home,  
he silently watched  
as the light gave way  
to another endless night.

# Solar Winds or the Neon Dance

Andre F. Peltier

Returning home  
from Sleeping Bear,  
we carried our futures  
under our arms,  
like Churchill's broly.  
We returned to grill burgers,  
dogs, sweet corn.  
Rays of sun broke through  
baroque clouds  
and rained our hopes  
upon the evening.  
That night, the neon green  
glow danced above  
the Harbor Springs highlands,  
and we imagined  
all tomorrow's revelries.  
We swayed to those polar particles  
and we swayed  
to the music  
of the stars.

Andre F. Peltier (he/him) is a Pushcart Nominee and a Lecturer III at Eastern Michigan University where he teaches literature and writing. He lives in Ypsilanti, MI, with his wife and children. His poetry has recently appeared in various publications like *CP Quarterly*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Provenance Journal*, *Lavender and Lime Review*, *About Place*, *Novus Review*, *Fiery Scribe*, *Fabmidan Journal*, and most recently in *ShabdAaweg*, *Cajun Mutt Press*, and *Pop the Culture Pill*. In his free time, he obsesses over soccer and comic books. Twitter: @aandrefpeltier [www.andrefpeltier.com](http://www.andrefpeltier.com)

# To Set the Pen Aside

Danny P. Barbare

Says the good deep blue, I'll help you  
write a poem, as if to change your  
mood or heart;  
as twilight, I'll let you look  
inside of me  
the beauty of words across the  
page  
as if eternity is a moment  
in time  
to look you in the eye  
and happily simply be satisfied  
to set your pen aside  
and as if in awe, you  
can say, I wrote this wonderful sky.  
A poem I can live with and call mine.

# Snowy Winter Poem

Danny P. Barbare

Simple  
as  
snow

that  
glint  
of  
sun  
and  
red  
bird  
that  
writes  
a  
poem,  
so  
beautiful  
and  
cold

it  
glows.

Danny P. Barbare resides in the Upstate of the Carolinas. Enjoys writing poetry in free verse about his environment. Lives in Greenville, South Carolina.

## Approaching Arcadia

John Muro

Morning's blurred smooth by mists and  
wind's snuffed out by the damp of autumn  
air. Sun still a brush-stroke of soluble  
light and leaves once wedded to boughs  
are now widowed as I sink into the soft  
tangle of quickening-to-duff needles  
discoloring the woodland floor and  
ankles wade into an armada of fern,  
serrated sails in green-bronze billow  
adrift beneath the sweetly confusing  
odor of pines that shadow a silent  
stream framing the far edge of pasture.  
Here, the blurred bliss of birds is  
everywhere: the pump-handled tanager  
hidden in high grass, the clutch of bitter-  
sweet – cinder of oriole glistening in nest –  
or the thin, trailing branch of thrasher  
foraging for food before the audible  
slather of a gravelly road, certain these  
hapless steps belong to something other  
than compacted stone, preferring the  
matted contours of a soft and mossy earth  
that swallow sound and the dim coin-glint  
of images we would just as soon unsee.

# Elegia

John Muro

Perplexed by this poor  
pretense of a summer day  
and the lurid opulence of  
leaves that fall just beyond  
your window like tiny sails  
unfurled and back-lit by sun,  
ghostly transparent, each  
exquisite in its air-borne  
decay, some ablaze in yew-  
berry red or rusted orange  
fringed with the blush of  
green-gone-yellow, and I  
too find myself adrift with  
little hope in my heart  
bartering with a grief that  
memory had managed to  
somehow tuck away in  
darkness until sunlight  
entered the room in latticed  
scatter, and stifled sobs  
became eerily still as you  
cupped my hand with a  
gesture as soft as sleep  
and, in a diminished  
voice, told me that, even  
when giving ourselves  
up to grief and pulling  
away from the world,  
hope will still find its  
way back as time  
staggers on, fumbling  
faith and forgiveness.

# Notturmo

John Muro

As if it were feeling its way  
across the harbor, fog clings  
to the masts of boats for  
ballast before making landfall,  
its pale gold and onyx train  
rippling like an underskirt  
of silk, and its gross profusion  
of fabric unfurling and then  
refashioning both marsh and  
meadow before coming to  
rest upon the snowy terraces  
of Queen Anne's Lace and  
verandahs of Woolly Yarrow.  
Well-bedded, it will disrobe,  
whitening hollows, muffling  
sounds and damping starless  
air, before lifting its still-gloved  
hands to extinguish the first  
tortured light of morning sun.

John Muro is a resident of Connecticut and a lover of all things chocolate. His first volume of poems, *In the Lilac Hour*, was published in 2020 by *Antrim House* and it is available on Amazon. His poems have been published or are forthcoming in numerous literary journals, including *Barnstorm*, *BlueHouse*, *Grey Sparrow*, *River Heron* and *Sky Island*. John is also a two-time, 2021 nominee for the Pushcart Prize, and his second volume of poems, *Pastoral Suite*, will be published this spring. You can contact him on Instagram @johntmuro.

# Bleaching

Bex Hainsworth

Acres of abandoned city,  
white ruins cloistered like bare trees  
hovering between life and death.  
Static, marble held in a museum.

The water is too warm here. Soaking  
in a salty broth, the coral is sun-drunk,  
starched, broiled. A scale has been  
tipped: balance is beyond the reach

of their chalky fingertips. The agony  
of snowflake shapes baking in  
shallow graves, in blue shadows  
which burn and blister and crystalise.

Bright scars left by an algal exodus speak  
of the hurt, the masochism of banishment.  
This is the collapse of a universe.  
A paradise emptied, drained, desecrated.

A lone turtle passes over the dustbowl.  
She peers into the pale gloom, tongue clicking  
against beaked lips, and then swims, heavily, onward.

# Ostrich on Namib Desert Cam

Bex Hainsworth

Early morning, and the horizon is undecided.  
She enters from stage right, the first  
visitor to the desert spring, where a spiral  
of water curls out in the dust like a shell.

Muscular legs stretch beneath a sphere  
of ashy feathers. She traces the dirt  
with a scaly claw. There is more prehistory  
than pigeon about her, despite the head bobbing

like a shadow puppet. The downy sleeve of her neck  
unfolds as she dips a shovel-shaped beak to the water.  
The dunk-splish of thirsty pecks is heard only by us  
and the ink-blot oryx herd shimmering on the sun-line.

Sated, she departs the small oasis, disappearing from view  
along an arc which curves towards water and a certain sunrise.

Bex Hainsworth is a poet and teacher based in Leicester, UK. She won the Collection HQ Prize as part of the East Riding Festival of Words and her work has appeared in *Visual Verse*, *Atrium*, and *Brave Voices Magazine*. Find her on Twitter @PoetBex.

# Paradise

Debbie Cutler

Diamond crystals glitter in the light  
atop mounds of snow  
cleared for a trail  
where cross-country skiers  
sashay  
to their swish-swash sounds  
in the Alaska wilderness.  
They stop to rest  
find peace in the quiet  
reach for their thermos  
filled with hot tea  
steam rising in the winter air  
the resonance of breath  
breaks still silence.

Debbie Cutler, a writer of more than 30 years, has been published in numerous mainstream and literary magazines, including *Cirque* literary magazine, *Wingless Dreamer*, *Journal of Expressive Writing*, *The Dewdrop*, and others. She currently works at the University of Missouri, writing for seven departments in the College of Arts and Science. She was the former editor of *Alaska Business* and *Alaska* magazines.

# When the Sun meets the Ocean

Sarah Wang

The soft sunlight glistens through the heavy clouds,  
onto the ocean's horizon.  
with the movement of the water, it shimmers,  
a perfect synchronization.

The vast royal blue  
reflects streaks of bright orange  
that all trace to an orb of light,  
screaming amber into the sky,  
intimidating the dusky clouds

As it descends into the orange-blue,  
the last bit of light radiates  
into your eyes,  
like a flower blossoming only for a minute.  
When its time is up,  
the gold petals drift off  
and sink back under the azure ocean  
once again.

Darkness patches the midnight blue  
The sewn-on reflections barely seen,  
still syncing with the night breeze.  
When dawn comes, a nascent of  
aureate petals rise again,

This time, blossoming for a day.

# On Free East Village Organ Concerts in September

Jacob Riyeff

Free organ music here  
on the East Side. Gray afternoons  
of autumnal equinox, fresh fallen  
leaves. So few here in this temple,  
eyes shifting in heads as Bach  
swirls and glints about Romanesque  
archways, the rose window hidden  
behind rows of pipes, the Sacred Heart  
refracting the bare light of None.  
Lilting chords fuguing along  
on the eardrum remind the harmony in bones,  
that we live and breathe. The upper register  
presses ossicles to proclaim that the Lord  
is my Rock and in him there is no wrong  
Wind cascading in rounds tripling  
back, too much for the mind to linger  
elsewhere. And so we listen—the bass's  
throb excites the nerveendings,  
the soul that much richer. I sit  
toward the back on Mary's side,  
not knowing a thing about organ music—  
not to speak of, anyway—  
and it doesn't even matter. Here  
we have beauty and we have it for free  
And no one can rob these glistering melodies  
from our ears, our buttocks on wooden benches,  
our spines. There is nothing and nowhere  
but this rush of harmony now, crystalizing  
the mass of consciousness with metal, air,  
the depression of bone and blood and flesh  
on polymer in strict, tempered proportion.

Jacob Rieff (@rieff, jacobrieff.com) is a translator, teacher, and poet. His work focuses on the western contemplative tradition and the natural world. Jacob lives in Milwaukee's East Village with his wife and three growing children.



*Winter's Exhale* by Cindy Bartoli  
Digital Image, 45" x 30"

Cindy Bartoli is an outdoor solitude seeker and amateur photographer who harbours a deep-seated yearning for beautiful language. She finds poetry in the small things – a ripple on the water, a rogue sunbeam in the forest. Her natural habitat is the backcountry of any country though she calls Peterborough, Ontario home. Her work has appeared in previous issues of *Paddler Press*. She can be found in the virtual universe on Instagram @cbart03 where she posts random shots of places, spaces, and moments that feed her soul.

# Message to My Body

Diana Raab

It took a long time  
for me to say this

but I do appreciate you—  
you have tested me

ever since my first push  
into this world. Born less than  
five pounds, tonsillectomy  
at seven, childhood trauma,

incompetent cervix  
leaving me on bedrest  
for three pregnancies  
then three cesareans,  
bout of breast cancer,  
then blood cancer.

Over and over again  
you tested me and I've  
pulled through.

My will to survive  
will get me through  
as I refuse to be the victim,  
but rather invite the light right in.

Diana Raab, PhD, is an award-winning memoirist, poet, blogger, speaker, and author of 10 books and is a contributor to numerous journals and anthologies. Her two latest books are *Writing for Bliss: A Seven-Step Plan for Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life* and *Writing for Bliss: A Companion Journal*. Her poetry chapbook, *An Imaginary Affair* is due out in 2022 with Finishing Line Press. She blogs for *Psychology Today*, *Thrive Global*, *Sixty and Me*, *Good Men Project*, *The Wisdom Daily* and is a frequent guest blogger for various other sites. Twitter: @dianaraab Instagram: @dianaraab

## Glimpse of Morning

Allison Potts

It starts with a shuffle and a wimper  
Clickety clack nails on wooden floors  
Instinctively I hold my breath  
Willing her return to sleep  
This canine offspring  
Roused by sunshine  
Sneaking through  
unclosed  
blinds

## Lighthouse Cigarette

Allison Potts

Walking in darkness  
Crossing the road to get home  
I looked for the light  
Bobbing in my dad's left hand  
A cigarette-tip lighthouse

Allison Potts has been writing poetry in fits and starts since early childhood. The Peterborough transplant came to the area for the parks, bike trails, cafes and local music. In 2011, Allison self-published a book of poetry titled *Talking on Paper*.

# San Diego, CA to Cleveland, OH

Adrienne Rozells

I am sunshine by osmosis,  
a girl made to glow.  
Saltwater sunveins,  
subdermal sparkles.  
Snowfall and winterspice are  
new tastes to melt  
on my tongue.  
Soft as sugar shaken  
over a gingerbread house:  
I dig my mittened fingers in  
to build the house into a castle,  
and when I lick them afterwards,  
I find myself  
spitting out beach sand.

Adrienne Rozells holds a BA in Creative Writing from Oberlin College. She currently teaches writing to kids and works as co-EIC at *Catchwater Magazine*. Her favorite things include strawberries, her dogs, and extrapolating wildly about the existence of Bigfoot. More of her work can be found on Twitter @arozells or Instagram @rozellswrites.

# Retraction

Ifenaike Michael Ayomipo

I stood before the mirror today  
and my reflection was adorned with a glow.  
Is this not how broken souls don deception every day?  
We host an unending ruin like a sophisticated grave,  
yet we collect a handful of sheen interjections from passersby.

I've walked out of my body many times to places I named after  
sanctuaries and asylums.  
My body, a roofless house, beneath a broken sky.  
Do sanctuaries grow thistles?  
Do asylums repel wounded boys like me?  
Home is a place that caresses our chest  
after choosing sandcastles and ice sculptures over it.  
In a room full of hurts, I go back to my body.

Ifenaike Michael Ayomipo is a Nigerian writer whose works have been published or are forthcoming in *The Quills*, *The Transit Lit Magazine*, *Naija Mad Hotstars*, *Kalahari Review*, *IceFloe Press*, *CovidHQ Africa*, *Shallow Tales Review*, *Whetstone Magazine*, *Institutionalized Review* and elsewhere. Also, he's a promising Educationist and public speaker.

# Brothers

Tim Moder

Yesterday it snowed.  
Dry fluff, uncolored by smog,  
Untouched by man or woman.  
This is my blanket.  
This is my ceiling.  
Today it snowed again.

There is a coyote I know  
who has wet hair.  
Sometimes he comes to visit.  
His eyes are the color of  
a muddy fishpond.  
His legs are thin and knobby.  
He smells like blood and  
outside winter air.  
I think that he is young.

He is a hunter and a watcher.  
A cousin and a brother.  
I am a flower that was planted  
in his backyard.  
In his blood is memory  
passed on through centuries  
of wild kings reigning over  
sacred ground.

Slowly he comes,  
face down, neck swinging,  
each uneven step a balancing act

as his stiff ears search for calm.  
Over the snow I hear his swollen feet  
coming, out of curiosity,  
his nose to my stone,  
An empty grave.  
And yet he stays.  
As if he feels the ceremony.  
As if he hears the drums.  
As if he smells the smoke.

He walks around until he finds  
A place to say his prayer.

He is running down the road.  
I know that he knows that the smell  
of rabbit in his nose is life

Tim Moder is an Indigenous poet living in northern Wisconsin. He is a member of Lake Superior Writers. His poems have appeared in *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Door Is A Jar Magazine*, *Main Street Rag*, *Olney Magazine*, and others.

# Flashpoint

Richard Bramwell

Few crumbs of sunlight reach the forest floor,  
Until a streak of lightning splinters down.  
A canopy that can eclipse a sun  
Cannot protect against the storm cloud's lance.

From superheated sap and severed wood,  
Tendrils of smoke emerge in wisps and plumes,  
And soon a conflagration flares and spreads,  
As sparks of flame are carried on the wind.

Birds fly, small creatures scurry, burrow, crawl,  
Fleeing the intense heat and choking smoke.  
And when the fire has passed and the air clears,  
The forest floor looks lifeless, black and bare.

Three summers on, the landscape is transformed:  
Seeds nestled in the soil and borne by birds  
Have germinated and are sprouting up,  
Flourishing with grasses and wild flowers.

More insects and small mammals have returned,  
Thriving in the profusion of small plants.  
Wildlife on the forest floor now enjoys  
A feast of sunshine in the fresh green glade.

# Prayer

Richard Bramwell

When people trip and lose their way,  
When those in need are turned away,  
When we can't spare the time of day,  
Let there be light.

When people want the upper hand,  
When two sides fail to understand,  
When we don't listen, but demand,  
Let there be light.

When people hurt and fight and maim,  
When teams refuse to play the game,  
When we seek someone else to blame,  
Let there be light.

Brought up in Yorkshire, Richard Bramwell now lives in north-west England. He finds creative expression in lightbulb moments (when he sees the latest electricity bill). His third collection of poems, *Mosaic*, illustrated by Rosemary Dring, was published in 2021. [www.richardbramwell.me.uk](http://www.richardbramwell.me.uk); [email@richardbramwell.me.uk](mailto:email@richardbramwell.me.uk)

# on greeting the light (of day)

Jennifer Schneider

before i scooped fresh grounds & brewed (strong) coffee - two creams, two sugars - each morning, precisely at 6:04 AM, i was a late riser & snooze presser. An adversary to dawn. A weakness for late nights. As slumber - wrapped in patchwork quilts of lavender & lime, scented of blueberry muffins & soft vanilla mist - stirred in response to sirens & staccato, i'd resist. My thumb always ready to push and press buttons. Claim minutes & moments - one.two.three.five.more. His always eager to please. One.two.three. Open the oak door. Wipe down the shower glass. Raise the accordion blinds. Pull back the velvet curtains. He'd wake early - earlier than needed. Scoop fresh grounds - \_\_\_ & \_\_\_ - & brew (strong) coffee. Embody strength.sun.light. Dressed in worn denim, frayed cuffs. Plaid button downs, double pockets. Tricks up all sleeve. Secret ingredients in recipes for blueberry muffins, cherry cheesecake crepes, dust free drapes. Always ready.eager.able to greet & meet the sun. before i scooped fresh grounds & brewed (strong) coffee i was blessed with light. His. shining on me.

## 4 (plus) ways to greet the light (of day)

1. Stir grounds of coffee & soil. Sip with care.
2. Sample. Seize. Marinate
3. Make beds. Make amends. Tuck all corners. Tight.
4. Make calls. Take calls. Hug all. Tight.

Jen Schneider is an educator who lives, writes, and works in small spaces throughout Pennsylvania. She is a Best of the Net nominee, with stories, poems, and essays published in a wide variety of literary and scholarly journals. Collections include *A Collection of Recollections*, *Invisible Ink*, and *Blindfolds, Bruises, and Breakups*.



*Backyard Sprinklers in the Early Evening* by Jill Kalter  
Digital Image, 29" x 29"

After spending 30 years in the hustle-bustle of Los Angeles, Jill Kalter escaped to the Applegate Valley in Southern Oregon. She now lives on a small “hobby farm” with her husband/photography collaborator, two border collies, one black cat, and six sheep.

# Just Another Blue Day

Yuan Changming

## *1/ Defining Daytime*

Day time is where we  
                    Can find  
All the blanks in life  
With our naked eyes  
When we just cannot  
Help filling them up  
                    One by one  
With our waked mind

## *2/ Blue in the Kitchen*

Birds love to eat red  
Insects prefer yellow  
While we sapiens like  
All colors  
                    Except blue  
Perhaps, which we reserve  
Not for our tongue  
But for our voice

# Deep in Frozen Doldrums

Yuan Changming

As snow begins to  
Dissolve, the days of  
Winter are numbered

Don't you feel agitations of spring  
Deep underneath your foot prints?

Yuan Changming hails with Allen Yuan from [poetrypacific.blogspot.ca](http://poetrypacific.blogspot.ca). Credits include 12 Pushcart nominations & 11 chapbooks (most recently *LIMERENCE*) besides appearances in Best of the Best Canadian Poetry (2008-17) & BestNewPoemsOnline, among 1909 others. Yuan both served on the jury and was nominated for Canada's National Magazine Awards (poetry category).

# The Sunday Morning Paddle Boarder

Simon Lamb

I spent Sunday morning paddle boarding,  
which is the closest to walking on water I think I'll ever come.

There is a knack to it, of course,  
once you're kitted out and out from shore, aboard your board,

first, kneeling as if in time-befitting prayer,  
then pushing up and into the sky, faith in the air to have and to hold,

and it's all about the balance, be bold,  
with bended knees, balance, paddle as new limb, balance,

and breathe, balance, and breathe, balance,  
and soon, you are walking on water. Behold. So you give yourself

to that faith, for you are walking on water! Pilgrim!  
Paddler! A miracle! But there are no miracles here. The sea is

a wild beast. Your faith in the air is no match  
for a sudden swell of the cold firth, and, at one such swell,

everything dips away, is stolen from you  
as you fall through the longest shortest moment you've ever known,

splashing backwards into the wetness  
of a world you thought you knew and trusted, pumping wet silence

all around till, on the third second,  
you are resurrected into the light, hands clambering for your board,  
instead of mere air, and a voice says,  
“You came back to us,” and you gasp and you gulp and you gasp  
and you gulp. The air! The sky! The sea! Ah,  
all is new and fresh and, yes, you are thankful for the fall,  
for there is a thrill to being swallowed by the black  
sea, only to be spewed back up after a scuffle with the dark.  
That’s what paddle boarding on a Sunday morning  
taught me: don’t chance your faith on unseen things like air,  
but place it in yourself and the wild salt of a black sea.  
It is the closest you will ever come to walking on water.

Simon Lamb is a Scottish poet, performer and storyteller. He won the Robert Burns World Federation’s international poetry competition in 2021 with *The Working Birds*, and his poem *On the Loch*, which featured in the inaugural issue of *Paddler Press*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His debut collection is forthcoming from *Scallywag Press*, with illustrations by former UK Children’s Laureate Chris Riddell. *When the Universe Creaks: Poems by Simon Lamb* is available now. [www.simonlambcreative.co.uk](http://www.simonlambcreative.co.uk)

@SimonLambCreative — Facebook & Instagram

@approx21words — Twitter & YouTube

# The Bluff

Jackie Kierulf

I can no longer ignore being shaken and force my eyes open. A voice hisses, “We’re leaving in five minutes.”

Still hazy, I wriggle out from my sleeping bag and splash some water on my face, slip on my shoes, and throw a sweater over my clothes.

It’s hard to make them out, blotches of what resemble bodies against the blackness. As I draw nearer, they’re shifting their feet in the dampness. “Finally,” someone mutters.

We’re the last to leave.

I see my breath. We walk, single file, slow pace at first, to adjust to the dark. There is no switchback to ease into the climb. Instead, a flashlight shines on a rough vertical path, carved out among fallen trees, the odd log, and other debris. Dead quiet, except for our panting, the pace and slope increase.

Even a short pause means more effort to restore the rhythm. The crackling of twigs underfoot continues. I breathe heavily, pressing onward.

Up ahead, the outline of trees is no longer obscure. Traces of their branches emerge. We are more visible to each other now instead of just dark shadows on the mountain.

The pounding of our soles tapers off. We navigate rocks of various sizes wedged in the ground, still wet from the dew. The

pitch is becoming more forgiving. Trees are scarce, with the odd one appearing on a patch of grass, their root flare jutting out towards our route, making it difficult to avoid. I reach down, take the lead from the person in front and grab a boulder to balance myself. Up ahead, some figures disappear.

Our group, not far behind, arrives.

We perch ourselves on a large flat slab of rock overlooking the vast landscape. Luscious green covers the valley below, the odd blue pool of a lake appearing, but from our vantage point, resembling a tiny pond. A rosy pink sky swallows the moon in slow motion. At the same time, a fiery golden disc appears, pushing its way up through the horizon ahead.

It's the summer of 1973. Huddled together, we each dine on a can of peaches that matches the brilliance before us.

Jackie lives in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Her publications include *Saturday* in *Route 7 Review*, *Forgiven* in *Tidbits*, and *Baking Lessons* in the *Williams Lake Tribune*, British Columbia). You can follow Jackie at [cherishingthedeath-process.com](http://cherishingthedeath-process.com) and at <https://fromsimplewordstorealstories.home.blog>. Besides writing, Jackie enjoys volunteering, hiking, reading, and traveling.

# The Tragedy of Photons

Tony Daly

It was born a millennia ago  
within the heart of a yellow sun,  
bouncing and bumping around  
with a plethora of friends  
until it broke through the surface  
of the photosphere,  
and reached escape velocity,  
starting a journey  
spanning light years  
and galaxies until, finally  
it reached Earth  
and was lost in the glow  
of a flickering street lamp.

Tragic, I know,  
but not as tragic as it's cousin:  
born of a collapsing star,  
forever trapped in space and time  
within a gravity-well,  
bent around objects,  
with echos of its cries  
falling on deaf ears.

But there is a bright side,  
as so many more of their cousins  
have more exquisite destinies:  
one reflected from an orbiting moon,  
then from a still lake surface,  
to be refracted in a diamond ring

held by a nervous man  
proposing to an overjoyed woman;  
another illuminated the smile of a child  
experiencing the ocean for the first time;  
and yet another, the final tear  
of a loved one saying goodbye.

Across time and space the photons  
raced past dangers and wonders  
unknown to humankind,  
all for the sake of the journey's end,  
and to be caught by the human eye.

# Digital Screen

Tony Daly

The modern-day bookstore is trapped in a digital screen  
Buildings with people and bindings are totally yesterday's scene  
Why risk the interaction with the smiling salesperson  
Avoid the complication from your comfy couch cushion  
Who cares what people say, at least with their actual voice  
The tongue is never tied on your digital board of choice  
Who cares about author signings and seeing face-to-face  
It's the mass email forms that really make hearts race  
The books will eventually gain that old musty smell  
But these ebooks, these digital books, you can never tell  
Just how old they are, unless you read the copyright date  
And please be honest, when it's dark and very-very late  
Isn't it nice to have the light emanate from the page  
Rather than searching for a lamp switch to assuage  
Your fears of the crazy cat creatures that never can be seen  
as you stand in the dark, alone with your digital screen

Tony Daly is a DC/Metro Area creative writer. He has work published in *The Poet Magazine*, *Danse Macabre*, *Red Ogre Review*, and others. He serves as an Associate Editor with *Military Experience and the Arts*. For a list of his published work, please visit <https://aldaly13.wixsite.com/website> or follow him on Twitter @aldaly18.

# Camping

Uday Shankar Ojha

Last year I camped  
Where I found solid earth  
With stable climate,  
Leaves lush green with edges dripping,  
Trees yielding friendly fruits and  
Not apples of discord.

Last year I oft encountered  
Moist eyes and drenched hearts,  
Rains running in human veins (serpentine though),  
Ghostly shadows in dark thickets,  
Walls half crumbled and half roofed  
Placing a plate full of peace  
And quiet breathing.

This year I see change.  
Cold eyes, nay responses,  
Tall talks with echoes fading,  
Whispers killing millions  
With slow yellowing death.  
Green are the wounds now  
And eyes in rains.  
Yes, I feel hands shaking,  
Fluttering desperately.  
Yes, I still see and feel.  
I am alive, perhaps,  
I feel so.

# Surviving

Uday Shankar Ojha

Let us survive through the violence.  
The violence of truth unknown,  
The chilly prospects  
Of images wrought in uncertain rains.  
Gloomy, dusky, deadening corners  
Breathe nothing but withering winds,  
Corroding the castles of love.  
I hate such winds, you know.  
I loved to bind the saffron air  
Blowing through the country green.  
Weakening forces  
Now fail to impress me.  
Here spiders  
Weave not webs anymore.

Let not the mind be savage  
To blot the bliss of simple faith.

Uday Shankar Ojha is a professor of English and former Dean, Student Welfare at Jai Prakash University, Chapra, Bihar, India. He has authored/edited many books on literature and has lectured widely across his country. He is prone to singing ghazals past midnight. Uday has captained his district cricket team and has been a table tennis player in the 80s. He can be reached at [udayshankarojha001@gmail.com](mailto:udayshankarojha001@gmail.com)



*Sunrise Over the Bay* by Paulette West  
Acrylic on Canvas, 18" x 24"

Paulette West is a visual artist residing in the Blue Mountains. A graduate of the University of Toronto in French Language and Literature, she went on to study visual art at Sheridan College. Known as a painter and sculptor, she also enjoys putting pen to paper. Her visual art and her written work has been included in local public exhibitions. She is a member of the Blue Mountain Foundation for the Arts and Tom Thomson Group. [paulettegwest@rogers.com](mailto:paulettegwest@rogers.com)

# Union Station: A Suite

Jérémi Doucet

## Flat Pigeon

Streetcar tracks catch and bend  
the thin wheels of my bicycle  
as a Prairie wind visits the city.

I risk a glimpse at the CN Tower,  
pumpkins, graffiti, and a Portuguese church  
while snaking my way between taillights.

In the maples along Lake Ontario  
a murmuration of starlings bickers.  
“Don’t stand under them,” she warns.

## Passerby in Chinatown

I pluck the stained Libro de Mormón  
out of the guardian lion’s mouth

and notice two bananas beneath the statue—  
a long way from home.

In a bed of crusted brown blankets nearby  
a crossword absorbs a slumped man.

## Loud Crash in the Night

The glare of yellow light singes my sleep.  
I stand aloof in stretched underwear.

Her freshly painted blue stool upset.

Soil splashed on the carpet.  
A broken aloe vera.

She frowns: my fault.  
I crunch my toes.

### **View from Ragged Lake**

A prickly silhouette of autumn hills  
in chilly dusk curves like a silent smile.

Blue and orange flames mix  
to the song of courting loons—  
their crooked wings flaunted mid-air.

Emma breaks us each a piece  
of smuggled dark chocolate.

### **Deep Breath**

I drive us home through flat Ontario farmland  
while psychoanalysts babble about intuition.

Hundreds of red taillights constellate  
on the slow highway—we are close.

When I open the door of her Victorian home,  
I notice—recognize—for the first time

its familiar, burgundy scent.

Jérémi Doucet studies Creative Writing at UBC. His writing has appeared in *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Gone Lawn*, and several anthologies. He currently lives in Vancouver.

# Sestina for when the sea turned blue

Annie Cowell

The storm succumbed to dawn's first light;  
its barrage silenced by the screaming of gulls;  
their discordant aria squalled on the wind.  
Like the sea, I was moody for lack of the sun-  
tired of being grey - we longed for some blue;  
the foaming electric of Monet's 'Waves

Breaking'. So I gathered my grey, walked to the waves;  
past mounds of marram where puddles of light  
revealed devil's toenails bruised with deep blue.  
I wanted that place where the seagulls  
had gathered. I envied their faces turned to the sun;  
watching the waves go chasing the wind.

The last sullen clouds unwound in the wind;  
stretching in time to the beat of the waves  
pirouetting to the warmth of the sun's  
serenade. Pastel plumes of indigo light  
bathed the heads of the paddling gulls  
as they hunted for minnows in watery blue.

When all at once from out of the blue  
sounds of the morning bounced on the wind  
and the air vibrated with wings of the gulls -  
a murmuring prayer which rose from the waves  
like a flurry of snowflakes that flew in the light.  
Fragments of glass thrown out by the sun.

And those fragments of glass, thrown by the sun  
became starry motes held by pockets of blue;  
tiny performers that twirled in the spotlight.  
And I had been pulled like a kite in the wind  
to where the beach became one with the waves  
which a moment before held the feet of the gulls.

The cerulean sky swallowed those gulls  
as they flew like Icarus close to the sun.  
I watched whilst my gloom was drowned in the waves-  
felt the sea breathing that grey into blue-  
and whispers of cloud snagged in the wind,  
silvery moths mesmerised by the light.

The wind had blown the gloom to the sun  
And just like the gulls it had melted in light.  
The waves, like myself, were rejoicing in blue.

Annie is a writer who lives with her husband and two rescue dogs by the sea in Cyprus. You can usually find her out walking or in a coffee shop. Determined to prove it's never too late. Poetry published and forthcoming. Twitter @AnnieCowell3

# Light of Hope

Robert Pegel

There's a thin blue light that lives  
in the sky connecting my son to me.  
It can't be seen but rest assured  
it's there.

It has no boundaries  
and transmits constantly.

If we could only travel on this  
light what a joy it would be.

Its energy would infuse our spirit  
as we traveled higher.

Peace would be the only  
requirement to approach it  
in any direction.

This soothing light would  
heal and remove all the  
stored pain within us.

It stretches across the sky  
and protects anyone who senses  
it and believes in it,  
securing them safely as they  
sail on troubled waters  
or fly into a thunderous  
lightning lit sky.

This thin blue light is a  
direct line to heaven.

It finds us when we are ready  
to find a reason to believe.

# Spring Forward

Robert Pegel

Don't pay attention  
to the distorted feedback  
from your mind.  
You're among the breathing  
don't be blind.  
Though your world is dark  
there's still truth to find.

A faint light from the sun  
looms in the clouds.  
The crickets chirp in the brush  
during the nighttime  
no matter what else  
is going on around them.

Spring is here and with it  
the promise of rebirth.  
Lean not on  
your own understanding.  
Move forward  
though your best plans  
may be thwarted.  
You will be forced to cope  
in a world you seldom understand.

Take my hand.  
We will walk together  
through the fire and the trials.  
The distant miles ahead or behind

mean less than ever before.  
Try to find love in this day  
in any way.  
It's a test for all of us.

Promise me you'll be okay.  
It's no longer just talk.  
You've learned  
to survive and walk tall.  
Restored and born anew,  
high above the clouds  
of this temporal existence.

Robert Pegel is a husband and father whose only child, his son Calvin, died in his sleep of unknown causes at age sixteen. Robert writes to try and transform his grief by creating. Robert graduated from Columbia University where he majored in English. He has been published in *Sledgehammer Lit*, *The Madrigal*, *Remington Review*, *Trouvaille Review*, *Lothlorien Journal*, *Goat's Milk*, *Fahmidan Journal*, *ZiN Daily* and others. He has work forthcoming in *Backchannels*, *North Dakota Quarterly* and *Toyon Literature*. Robert lives in Andover, NJ, USA with his wife, Zulma.

# Wander into the Wilderness

Michael McCourt

Wander into the wilderness, where sunlight  
hits you hot and there are no longer

borders between what is permanent and  
what is fleeting. No edges to define

where one might end and another begin. No garden  
wall around a green and ripened place

that might keep a serpent out. No protection from  
the clawing wind or the oppressive sun

spreading out in a wounded sky. No, this is the hard land.  
The untamed land. A wasteland. Where fear

curls itself around you, wraithlike and cold.  
But, this is also the land of searching and finding.

Of death and rebirth. Of restoring what is broken.  
Of confronting the serpent within,

where raspy prayers are offered up under  
the silvering moonlight,

and a heaven made of stars, fires blazing  
bright, lights the way home.

Remember, you too are light;  
You are made of the stuff of stars.

Michael McCourt is a high school Music and English Teacher, and has had work published previously at *Paddler Press*, and also *Every Day Fiction*, *Green Ink Poetry*, and *Paper Swans Press*. He writes poetry, flash fiction, short stories and is working on his first novel. He lives in Kingston, ON, and is married to a wonderful, brilliant redhead, and together they have two kids and a cat. His writing can be found at [goodwords.substack.com](http://goodwords.substack.com) Twitter: @mikejmccourt

# Slow Mornings in the Mountains

Matthew Miller

*after B.P. Miller*

It's good to know that there will be  
another morning here. But this one:  
the clouds a foggy canvas behind  
mountain knobs, and my wife stroking  
her thumb across the pages of her novel,  
like smoothing out wrinkles from bed sheets,  
moving her hand away every once in a while  
to swirl fingernails behind my ears. Swaying slow,  
the limbs and cones of pitch pines nuzzled  
by the smoky breeze of the brook, winding  
below our cabin. Tomorrow could be different, maybe  
I will brew Ethiopian coffee before  
she wakes, maybe whisk some pancakes.  
The tree trunk ceiling beams would be steeped  
with dark roasted maple and wildberry.  
I might splay on the long pile rug, warmed by  
the fireplace, and sketch the gray ridgeline.  
She might step from the bedroom, bare  
feet on cold concrete, arc her back, stretching  
arms wide to breathe in another morning.

# Why the Sun Hesitates

Matthew Miller

She blinks awake, thin elbows poking  
through the clouds. Covers roll over her  
shoulders, sliding aside like fog on her exhale.

The clock gives a coy flicker behind the lamp.  
Quickening voices from the floors below  
where bare feet brush the concrete.

In leafless trees, thrushes echo with song. These whispers  
crawl the horizon, hidden calls desirous  
of her light. After mute winter,

she is embarrassed to rise  
and be seen by expectant eyes.  
She fears she is not enough.

Matthew Miller teaches social studies, swings tennis rackets, and writes poetry - all hoping to create home. He and his wife live beside a dilapidating orchard in Indiana, where he tries to shape dead trees into playhouses for his four boys. His poetry has been featured in *Whale Road Review*, *River Mouth Review*, *EcoTheo Review* and *Ekstasis Magazine*. His work can be found online at [mattleemiller.wixsite.com/poetry](http://mattleemiller.wixsite.com/poetry).

# Torn From A Science Textbook

Matthew McGuirk

Strip it all away and aren't we just atoms  
pulling breaths in and letting them out,  
living beat to beat?

What makes winking glass across a night sky so perfect  
and white soap waves crashing so mesmerizing?

Why do sunrises look better in person  
and how do the oranges, purples and reds of sunsets  
hang in the sky so long?

Caught in orbit from the start,  
a universe built in unsuspecting moments,  
but like shards of metal collecting at a pole,  
you pulled me in.

Still unsure what makes your eyes  
mined and polished gems  
or what makes your chest rise and fall just right,  
but somehow our molecules match-  
uneven pieces fitting in all the right places  
to make us whole.

How easy it is to forget that you weren't always there,  
but time wrinkled just right to bring us where we are.

# Unmarked Seeds

Matthew McGuirk

Just like an unmarked seed,  
she comes into the world as anything,  
possibilities running in our mind.

Each seed pushed into the soil  
grows through opportunities,  
some made by them and others made by those around them.  
Some are bound to bear fruit,  
others to help pain,  
some will be crowded out by those that are stronger,  
but others will thrive where they are planted.

We push those seeds into the soil,  
add necessary nutrients, apply water  
and fend off pests.  
We make the environment just right,  
cultivating success and happiness  
even through the onslaught of weeds  
and torrent storms.

Matt McGuirk teaches and lives with his family in New Hampshire.  
BOTN 2021 nominee with words in various lit mags and a debut collection with *Alien Buddha Press* called *Daydreams, Obsessions, Realities* available on Amazon and linked on his website.

Website: <http://linktr.ee/McGuirkMatthew> Twitter: @McguirkMatthew  
Instagram: @mcguirk\_matthew.

# dum spiro spero

Colleen E. Kennedy

The silliness of sparrows—  
those most delicate  
of birds,

the color of mice,  
softer than sound,  
smaller than the palm  
of a child.

These are the birds that don't flee  
the brutality of Buffalo winters.

Huddling together on a bare, ruined branch  
chattering and puffed up  
complaining about the winters together.

Not unlike all your aunts  
gathering for coffee after mass,  
spilling into the kitchen,

and all of them looking alike and  
singing the same song—  
family, church, money problems, the cold, the snow.

As though every February isn't the same,  
the color of a migraine, muddied mounds of snow,  
the sun glinting like diamonds off the pristine layer.

If you really look,  
you can even see their breaths  
just a puff, a wisp of white.  
And they look like smokers  
huddled outside a bar in winter  
in puffer parkas and chattering loudly about sports.

Clutching onto hope—  
like the birds clinging to icy branches—

that this will be the year

and how the Bills almost made it all the way.

but next season  
but next season  
but next season.

The winters in Buffalo always feel like they'll never end.

Many of the other birds—  
the honking majesties of Canada geese  
or the harbingers of spring, robin redbreasts—

all fly someplace else, someplace warmer,  
maybe near a beach or a place with a view.

Like your well-to-do cousin in Amherst  
who takes the family down to Disney  
for a week each winter.

But all the sparrows together  
with every chirped declamation  
against Buffalo's winters  
cry out:

While I breathe, I hope.

Previously, a university instructor of English and Theatre, Colleen E. Kennedy is a writer and communications professional. She is a contributing writer for *District Fray*, *Classical Post*, and *Washington City Paper*. Her poetry has recently appeared in *The Decadent Review*, *The Dillydoun Review*, and *Heron Tree*. She lives in Washington, D.C., and tweets nonsense @ReadColleenK.

# Unfamiliar

Peter Lilly

*'... in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.'* Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Question every earthly authority  
The way molten rock challenges mountains  
With heat and glow, and a slow, considered,  
Hypnotic resolve. Such calamity  
As is caused when the foundations fountain  
Through the summit, like ants ordered  
To war by an innate complicity,  
Is not the call of being and breathing.  
But to live at a different temperature.  
As heat, to melt rampant duplicity.  
As light, illuminate daylight thieving.  
As liquid, transform our cold container.  
Make strange the accepted forms of control,  
For each context demands parts of your soul.

# Harrowed

Peter Lilly

Speak me into existence, I am yours.  
Or, the you that is yet to be. Transformed by  
The speaking, the creative change that pours  
From the wellspring of language. As the tide,  
Unstoppable and incessantly true.  
Yet warm, as the most familiar embrace.  
There is a great light in the future's view,  
And new terrain for the radiance of grace  
To display across fresh contours, shadows  
Exquisite, and abstractly portraying  
The inner-workings of the artist's soul  
In ecstatic breath, a visual praying.  
For all our doom, we yet have tomorrow,  
A landscape of soil, freshly harrowed.

# Spring

Peter Lilly

Winter has hidden its frosty face  
For another few months of future.  
We stand with heels in the snow,  
And toes touching the thaw.  
Wet, green, and flowing.  
Fresh as a spring on timid skin.  
Wanting the crystalline cling of water  
To give into its moving.  
For the brittle to become a torrent,  
And to be carried in current  
To another here, where  
The spring light can change everything.

Peter Lilly is a British Poet who grew up in Gloucester before spending eight years in London studying theology and working with the homeless. He now lives in the South of France with his wife and son, where he concentrates on writing, teaching English, and community building. His recent and forth coming publications include *Archetype*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, and *Ekstasis Magazine*. Twitter: @peterlillypoems

# Keel and Song

Jeff Burt

Even now, amid hatred, violence,  
self-achievement and greed,

I raise my head in the morning  
like a small bird below the large feeder

watches the jumble of others arrive,  
snatch, and depart swiftly

before a raptor lands and sweeps a wing  
to scatter fluff, flax, and millet.

Amid flutter and chirp, keel and song,  
a new day's light, I am grateful.

# Eau Claire

Jeff Burt

Twelve, I pushed the rowboat  
from the pier in the twilight of dawn  
when we could tell tree line and east from west,  
slipped to the prow ahead of two uncles.  
The windless lake still lapped the pier, slurped.  
Oars carved eddies in the dark purple of the lake.

The prow aimed at a single yard lamp  
across the flowage that dimly searched  
the pines and scarce hardwoods.  
Water burned, as if a fire  
of submerged radiance and starlight.  
Oars dove, rose to the air,  
wet wood shone as if luminescent,  
the way the last wood in a campfire  
appears to be out until you poke  
the white ash and embers reveal.

Often I find myself traveling  
to that steady beating of oars,  
like a child churning water,  
trying to uncover truths  
by sifting the ashes of fire.

Jeff Burt grew up in Wisconsin, was tempered in Texas and Nebraska, and found a home in California, though landscapes of the Midwest still populate much of his writing. He has work in *Williman Journal*, *Red Wolf Journal*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Rabid Oak*, and won the 2017 Cold Mountain Review Poetry Prize. Other work can be found at <https://www.jeff-burt.com>.

# The Last Waltz of the Firefly

Renee Cronley

I remember those electrified summer evenings,  
when we ran through the backyard woodlands;  
the stars fell from the sky and danced around us,  
as if choreographed to the music of our laughter.

Our innocence infused with the forest air,  
making the smell of damp moss, wet tree trunks,  
and flowers just that much sweeter.

It felt like we were breathing for the first time.

They were pieces of magic we caught in our palms  
and moved into mason jars to light our way home.  
We whispered goodnight and set them free,  
watching them set the night on fire in beautiful chaos.

These memories echoing back at me  
are almost drowned out by the urban sprawl.  
Pesticides overwhelm the remaining flora  
that promise to protect the nearby crops.

I have no choice but to breathe through it.

Exterior lights of manicured yards flood the night—  
a tiny glow waltzes alone in the distance,  
desperate to synchronize his flashes to a partner  
before he loses the language of light.

I memorize the flickering before it dims  
and the sequel to my childhood blinks out.

Renee Cronley is a writer and nurse from Brandon, Manitoba. She studied Psychology and English at Brandon University, and Nursing at Assiniboine Community College. Her work has appeared in *NewMyths.com*, *Love Letters to Poe*, and many anthologies and literary journals.

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# For Wink

Candice Kelsey

She had faith in a one-eyed Pitbull named Wink. He lived across the street during the lonely stay-home days of 2021. After teaching on Zoom all day, she would ride her bike through Westport Heights, a few miles from Los Angeles International Airport. She couldn't hear the engines overhead, but the streets were named Kittyhawk, Flight, and Boeing. She noticed something poetic about a lockdown, an airport, and a girl on a bike but forgot what that was exactly. Her neighbor took Wink on long, slow walks every morning and afternoon. Once he couldn't get him to stand up and keep moving. The girl on the bike waved every time she saw them. It made her happy. She remembered that George Harrison's mother played weekly broadcasts of Radio India while she was pregnant, hoping the Eastern music would be calming. She also remembered George Harrison's ashes were scattered across the Ganges. Her own mother chain smoked while pregnant. She imagined an ashtray beside her mother's hospital bed in Labor & Delivery. A text came in a year later— Wink had to be euthanized. She wants to forget he will be reduced to ash. She plucks the spokes of her bike like a sitar.

Candice Kelsey is in her 24th year of teaching and currently lives in Georgia. She serves as a creative writing mentor with PEN America's Prison & Justice Writing Program; her poetry appears in *Poets Reading the News* and *Poet Lore* among other journals. Candice's first collection, *Still I am Pushing*, explores mother-daughter relationships as well as toxic body messages. She won the Two Sisters Writing Contest, was chosen as a finalist in *Cutthroat's* Joy Harjo Prize, and has been nominated for a Best of the Net and two Pushcarts. Find her at @candicekelsey1 and [www.candicemkelsey1poet.com](http://www.candicemkelsey1poet.com)



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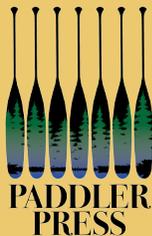
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to greet the morning light...*

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