

A photograph of a forest path in autumn. The path is covered in fallen yellow and brown leaves, leading into a dense forest. The trees are mostly deciduous, with many leaves turned bright yellow and some still green. The lighting is soft, suggesting an overcast day. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

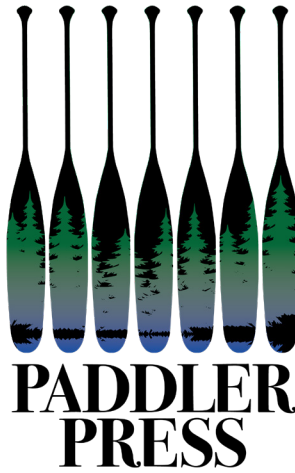
# Faith

Paddler Press Volume 15



Paddler Press

Volume 15 - Faith



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# Foreword

I cannot think of a more important theme to explore in creative community, at this time of strife and uncertainty, than faith.

Many might say that faith is at the centre of the divisions and conflicts that plague our world and cultures. Others might say that faith an easy scapegoat, that it is only used as a weapon by those who have faith only in money and power. Both may hold some truth, but I believe that faith can also be the grounding we need as individuals and as a society, to get through the divisions and violence. This collection is a manifestation of that sort of faith.

In this issue, artists from diverse faith contexts, including no religious faith, have journeyed into their deep selves and found beautiful, inspiring, challenging, sometimes heart-wrenching and sometimes humorous ways to express what they found there. This collection is an embodiment of our shared humanity in its beautiful creative diversity.

I want to thank Deryck, from the bottom of my heart, for giving me the opportunity to guest edit this issue, and every single person who submitted work. The quality and depth of the pieces submitted made it such a pleasure, but also a very difficult task, to make the selection. Thank you for your vulnerability and confidence in sharing your faiths and doubts with the world, and making this such a beautiful issue.

Faithfully yours,

Peter Lilly





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**Beyond** by Silje Lilly  
Digital Photograph



# In the Beginning was the Word

*... and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

John 1:1

Bethany Jarmul

And the Word unfurled its green tentacles across the universe,  
spreading roots in the form of galaxies, petals as stardust.

The Word birthed beauties of immeasurable grandeur  
in the breadth of a single planet—the intricacies of dragonfly wings,  
the pollen heads blown in the wind, the colonies of kelp and seagrass.

And the Word unleashed branches in fractal patterns, stretching  
from earth-flesh to marble sky, grew robins with worms writhing  
in beaks, foxes curled in dens, mist thick as molasses.

The Word formed the succulent pulp of the pomegranate, the slit eyes  
of the striped snake, the human heart with all its hunger. Then rested.

Now, the Word stumbles forth when our tongues loosen, our lips dance,  
when syllables spill onto the page or into the atmosphere with a single breath.

# A March Snow Shower Reminds Me to Pray for Our Children

Bethany Jarmul

Seven daffodils bow  
their lemon heads

toward the snowflakes  
gathering at their feet.

These new flowers have  
not yet learned frost.

No fear of freezing  
petal-veins or stamen-hearts.

Like our children, they cannot  
grasp the things that bring harm.

They know nothing of wars  
or weed killer, genocides

or lawnmower blades,  
gun violence or fungal diseases.

Tenderly, I brush the snow from  
their necks, sink my knees into

the cold ground, groaning out,  
*Protect them, Lord, for I cannot.*

# You're Telling Me

Peter Lilly

You're laughing.  
It is a cool breeze  
beneath the beating sun.

It is a pause between passing traffic,  
the rustle of an autumn oak.  
It is when I am still, alone,  
in beauty's womb,  
I feel your laughter in the liquid of my breath.

You speak things into being,  
and I am a joke on the tip of your tongue.  
You speak in might and persons,  
and I'm happy being a good, clean  
joke.



# God's Spoken Word

Janina Aza Karpinska

made everything -  
seen and unseen – all  
came into being with His resonant tones  
we are His on-going collection: poems  
of lyrical wonder; our heartbeat  
and His, make up the metre  
we're God's manifest, animated vision; His  
designer-created companion; the One  
He desires; His  
Heaven.

# A Lesson in Trust From *Old Stone Face*

Janina Aza Karpinska

In childhood shadows stalked corridors  
appeared unbidden in darkened bedrooms

with low-noted growls that threatened  
to blow – blow – blow the house down.

Now when fears scream, peace only whispers  
and doubts remain tongue-tied and mute, it helps

to remember, during implied disaster, that scene  
in the film: *Steamboat Bill Jr*, where Buster Keaton

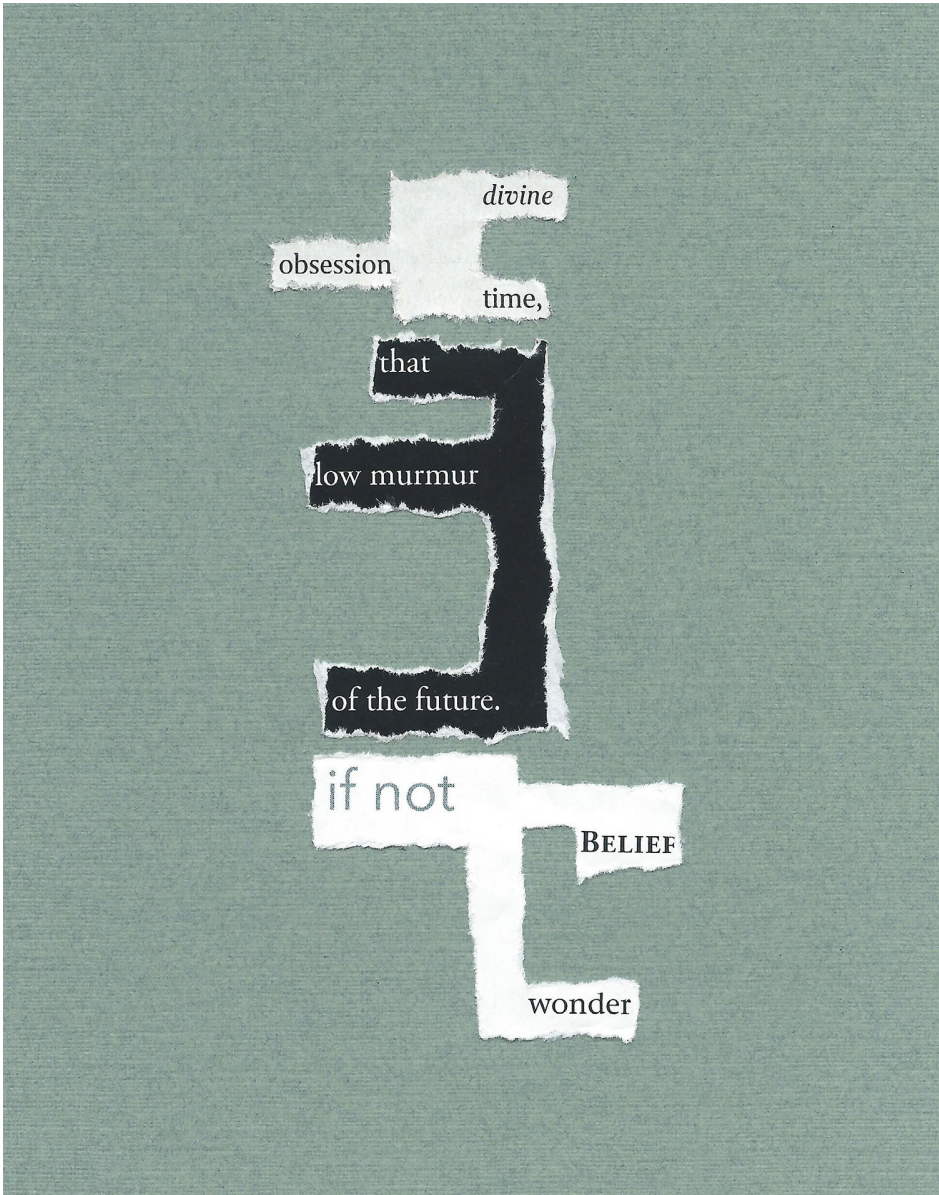
stands alone in the foreground as the front  
of the building falls down around him -

swallowed whole but  
of an open-mouthed  
unchanged - and yet

unscathed by the frame  
window: view and stance  
nothing quite the same.

# Divine

J.I. Kleinberg





# April Showers

Daithí Kearney

April showers create a curtain  
Budding blossoms await  
The final, damp bars of  
Spring's daffodillian overture

Looking out between sheets of rain  
At heaven's colourful arc  
A catwalk of PAR cans  
Surround sunset's warm spotlight

Stars standing at the cusp  
Nearly time to pull back  
Curtains and let  
Summer's show begin.

# April Snow

Marya Smith

It snowed last night without me,  
Without any help or planning on my part.  
It just fell out that way,  
Like meeting someone new and finding touch points  
Without a zodiac chart or weatherman prediction.  
How this happens,  
How clean white patches surprise the greening ground,  
How any new thing comes to be  
Without my worrying it to be, without a to-do list or a sanctioned  
plan,  
Is a mystery –  
One that makes me stop and keeps me going,  
Hoping for more surprises.

# The Birthday Party

Liv Ross

When a birthday candle remains unlit,  
And the singing is silenced by a sigh,  
When the puzzle pieces no longer fit,  
And the long-deferred hope, at last, has died,  
When the whiskey has spilt and wine is spent,  
The bread on the table is hard and cold,  
When friendship and family are torn and rent,  
When the hearth holds just ashes, grey and cold,  
You told me your comfort would meet me here.  
You told me your love was a warming flame.  
You told me your song would be loud and clear.  
You told me your love was like falling rain.  
You told me these things. I believed them true.  
So here I am asking, just where are you?

# A One-Sided Covenant

Liv Ross

A covenant requires that there are two.  
One gives the vow. One sees the vow returned.  
A covenant requires that both are true,  
That keeping it is their utmost concern.  
A covenant is such a heavy thing.  
How can a man keep to it on his own?  
Whose feat of strength could bear a binding ring  
That rests upon the hand of one alone?  
Only the man who's called the King of Kings—  
A Prince of Peace whose task is foolishness.  
He walked the path of severed limbs and wings,  
While Abraham lay down in quietness.  
The vows of mortal men are faithless, yet  
There is a God who swears and won't forget.

# Another Kind of Breaking

Liv Ross

When the darkness and close comfort  
bursts open, the babe comes out with a wail;  
slippery, messy,  
into the wide cold of a too bright world.

Does the acorn cry, too, when it cracks?  
Does the slim shoot fear the sudden horizon  
and long to be blanketed by earth,  
to be kept safe for one season more?

Beauty requires a birth,  
and birth is just another kind of breaking.  
Did you forget  
how much it hurt  
to get here?



# Morning

Jeff Rensch

The cold was full of pain.  
The pain was full of possibility.  
To be alive and hurting was a gift.  
Feeling was like a package in his lap  
He couldn't open. The girl at his side  
Held up a message he could not receive.  
You are here. You are present. Do not refuse  
The opportunity to fall apart.

God was less hidden when you went outside.  
An owl was talking to itself.  
The other birds were listening to him.  
Lord, break me open. Reassemble me.

# Medusa

Sophia Man

Same conversation, different time, same place.  
Little wonder to us that birds migrate.  
Same thoughts, later on, again, somewhere else.  
Whirling thoughts, they lead back towards myself.  
There on my arm clear for all out to see  
is a scar. Not from pain, but from pleasure.  
Unlike people near, for once I felt free,  
For work done well – deserving of leisure.  
I tried to walk into the light, to you.  
The excess of light, it served to make blind  
eyes to the splendour of nature. So few  
things out in the world which make the heart kind.  
If from our mouths our thoughts turn to prayer  
for once we'll show others that God is there.

# The Children's Author

John Peter Beck

Philip Neri believed  
that a cheerful heart

was closer to God  
and heavenly perfection

than any sad and  
downcast soul.

He is our patron, the saint  
to writers and artists like me.

My books for children  
are full of bright colors,

page after page of unfolding  
wonder, my hopes for joy and peace,

and the words, fun to see  
on the page, funner to say

out loud to an outburst of giggles  
galore – eggplant elephant,

jazzy jiggle jello,  
sloppy stump-eating silly-pede.

Can it be any better  
expression of God's love

than to feed the widening eyes  
of a child, capture her rapt

attention, spark her laugh  
so explosive, so infectious

that no earthly vaccine  
can staunch or contain it?

# Communion of Hearts and Hands

Titilayo Matiku

We hung our heads to pray over the meal.  
Our sweat had trickled into the earth,  
  
and blossomed on our plates.

Their petals stirred our hearts and bellies,  
desire fed by labor.

We held our hands in reverence,  
cast our burdens beside the cutlery.

Father placed a chunk of bread  
on a white ceramic plate, bare

as the place where life began. My infant daughter  
struck her tambourine, metallic bursts blending  
with the clatter of spoons.

Through the windows the wind, like angels,  
flipped tablecloths with childlike ecstasy.

Had the earth stood still, or the sun collapsed  
into a lamp of fire, we would have remained

oblivious, while our hands and hearts  
communed over a bowl of harvest.

I broke a loaf as my eyes roamed the city.  
Lights were floating down the stream,  
each circle widening, widening,  
as if heaven had leaned close to listen.

# A Walk in February

Leanne McClements

‘Arise! Vite! Get dressed!’ Mum called.  
‘There will be mud and miles to walk  
around the flood, but we’ll hold hands  
and find the best way.’

We sailed over half-submerged lands,  
walked planks like pirates, and laughed  
at Hugo, who slipped and pitched  
into the ooze. We tracked down clues  
and flung ourselves on fallen logs  
in spreading clumps of snowdrops,  
licking warm chocolate from our lips.  
When sticky burdock burrs caught on  
gloves and jumpers, Lockie hurled them  
at our backs, long into the meadow.

Love mantled cheeks, and we held them,  
incandescent; catkin, squirrel, lichen,  
chaffinch, linnet, blackcap, bud, bulb and  
blackthorn blossom, hip, haw, holler and shout;

we took them home with silver birch  
to sweep the old words out.



# Kindness

Leanne McClements

Today the clouds sing with washed light;  
I can hang mountains on them.  
Sammy and Albert invited me to play.  
In the school garden there's a cave to hide in,  
a steep side to climb, a top to yell from,  
and lots of secret places to keep treasure.  
Sammy and Albert showed me some;

buttercup gold, silver shells, wildflower rubies,  
leafy emeralds, and lots of pebble money.

'You can share our treasure.'  
'Shall we climb the mountain together?'

Let me climb your little sky-scraping words,  
I thought, then rest awhile at breathless height,  
closer to the newly laundered heaven.

# Fairy Flowers

Olivia Koutsky

Fairy flowers'  
Hints of purple  
Dust the garden-tops  
Sprinkling over summer  
With a playful pixie touch

Hummingbirds stop by to sip  
They pause and taste and flit away  
Blossoms nod polite goodbyes  
The bobbing slows  
The flowers still  
And then the peacock honks  
And a golf cart putters down the road

Fairy flowers  
Whisper from their pretty stems  
The light threads through myself and them  
And finds itself a little place  
While all the while the peacocks honk  
And golf carts putter past

# It Stands Before Me, Enormous, and i can't help but know to be hit

Jaden Schapiro

The tree out front does not survive the hurricane this time. It has a second helping of lighting, thirty years late. I hope for a spectacle when I step outside. Flying limbs. Chunks of hot charcoal. Thor's Bifröst mosaic. Squirrel Sunday roast. My imagination bubbles aimless, nosy, as I chew away in the cellar between half-cooked, half-eaten Cup Noodles and Mama sketching with oil pastels.

A long strip peels down the tree's side like an overripe banana. Most of its branches are intact save for one on the ground, which is naked, frozen, and mocking its killer in the shock of a petrified bolt. The branch is beige on the inside, but dark and pliant from the rain. Bark swatches ring orange round the base. No soot to be seen. It splinters—it looks painful, if anything. This is the birth of a slow, stiffening corpse.

\* \* \*

I had seen dead deer and turkey on the side of the road because Mama liked to point them out. She was not afraid of dead things. My friends' parents said the animals were sleeping. I did not understand how kids made sense of taking a nap next to a loud and smelly road. I did not understand why Mama was so lighthearted about death. I figured all artists were not afraid of death and saw something playful in it. Or that death was just as much a part of any highway, any between, as the shoulder or Punch Buggy. Still, these were not carcasses as much as they were "roadkill." That word implied the road—not a human—killed the animal; it implied it was a sad, but necessary part of life you hoped you were not responsible for.

Deer accidents happened often in our town. Yellow signs made no difference. On our lick of the island, the back roads grew blue with lichened trees teething whatever was left of the sky. Then night molassesed through, too viscous even for a full moon. You sped through the black anyway. The forest wall might as well have been the thick of a tunnel until a brown, shimmering bullet kissed you awake. At the end of a curve's hug, I anticipated flaccid entanglements schmeared to red like a poorly wiped booger.

Roadkill were crumpled and dirty without being violent. Blood dried to the color of the tar, bodies abstract, their spiritual departure was pre-digested and pre-dissociated. I was unable to hear the timbre of antlers, hooves, and two-hundred pounds of venison cozy up to the grill and buckle under the wheels. Was it one big thud? A clack and a crunch? Maybe a screech? I was thankful we never ran over anything big, or I would have replayed the memory again and again, revising it to imagine the full extent of the cull. Just as fast as we drove past roadkill, my attention moved to other, more attention-sluicing things.

\* \* \*

The tree's largeness makes its death more real and immediate. I feel negligible, *de minimis*. The strike seems impossible: our house is in a valley. Why not tag the other cliffs? I sense this argument starts long before I am born—the world finding ways to eat itself to save itself. I am rooted before the tree, not paying attention to my stomach's deepening bunker. The tree is not a second on the highway like roadkill; I cannot drive past it and hope someone will clean it up or haul the tree away; I cannot keep its death on the shoulder. I still hear the strike from the cellar. It is the first time thunder is more of a scream and less of a passive aggressive purr. This does not warrant a funeral—it is not a relative or a non-aquatic pet. I do not think I am a tree-hugger. Tree-hugging is for artists. I am not an artist. Death is for artists, too. And roadkill.

# Van Gogh's Room

Joseph Fasano

I could show you what coldness is.  
I could show you how the floor is worn  
to autumn  
where I kneel, each night, in the trial  
of my life.  
I could show you how the walls  
lean toward me, lean toward me  
as my mother  
never did, as her face turned away  
from the creature that I was—  
ruddy, naked, wriggling  
on the kitchen floor.  
But I give you nothing if I keep you from the mystery.

What have I done with my life?  
Once, in the fields of childhood,  
I found the horse of a neighbor  
who had vanished,  
its withers trembling in the morning light.  
The wild beast panicked with lightness.  
The crows sang their one song from the pond.

Yes, I was nightshade, I was poison.  
But now I have this small room  
in moonlight, this little place  
to hang my hat  
and madness, to give me  
the peace I cannot keep in me.  
I know myself. I will ruin it  
as I ruin everything; I will leave it  
and stand among the deep wheat, calling  
the ravens' wings to take me, to give me  
no home, no home but openness.  
Be so lost  
what saves you  
must be God.





**To Life** by Silje Lilly  
Digital photograph

# Beautiful Things

Tracie Adams

Hope was the tinny jingle of the ice cream truck always right on time, a promise that goodness would find me if I waited patiently. I stood by the curb massaging coins in my hand, anticipating vanilla trailing down my wrists.

Six-year-old me knew that hope had a sound. It also had a smell, like Ivory soap and Clairol Herbal Essence shampoo. Bath time was a baptism of warm water sluicing down the drain. Mama's hushed voice reminded me to say my prayers. Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep... Hope was the glow of a nightlight, the hush of a bedtime story, my mother's hands tucking me in.

But not all hands were Mama's hands. Not all touches washed me clean. Away from the safety of my canopy bed, there would be other hands that stole my innocence. Mama's goodnight kiss was a promise that the world would always keep its word. But the world is not a promise keeper. The world is a liar.

By the time I reached adulthood, I willingly handed over my dignity to cocaine and a long string of lovers whose names I never knew. I sacrificed myself on an altar of shame in exchange for the searing brand of scarlet letters. U-N-L-O-V-E-D.

There were nights I spat every prayer back at the ceiling. I told grace to find someone less broken. I slammed the door in hope's face. Still, it chased me like a shepherd pursuing a lost sheep.

Hope found its way back to me in the slow burn of surrender. No one could want it for me more than I wanted it for myself. And I did. Want it, I mean. It started with a prayer. It started when I dared

to trust again, not in fleeting promises or flawed humans. It started with Jesus calling me Beloved. It started with forgiveness.

Then came a man, the one who refills the bird feeders on our porch, seeds spilling like blessings into his palm. He says he does it for the birds, but I know it's because he loves what I love without needing a reason, from purple finches and cardinals to sacraments on Sunday mornings. He gives more than he takes. My rituals are his rituals. He keeps his promises.

Hope is a song I sing to a Redeemer, the strong hand of a husband who stays, a sparrow that knows it is loved.

# wandering

Sharisa Aidukaitis

I once placed my faith where  
it never should have been and when  
it evaporated with the spring dew  
my unmoored feet stumbled for miles  
through sandy deserts aching  
for a new oasis, and only when  
I sat to satiate myself on the sublime  
sensation of the surrounding vistas  
did hope in transcendence distill into my heart

# Old Cafe

Strider Marcus Jones

a rest, from swinging bar  
and animals in the abattoir-  
to smoke in mental thinks  
spoken holding cooling drinks.

counting out old coppers to be fed  
in the set squares of blue and red  
plastic table cloth-  
just enough to break up bread in thick barley broth.

Jesus is late  
after saying he was coming  
back to share the wealth and real estate  
of capitalist cunning.

maybe. just maybe.  
put another song on the jukebox baby:  
no more heroes anymore.  
what are we fighting for-

he's hiding in hymns and chants,  
in those Monty Python underpants,  
from this coalition of new McCarthy's  
and its institutions of Moriarty's.

some shepherds sheep will do this dance  
in hypothermic trance,  
for one pound an hour  
like a shamed flower,

watched by sinister sentinels-  
while scratched tubular bells,  
summon all to sunday service  
where invisible myths exist-

to a shamed flower  
with supernatural power  
come the hour.



# Boggled

Adele Evershed

Who was that poet—  
the one who wrote about God and bogs?

I love that word—bog—  
it sits thick in your mouth,  
full of everything  
you'd rather not see again.

Starting with that softened 'B',  
as your lips brush together  
like a kiss to a passing life,  
then the holy stretching 'O'—  
a black hole to fall into

and finally, the phlegmy 'G',  
like a miner boggy with black lung,  
belting out Bread of Heaven  
or some other funeral dirge.

Here, there are cranberry bogs—  
full of bitterness,  
berries only good in pie—  
and still—you need a bog full of custard  
to stop them tasting like a sacrifice.

I prefer my bogs like my Gods—unknowable,  
and as dark as a pint of the black stuff—  
foggy-headed, dripping with damp,  
where swirling ghosts of bog bodies  
dance and are then discarded  
like yesterday's news or a virgin martyr.

Do you know there's such a thing as bog butter—  
deliberately buried to preserve it in the cool,  
still edible centuries later?

I find it strange that I know this—  
but can't remember that poet's name.

# In the Shadow of Saints

Adele Evershed

I was born to a land of ruins  
of a Devil's Bridge and dying words  
where there are five types of fairies  
all with different names and mischiefs  
and where dragons grumble discontent  
in the mines of the earth  
or just coiled deep in your gut

There was even a remnant  
of a castle in my back garden—  
with dressed stones surrounding  
a heart-shaped courtyard  
and a dreaming of ash trees  
that eavesdropped on all my games  
of let's pretend

When I was Winefride  
the saint who lost her head  
to a Knight so full of his own import  
he couldn't fathom  
why a woman would choose a cloister  
over his killer charms, so he raised his sword  
and severed her from the world

Under a cave of whispering shadows  
I knelt, brushing the earth  
until the mud gleamed like copper  
stacking stones in a sacred circle  
offering dock leaves to soothe  
the stings of my little world  
and God was all around

But this was only make-believe  
now I know better—  
there is no romance in ruins  
only dust and disappointment  
(though men still struggle  
when a woman says ‘No’)  
and if God was truly all around  
why would shadows still drag us  
against our will  
into the darkness?

# I left God

Arvilla Fee

beneath soiled linen  
and balled up tissues.  
Like a toddler in a tantrum,  
I covered my ears  
after I heard the diagnosis  
and timeline of my life.  
Between treatments,  
my head above the toilet,  
the only prayer that escaped  
my lips was *Why?*  
I didn't raise my hands to God  
in praise or adoration  
but to show him clumps of hair  
mixed with peach shampoo.  
The preacher came to see me  
asked, are you a firm believer?  
I said I used to be, and he said,  
Why not now?  
I told him I was angry; he said  
that didn't change God's power.  
He was still the great physician,  
still King upon the throne.  
Then he lifted eyes to heaven  
and asked God to fill my room  
with His beloved presence,  
to hold my hand and let me know  
He'd never left my side.  
I felt the brush of angel wings  
and the faith of generations  
calm my broken spirit  
and take away my fear.

# A Lone Sheep Is a Dead Sheep

J.D. Isip

One cannot unhear what is overheard. Overuse of certain words is a [*synonym for kind*] of diagnosis. We make manifest in our repetition what it is we [*Google want*], a [*another word for man*], a little romance, even some [*tell me how to say hope in French*], which sounds hauntingly like the beginning of despair. It has come to this, asking for [*ChatGPT please give me more words for hope*] where you went wrong, where [*did you ever hear, "All who wander are not lost"?*] one might go to find a way [*bildungsroman sounds so, but it's as ordinary as*] to [*forgive me for repeating endure, again*] all of this [*thesaurus for loneliness: isolated, alone, friendless, outcast, forsaken*], where to rest your weary [*"uneasy lies the head"*]. Down the bar, just beneath the television din, [*another word for man, cowboy, shepherd, sweat around the collar*] tells [*maybe me, maybe the bartender, maybe the emptiness itself*] his well-rehearsed tale, "So, I say to him I can't sell you a single sheep..." and if only [*how to say God when you have doubts*] had been so [*synonym for merciful*], knowing how stupid and dependent, how prone to death the [*sheep, another word for men*] are when left [*Spanish for alone, masculine*], low. "Can I buy you another [*search chance, risk, game, strategy, win, lose, pay*]?" I feel like I'm dying out here.

# Mists of Time

Time trickles through my fingers | I dream of deeds I've  
planned | When I am gone, what will be left | a little pile of sand.  
*Lilian Stockton Edmonds, Untitled c. 1920 | b. 1884 | d. 1966*

Lilian Pomeroy Edmonds

My grandmother is calling me from the past. How much time do I have to return to the faith of my youth? The century-old, hidden poems I discovered in her Civil War desk are exquisite ones of lost love, wasted time, regret, and faith rattling against the bones of her memories as she lies in her grave.

Must I remember everything? Forgive all before I can return to my Father in heaven? Lord knows I cannot return to the one on earth—he died when I was only twenty-four. We scattered his ashes in his favorite boyhood creek in 1974. No grave to visit. He does not even have an urn with an angel praying over him like the one I found for my older sister. White clay guardian with hands clasped in front of her tiny wooden coffin as she rests beside my bed.

I say goodnight to Penelope every evening—along with offering a silent prayer I do not believe in anymore. I want her adored, kept safe, embraced until I arrive, should that happen. But I am in doubt as to any of it being real. Faith eludes me at the moment.

Writing in burgundy ink, I am my grandmother filling pages in a leather-wrapped journal packed with thick, handmade, linen paper. Only hers are crumbling and yellow with age—brittle skeletons of a life begun in 1884. A few of her lines scratched out and edited, but never shared. The poet urges me to take her place in my old age. To write, remember. Forgive myself for the paths I chose without discernment. Forgive those I have not been able to forget. I believe she is warning me.

“You must do this before you die,” she whispers. “You’ve abandoned your faith. Search again.”

Remembering the trials of Saint Teresa, who lost her faith for decades, I think, perhaps this is my test. It's just ... I don't believe that—not anymore. I believe my forgetting is a choice I make. To give up on the God I've spent half my life chasing and then leaving behind. Can I find the strength, the courage to believe once again what I can never know? Before my time is up.

Only a few years younger than my grandmother was when she died at age eighty-two, I might not have years to rekindle my faith—to believe without doubt, if such a thing is still possible for me. Maybe that is why my grandmother hounds me.

She begs me to pick up what she abandoned. She won't leave me alone.

“Write poetry, create short stories. Work out your memories on paper. Be brave. Do not quit the way I did when my beloved died. Believe again. Achieve what I could not. I have left you the path with my words.”

Stalling any longer is useless. Lilian the elder calls me to my task. Or perhaps, the gift of faith I was handed as a child is calling me back? It chased me when I was in my forties. Lost. Then after a while, I abandoned it for the second time. I suppose it doesn't matter which one of my ghosts I hear in my old age.

“Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” —*James 4:14 (Bible: English Standard Version)*

I must answer. It is time. Drifting on my grandmother's rose-water—the scent of my childhood, I bury my nose in the warmth of her neck. I am four years old, and for a moment, eyes closed, I remember faith. Believing without knowing. He waits for me to return to Him.

Can I hold on to faith one day at a time? I pray it will not matter in the end, as long as each time I fail, I try, yet again.



# At The Door

John RC Potter

You said to me:  
never again.  
I had heard it too often.  
I left you behind.  
In my past.  
Just a memory.  
Nothing more;  
nothing less.

Years ago, I was in Germany.  
In a place of shadows  
and death.  
At the door, there was a book to sign.  
Someone had written:  
*Never again! Never again!*  
But how can this be possible?;  
a world of hatred has begun again.

I have a dream;  
I have a hope.  
*God in Heaven!*  
*Never again!*

*Written in German and translated by the author into English*

# The Longest Day

Patrick Connors

Sunday Vigil Mass.

I am on my way  
to the summer edition of the  
holiday party I went to late last fall  
and I know I will not want  
to get up tomorrow morning.

This is the Sabbath celebration  
of The Body and Blood of Christ.  
In the preamble to this weekend's readings,  
I learn of the legend of a mother pelican  
who tore her own flesh to feed her young  
during a time of famine.

Children are starving in Gaza.  
And South Sudan. And Yemen.  
And Guatemala and Haiti.  
A whole generation on the brink of disaster.  
This civilization has failed  
if we can't take care of our most vulnerable.

In the Northern Hemisphere,  
today is the longest day of the year.  
There are days when the sun rises earlier,  
and others when it sets later.  
But the summer solstice  
has the most minutes of daylight.

Today is the longest day.  
For those of us who believe  
in a better world to come,  
the times we are living in seem  
as though they have lasted forever.  
Especially since we cannot know exactly when they will end.

# Brake pads

DS Maolalaí

it took him under 38 seconds.  
all I'd said was the brakes  
made a sound. did one circle  
shining a flashlight.  
then he described  
the noise I'd heard accurately

*“like metal was dragging  
out under the car, right?  
just after you left off the brake?”*  
he went into the office  
to write a receipt  
and told me come back  
in the morning.

sometimes I worry  
it's not any good  
writing poetry.

# The Street

Erin Jamieson

luke warm tomato soup  
& gooey grilled cheese  
wedged in our teeth  
with an artifice  
no cups of coffee  
can erase

When I'm  
at the edge  
of town,  
Aileen calls:

*It's getting dangerous  
out there, please  
come home*

home is not  
this town  
or my mother's

but the studio apartment  
Aileen & I share  
a place that smells  
like lilac & vanilla

# The Highway Home

Sharon Weightman Hoffmann

My house is near a highway  
lined with strip malls,  
cluttered with garish signage,  
an abundance of pawn shops,  
tattoo parlors, bars,  
block after block  
of graceless architecture.  
The day I left by ambulance,  
it was still ugly,  
but when I returned,  
my sternum stapled shut,  
how curiously beautiful  
the highway had become,  
how burnished with light.

# Such Love

Matthew White

These lustrous beams that warm my face  
Remind me of a bygone grace  
Within whose slipstream I have played,  
Without whom I'd have fully strayed.

Such love can never be outrun  
When there is always more to come.  
I smile as sunlight warms my cheeks,  
Exhale, then dare to re-believe

That such love is a love that such  
Restraint with which we knot ourselves  
Has ne'er on us sought to impose  
And weeps when we to love are closed.

We fragile, fickle, troubled hearts  
Have been reduced to wounded parts  
So let truth gird us like a glove  
For we are lovers loved by love.

# Ocean prayers

Rosalie Hendon

Water slides over your face  
Can you see me if you open your eyes?  
Call me, I'll come  
out from the umbrella's shade, into the surf  
Names on my lips, of every saint  
It's so easy to pray like this  
Fear making me a believer



# Season of Rebirth

Judy Lorenzen

Teach me, oh Spring, to be faithful like you—  
returning, again and again, after seasons of sorrow.  
Teach me to be like your beautiful blossoms,  
the spiderwort, a flower so perfect  
in its purple jewel-tone,  
attracting the butterflies of life,  
the prairie phlox, a magenta so pink,  
mothers drank its tea to ensure baby girls,  
or the wild cucumber,  
a vine so verdant, climbing upward towards heaven,  
spilling its flowing lush leaves  
downward from the highest treetops,  
like the fountain of life.  
Translate this sacred language of earth for me  
and roll away the stone of my ignorance,  
so I can understand and partake,  
and celebrate this holy season.

# Tornado Tarantella in Stranger, Texas

Lori Romero

Wild winds swallow huge gulps of lacewood leaves,  
then spit them out at a jittery swing set.  
Honeysuckle puckers for a spring shower,  
but the drops are heavy, pink lips torn.  
Weathervanes creak with urgency,  
plywood skitters along a chain link fence.  
Gusts pick over debris: one shoe,  
soup cans and a black hymnal. Dust devils  
scour smooth the bark of a Bigtooth Maple.

A parent cloud grows; snake-like fingers  
extend to prickle the earth. Hail slams  
like stomping shoes. Lawn chairs orbit  
the funnel, a crazy carousel. Cows bellow  
at the stench of thrashed tree roots and wet  
insulation. Corn explodes as if popping in hot oil.  
Glass crashes, bricks detonate, sirens scream.  
A quick lick of a tornado tongue  
slashes truss off the barn. An invisible vortex  
strikes an old garbage dump, picks up  
thousands of discarded tins,  
carries them away amid great clanging.

Down a flight of shoe-worn stairs,  
past the rows of peach preserve,  
cranberry compote, and the dressmaker's form  
in a gingham frock, the family  
holds a candlelight vigil. Butter sandwiches  
wait, dank air and calamine lotion  
permeate the room. Thin lips move  
together. Shadows slither  
across walls. Hearts beat at eagle speed as hands  
worry wrinkles in blankets,  
finding courage in Psalm 31:  
*"For thou art my rock and my fortress;  
therefore, for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me."*



**Journey nears** by Merlin Flower  
Digital photograph

# Summoning You

Ron Bearwald

The trees are still.  
Solemn in a way  
They are so silent.  
They've seen so much  
But refuse to say.  
The birch remembers  
Her hands on its white.  
Not here,  
But it's felt here.  
Souls reach you see.  
They travel invisibly  
And know home.

# A Shrine in the High Alps

Sarah Das Gupta

Here water falls over ancient stones  
as through the seasons the music changes  
In spring the notes reach a crescendo  
The snow in the high peaks begins to melt  
Rushes whisper the familiar prayers  
gathered from pilgrims through the centuries  
Patches of yellow celandine gleam  
like offerings left from ages past  
Pale primroses peep from their leafy sanctuaries  
A bunch of tiny violets lies at the Madonna's feet  
a child's tribute on the way to school  
Now at noon old women sit chattering  
a row of black birds, shawls fluttering in the wind  
A place of stillness in the dusk  
as the world spins around it.

# Two Portraits of Jesus

*His head and his hairs were white like wool,  
as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire.*  
—Revelation 1:14

William Ross

John is alone on rocky Patmos when he makes  
his famous portrait, the Lord descending from the sky  
wrapped in cloud, throated voice like waters rushing,  
telling John, *write what you see*.

John sees the blinding eyes, a hand holding stars,  
words like a sword cutting air. The portrait  
catches fire, ashes bearing witness. Seven winds  
stir the embers, lofting them.

My modest portrait done in paint shows  
two human feet, one bronze and planted firmly  
in the dirt, one translucent, hovering.

# Navigating Belief

William Ross

The hatch to the root cellar  
was in front of the wood stove  
in our old farm kitchen.  
Descending, it was cool  
and smelled of potatoes.

Scuttle to the attic is now  
in the ceiling of a third-  
floor bedroom, burning  
hot above. The smell of  
shingles and tar lingers there.

The nose is not a reliable guide  
to faith—the molten door  
to hell is below, the cool waft  
of heaven is reached  
through a small hole in the sky.



# Buddha in Wales

Louis Faber

Sitting cross legged  
I dance between mindfulness  
and Samadhi,  
slipping the unmarked boundary  
until engulfed by the void.  
Buddha crawls into my lap  
an utter stillness until  
she touches my cheek  
with sand paper tongue  
and kneads my chest  
with rhythmic paws.  
I run my fingers  
down her spine.  
We purr, wedded  
in perfect enlightenment.

# Meditation on God I

Sam Kerbel

The mad flower in your lapel  
Is unprepared for what I  
Am about to say

The pace of the street barrels  
Down like hay to the sea  
Swimming with strange alphabets

Some colored garland lies deep  
In the basin of your voice  
Uniting us in a way

Despite your reservations  
Being all macadam tongued  
Ensnared in the hunt

Those cheeks they lick so eagerly  
Might as well be murals  
To the Maker

I stayed with Him once  
The attics were absolutely  
Filled with

Twigs and snakes  
So pristine behind  
Glass

# Meditation on God II

Sam Kerbel

Darling stop treating  
Yourself this way  
Whatever this is  
Be unto yourself  
It is not Revelations  
Time does not end  
It only collapses  
Upon itself  
And is beautiful  
And only a phase

# Aspects of Faith

Nick Horgan

I

His faith in me is unwavering  
Why I shun the gift?

II

The world shouts, pleads, whispers -  
What I need  
is to be taught, inspired and comforted  
To navigate not succumb  
Give me headphones, not blinkers

III

It's there in the storm, my spine  
holding everything together  
But where does it go on days of success?  
Abandoned in noise and colour  
as if the two were oil and water  
Until the lonely grey descends  
and I'm holding fast again

IV

Taking risks, not reckless  
Aligned with purpose  
step by step

V

A rise of fortune and I forget  
a God who blesses at a stroke  
If only I could remember, all things change  
and yet eternity hasn't moved an inch

VI

I'm anchored on a chain  
which I lengthen, 'til I reach dangerous waters  
still connected as I turn away

VII

Sometimes you carried me, I saw the footprints  
And sometimes you led me, through minefields,  
always my shield and guide  
I wandered  
then felt the damage done  
mercy teaches compassion

VIII

From this scaffold I see the contours of history,  
And the tussle for my soul  
The path to paradise and the wolves at the door  
Where this me came from and where he could go

IX

The Spirit who gifts faith, acts by faith, and holds faith to account  
says stop trying to be, and draw closer.

# New Mercies

Noah Platz

Bitter winter mornings are like fall apples  
picked a little too soon  
crowding your tongue with sourness.

On one of these mornings, I  
drove a red four-wheeler to an island  
of alfalfa the sheep had missed.

Green bits of hay and white snow mixed together  
like a leprechaun's plaid jacket  
and it was beneath the manger I found him.

He was a black lamb  
buried in hay and a dusting of snow.  
I pulled him out,

He scampered off to find his mother.  
Was our meeting accidental,  
or was I somehow his angel?

# The Word for It Is Scrupulosity

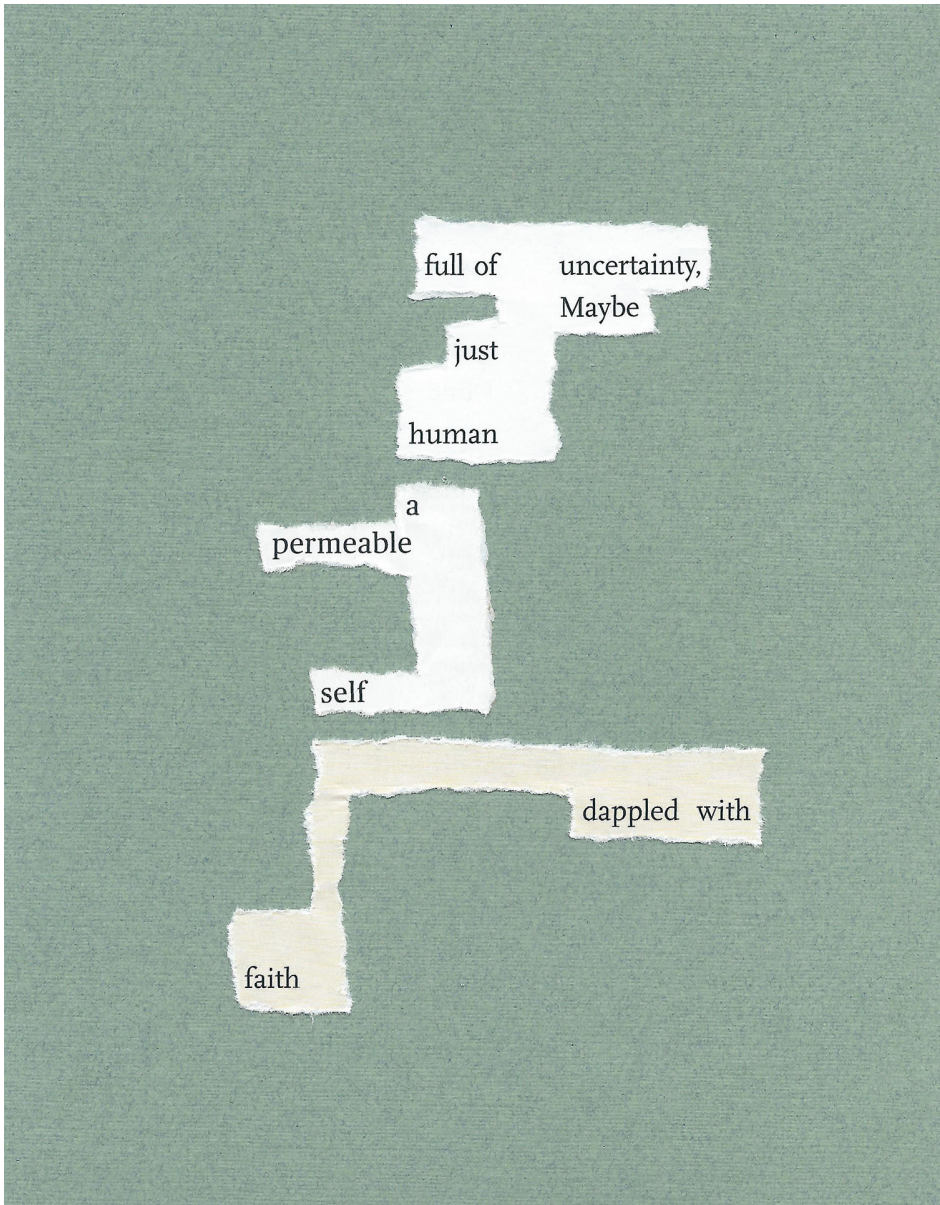
Jessica Whipple

--after "Losing My Religion" by REM

In a dark corner  
a song, a haunting:  
(from the radio) losing  
(a curse) my religion  
But let me say this about beauty:  
Even the ugliest thing  
knows it's there

full of uncertainty

J.I. Kleinberg





# Preface

Marie Anne Arreola

Your words slip down my skin like restless birds—  
fluttering colors I can't hold,  
meanings that dissolve before I catch them.  
I thought I was rounding a corner,  
but I'm still chasing your heels,  
toes nipping at the space between us,  
hands sticky with beer and guilt,  
painting me in shades I never asked for.

## If, I survived

Hulian Zhang

If—

I mean *if*  
if this kind of pain  
no longer haunted  
this world—

would my pain...  
disappear, too?

## Pearl and oyster

Hulian Zhang

Life gave me a grain of sand  
I made a pearl

In my chest, so soft, a quiet fold  
it hurt, for many years  
it hurt—

As the water of time flowed through me  
My blue tears merged into the sea  
No one will see the layers of becoming

From a grain of sand  
I made a pearl  
With a new sword called fate  
I opened the oyster—  
and claimed my world, inside

# 13 days

Alison P. Birch

on the 13 days, my best friend  
was in a coma  
I learned more about faith than all my Sundays in church  
I learned about —faith  
I learned about loss and grief  
I learned we don't always get  
what we want  
or what we feel we need  
I learned we might have  
the worst days of our lives  
I learned we might feel  
we will never recover  
I learned we may spend hours and days on the floor  
praying and coming undone  
begging our god for a miracle  
that our best friend,  
or child  
or the love of our life  
will wake up, be ok again  
and our faith keeps us going and may  
be renewed hundreds of times a day  
giving us strength, breath, and hope  
I learned that when it feels like hope runs out  
and maybe they don't wake up  
or won't be with us here  
ever again on earth  
faith can keep us going  
faith can fill us with peace that surpasses understanding  
faith may be  
the only thing that can

## In the Flesh

*"Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong."*  
– 2 Corinthians 12:10

Mary Grace Mangano

The limb that's healed will one day break again.  
My health is good to have, but it will fade  
Or will be taken, I know not when.

I press my palm to the empty space inside  
My heart and scream inside my car alone  
And burn my knees on carpet floor, a heap  
Of quiet, closed desire that's whittled slowly.

I see I'm nothing now but vessel, a string  
To pluck, an instrument where wind might come.  
The music only plays now and at my death.  
The music is the gift. My emptiness

Makes room for breath. How lovely to be used  
For Loveliness, how glorious that Glory  
Might love me in the flesh like this.

# Liturgy I

Galloway Stephens

I spend my Sundays talking with the dead,  
knowing our conversation is more or less  
one-sided, but nonetheless essential,  
a raft adrift on the Jordan or the Thames  
or the Mississippi River, held aloft by gathered tears  
of turtles, martyrs, angels, crocodiles, a testament  
to the endurance of the water and the word.  
The cord connecting us is part plumbline, part prayer,  
a lifeline long as ripples on the river that rolls into waves,  
the echoes of a pebble dropped at the fountainhead  
two thousand years ago, extending holy hands  
to touch my temples, bless my tombs, anoint my head.

# Sunday Mornings

Galloway Stephens

Mother tells me her grandmother made biscuits  
on a countertop from a formless void  
of White Lily flour, measuring with her hands  
and eyes. A kind of magic,  
those spells of buckwheat and butter.  
She'd summon biscuits from the flour,  
shaping them in her white, warm palms.  
My mother doesn't believe in her own magic,  
leveling her flour with the flat edge of a knife,  
measured and even as her heartbeat and her life.

Mother made biscuits in the freezer aisle.  
Every Sunday of my childhood,  
she baked a full dozen: uniform, anonymous.  
She apologized to the ghost of her grandmother  
while rolling the little cold moons in sugar and cinnamon,  
laying them in rows for the oven's mouth and mine.  
I woke to the ministry of biscuits and orange juice  
laid on a Technicolor quilt of comic strips.  
I bit into the memories my mother made from scratch,  
the only homily I know by heart.

# Anagoge

Sanjeev Sethi

Without stimuli, a conglomerate of verities  
meld into involute entities. All we ought  
to enroot is a conversation with the Creator.  
Diction is an offshoot.

Mantras that the Maharishi arrays are for him.  
Each has to beat the bushes for a blueprint.  
Hap hums it for us. It is no blad. Circumvention  
isn't a corrective.

The rhythm of the recondite has its emphasis.  
Erebus is one home. Others choose other abodes.  
The codes of faith coordinate it as the unmoored  
confront another crepuscule.

# Fallback Plan

Shane Schick

But if we could put the leaves back on,  
would it be with the happiness of doctors  
electing to perform cosmetic surgeries,  
or with the weariness of proofreaders  
correcting all the same old mistakes?  
To say nothing of the leaves themselves,  
uneasily trying to measure the distance  
between limb and lawn, a leap of faith  
being inevitably longer the second time,  
when it is made straight into the known.



# temple seeking behavior

Beau Maibaum

naked under this bridge  
I wash my underwear  
and shirt and let them  
dry in the sun as I dry myself.

the bridge's shadow  
will wander over me,  
but there is still time.  
I rub my antlers

against the willow's bark,  
they will go  
as they go every year  
but there is still time.

I have much to learn yet.  
I know only of what the  
wind tells me, soft  
and spring-fresh

raising the hairs  
on my scarred chest. I hear  
children playing  
downstream.

I know it will be well,  
what comes.  
It has to be.

# Questions of Constancy

Terry Trowbridge

The defenestrated glow of indoors begins  
to light the cold street pavement where I walk.  
Today is the first day that sundown was later than 6pm.

Today, one imperturbable cloudbank stayed up until now.  
Indirectly, the sky is still lucent enough to blue the stars away.  
I wonder if tomorrow's colours will be painted by the same painter as today's.

The painter changes the weather; I wonder if  
tomorrow they'll acknowledge the same promises,  
remember promises have been kept. Are there any still to keep?

Unfinished business starts to freeze in oncoming streetlights their electric  
shadows.

Ice is formed in the hairsbreadth between sun and stars,  
in the sound of my footsteps, a few commuters coming home.

January locks in the sounds of highway suburbanism.  
Ice takes the form of light refracted through vinyl-edged panes  
(ice does not hear me walk past, nor the commuters

who will keep their schedules tomorrow  
in my time- and rime-frozen footprints).

# Knock, Knock - Lord's Prayer

Peter Lilly

Knock, knock.

*Who's there?*

Someone.

*Someone who?*

Someone      who bears your image  
                  who, in a world of absent fathers  
                  has been told to call you father  
                  in heaven,  
                                not here.

With all your heavenly otherness,  
                  your purity is approaching,  
                  it is      the slow rumble of heavy  
                                steel on distant tracks,  
                  a whispered prayer, barely spoken  
                                amidst the echoes of a high-ceilinged cathedral,  
                  the throbbing digital line showing  
                                the slow progress of a delayed package,  
                  a circled square  
                                in the month-grid of time:  
  a birthday, a deadline,  
  an ultimatum, a due date,  
  a funeral, a revolution,  
  a wedding, an eclipse,  
  spring cleaning, a first,  
  a last,  
                  approaching like a father,  
                                woken by his child's cry,  
                                dodging the right angles of  
                                wooden furniture as  
                                he makes his familiar way

Someone      who   gets   in the dark.  
                 who   gets   hungry  
                 gets   muddy  
                 gets   mad  
                 distracted  
                 loses his way.

Yet in a world that is wholly yours  
I will never be lost  
to the vastness of your proximity  
that stays, like expensive perfume  
sticking to inside of my nostrils.

# the bag of assholes

Alexis Rhodes

“Mom, will you help me open this bag of assholes?”  
his innocent face  
softening the startling question as he  
dangled a bag of bright red  
apples.

my jaw dropped in shock,  
then erupted with laughter.

age eight, eyes wide: “Mom, what’s so funny?”

do i  
shoot this sweet cherub into my  
adult world and  
make him human?  
feed him this *asshole* of knowledge  
and spoil him, soil him?  
let him in  
on the joke  
and break a tiny piece of his heart?

or do i  
let him have  
one more minute in the dark  
where children’s teeth are fairy-bait  
adult mouths sweeten their words like candy  
around little ears  
and kids say  
the darndest things?

i choose to crack him just a little because  
soon

YouTube will do it for me  
and i'd rather share a smile  
than hide him from a world  
that will do everything in its power  
to destroy him  
before i can teach him how  
humor makes sense  
of chaos.

“honey, i thought you said ‘assholes.’”

whenever we see apples  
we still laugh about it  
together.

# faith

Alexis Rhodes

atheism is a comfort.  
no threat, no unknown.  
but i would pray  
for an encore life  
with you.

find you in the in-between, where  
we could lay  
openly  
coiled together.  
it can't *be* in this lifetime, but  
i'd take the risk of hell  
to believe *just a little*  
in a thousand years more  
with you.

dancing on starlight, little prince meetings  
deep in the Sahara.  
train rides through the Orient  
or two beetles in some  
elephant dung.

i would sacrifice my  
lack of faith  
if i had faith  
i'd spend a little more time  
with you.

# My Heaven

Maria Nobile

Where love is all encompassing  
Where souls unite in their search for truth and light  
Where spirits are of equal mind  
Guided by principles throughout their lives  
In honor of You,  
God.



# Give Us This Day

Terri Watrous Berry

Seems I have so little left to say,  
nothing left to burn or prove  
as Seger said, finding  
nothing in this life  
that is more profound  
than daily bread and nightly bed.

# Tongue

Terri Watrous Berry

Be still inside  
my mouth, oh  
angry tongue,  
wicked tongue,  
don't whisk  
this away  
with your pink  
and narrow broom.



**Be Still** by Silje Lilly  
Digital photograph

# When you move,

Laura Reece Hogan

I breathe. When I breathe,  
I find you have moved, though I lag. You move  
and I catapult through a trajectory of zest. I am flimsy  
to futile, *wanting*

in both senses, but your pervading spice  
scents my room. Kiss my hunger where you please,  
feed me an orchard. Your halo a wormhole, lancing  
eyes so bright they are here

and far away, core of a star.  
The apricot tree slumped, expired branch by branch,  
bark shedding in sheets. Then up from the root those twins,  
saplings rising centimeters,

leaning into one another, luxuriant,  
upright tangle of emerald, one in their noiseless growth.  
I couldn't cut it down, it meant too much to me,  
the dead wood,

a ghostly tatter. When you move,  
you take the rot down to the root, the stump clean.  
I breathe green, glint gold, sink into the sweet grasses  
of our blue glade—*You don't need*

*what you think you need.* Your words seesaw  
and telescope, an accordion, an accord shining  
between us. Your music hushes. The portal rushes.  
I teeter.

# A Sign that Contradicts

Laura Reece Hogan

To awake—staggered in the night  
to hear the line unspool in me,  
crystalline thread

between heaven and earth. This tiny  
glass may crack or  
scorch in the sun, yet angles

in your hand. All the world strains  
to see the path of flash  
just there past your stars.

What are we to you that you come  
to our nothingness, pour molten gold  
on rags, majesty

on organic frames, leaves  
half red, ready to rot?  
We cannot grasp a single filament.

Let me sway  
the way unseen, totter on ordinary  
silences. Was there ever a truth

or paradox not also skipped of time,  
belonging only to you?  
We contrive, we strive to hear—

and underneath, patient with the fret  
and wobble  
of our exhausted, fickle humanity—

you,  
the invisible tightrope forward.

# It's in the Little Things

Jolynne Mallory

I know my toothbrush will be there in the morning.  
My hair will be curly after I braid it.

I don't put my hand on the stovetop when it's on.  
Heat doesn't have a face.

I know the crickets will whistle to the moon,  
and the birds will sing the sun awake.

Does lightning ever question thunder?  
Will fire ever get along with water?

# Prayer For My 84th Year

David Lewitzky

Lord, Let me live

I have my doubts  
About your mercy. Qualms  
About your good intentions

Lifelong lecher that I am  
Can't do much about that anymore

I'm pretty weak. My balance ain't so hot  
My eyes are bad. My hearing's shot  
I've bloody stools  
My hands and feet are icy  
I'm haunted by mementos mori

Lord, I want to live  
At least a decade more  
I still have lots to say

My ass and one foot's in the grave  
But the other foot's  
My kicking foot

And my heart is in the gravy

# You Must Have Hope

David Lewitzky

Friendless or deserted  
Have hope

Believe I'll build your nest  
Your igloo

Believe I'll be your gate  
From solitude to sleep

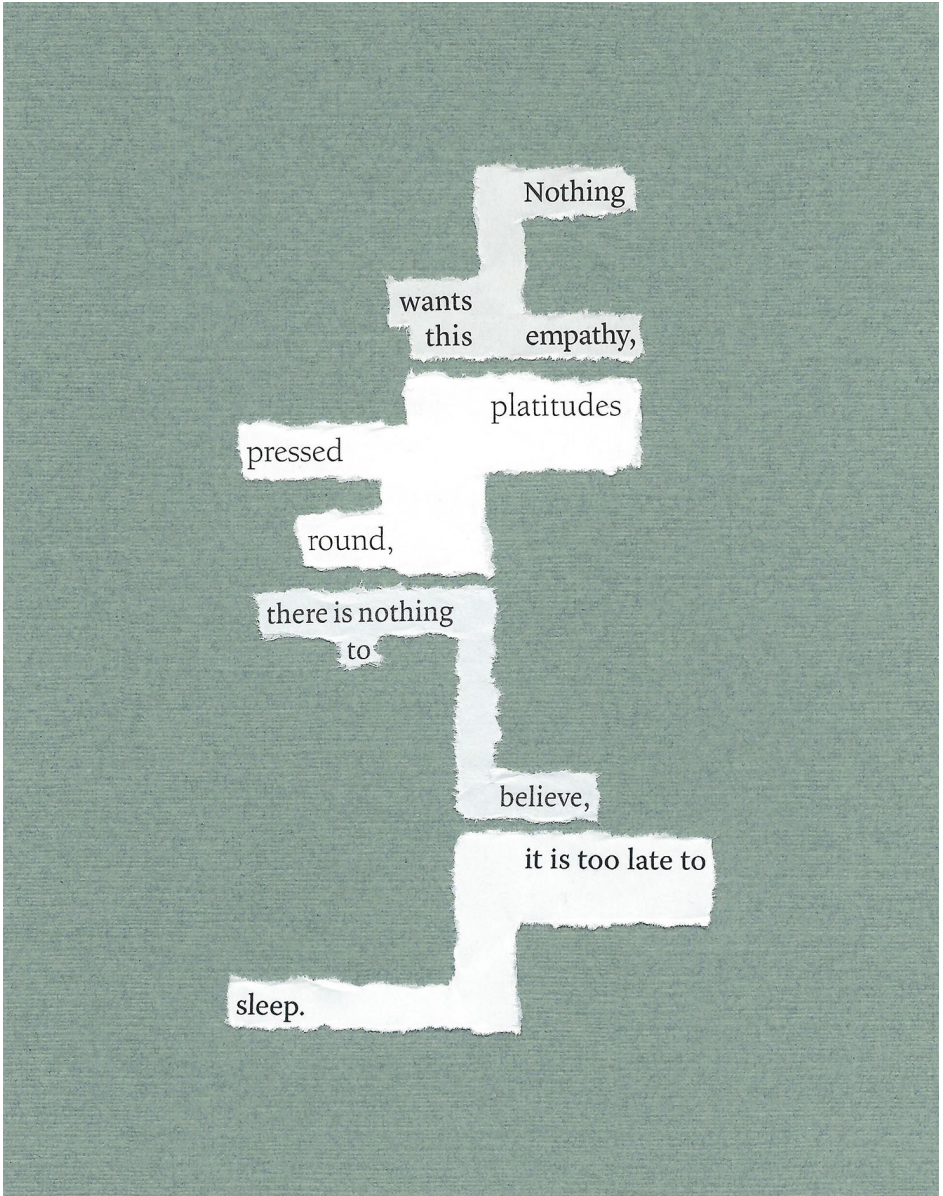
Trust in fog and furnace  
Believe I'll watch you through the night

Fevered, deep  
Immaculate



# Nothing

J.I. Kleinberg





# Climbing the Ladder Home

inspired in part by Georgia O'Keeffe's painting *Ladder to the Moon*

dedicated to John P Castelli, 1916 - 2004

Mary Castelli

a wooden ladder floats in a turquoise sky  
deepening to indigo, like eyes approaching nightfall

the ladder points to a half moon  
suspended between here and not here

a scientist who studied the sun's activities   solar flares   the darkness  
of eclipses, my father understood the half moon

the gap between light and light's reflection  
the faltering space between the attained

and the ungrasped rung above  
the chasm between salty perspiration   and cool celestial space

my father's hands were calloused from the climb

at 72 he walked a tall ladder home  
his car in the shop, his ladder in his son's garage five miles away

hoisted it over his shoulder   started toward home  
a chore of painting windows perched above the yard

at 89 he tended his failing wife   his gardens   his memories  
dreamed he saw his brother, dead in the war, walking up the gravel drive

the week before his final hospitalization a mailing came:

Eye has not seen   Ear has not heard

What God has in store for those that love him

he climbed the ladder home

# The Misgivings of Obituaries

J. J. Steinfeld

At the end  
will it be the simplicity  
or the complexity of being  
that edits the text of one's life  
of what has gone before  
of what is remembered  
of what is forgotten  
of the plentiful formulas  
of the blank pages  
that occupy the mind  
clarify or blur the vision  
even if you whisper  
the words at the end  
or shout at the end  
will that transform anything  
provide a few additional moments  
of simplicity or complexity  
alone or surrounded  
visible or invisible  
you will anticipate  
your final breath  
that sound, that symphony  
but hear nothing.

# The Biodiversity of Graveyards

David Kenny

In the height of summer, before the blessing  
of the graves, flowers and wreaths on graves  
wither, wilt, rot, decompose. The grassy paths  
up and down the graveyard are in need of cutting.

Wafer thin butterflies and fat, buzzing bumblebees  
hover and drift, collecting precious pollen from  
daisies, buttercups, clovers, cuckoo flowers;  
the soil beneath enriched by a loved one's bones.

At night, solar powered ornaments illuminate  
the graveyard, calling moths to L.E.D. flames.  
Bats find their way in the rural dark to the feast.  
Mice and rats devour rotting graveside flowers,

unaware of waiting owls, those graveyard screechers,  
hiding in the towering yew tree. In the morning,  
the grass is cut, graves are tidied for the blessings.  
Mourners greet each other with talk of banshees.

# Image

Peter Lilly

Image of the invisible God,  
Give me eyes to see The  
Image of the invisible God, give me eyes to see The

Utterance of the ineffable Word,  
Give me ears to hear The  
Utterance of the ineffable Word, give me ears to hear The

Living Parable, salt the plankton in  
My drowning heart to illumine The  
Living Parable, salt the plankton in My drowning heart to illumine The

Flesh Psalm, soften my grinding cogs  
That my living may harmonise with The  
Flesh Psalm, soften my grinding cogs That my living may harmonise with The

Oh ever unfolding mystery,  
Oh map of inexhaustible detail  
Detailing a living land  
That defies familiarity  
In all but love,

Oh great poet, re-write me

Let me be the line of a limerick  
You mumble to yourself  
When you are feeling  
cheeky.

# Contributor Biographies

**Tracie Adams** writes short fiction and memoir from her farm in rural Virginia. She is the author of the essay collection, *Our Lives in Pieces*. Find her at [tracieadamswrites.com](http://tracieadamswrites.com).

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**Ron Bearwald** is a career educator, administrator, trainer, mentor, writer, and life-long learner. Published works include: *Life Lessons of the Trail: Hiking as a Metaphor for Life* (Natural Life) and *It's About the Questions: Effective Coaching Thrives Not on Quick Fixes and Ready Answers, but on Questioning and Listening* (Educational Leadership).

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

**Terri Watrous Berry's** work has appeared widely and is upcoming in *Monterey Poetry Review*, *London Arts Based Research Centre's Indelible*, and *Red Wolf's Recovering Greenness Anthology*. She lives in Michigan with her husband, an accomplished luthier.

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**Patrick Connors'** first chapbook, *Scarborough Songs*, was released by *Lyricalmyrical Press* in 2013, and charted on the Toronto Poetry Map. Recent publications include *Spadina Literary Review* and *Dissident Voice*. His collections include *The Other Life* (Mosaic Press 2021) and *The Long Defeat* (Mosaic Press 2024). [facebook.com/patrick.j.connors.3](https://facebook.com/patrick.j.connors.3) Instagram: [@patjtconnors](https://twitter.com/patjtconnors) Twitter: [@81912CON](https://twitter.com/81912CON) Bluesky: [@81912con.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/81912con.bsky.social)

**Sarah Das Gupta** is a writer from near Cambridge, UK whose work has been published in over twenty countries in many magazines and anthologies.

An inveterate wanderer, **Lilian Edmonds** writes poetry and creative nonfiction. Her most recent work appeared in *Fifty-Word Stories*, *Planet Paragraph*, and *Accidental Magazine*. @wavingfromadistance

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**Louis Faber** is a poet and writer living in Florida with his wife and their cat. He is a retired Corporate Attorney and college English Literature Instructor. He has been widely published in the US, Canada, Europe, and Asia including in *The MacGuffin* and *Passager Journal*. His most recent collection, *Free of the Shadow* was published by *Plain View Press*.

**Joseph Fasano** is the celebrated author of many books of poetry and prose, including *The Last Song of the World* (*BOA Editions*) and *The Magic Words* (*Penguin Random House / Tarcher*). X: @Joseph\_Fasano\_ Insta: @joseph.fasano @josephfasano.bsky.social josephfasano.net

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**Laura Reece Hogan** is a poet from California. She is the first-year poetry mentor for the new Whitworth MFA program and her work has most recently appeared in *St. Katherine Review* and *Crab Creek Review*. [www.laurareecehogan.com](http://www.laurareecehogan.com).

**Nick Horgan** co-leads the Pinner Writers Group in NW London, and has two collections published - *Breathing Underwater* and *Memories of Time Travel* [ <https://tslbooks.uk/product/memories-of-time-travel-nick-horgan/> ], and an occasional blog [ <https://wotseotm.blogspot.com/> ]

**J.D. Isip**'s collections include *Reluctant Prophets* (Moon Tide Press 2025), *Kissing the Wound* (Moon Tide Press 2023), and *Pocketing Feathers* (Sadie Girl Press 2015). He is the editor for the upcoming anthology, *American Pop Culture Almanac: 1776-2026* (Moon Tide Press 2026). J.D. teaches in South Texas where he lives with his dogs, Ivy and Bucky.

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**Bethany Jarmul** is an Appalachian writer, poet, writing coach, and workshop instructor. She's the author of a poetry collection, *Lightning Is a Mother* and a memoir, *Take Me Home*. Her work has appeared widely, including *Rattle, Brevity*, and *Salamander*. Her writing was selected for *Best Spiritual Literature* and *Best Small Fictions*. Connect with her at [bethanyjarmul.com](http://bethanyjarmul.com) or on social media: @BethanyJarmul.

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**David Lewitzky** is a retired social worker/family therapist living Buffalo, NY. He has been published widely in such places as *Nimrod*, *Passages North*, and *Seneca Review*. His friends and family will tell you that he's a good egg. At least his family will. I'm not too sure about his friends.  
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**Peter Lilly** is a British poet, living in the South of France. You can find him at twitter: [@peterlillypoems](#), or Bluesky: [@plpoetry.bsky.social](#)

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**Judy Lorenzen** is a poet, writer, and teaching artist. Her first book *Turning Back to Her Love Pages* was published in June 2025. She is looking for a home for her second book, *Seasons of Reverence*. Her work appears in journals, magazines, anthologies and websites.

**Beau Maibaum** is a queer writer living in Thuringia, Germany. Beau's last publication was a science fiction short story in the magazine *queer\*welten*. Handles: [beaumaibaum.de](#) // [@birkenperson](#) (Instagram)

**Jolynne Mallory** is currently a sophomore at Corban University majoring in creative writing.

**DS Maolalaí** has been described by one editor as “a cosmopolitan poet” and another as “prolific, bordering on incontinent”. His work has been nominated thirteen times for BOTN, ten for the *Pushcart* and once for the *Forward Prize*, and released in three collections; *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden*” (*Encircle Press* 2016), *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (*Turas Press* 2019) and *Noble Rot* (*Turas Press*, 2022).

**Sophia Man** (萬明慧) is a writer, researcher and community organiser based in London, UK. Her poetry features in the anthology *Hiding in the Sea from the Rain*. [@sophiamingwai](#)



**Mary Grace Mangano** is a writer, poet, and teacher from New Jersey. She is an associate editor at *New Verse Review* and her poems recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Subtropics*, *JARFLY*, and *Ektasis*. [marygracemangano.wordpress.com](http://marygracemangano.wordpress.com)

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**Noah C. Platz** is a Senior at Corban University studying creative writing. He grew up on a small farm in eastern Oregon and became a pastor's son when his father started a church just before covid. He won third place for best poetry at Corban's Fusion Art Show, and has been published in Willamette University's magazine *Pomelo Pulp*.

**John RC Potter** is from Canada and currently residing in Istanbul. The author has a gay-themed children's picture book that is scheduled for publication. He is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. [johnrcpotterauthor.com](http://johnrcpotterauthor.com) Twitter: @JohnRCPotter

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**William Ross** is a Canadian writer and visual artist living in Toronto. His poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Amethyst Review*, and others. He is

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**Jaden Schapiro** is a writer and poet from New York. Their work has recently appeared in *Pamenar* (UK), *Biscuit Hill*, and *Collision*. Their creative essay *Children of the Barcode* won the 2025 Laura Adelina Ward Prize. @jadenschapiro

**Shane Schick** has had poems published in journals across Canada, the U.S., the U.K., Africa, and India. He guest-edited *Grace Notes*, *Paddler Press* Vol. 9. He lives in Whitby, ON. [ShaneSchick.com/poetry](http://ShaneSchick.com/poetry)

**Sanjeev Sethi** has published eight poetry books. He lives in Mumbai, India. He has guest-edited *Fictile Feelings*, a poetry special for the Kolkata-based *The Hooghly Review*. It will release on October 3, 2025.

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**J. J. Steinfeld** lives on Prince Edward Island (Epekwitk), where he is patiently waiting for Godot's arrival and a phone call from Kafka. While waiting, he has published 25 books, including *Acting on the Island* (Stories, *Pottersfield Press*, 2022), *As You Continue to Wait* (Poetry, *Ekstasis Editions*, 2022), and *My Post-Holocaust Second Generation Voice: History / Memory / Identity* (Poetry, *Ekstasis Editions*, 2025).

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Our site is divided into canoeing-themed pages: *The Put In* is where the trip begins. *The Trip Log* is a reminder of where we've been, the details of *The Journey*. *The Portage* is where we get out of our boats, stretch our legs, and carry our junk to the next put in. *The Campfire* is where we drink coffee, tell stories (for the umpteenth time), laugh together, and many times, just sit and reflect.

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*I felt the brush of angel wings  
and the faith of generations  
calm my broken spirit  
and take away my fear.*

*from I left God*  
by Arvilla Fee



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