

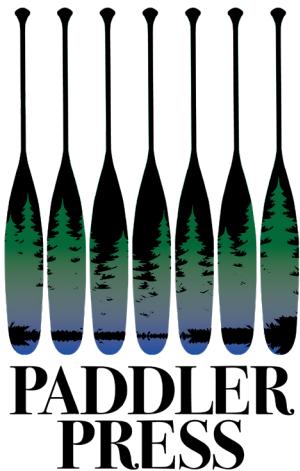
A photograph of a forest path in autumn. The ground is covered with fallen leaves, mostly in shades of brown, tan, and yellow. The trees are tall and dense, with many leaves having turned yellow or orange. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

Faith

Paddler Press Volume 15

Paddler Press

Volume 15 - Faith



October 1, 2025

Copyright © 2025 Canoe Ideas & Contributors

All Rights Reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without prior permission from the editors/authors.

Extracts may be quoted on social media or for review purposes.

Paddler Press

Peterborough/Nogojiwanong, Ontario

paddler@canoeideas.ca paddlerpress.ca @paddlerpress
paddlerpress.bsky.social

Established 2021

ISBN: 978-1-7381917-6-5

Front Cover Art: *Autumn Path*

Back Cover Art: *Morning Light*

by Heather J. Robertson

Printed in Canada by DigiPrint
digiprint.com

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



Table of Contents

Foreword, 3

Silje Lilly - *Beyond*, 6

Bethany Jarmul - *In the Beginning was the Word & A March Snow Shower Reminds Me to Pray for Our Children*, 7

Peter Lilly - *You're Telling Me*, 9

Janina Aza Karpinska - *God's Spoken Word & A Lesson In Trust From Old Stone Face*, 10

J.I. Kleinberg - *divine*, 12

Daithí Kearney - *April Showers*, 13

Marya Smith - *April Snow*, 14

Liv Ross - *The Birthday Party, A One-Sided Covenant, & Another Kind of Blessing*, 15

Jeff Rensch - *Morning*, 18

Sophia Man - *Medusa*, 19

John Peter Beck - *The Children's Author*, 20

Titilayo Matiku - *Communion of Hearts and Hands*, 21

Leanne McClements - *A Walk in February & Kindness*, 22

Olivia Koutsky - *Fairy Flowers*, 24

Jaden Schapiro - *It Stands Before Me, Enormous, and i can't help but know to be hit*, 25

Joseph Fasano - *Van Gogh's Room*, 27

Silje Lilly - *To Life*, 28

Tracie Adams - *Beautiful Things*, 29

Sharisa Aidukaitis - *Wandering*, 31

Strider Marcus Jones - *Old Cafe*, 32

Adele Evershed - *Boggled & In the Shadow of Saints*, 33

Arvilla Fee - *I Left God*, 36

J.D. Isip - *A Lone Sheep Is a Dead Sheep*, 37

Lilian Pomeroy Edmonds - *Mists of Time*, 38

John RC Potter - *At the Door*, 40

Patrick Connors - *The Longest Day*, 41

DS Maolalaí - *Brake Pads*, 42

Erin Jamieson - *The Street*, 43

Sharon Weightman Hoffmann - *The Highway Home*, 44

Matthew White - *Such Love*, 45

Rosalie Hendon - *Ocean Prayers*, 46

Judy Lorenzen - *Season of Rebirth*, 47

Lori Romero - *Tornado Tarantella in Stranger, Texas*, 48

Merlin Flower - *Journey Nears*, 49

Ron Bearwald - *Summoning You*, 50

Sarah Das Gupta - *A Shrine in the High Alps*, 51

William Ross - *Two Portraits of Jesus & Navigating Belief*, 52

Louis Faber - *Buddha in Wales*, 54

Sam Kerbel - *Meditation on God I & Meditation on God II*, 55

Nick Horgan - *Aspects of Faith*, 57

Noah Platz - *New Mercies*, 59

Jessica Whipple - *The Word for It Is Scrupulosity*, 60

J.I. Kleinberg - *full of uncertainty*, 61

Marie Anne Arreola - *Preface*, 62

Hulian Zhang - *If, I survived & Pearl and Oyster*, 63

Alison P. Birch - *13 Days*, 64

Mary Grace Mangano - *In the Flesh*, 65

Emma Galloway Stephens - *Liturgy I & Sunday Mornings*, 66

Sanjeev Sethi - *Anagoge*, 68

Shane Schick - *Fallback Plan*, 69

Beau Maibaum - *temple seeking behavior*, 70

Terry Trowbridge - *Questions of Constancy*, 71

Peter Lilly - *Knock, Knock - Lord's Prayer*, 72

Alexis Rhodes - *the bag of assholes & faith*, 74

Maria Nobile - *My Heaven*, 77

Terri Watrous Berry - *Give Us This Day & Tongue*, 78

Silje Lilly - *Be Still*, 79

Laura Reece Hogan - *When you move & A Sign that Contradicts*, 80

Jolynne Mallory - *It's in the Little Things*, 82

David Lewitzky - *Prayer For My 84th Year & You Must Have Hope*, 83

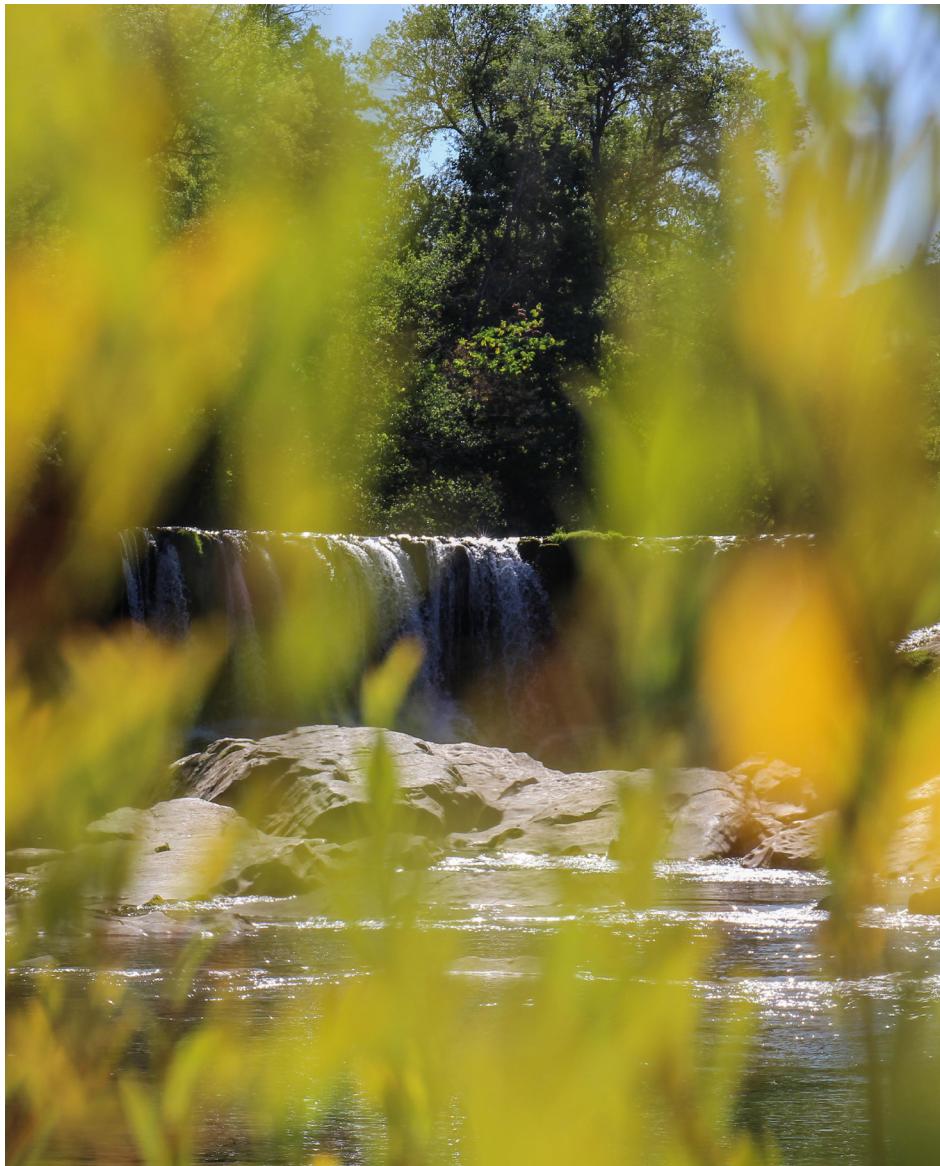
J.I. Kleinberg - *Nothing*, 85

Mary Castelli - *Climbing the Ladder Home*, 86

J. J. Steinfeld - *The Misgivings of Obituaries*, 87

David Kenny - *The Biodiversity of Graveyards*, 88

Peter Lilly - *Image*, 89



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

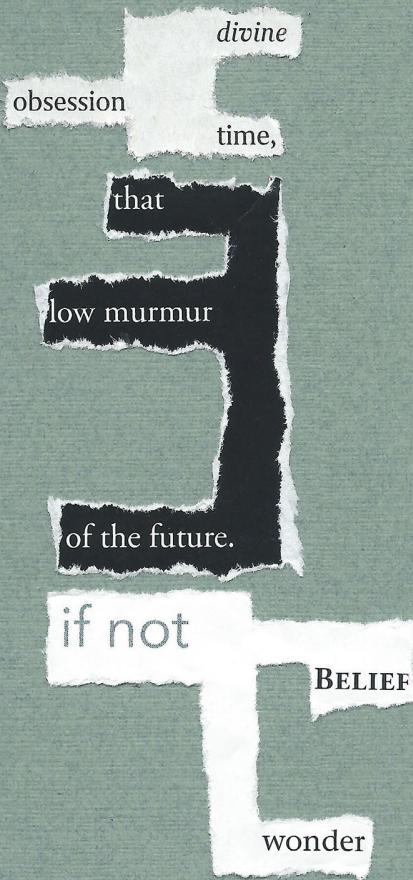
stands alone in the foreground as the front
of the building falls down around him -

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



divine
obsession time,
that
low murmur
of the future.
if not
BELIEF
wonder

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 jiggly jalopy 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 lichen 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 clang.

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

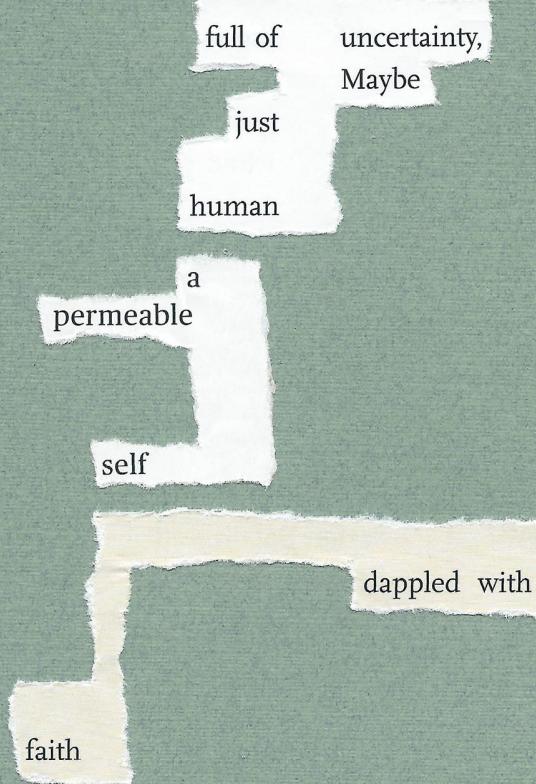
Jessica Whipple

--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



full of uncertainty,
Maybe
just
human
a
permeable
self
dappled with
faith

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.

Anagogue

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

in the dark.
Someone who gets hungry
 who 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

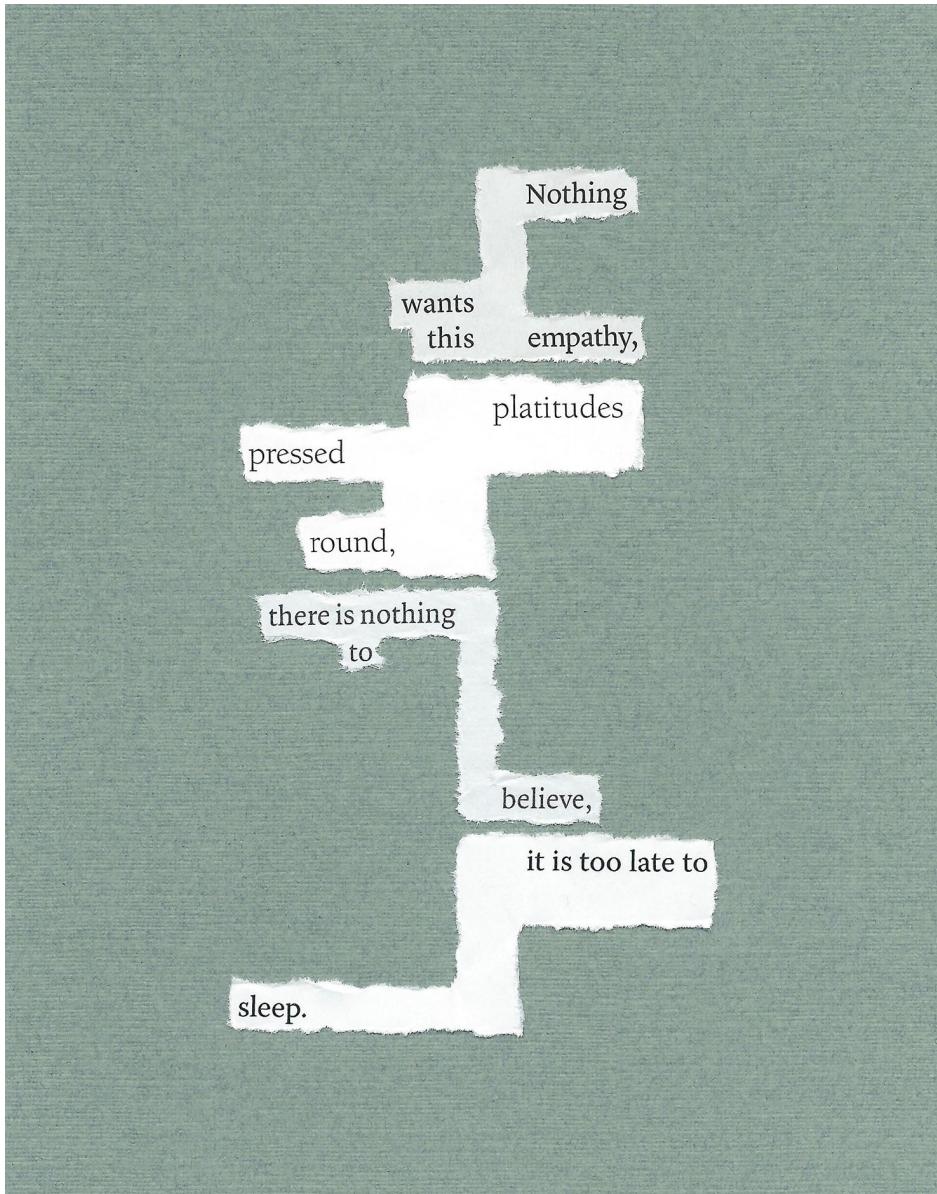
Believe I'll be your gate
From solitude to sleep

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

Sharisa Aidukaitis is a writer and college educator located in upstate New York. Her work has appeared most recently in *Sublimation*.
[@drsharisa.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/drsharisa.bsky.social)

Marie Anne Arreola is a writer from Sonora, Mexico. She is the founder and EIC of *PROYECTO VOCES*. Her work has appeared in *Latina Media Co.*, *Hypermedia Magazine*, and *Lucky Jefferson. Sparks of the Liberating Spirit Who Trapped Us Back in Woodstock* (Foreshore Publishing) came out this year.

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.

Alison Birch is a poet from WA State. She is a teacher of Literacy. Her works have recently appeared in *Paddler Press* and *Texas Poetry*.
[@irishali13.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/irishali13.bsky.social) / Irishali13@x.com

Mary Castelli lives in Hollis, NH. She is a retired public service lawyer, a lover of libraries and former Library Trustee. She has previously been published in *Touchstone* and *Smoky Quartz Journal*. She belongs to the Percheron Poets.

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 Instagram: [@patjconnors](https://Instagram.com/@patjconnors) Twitter: [Twitter: @81912CON](https://Twitter.com/@81912CON) Bluesky: [@81912con.bsky.social](https://Bluesky.com/@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](#)

Adele Evershed is a Welsh writer living in Connecticut. Her work has appeared in *Poetry Wales*, and *The Ekphrastic Review* among others. She is the author of two poetry collections—*Turbulence in Small Spaces* (*Finishing Line Press*) and *The Brink of Silence* (*Bottlecap Press*)—with a third, *In the Belly of the Wail*, forthcoming from *Querencia Press*.

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](#)

Arvilla Fee lives in Dayton, Ohio. She has been in over 100 publications and has three published poetry books. For more visit [www.soulpoetry7.com](#).

Merlin Flower is an independent artist and writer.

Rosalie Hendon is a poet living in Columbus, Ohio. She is published in *Chiron Review*, *Inverted Syntax*, *Cosmic Daffodil*, *Flora Fiction*, and elsewhere and published her debut chapbook, *The Black Between the Stars*, in 2025.

Sharon Weightman Hoffmann is a writer based in Atlantic Beach, Florida. Publications include *New York Quarterly*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives* (*Harvard University*). Awards include fellowships from Atlantic Center for the Arts and Florida's Division of Cultural Affairs, and two Pushcart nominations.

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](#).

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.

Erin Jamieson's writing has been widely published and recognized with two Pushcart Prize nominations. She is the author of four poetry chapbooks, including *Fairy Tales* (Bottle Cap Press) and a forthcoming poetry collection. Her debut novel (*Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams*) was published by Type Eighteen Books. X/Twitter: @erin_simmer

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 or on social media: @BethanyJarmul.

Strider Marcus Jones is a poet, law graduate and former civil servant from Salford, England with proud Celtic roots in Ireland and Wales. He is the editor and publisher of *Lothlorien Poetry Journal* lothlorienpoetryjournal.blogspot.com. Connect online: stridermarcusjonespoetry.wordpress.com

Janina Aza Karpinska is an artist-poet from the south coast of England, featured in many journals, with work forthcoming in *Clarion Poetry*, Issue 5 #Home.

Daithí Kearney is an Irish poet, lecturing in music at Dundalk Institute of Technology. and most recently published in *Drawn to the Light*. @dceol

David Kenny lives in Wicklow, Ireland. He holds a BA in Film and Documentary from ATU Galway and Certificates in Creative Fiction and Poetry from Carlow College. His work is found in *Underbelly Press*, *Ragaire*, and *Crannog*.

Sam Kerbel's first chapbook, *Can't Beat the Price* (2025), is available from *Bottlecap Press*. He was shortlisted for the 2024 *Oxford Poetry Prize*.

J.I. Kleinberg lives in Bellingham, Washington, USA, where she tears words out of magazines and stares at them until they turn into poems. See more on Instagram [@jikleinberg](#)

Olivia Koutsky is an English tutor from California. She has a B.A. in Literature/Writing from U.C. San Diego, and this is her first published piece. Instagram: [@olivia.ok.4](#)

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.

david.lewitzky@verizon.net

Peter Lilly is a British poet, living in the South of France. You can find him at twitter: [@peterlillypoems](#), or Bluesky: [@plpoetry.bsky.social](#)

Silje Lilly is a French-Swiss-Norwegian multi-disciplinary artist and photographer, living in the South of France. You won't find her on socials, but for commissions or book cover inquiries you can reach her at siljegrace@gmail.com.

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: beumaibaum.de // [@birkenperson](#) (Instagram)

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

DS Maolalai 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 *Ekstasis*. marygracemangano.wordpress.com

Titilayo Matiku is a poet and story teller from Nigeria. Her work has appeared most recently in *Mouthful of Salt*. Twitter: @titilayodm

Leanne McClements is a poet from Oxford, UK, where she lives with her three sons and leads children's services and immersive song and story sessions.

Maria Nobile is a poet from New York City. She is a modern languages professor. She has been published recently in *Agape Review*. Twitter: MariaG.Nobilepoetry@gnovb2

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 Twitter: @JohnRCPotter

Jeff Rensch, Palo Alto, Calif, is a retired software developer, Twitter/X: @rensch95874

Alexis Rhodes (she/her) is a queer, polyamorous poet, playwright and performer based in North Carolina. Her work has appeared in *Action*, *Spectacle*, *The Wayfarer*, and more. Find her on Instagram at @alexis_writes_things.

Lori Romero is a poet currently residing in Brooklyn, NY. Her work most recently appeared in *The Sun* and *Santa Barbara Literary Journal*. @traipseness

Liv Ross is a poet and essayist from the Midwest of the United States. When not writing, Liv practices gardening, pipe-smoking, leather-working, and music. She can be found on Instagram @liv_ross_poetry, or her substack, <https://substack.com/@theabbeyofcuriosity>.

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

currently at work on a collection that explores his challenges with faith.

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](https://twitter.com/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

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 Hoogly Review*. It will release on October 3, 2025.

Marya Smith is a writer living in rural northwestern Illinois. Her essays and profiles have appeared in a variety of publications and her poetry most recently in *Passager*.

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).

Emma Galloway Stephens is a neurodivergent poet and professor from the Appalachian foothills of South Carolina. Work has appeared in *The Windhover*, *The Christian Courier (CA)*, *The Christian Century*, and others. She is a co-founder and the Educational Director of Arbor Institute for the Arts in Greenville, SC. Read more at egstephenspoetry.com.

Terry Trowbridge is a poet from the Niagara region of Canada, with a little funding from the Ontario Arts Council.

Matthew White is an Anglican priest, poet and songwriter based in West Sussex in the United Kingdom. His debut poetry collection, *Propelled into Wonder*, which spans themes of beauty, loss, and faith, was published in September 2024 to wide acclaim. You can connect with Matthew by subscribing to Idle and Blessed Poetry on Substack and via his website: matthewwhite.online.

Jessica Whipple lives in Pennsylvania. She is the author of two children's picture books and numerous poems, published in print and online literary magazines. [AuthorJessicaWhipple.com](https://@JessicaWhipple17)

Hulian Zhang is a bilingual poet & writer, researcher, and entrepreneur. Her work has appeared in journals across North America and Asia, including *Moist Poetry Journal* and *The Other Girls* (formerly *Vice China*). She is also the author of *Windmill: Poetry and Paintings*. @HulianZ_



At *Paddler Press*, we are outdoors people. Please visit paddlerpress.ca for new releases and to read our previous titles. Your purchases and donations help support the publication of new poetry, CNF, and art.

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.

We run contests from time to time and encourage you to search out the secret prizes hidden on our site. We nominate for the *Pushcart Prize* and work is considered for the *Best of Canadian Poetry (Biblioasis)*. Thank you to those who voted us Peterborough's Best Book Store last year in the Readers' Choice Awards. We're listed on Chill Subs and CLMP.



Turn over a new
stanza.

The **FIDDLEHEAD**

Atlantic Canada's International Literary Journal

ENTER OUR 2025 POETRY CONTEST
OPENS: SEPT. 1 | DEADLINE: DEC. 1, 2025

Enter via [Submittable](#)

JUDGED BY:



**BERTRAND
BICKERSTETH**



T. LIEM



**DOUGLAS
WALBOURNE-
GOUGH**

+ PLUS PUBLICATION

**\$2000
Prize!**

THEFIDDLEHEAD.CA/POETRY-CONTEST

[F/TheFiddlehead](#) | [M@fiddlehd.bsky.social](#) | fiddlehd@unb.ca

canadian literature

canadian literature is a scholarly journal that publishes original poetry and peer-reviewed articles on literary texts and cultural objects created in or about the lands known as Canada.

Purchase an annual subscription for as low as **\$60** and get four issues a year delivered right to your door.

Submit to **canlit.ca** and enter into a conversation with leading scholars in the field. Our submission guidelines can be found at **canlit.ca/submissions**.

Recent special issue topics include:
*How to Be at Home in Canada;
Pasts, Presents, and Futures of Canadian
Comics; Poetics and Extraction;
and Feminist Critique Here and Now.*

For more information, visit our website or contact us at **can.lit@ubc.ca**.



[fb.com/CanadianLit](https://www.facebook.com/CanadianLit)

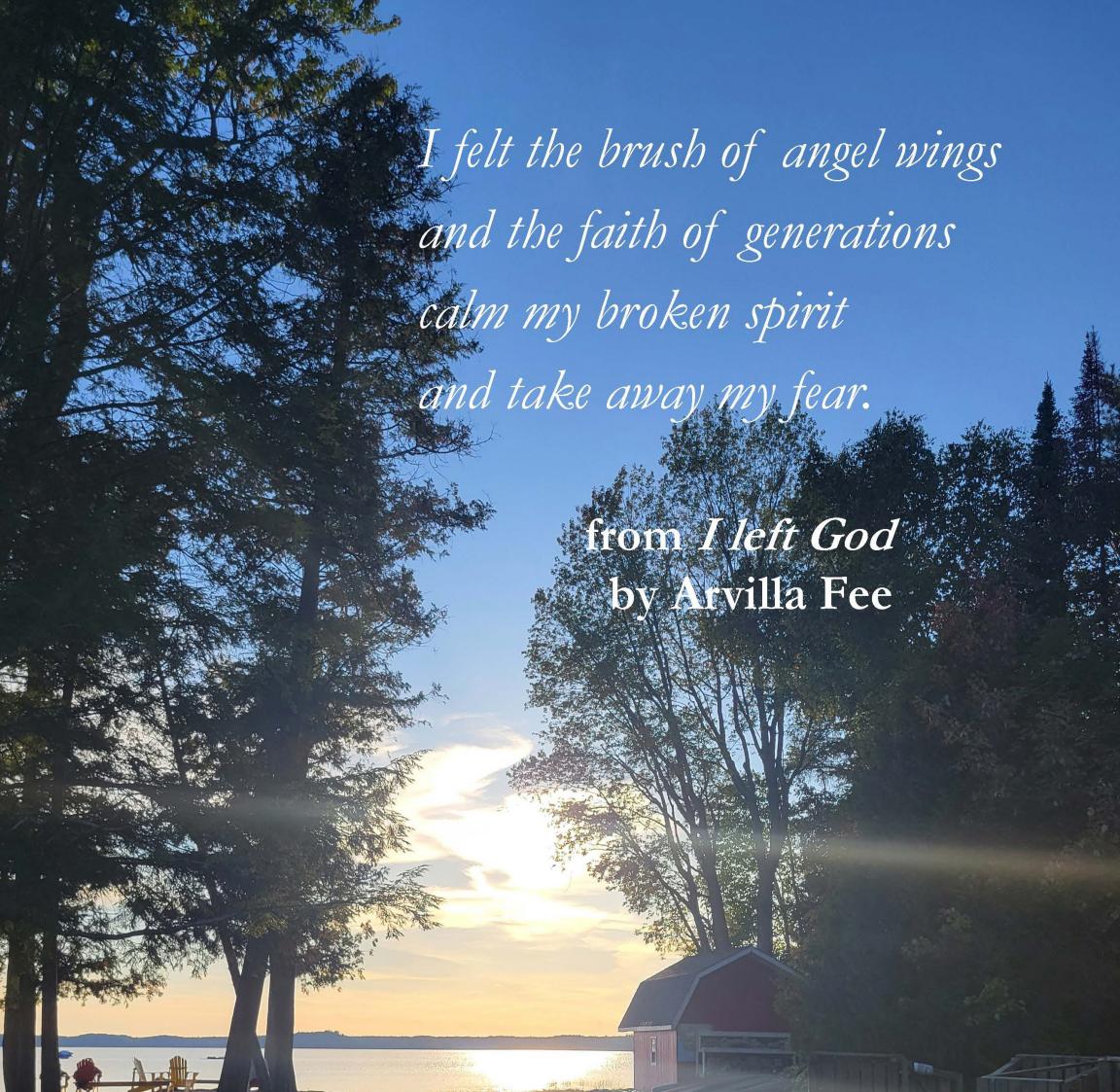


@CanadianLit



@CanLitJournal

canlit.ca



*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



Featuring new work by:

Tracie Adams	J.D. Isip	Leanne McClements
Sharisa Aidukaitis	Erin Jamieson	Maria Nobile
Marie Anne Arecola	Bethany Jarmul	Noah Platz
Ron Bearwald	Strider Marcus Jones	John RC Potter
John Peter Beck	Janina Aza Karpinska	Jeff Rensch
Terri Watrous Berry	Daithi Kearney	Alexis Rhodes
Alison P. Birch	David Kenny	Heather J. Robertson
Mary Castelli	Sam Kerbel	Lori Romero
Patrick Connors	J.I. Kleinberg	Liv Ross
Sarah Das Gupta	Olivia Koutsky	William Ross
Lilian Pomeroy Edmonds	David Lewitzky	Jaden Schapiro
Adele Evershed	Peter Lilly	Shane Schick
Louis Faber	Silje Lilly	Sanjeev Sethi
Joseph Fasano	Judy Lorenzen	Mary Smith
Arvilla Fee	Beau Maibaum	J. J. Steinfeld
Merlin Flower	Jolynne Mallory	Emma Galloway Stephens
Rosalie Hendon	DS Maolalaí	Terry Trowbridge
Sharon Weightman Hoffmann	Sophia Man	Matthew White
Laura Reece Hogan	Mary Grace Mangano	Jessica Whipple
Nick Horgan	Titiyalo Matiku	Hulian Zhang



**PADDLER
PRESS**

ISBN 978-1-7381917-5-8



9 781738 191758