

Fahmidan Journal
Issue 5: ‘When Mother Nature Wakes Up’

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An Eclipse of Your Eyes
Kristin Garth

Inside a spring forest without you this time,
moth wings blink a reveal of your hazel
eyes. Spots unshutter then flutter while I
shudder in place then mutter denials
of what flies in my face. Extend a finger
so one might land. Inspect it up close
then understand this ocular patterned wing
a meadow goddess must have transposed
one of those afternoons we felt smothered
in clothes. Disposed of them in this grove
where nobody goes — save for some specter,
who memorized your smatter of clover
in amber irises below wildflower nectar,
my teetering torso, and would design
an eclipse of your eyes for me to find.

Kristin Garth is a Pushcart, Rhysling nominated stalker. She is a Best of the Net 2020 finalist. Her sonnets have stalked journals like *Glass*, *Yes*, *Five:2: One*, *Luna Luna* and more. She is the author of 20 books of poetry including *Candy Cigarette Womanchild Noir* (Hedgehog Poetry Press), *Flutter Southern Gothic Fever Dream* (TwistiT Press), and *Girlarium* (Fahmidan Journal). She is the founder of *Pink Plastic House* a tiny journal and co-founder of *Performance Anxiety*, an online poetry reading series. Follow her on Twitter: (@lolaandjolie) and her website kristingarth.com

Tin Flowers
Lane Chasek

The last day I saw my grandma alive she said that, most days, all she needed to live was air and an hour in the sun.

*

The hoard of empty boxes and moth-eaten clothes eventually forced my grandma out of her home. When she awoke at 3 a.m., emaciated and unable to breathe—that's when she left and took refuge in an apartment on the edge of Chadron, Nebraska, for the rest of her life.

*

Her green kingdom sprawling on each windowsill of her old home, nothing to keep her company in widowhood save sunlight, simple sugars, and photosynthesis. "I need these fellas more than they need me," she said about her plants. There was always something, someone, she

wanted to save or be saved by.

That last time I saw her, now in her clean, new apartment (her left ankle swollen over her sock, riddled with veins like fissures, her nose just as swollen) I was surprised to see that she'd

replaced all of her plants with metallic replicas. Tulips, roses, violets—all gleaming, gasoline-

puddle and rainbow-hued metals, their stems made of green barbed wire.

"Some days I'm not hungry," she said. "Breathing—that's all this gal needs."

She liked to sit by the north window, where the sun shined brightest.

*

The flora never needed us.

But each houseplant, inevitably, desiccates, and we're praying that this next sunrise, this next round of nutrient solution will be a remedy to the browning leaves, the drying roots—but

nothing remains green forever.

Still, if the world were populated by plants alone, this planet would continue to respire and turn. The cacti that rest on my windowsill need me less than I need them.

*

It took ten of us four days to clear her estate when she died. The porcelain imps and gnomes that had kept her plants company, the dried tulips and spider plants, the decaying clothes

and hatboxes—all consumed in a cleansing blaze we ignited a mile west of her house. But beneath a pile of boxes, pressed against a window, watered by a slowly leaking pipe, we discovered a small cactus, still clinging to life.

Lane Chasek's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Cactifur*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *perhappened*, *Taco Bell Quarterly*, *What Rough Beast*, and many others. Their nonfiction novel *Hugo Ball and the Fate of the Universe* was published last year by Jokes Review Press.

Armoured Glory
Lorelei Bacht

Wild chorus: my sisters announcing
The time of our transformation –

This body has become too small
For my will to power.

Relief, immense at the point of my back
Cracking open: I will continue to happen –
I have found a way out.

Hours of toil, delicate,
To extricate myself. Unpeel

My face from the mask that I once
Called mine, pull every leg
Out of its brittle boot.

I await in the colour green, a wet
Vulnerability. The silent growth of wings.

Wonders of our patience: the sun
Bakes me into renewed magnificence,
Armoured glory.

Dandelions, a burst of yellow
Lorelei Bacht

For everything a season.

This one: season of the sunlit sky
Immense, unapologetic -
I have earned it.

Away with the grave underground,
The tedious, the dark. Hopeless

No more. I have observed
The roots of the dandelion, and found

Them lacking in colour,
In warmth. Time to try revival,

To follow the course of the sun
In flushes of growth, ecstatic.

Lorelei Bacht is a poet of mixed European heritage living in Asia. When she is not carrying little children around or encouraging them to discover the paintings of Edvard Munch, she can be found collecting bones and failing scientific experiments. Her recent work can be found and/or is forthcoming in OpenDoor Poetry, Litehouse, Visitant, Quail Bell and The Wondrous Real. She is also on Instagram: @lolelei.bacht.writer and @the.cheated.wife.writes

Along the Path
(After Billy Collins)
Gurupreet K. Khalsa

Just as the sun rises
I stand in the still garden.
Behind me the water mulls
as life warms.

A bee early to the day's work
arrows into a gold bloom.
The grasshopper I stepped on
writhes its end.

I can't leave the bugs
to eat what they prefer because
I want clear-skin tomatoes,
smooth beans.

Ants march in determination,
dragonfly perches,
dives to conquer
smaller winged things.

Mosquito pierces a tender vein,
her sustenance ghoulish;
does she weigh the risk
of a cracking slap to get her meal?

Moth finds the stems
for her grub children,
Each has a place, a process, a procedure,
a perfect plan. Wait – do they plan?

What of my plan?
What is my appointed realm,
the need and purpose
of my path?

Perhaps I wait,
unwithered, unslapped,
for a happy blossom or stem
on which to alight and claim my due.

Gurupreet K. Khalsa is a current resident of Mobile, Alabama, having lived previously in Ohio, Washington State, India, New Mexico, and California. She received her Ph.D. in Instructional Design from the University of South Alabama. Dr.

Khalsa taught middle and high school English classes, emphasizing poetry writing, for over 20 years and was active in the California Writing Project's initiative to improve student academic writing skills. Currently she is a part time online instructor in graduate programs at the University of South Alabama and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Growth
Jason de Koff

The root, extracting itself,
pushes down,
as the shoot seeks escape
from inner darkness.

Bursting forth from swaddling layers,
she pursues light and life
with the abandon
of childlike wonder.

As a teen,
she puts on showy displays of fragile flowers
that can be damaged
by harsh environments.

Engaging in discussion
with those who love her sweet nectar,
she learns of the potential within
and dangers without.

Enter motherhood
with sapped resources
and personal growth yielded
to the needs of her brood.

With commanding presence
over growing yearlings,
bestowing protection
for those of tender youth.

Over time, the outer skin
takes on yellowed hue with age,
enjoying the last summer sun,
basking in the energy of her own.

The matriarch becomes immortal,
through her progeny she sacrificed all,
and upon the day the great wind blows,
she falls peacefully back to the earth.

The Overburden
Jason de Koff

Harbored upon a speck of clay,
a vast community engages,
both living and never lived,
in fueling the growth,
of the underworld.

Microdroplet moisture,
feeds broods of billions,
humming unheard,
in a chorus,
of expectant purpose.

The finest tendril,
of hyphae slips by,
with its highway of succor,
destined for,
interspecie partners.

The lumbering earthworm,
mines the rhizosphere,
surfacing occasionally,
as the whale,
providing breath to those below.

Roots splayed,
in city road configurations,
enter entanglements,
with surrounding soil,
anchoring the world.

Hidden stories,
yet to be written,
connected through life struggles,
waging wars unseen,
feeding the billions above.

Jason de Koff is an associate professor of agronomy and soil science at Tennessee State University. He lives in Nashville, TN with his wife, Jaclyn, and his two daughters, Tegan and Maizie. He has published in a number of scientific journals and has over 70 poems published or forthcoming in literary journals over the last year. Social media-
Twitter: @JasonPdK3

BEHIND THE STORM
D.S. Twells

Cloudlets, racing along the dawn horizon,
chase after the receding storm. Do they
really hope to catch up, rejoin the front?

Without their comrade clouds – strength in numbers,
they're missing out. Scattered, they've lost their chance.
They hardly cast a shadow. Huddled up,

they might have set forests on fire, blown up
transformers, trashed trailer parks, flipped
semis, washed away a car or two!

No, they missed the show. How did they fall off
in the first place? They got distracted? Lost
their way? Maybe it was piety.

Perhaps they spied a holy site, a hillside
temple, and so they paused, bowed as they
were no doubt taught, said a prayer, took time

to circumambulate. Not likely. Did some
feature of the terrain tempt their vanity?
Their reflections in a pond? Lewd winks

from antennae? After all, they're only
clouds. More likely, some simple mischief
led them astray - the chance to pelt a tin roof,

make a racket, and trouble a farmer's sleep.
Or shake a car and frighten lovers in a lane.
That's always fun! Whatever it might have been,

delinquent, possibly penitent, these
fledgling clouds face a whipping now -
it's becoming clear, well behind the storm.

In earlier years, D. S. Twells served in the Peace Corps in India and taught English in Iran. After returning to India to complete a research fellowship, he pursued a career in university administration. Retired, Twells lives in St. Louis, writes, and occasionally teaches.

Living Waters
Shane Schick

What makes them all so sure of themselves
that never in recorded history has anyone
witnessed a single wave's sign of hesitation,
no "On second thought," no turning back
to that from which its liquid flag unfurled?

That not one ever felt it didn't belong
with the rest, that salt, sun and the clean air
could so easily cure impostor syndrome,
or that culture isn't so much anchored in tradition
but proves stronger when it can simply float?

Add up all the hours spent doing nothing
but this act of aquatic ethnography and
it's still possible to make so many errors:
to describe what happens in a storm as
anger instead of an opportunity for ecstasy,

Or to study the moment of impact
upon shorelines and cliff sides and
conclude "Crash," when the truth is,
irresistible forces and immovable objects
just can't get enough of each other.

Shane Schick is the founder of a publication about customer experience design called [360 Magazine](http://360Magazine.com). His poetry has appeared in literary journals across the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and Africa. He lives in Toronto with his wife and three children. More: shaneschick.com/poetry. Twitter: @shaneschick

The Queen's Dream
Tamam Kahn

Damascus: a shop window in the souk
displays the long nightgown, inscribed with the word
hulm, Arabic for “to dream.” They say in Ramadan

*Blessing and knowledge of a dream most true
will be given. All difficulties are suspended...*

I slip into bed that night in the dream-gown.
I—the *Queen-of-In-Between*—find myself inside
sornial seams of long ago and now, sewn together.

I float through the Al Assad National Library, circle the head-shrine
of John-the-Baptist, and pass near the stone room of Paul-the-Apostle.
I never trust this tyrant, yet I am here in my nightdress
in the grand hall of Bashar Assad’s Palace Fortress.

Syria’s President stands here as I arrange my queen’s crown and speak:

All difficulties are suspended! Let your people be.

I move closer and gaze up into his face.
He scowls and gestures to a guard who holds a weapon.
The jewels on my head sparkle. I don’t react.
Assad glances down in almost a smile.
There is no need for introduction to me, *the Queen-of-In-Between*.
I say these words:

We could have world history rewritten. Right now. Why not?

A soothing anesthesia settles over Damascus.
I wake from the dream and say a prayer for daring, diplomacy, freedom
and the saying:

Blessing and knowledge of a dream most true...

Outside my window the full moon hangs her beautiful light
as if suspended from a dark branch
the first night of spring.

After Saddam Bombed and Drained the Wetlands of Iraq
Tamam Kahn

homeland scarred
with cluster bombs and napalm—we marsh Arabs,
shredded like a Bagdad newspaper, are stripped of our
families, towns and breath of our own wetlands. Hear me:

Başrah (Arabic)
means “overwatcher.” Mother Nature, Legendary Rabia, The-Woman-
Who-Never-Dies,—watches over Basra, over everyone across the Tigris
and Euphrates plain, south through date palms, cattails—the water

voices, mud
with music. I am a River-Raised Child. Once what I take to be
the *s’ilūwa* water spirit—hovering on the surface, terrible
to see, her body with long hair, breasts stretching to her knees—is

fear itself.
I scream to Rabia-The-Wise for help. The shaking vision breaks,
vanishes. Grandmother, waist deep in the river, cleans my face, wipes
away tears and keeps scrubbing our clothes in Mesopotamia’s flow.

War years
cripple us. I see thick smog, be-headed palms, their trunks
like matchsticks burnt in hot wind. Foreign soldiers climb our Sacred
Tree of Knowledge, laughing as the ancient trunk splits under heavy

work boots.
The Shatt al-Arab River where Grandmother sloshed, has joined
the Unfertile Crescent. Typhoid and cholera swim in sewage.
The *s’ilūwa* enslaves Basra with her poison, oil, and greedy power

grabbers. O—
Mother Nature, I call you, my voice squeezing time. Rabia,
see how this world has cracked? How it slides down river into
the sea? One muezzin died. And the next. No call to prayer here.

Overwatcher,
you, watching over Basra. You—begged for, cried to by the sick,
the homeless—speak to us, we, the hopeless slaves of this insanity.
Rabia answers: “When does a slave become contented?”

Slave contented?
“When she is as grateful for adversity as she is for generosity,
abundance for all.”* You mean, Rabia, to hold the oil lines
and pumps with thanks, as they savage land from Basra to the sea?

Unnatural churls,
we—Madaam Marsh Arabs—live here in shacks where existence is
hardly worth a hand-out. Rabia give us clean water! Show us how we
deserve to transform ourselves in Basra. Glide us into nature's green.

*From well-known stories of 8th century Rabia of Basra. Farid ad-Din Attar, #41.

Tamam Kahn is author of *Untold: A History of the Wives of Prophet Muhammad*, Monkfish Press, which won an International Book Award in 2011 and another book on The Prophet's daughter Fatima, a finalist—all in poetry. She was invited to read in Morocco by the King's Cultural Minister in 2009. She has led Sufi groups to sacred sites in Syria, Morocco, India, and Turkey. Tamam read her poetry at the Shift Network Mystics Summit in February. She and her husband, Pir Shabda Kahn live North of San Francisco.

Eternal Elixir
by Phyliss Merion Shanken

My ocean seduces me — yet again. Despite her misty dance, she shows off her glassy crystals, forming a ghostlike mirage; a message just for me. Her ruffles beckon to me:

Submerge yourself back to your roots, to your amoeba-like existence before you were born.

Her foamy ribbons beseech me like a nagging ship that never docks but rocks to and fro, waiting, waiting for me to board. She says: *Come closer, my Love. Return to my serenity — for all time.* Knowing how her undertow would swallow me in one gulp and into the heart of her, with each of her tireless, armlike ripples, from the beach, I inhale my ocean's vapor; I taste life's spices.

Eventually, I'll succumb. I'll give myself over to her womblike abyss.

As a child, each time I coaxed my sunburned legs toward her alluring waters, I was renewed. I'd risk anything to be cleansed, to wash off my bad and make myself good. But never to drown myself in her watery cradle. No. I had guarantees to fulfill — to myself, to others, to life. I was born. It was my job to live that life.

Another roar. Followed by a swish from the gentle beast, reminding me of her liquid moods.

In the sunlight, I narrow my weary eyelids, almost squinting, as I behold her diamonds blinking, ever blinking, and twinkling as if winking at me. She smiles through short white waves which arch like a brow above a surprised eye. And her serpentine coasting reforms itself, crashing against the shore, feeding my vision's desire.

Now I am old, softening anew, not yet ready to exit but too aware of endings as hard and tough as wet concrete on which, I once reluctantly carved my life.

My ocean is the breath of life. With her charm, again, she fetches me to submit: *Let Go.*

The more I adore her, the closer my urge to wade into her sympathetic core. I have given over youthful demands on myself, unlaced my stardom aspirations that never quite came to fruition. Her Majesty cajoles me to rehearse the irrefutable finale, to release my linchpin grasp on my internal storms, one by one. These days, it's easier to comply. And people gravitate to me as never before. I know now, my fellow humans love those who are not afraid to die.

With proper water flow, I, the once fearful child startled awake by nightmares of wolves who would barge into my room and eat me up, am soon to give up my guard. I ride the waves and when called upon to do so, I'll relinquish mock control and float into joyful tranquility.

In the foreseeable future, destiny will propose the proper timing. Then I will anchor down to the ocean's floor and release my hold on earthly blessings.

For now, I will kiss the ocean just as I did yesterday.

Phyliss Merion Shanken is a retired psychologist, creative writing teacher, and playwright. She's been published in psychological and literary journals, weekly newspaper/magazine columns. In addition to her literary and poetry awards, she is author of *SILHOUETTES OF WOMAN*, as well as a number of plays. She has two novels, *EYE OF IRENE*, and *THE HEART OF BOYNTON BEACH CLUB*. Her memoir, *CONVERSATIONS WITH PERFECT STRANGERS* is the culmination of her life's work. Presently, she is working on her novel *WISE OLD OWLS: Gray Matters*.

Ghost Apple
E.E Rhodes

Above me the branches tickled the sky. The summer was leaching into earlier nights. Five minutes every day. Barely noticeable unless you were paying attention. I was paying attention. I had found there was little else to do.

This was becoming my favourite spot, under a rogue apple tree, probably rooted in a discarded pip, cast off in anticipation that it would decompose or be eaten. Fuel of a sort. The leaf mould was greasy under my fingers, thin layers of decay building up and breaking down.

The wood had been beautiful in spring, the squeaky greens of hawthorn and beech, everything unfurling from the winterbudded cocoons. It had been like this when I first visited, green and green and green. I didn't have enough words for all the different shades then. Looking up into the boughs I understood why the top of a tree was called a crown.

The apple tree was on the edge of a thicket of brambles and nettles. I'd read somewhere that nettles are pioneers, the plants that come in fast after a fire. They flocked here. And if the imminent sting didn't put you off then the blackberry thorns would. I suppose this is why it made such a good spot. Quiet. Secluded.

Maybe there had been a house here once upon a time. Not a gingerbread cottage, more likely a charcoal burner's lean-to, or belonging to someone who coppiced the hazel and chestnut stands. There were plenty of them growing out now. No one wanted stakes or fence posts these days.

Whatever it had been the house was gone, folded in on itself into the dark and weeds, dank with rot. Maybe the apple was a remnant left behind by the woodsmen.

As the first season turned there was blossom, pink and white, confetti shifting in the gentle breeze. I had never been a bride but this was something better, an accolade from the trees.

There were bees too and I was careful not to disturb them when they buzzed close to my face. Maybe there was honey coming. Not in one of those fancy hives or skeps, but in the hollow of a tree or seam of a stone. Something broken open, dark and cool. The quiet sawing noise was a bass to the flute of a blackbird and distant carrion call of some rooks. I knew them all by name now.

Through the long summer I settled into the drowsy heat, learning to smile again under a staring sky. Sometimes there would be a small mammal, creeping through the undergrowth, always surprised when they got close. I'd stay stiller than I thought was possible, willing myself to be at one with the lichen and moss. Willing myself to be quiet. A squirrel sat on my chest, up close their faces are just like rats, and one or two mice nibbled on my hair.

In the autumn I was glad of my coat and the blankets wrapped around me. But I still lay under my favourite tree in the chill, smiling into the branches of the leaves shivering down on me. They say it is lucky to catch one. I must have caught a thousand or more.

The wood was turning again now. And there were still a few apples clinging on. No one had come by to pick them. No one else had stumbled into this prickled corner. No one after me.

There was a cold frost, and then a freeze. The temperature dipped hard and I stiffened and fractured with the cold.

One by one the apples froze and then decayed from the inside out, leaving only the icy shape behind. When it warmed up I knew even they would vanish.

With the first break in the frost all my soft parts finally disintegrated into the ground. Only my bones were left, and though my skull was greyed and tatty honey had crystallised there. My eye sockets glittered in the wintry sun as they never had in life.

My heart, that had rabbited away until it was hunted down by a weasel knife, was now a dark cluster of bees, pulsing in long, slow beats.

Like the fruit above me there would be nothing left soon, only a scant memory desiccated on the wind. Like a ghost apple melted away after the warm. Simply gone.

E. E. Rhodes is an archaeologist who accidentally lives in the corner of a small castle in Worcestershire in the U.K. She writes flash, cnf, and prose poetry. Her work has recently featured in Janus Literary, Twin Pies Literary, Fudoki Magazine, and The Cabinet of Heed. Forthcoming work may be read in Blink Ink and Fictive Dream. Her flash and short stories regularly place in competitions and she recently won The Phare Short Story competition and The Intrepid Times CNF Reunions Travel Writing Competition. She tweets @electra_rhodes

Remaining Beliefs
Matthew Miller

after Charles Wright

Praying again on the front porch,
shriek of the red-tailed hawk,
squeak of spring peepers.
Something speaks modestly, but it speaks
somewhere else.
Yellow of daffodils, ashy ridges of the gravel.
Patience of the lamppost and the grass.
It's twenty-nine miles into the sunset to the shores of Worster Lake.
Paint the door jamb on the front door with rainwater on my fingers.
I wonder how it feels in the wind.
By the driveway, the shadows poking, wake-up.
I enter the opposite way,
over the doorstep,
past her empty shoes, library books and a pepper-stained paring knife.
Evening allures me to bed,
colors like a woodnymph.
Under my side of the covers, tucking in,
her hands now warm as a crocheted afghan,
folded and stored by the furnace.
The last snow
like soap on the floor of the shower.
Spring tricks us with its moonlight,
the grapevine brown over the broken ground's heart.
In the morning, I could leave for the southern mountains,
a half day's drive from here.
But tonight, cold and weak under the pink of the crabapple trees,
decide to believe. Summer will taste richer
splitting out of this singular seed,
like the savory myth of peaberries.

Matthew Miller teaches social studies, swings tennis rackets, and writes poetry - all hoping to create home. He and his wife live beside a dilapidating orchard in Indiana, where he tries to shape dead trees into playhouses for his four boys. His poetry has been featured in *Whale Road Review*, *River Mouth Review*, *Club Plum Journal* and *Ekstasis Magazine*.

Flowers for Dessert
Elizabeth Bates

Have you seen the tulip
that looks like a bowl of ice cream?
Or the daffodil as it melts like
butter under the beating sun?
The snowballs will stand in
for snow cones today
and roses and nasturtiums
can adorn our table
until appetites
strike again.

With the Promise of Tulips
Elizabeth Bates

Each April of my life
I've watched the sun cast
its rays—like tendrils—
down across the valley
where the fields
explode in
mirages—like rainbows—
in this place
where the tulips
keep their
perennial
promise
to bloom

Elizabeth Bates is a writer and teacher from Washington state where she lives with her husband, son, and two Siberian Huskies. Bates is the EIC of *Dwelling Literary*. Her writing has most recently been published at *The Daily Drunk*, *Poetically Magazine*, and *The Minison Project*. She has pieces forthcoming in *Seaborne Magazine*, *Skyway Journal*, and the *BYLINE LEGACIES* anthology (Cardigan Press, 2021). She tweets at @ElizabethKBates.

the vision
Adrienne Wartts

i was talking
to God today
when i looked up
to see the sun
saunter from behind
cumulus clouds

its rays were hollow
it looked like
a silver moon
drenched in streams
of billows and
golden light

it was like
the sight of
un-d(en)ying love.

Adrienne N. Wartts' poetry has appeared in Black Magnolias, Diverse Voices Quarterly, Entropy, Frogpond, Kweli, PEN, and Reverie, as well as the anthologies Encounters and Ocean Voices. She resides in New England.

SEA LOVE
L.A. Hawbaker

The sand still smells of salt-water taffy, even though the taffy shop is gone. Taffy pulls, a thick skin that takes on the warmth of the hand that holds it. Taffy sticks to gums and molds to teeth and drowns the mouth with an over-sugared sweetness that's actually acidic.

An old man kneels eastward. A faded gray tattoo peaks from his jacket sleeve, camouflaged in the varicose veins on the back of his hand. Salt and sediment shrivel his throat. Sand is erosion. Rock and shell broken down over millennia. The beach is sprinkled with particles: the candy, corn dogs, shop and pier busted to atomic bits. Centrifugal force, the glitter that used to dust the shoulder blades of kids pressed into Tilt-a-Whirl shells. There used to be a dock. The boat masts would clink against one another. Hulls creaked, seaweed slicked.

At low tide Her cheek presses the faint penumbra of the horizon. The sun's eye is closed behind a silvery mist that puts Her at a distance, like a tintype photograph. Her waves froth the sand and barely disturb the coquinas. They're pink and pale and the size of fingernails. They wriggle back into the sand until the next wave laps over.

Why you nice today? the man asks, recalling the fury of their fight just days before. She doesn't answer. Inscrutable.

#

Long ago he kicked off his sneakers and rolled his dungarees to climb barefoot over sun-hot dunes. Beach grass as high as his head. Greenheads whizzed by like bullets and pricked malicious bites, leaving behind red bumps the size of dimes.

Gold eyelets rippled across Her body in repose. Waves sweetened the air. Slapped when riled. She was a wild, beautiful thing. Her wet lapped like a warm mouth. Seaweed knotted like tissue. Her teeth were the clams and rocks underfoot.

The carnival on the pier hugged Her the way he wanted to. He ribbon'd red tickets from a booth so narrow he hunched his shoulders to fit inside. He scraped rust off the carousel's drop rods. The boss promoted him to manage the coaster. It danced along Her edge. The big drop's neon lights crested Her mirror. Her reflection was a proud smile. The carnival is gone now.

For their anniversaries, he ate an elephant ear. He licked oil from his fingers and tossed sugar into Her belly. The sugar was powdery and white like wake, and She was vain and liked things that looked like Her.

Too old now, so the boss put him at the taffy shop. Air- conditioning eased his joints. Kids pressed their noses to the glass, picked out their flavors: blueberry blast, pineapple whip, birthday cake and creamy caramel. Through the smudged display, She shifted colors in a kaleidoscope, a dazzled dream state.

The pier wood groaned, riddled with arthritis. The pier is gone now, too.

#

Why'd you do what you did? he asks.

The construction crews haven't cleared the pier busted to thick splinters. Bent metal handrails. Boat hulls shot inland, bulleted by trees stripped to bone. Her fury that night smelled of distant deserts. Clouds spiraled in a sky the color of acid. Metal screeched. The wind broke every pane of glass. Blew off every shingle of every house. She bloated in a swell that surged inland. Waves washed away cars. In her vengeful rage, She gulped it into Her gut. She swallowed the shops. Houses. Boats. Nothing left but refuse: a regurgitation of debris mirror-mazing the coast.

Wasn't I good to you? the man asks. Did he misstep? Did he take her for granted? Was his a selfish love? The fishing boats plundered, the rainbow oil skeins tattooed across

her skin, the brown fog choke in poisoned clouds, the bloat of Arctic water. *That wasn't me*, he pleads. *That wasn't me...* though he isn't sure.

No answer. She is a sempiternal sea. An omniscient titan that has ruled epochs. Her silence is the cold apathy of the inhumane, the inhuman. A tide-keeper who has answered to no man for millennia. Disturbed by man's consequential presence, she riles vengeance. Deep below, She moves in tectonic shifts. Her apocalyptic anger. Her righteous fury.

The man doesn't mourn the buildings and things that were lost, but the losing of Her. She could never be a wife. She doesn't know he exists. He's a trivial thing... a nothing. To Her, this particular old man is as small and insignificant as a grain of sand.

L.A. Hawbaker is a writer and artist in Chicago, her hometown by way of New Orleans, Hawaii, Poland, and Prague. She served as the 2020/2021 Artist-in-Residence at the Columbia College Chicago Aesthetics of Research, where she is an MFA candidate in Creative Writing. www.lahawbaker.com

The Chill And Lemony Sun
Mark Binmore

The soft rains of April

Heaven's tear must be a pear

That pastel green which holds nuances of lovely rue

That odd quivering quintessence of a pear

It's late in the fall

The leaves descend, auburn hairs falling from autumn's nodding

Just a melancholy bliss

A child blows desire from a downy dandelion gone to seed.

The wind whistles sadly across the grey sky

Like half an eggshell cupped in divine hands

And all the others

All the others....

The fields and fields of spun silver, endless ghostly, full of sorrow, with a thousand forsaken wishes floating on the wind. There are combs of ice in the dark river. Icicles, long fingers, lacement, and glissades of creaminess. I watched the combs of ice come floating from the banks. They are like lilies launched like pure white cups, sweet sailing vessels. As innocent, they give themselves like gifts, calm floating circles on the sloughing water.

The gift of poems, drifting towards spring.

In the open there are endless fields of flowers of poppy and snapdragon, hollyhock and rose. The dead pass silently there, as if dreaming. Fingers pressed to lips, wandering through endless fields of poppy and snapdragon perfumed with forgetfulness.

And so beauty passed through the dead like water, through a sieve. A brilliant blast of turning leaves gold and crimson bursts with wind and whimsy they find my path and fall with grace and sacrifice. And in the corner by the bed where broken dreams fall, wispy webs of

sorrow gather. I wipe away the remnants and chase away the dust, but without you what else matters.

The chill and lemony sun cast over the serpentine waters all glittering in scarves of murky topaz green.

And I look over them with secret nostalgia and a kind of private pleasure and pain. I wonder how long that will last. Spring is setting in and the train-tracks catch the azure sky as they wind away from here. A sky of such clarity and such depth. It's euphonious blue of luminous intensity. Words thrown like kites in sensuous immensity.

The poetry of life for its own sake.

Beekeeper
Mark Binmore

Forward into the mysterious beauty of spring
The crocuses, melon-dawn yellow snow-purple veined saffron and milk-hearts
And birdsong becoming audible, trilling and chattering in symphony
Spools of song, sweet canticles in taunting magniloquence melodious code
Like an angelical speech
Like golden divination and ambiguous dreamlike augury
And I came upon a beekeeper
And he said do you know you can have it all?
The blessed bees vibrantly humming stung with nectar and honey
Stinging and healing our ache and our sweetness, our love and our hurt
Extraordinarily, the honeybee came upon this
All so beautiful
And I feel as if spring has touched me and saved me

Mark Binmore, author of 'Sad Confetti' 'Beautiful Deconstruction' 'Everything Could Be So Perfect' & 'Sunsets Etc' and more, is an award-winning novelist. In 2015 Mark was ranked one of Britain's 100 influential LGBTQ+ writers. He was also the subject of the Chris Henson trilogy 'After The Event.' Twitter @MarkBinmore markbinmore.com

Becoming Someone Else's Forest
Judy DeCroke

into this tall world,
with anchors tethered to the next

looking up as we begin our first spring
echoing the days far away,

yes, elsewhere is waiting...
towards this we move and falter

with innocent grace in our changes—
calm, flowing, feeding and feeling

a surprise in knowing
and yielding less with time

Judy DeCroke is an internationally published poet, flash fiction writer, educator, and avid reader whose recent works have been published by *The BeZine*, *Brown Bag Online*, *North of Oxford*, *The Poet Magazine*, *Amethyst Review*, *The Wild Word*, *The Front Porch Review*, and many journals and anthologies. As a professional storyteller and teacher of that genre, she also offers workshops for all ages in flash fiction. Judy lives and works in upstate New York with her husband poet/artist, Antoni Ooto.

There Could Be Hope

M.L Watson

When mother nature wakes up, she will weep. She will discover the damage destroying her creations, the swelling waves full of thick oil that glistens purple in the hot sun. She will see the broken trees, the stumps that litter her hand-painted landscapes, and cradle the homeless, whimpering animals in her arms. She will count the plastic submerged in the glittering sand and grow angry, her cheeks flushed as she loses her count, time and again. She will note the creatures she has lost, who can never be returned, and choke on the fumes that suffocate the air. She will see the suffering of the voiceless, the helpless, and know who is to blame. She will scream and cry and yell and regret ever allowing the humans into her home. And she will consider removing them, starting over, allowing her world to heal. But then she will see the goodness, those who care, those who march the streets with panels in hand, bedecked in blue and green as they call for action. She will see the little boys planting saplings, their hands brushed with soil, the little girls creating new ways to recycle rubbish, and the mothers, fathers and siblings ditching their cars to spin the wheels of their bikes. She will see the mass efforts, the small efforts, and know that within the bad, the darkness, there will always be good. So, with hope warming her heart, she will return to her bed, fall back into slumber, and dream of a world where her home is restored. And she prays that, when she wakes again, her future will be secured.

M. L. Watson is a writer based in the Yorkshire Dales. Her work has been published in Ellipsis Zine Magazine and in 'Tales of the Supernatural' at Otranto House.

Persephone's Rose
Lisa Mary Armstrong

Like a rose, unfolding under
the tutelage of the sun
Her body stirs in Springtime
Shrugging off winters coat
Before softening, then slipping
into Persephone's season

Like a rose, that buds despite
Having endured the brutal
Hands of the elements
She stands firm, her roots
Never wavering

And in a world that tries
To strip her of her beauty,
She is the centrepiece
Only growing bolder and
More beautiful with every
turn of season

Lisa Mary Armstrong lives in Scotland with her children. She tutors law and researches women and children's experiences of the criminal justice system. In her spare time she enjoys reading and writing poetry and fiction and playing the piano. You can find her on twitter @earlgrey79_lisa

The Last of Silver Winter
John Davis

dew not frost not darkness lost
in bare-tree branches not thorns
scraping the cold that froze
the swamp where reeds tilted

like masts bending against the wind
rainbows on dew and the hue
of green not brown a spider web
too soon for the harmonies

of bees and the battle of bee vs. spider
too soon for bare shoulders and lotion
scented with pollen and song voices
rhyming against the night

just now an hour of dew in the inky
dawn and the last sparks of stars
those jewels among the mist silent
syllables in a festival of morning

verbs in foreign languages finding
tongues that have slept in root havens
of dreams and threaded themselves
through tones of the morning thrush

Wind Inside the River
John Davis

We have found fog under the dry night.
It bends over us, silent as soil, a mouth

of spirits whose secrets are hidden in stone.
The water here is the wind, the stars saltless

as young salmon swimming downstream.
The celebration of eggs into silvery skin,

the howling hunger of moonlight through clouds,
the woods, the stream, the rocks below summer sky,

the robes of thunder—we hold them in amazed
laughter as if we are deer-hoofed

and dart through the forest. We do not cry
like thorns in berry vines or the dried light

stored in bark. We do not gleam like black eyes.
We do not scatter bones like flecks of daylight.

Within our sleep we set fire to our bodies,
breathe evenly, a song of quiet warmth.

John Davis is the author of *Gigs* and *The Reservist*. His work has appeared recently in *DMQ Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review* and *Terrain.org*. He lives on an island in the Salish Sea. He performs in blues bands.

It's Not Always Sunny in Philadelphia
Chris L. Butler

the first play I ever tried out for
was *The Passion*, also known as
the last 72 hours of Christ's life

I thought this was my moment
my name means *bearer of Christ*
my skin is the color of burnt brass

my hair, back then
was reminiscent
of sheep's wool

when the hour arrived
to choose which boy
would represent our savior

the honor was given
to the child
with the most white privilege

if God has the complexion of soil
why is it
the opportunity to portray him

is not provided to the meek,
but to those who have inherited
the Earth already?

A City Boy Rides a Horse
Chris L. Butler

to be a child is to be a noble
even in the worst of conditions
a toddler is the lord of the land
our living ancestors serve the feudal
system stemming from our existence

an elder's love is deep, like grease stains
every birthday is another coronation
celebrating the continuation of your breath
a time when the stars align with spirit

I remember my third birthday
you put this city boy on a horse
looking back, it must have been breathtaking
for you to see me blazing saddles
at such a young age

before the pain—sometimes
I wish I could return to the good days

Chris L. Butler (he/him) is an African American and Dutch, Pushcart Prize nominated poet, and essayist from Philadelphia, PA. His debut micro chapbook, *BLERD: '80s BABY, '90s KID* (Daily Drunk Press) is set to be released in August 2021. He is an Editor at Bending Genres, and Versification Zine. You can find his poems in *Trampset*, *Perhappened Mag*, *The Bayou Review*, and others.

Spring: Cherry Blossoms

Sidrah

Ask me what I know of spring and
I shall speak of cherry blossoms:
gaps of sky between the branches,
dusted over with glorious blushes,
spreading across the cheeks of mornings.

With the ebbing and flowing of changing times,
I greet these days in raptured delight,
empyrean tides now leaving behind,
these drifts of petals that pause on their way,
on the shifting, bending shores of my days.

Amidst a deluge of floral flotsam,
winking and twinkling in levitation,
my overcast skies become bestrewn
in velveteen constellations.

In a world full of downcast eyes,
and glowers of gluttonous screens,
these glimmering opening fingers,
they beckon for us to just:

look up,
slow down,
take my hand.

Sidrah is a 28 year-old Pakistani poet in the UK. She is a teacher, reader, writer and collector of hobbies; she also dabbles in painting, photography and martial arts. Poetry is deeply personal to her; something to allow her to process experiences. As a result, her poetry is personal, raw and honest. She tends to write shorter pieces focused on strong imagery: an encapsulation of one moment, one feeling.

Fair Spring
Michelle M. Mead

Time has come to put aside,
Our flutter-fragile fear to fly,
Out upon the open skies,
Of pink and blue and yellow highs,

Embracing Spring's first buds anew,
The freshness of a morning's dew,
Snow no more on fields of grass,
Ice released from water's pass,

Flowing over rocky beds,
Everywhere, renewal treads,
Bringing hope on feathered wings,
Oh, what a pleasant song it sings,

It rings aloud in every hollow,
Over the backs of deer and swallow,
Dancing on green forest's floor,
This glow of Spring we all adore,

Come, my friend,
But walk with care,
For love's true heart,
Abides in there.

Gallop
Michelle M. Mead

Across swathes of new grass growing,
Hope's first tentative steps are made,
Mingling with autumn's dried-up remnants,
Long winter's chill begins to fade,

Renewal bursts forth full gallop,
In nature's heart both felt and seen,
Morning arrives on nearby birdsong,
Bright sunlight coloring carpets green,

Gardens begin to raise their voices,
Gathering insects start to hum,
Baptized beneath showers of Springtime,
Shouting promise of blooms to come,

Rainbows arcing over meadows,
Buds abound on flowering trees,
New lives born within the forest,
And gather on the softest breeze.

Michelle M. Mead is a writer from Upstate New York. She has edited two print zines, *Artless & Naked*, and *Whimsy*, and has been published in various print magazines (*Polluto*, *The Thirty First Bird Review*, *Trespass*, *Blinking Cursor*, *Capsule Stories*, *Words@Deakin Press*, *The Chronogram*, *Montana Mouthful*, etc.) and ezines (*Gutter Eloquence*, *EMG Zine*, *Apparatus*, *Under The Juniper Tree*, etc.) as well in her poetry books, *Moongirls* and *Nightdreams* and *Divided Together* (lulu.com). She is currently working on multiple novels and a poetry collection.

Winter Aconite
Andre F. Peltier

From the St. Patrick moon
to shores of Walloon,
the winter aconite bloom
through the darkness
and the snow.
The flowers trumpet
the arrival of Joseph;
they announce the
second coming.
They remind us to till the fields
and plant the seeds.
Little yellow
and tiny white,
they are the advance-men.
Winter's turmoil - in
endless fight
for soul - meets its annual
end before the daffodils
cut above
the frozen world.

Andre F. Peltier is a Lecturer III at Eastern Michigan University where he has taught African American Literature, Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, Poetry, and Freshman Composition since 1998. He lives in Ypsilanti, MI, with his wife, children, turtles, dog, and cat. His poetry has appeared in Tofu Ink Press and is forthcoming in The Great Lakes Review, La Piccioletta Barca, Big Whoopie Deal, Prospectus, Griffel, The Write Launch and an anthology from Quillkeepers Press. In his free time, he obsesses about soccer and comic books.
Twitter: @aandrefpeltier

How do you paint the Holly Blues?
Glen-Wilson

whose meadow flight is love,
the flutter and flit of the colour,
life that wants to continue, commune-

-call others to table, plucking
joy from fables, such a feast!
Such frenzy of movement! Energy

and the elegance of see through
wings, lingerie longing
for the soft song of the eye's offering,

the deepest colour is at the edges,
the faintest hue worn thin by the heart,
how like us in our love-

vulnerable to outside forces,
attached, arched, adored,
unlike us in our split lusts,

our neglect of the symmetrical,
all flight is trust, the best touch
knows its moment,

knows what is spent will rust,
and it is not a tragedy
to chart such arcs on canvas

so chart such arcs on canvas.

Glen Wilson is a multi-award winning Poet from Portadown. He won the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing in 2017, the Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Award in 2018 and The Trim Poetry competition in 2019. He has recently been shortlisted for the O Bheal Five Words Competition, The Ken Saro-Wiwa Poetry competition and the Dalkey Creates Writing competition. His poetry collection *An Experience on the Tongue* is out now with Doire Press. <https://glenwilsonpoetry.wordpress.com/>
Twitter @glenhswilson
<https://www.doirepress.com/bookstore/poetry/>

this spring my youth goes crimson

Halin Roche

this spring
my youth goes crimson
amidst myriad colors.
skirts turn velvet with frills and bonnets
just like trees which shed their bark
and adorn their claws.
interspersed between the freezing winter
and the burning summer
it is the short while
that hangs loosely between
fading time and a feared goodbye.

the milieu looks like an artist's canvas
a vivid palette
but spring paints a myopic picture.
a passing pleasure that lasts till summer arrives.
bygones turn into a sepulcher.
memories drift and dissolve
green becomes greener
a close bond with nature.

the frost turns dew
and the dew turns mild.
when earth takes a temporary slumber
for the sun to shine better
and rain to bless later.
it brings bliss
for all maidens and dames

birds and calves.

seeds and birches

my youth picks up a few seeds

and plants them in the soft earth.

the soil takes it in

and promises me to moist and soften them

to not let it droop and wither.

i promise back to moist and soften my heart

but not let it become damp and wilt

to the whims of adolescence.

a heart of spring

myopic spring

my youth goes crimson

this very spring.

Halin Roche is a twenty-year-old literature student from India. She loves to read, write, doodle, and make journal entries.

She is chiefly interested in poetry, but also writes essays, book reviews, and loves photography. Her works have been published in Visio Mag, Sunbeam Zine, Walled Women, Lavande Magazine, and elsewhere.

Instagram: @365tales

April Preservation Charm
Cecily Fasham

The guilelessness or glassiness of night, unending
blue or colourless, becoming green
as those long evenings in the orchard, when the stars
unveiled themselves to hear us whisper nothingness
like sequinned gravel or an uninvited song
a trill unbidden, as the trenchant nightingale.

We two as young as apple blossoms, not so bright,
were far too delicate to breathe or even shatter
almost saccharine but shivering instead
without the slightest hint of rent, fate, manifest destiny.

Not a sliver's threat or truth, look on that cherry-ripened youth
not quite undone but stored up, shelved, promise in aspic
picked and pickled, all preserved until we lean to shake
our picnic blankets out again & raise ourselves to (unintended) life.

Cecily Fasham is a novice poet and literature student from the UK. Ordinarily, she is interested in translation, reading-experience, sonnets, and unearthing the forgotten histories of women who write poems. During the pandemic, she moved back from university in Cambridge to her family home in a tiny, quasi-rural English town, and in her daily looping walks through fields has discovered an affinity for grass and flowers, which are now almost the only things she writes about. Her work appears in DAISYWORLD magazine, and nowhere else yet except student anthologies. She can be found on Instagram @lightseedling.

The Seas We Left, The Seas We Kept
S.E Hartz

We crawled from warm and shallow waters,
moon low and red in the sky like a candled egg.
We were built of palm fronds and scuttling insect steps,
lightning-struck, membrane creatures striped with salt rivers,
gas-sucking, brine-drinking,
changing chemistry and cadence
through our capture.

We are not a body; we are an exchange.
Before we are singular we are dispersed,
an ocean then a bellyful then water
walking on its own two feet.
There is a river running through plasma,
through wombwater and tears,
through secret rivulet fountains underground,
poison-stricken, ironbound.

Storms crack the sky;
the waters will rise,
returning us to our returning.

S.E. Hartz (she/her) is a queer fiction writer and environmental scientist living in Brooklyn, New York. Her writing can be found at small leaf press, Lammergeier, and applestreet. For musings (both fictional and factual) on nature, time, energy, and apocalypse, follow her on Twitter at @unsilentspring.

50% Of Flowers Die Before They Can Be Sold
BD Salvas

March comes gently like a tornado,
Causing my ankles to unbraid themselves.
Silver fish scales and virginal blossoms
Crack under the incandescent sun.
Off the path, a fledgling spreads for the first time,
Amazed at its own unfinished wingspan,
Speckled wings beating into streams
Of ego. Flared by the ricocheting chaparral.
Unbridled feet also failing at swift flight,
We are fairy dust pining for the new moon.

Brown and shrinking like rotting wood
Or fabric that clings too tightly to the bosom,
Eyes close quickly, unable to take root in the sight
Of arrogantly mounted hills spoiling my youth.
Hairy asses of the colonizers lined up and clenched,
Build a dam before the water can thaw.
Ready to fire upon the innocent,
Unscorch the incense with gunpowder,
Only going so far as to blaze new trails
Leading to familiar forbidden fruit.
Imperfections in their design run down my legs,
Tulips sprouting against icy chauvinism.

BD Salvas is a Black poet from Southern California. She uses her experiences as a Black queer person to write about sex, love, trauma, and nature. When she isn't writing poetry, BD is likely to be analyzing classical literature or watching anime. Twitter: @BethDimanche

When Mother Nature will not Wake

Elizabeth M. Castillo

There is a girl here, she is a goddess and she is me.

There is a mountain beneath that girl, that heeds and kneels to the goddess, and that mountain is also me.

There are legs beneath that girl, as she stands, towering over, straddling that mountain. Legs that reach beyond oceans, across seas. Legs that span the continents.

Beneath the mountain, Gaia¹ sleeps, weary from the angry years of men waging war across her skin, and plundering her depths with impunity. She sleeps because it is her time. Turning over in her slumber, she shifts the earth and its casing, throwing up the waters into one great wave, and splitting the ground beneath humanity in two.

In her rest she has sent her daughter in her stead, and her daughter is the girl.

There are waters inside this girl, rain and thunder that rage and roar. The sound of ravenous hunger not for food, but for blood, and conquest, and empire. And desire. She carries not her mother's weariness, and now she has awoken, she will no longer sleep. The storms inside drive this girl, this goddess, not to madness, but to understanding that is beyond the world of men. To her duty to the mother Durga², and to the earth she has left in her care. To gale-force winds, and feral, ferocious fire.

There is vengeance inside this girl, but she keeps it under lock and key. The key swings on a chain about the tall column of her neck- a warning to those who might mistake her patience for weakness. There is greater strength in silence. In knowing one's weight and worth.

There are arms here, and hands. And fingers built for power, and possession. Built for conquest. The four winds heed their every flex, their every fold. Might, like a sword can be wielded both ways. But these hands course with creation, not destruction, sprouting cherry blossoms and fruiting trees in whichever direction they incline. Such is the divine way.

There are tears that fall here, over the equator. Over the Americas. Returning to the sea. There is pain that has been bartered, recycled into fodder, into food for the mountains and trees, as they too, awaken once more. The salt is gathered into the earth, and there sets itself, collects itself, as diamonds in the soil. Men will kill themselves, and each other for the tiniest sample of the goddess' sadness, the tears of the girl. Each year she will shed more.

There is patience here, marked as veins across her neck and wrists. Heavily they heave in her full breasts. Patience, and promise of provision, of providence. Of blessing and bounty and beauty, even in her great sadness. Blood and milk, surging through her. Bountiful harvest, just waiting to be birthed. She bears their weight gladly, knowing these are the means, and not the end.

There is a song here, a melody so terrible no ear can stand its sound. There are words sung in

¹ Mother Goddess of the earth according to Greek Mythology

² Hindu supreme Mother Goddess

adoration, incantations, travelling upwards from the ground, from the very earth beneath her, the Pacha Mama³ herself sings her own daughter's praises. Toasts her long-life, her great love, and her health.

Elizabeth M Castillo is a British-Mauritian poet, writer and language teacher. She lives in Paris with her family and two cats. When not writing poetry, she can be found working on her podcast or webcomic, pottering about her garden, or writing a variety of different things under a variety of pen names. In her writing Elizabeth explores themes of race & ethnicity, motherhood, womanhood, language, love, loss and grief, and a touch of magical realism. She has words in, or upcoming in Selcouth Station Press, Pollux Journal, Revista Purgante, Lanke Review, Authylem Magazine, Fevers of the Mind Press, Melbourne Culture Corner, Epoch Press, among others.

³ Amerindian Goddess of the Earth, or Mother Nature