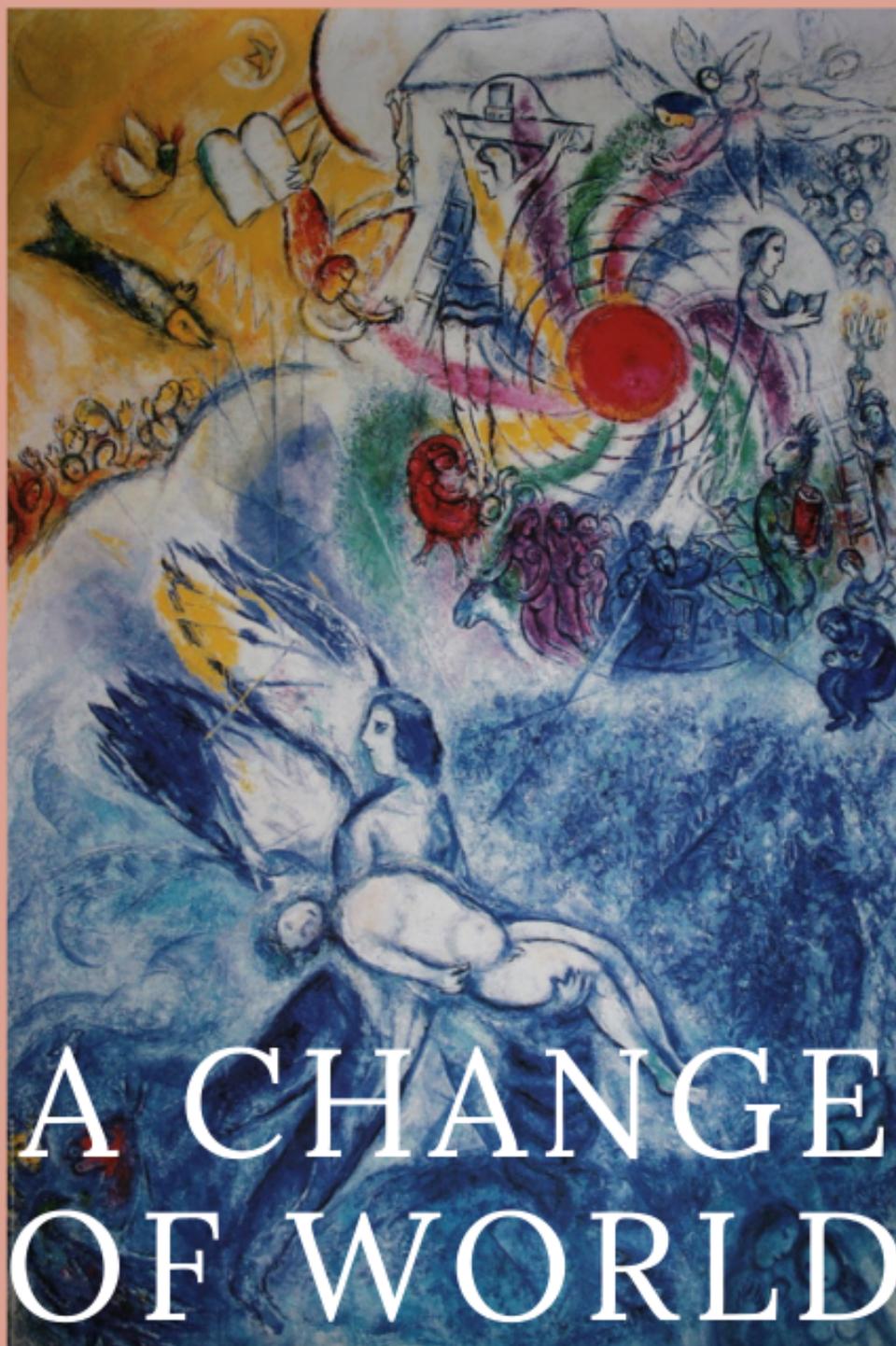


RED WOLF SPRING 2022 ISSUE 20



A CHANGE OF WORLD

IRENE TOH, EDITOR

Red Wolf Journal

Spring 2022 Issue 20

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A Change of World

Since 2020 the world has changed radically. Who could have imagined this, a pandemic world? Should I say, post-pandemic, going forward? To be honest I'm not so sure how that will be, but hopefully it will, as they say, morph into an endemic flu situation, where fatalities are relatively low even though new variants continue to spread like wildfire. Our new issue here is not meant to be about the pandemic as such; it definitely takes it on board though, and you, like me, may wish to do so in our writing. But change is meant to be taken in a generalised, more internalised sense. But of course what is internal is reflected in the external world. One mirrors the other. Isn't that true?

Before things changed, before anything changes, there is a sense of a lack of change, of deadwood, and of the desire for change. Since the time for change hasn't come, one has to wait it out. The state of waiting for change is one of apparent passivity, but it need not be. What one does to fill the time while waiting is one question. The other question is one of dissatisfaction and longing, and with that comes an internalised clock where one prepares for change. This is an intricate process, perhaps like how a spider constructs its web, or how a bee flies from flower to flower to gather pollen. It is a process of long patience and internal work coupled with actual steps of doing. Change takes time. Time changes things.

Which brings me to the next point, and that is that loss is change. Even if things are in a state of equilibrium, it cannot remain still. Change happens whether you will it or not. When you look back at the stages of your life, you will realize this. It's as if the curtain falls, the stage that opens in the next scene is different, has progressed. Sometimes the scenery changes, or the people are new, or if the same, they are altered by events. The social dynamics also change with time. Do things change for the better, or for the worse? How does one deal with loss, with change? Does it lead one to cynicism, bleakness, depression? How does one deal with such shifts?

How do you feel about the world's environmental issues of change, which appear to be at tipping point? What changes have come over us? Yet it's never one thing, is it, but losses and gains. The body deteriorates, the spirit comes into abundance? And isn't the ultimate change death? A change of world that we'll have to die to find out. Though it may be your death you're thinking about, the world doesn't end. Like a wheel, it spins, as seen in Chagall's *The Creation of Man*, and a new human and other new creatures shall spring forth. Nature works in cycles, in seasons of change.

Time may be silenced but will not be stilled,
Nor we absolved by any one's withdrawing
From all the restless ways we must be going
And all the rings in which we're spun and swirled,
Whether around a clockface or a world.
—Adrienne Rich, "A Clock in the Square"

Finally, I'd like you to think about poetry and change. Do you, like Rich, believe that poetry, as it is imaginative, is also transformative? That it is not mere self-indulgence, a marginal activity, that its voice, alongside other human endeavors, grounds us, reminds us, prods us, that it is "not a resting on the given, but a questing toward what might otherwise be" (Rich, *What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*), toward change? Perhaps not 'change' in capital letters yet but changes within the self, toward a new reflection of self and world? A rebirth of your world

begins with the self. I believe that imagination leads to a change of self and a change of world, however you interpret it. A person, after all, is a world. To quote Alan Walowitz, in his poem, "Revision":

I assure you, from vast experience,
to change a life requires more than one's full portion.
But to revise, to see yourself again,
that can be an everyday miracle, if only we'd try.
Some of our fathers tell us we're not quite chosen,
but just to be certain, we had better be better
and a light unto the nations.
This is hard work, the toughest there is,
but, didn't I hear God say, in some unrecorded verse,
Hey pal, isn't this what you signed up for?

The world as you imagine it, day by day by day, is a powerful one, can determine your mood, stance, everything. With poetry, we can perhaps practice the zen that Jane Hirschfield speaks of: "Zen pretty much comes down to three things – everything changes; everything is connected; pay attention." Then, for us poets, we write it down as if our souls depend on it.

Irene Toh
Editor
Spring 2022

The moment of change is the only poem.

—Adrienne Rich

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A Yawn of a Butterfly, a Handful of Confetti
by Dmitry Blizniuk

The flying snow outside the window –
huge flakes, a slanted white fringe –
made the room look like a firm soap bubble,
or a capsule of a space ship.
We, astronauts of love,
were comfortably settled in it,
and the winter silence –
the burlap wrapping Hannibal's elephants
crossing the Alps of life –
made us confident,
while your cream-white, sleepy waterfall of curtains,
gave us comfort.
In such winter evenings, non-Euclidean,
warped by the snowfall,
you can feel your roots.
Like a pine, you let them touch
the eerie depth of millenniums,
go deeper and deeper, like black multiarmed lightning.
How big is the civilization? –
just a yawn of a butterfly,
a handful of confetti
thrown on a piece of raw meat...

Do you remember the evening BI (before the Internet),
when electricity was cut in the whole building,
and we suddenly became a thousand years older,
got filled with animal wisdom and darkness,
but were still lit by an inner light,
usually invisible?
Like blind people who live by touch, by poking fingers,
like sneaking wart hogs,
we lit candles, searched for books,
had mysterious conversations, listening to the rustles, whispers,
drops of sound, which touched the surface of the lake of silence,
to the flinching fridge,
to the thump of the doors opening and closing in the stairwell,
to flickering ribbons of the voices between the concrete walls,
or to the murmur of our own circulatory systems,
as if we were in a womb.
Do you remember, fifteen years ago,
the chandelier suddenly went off,
as if a royal golden octopus
had died of a heart attack?
The tape-recorder stopped working.
Paganini's melody came to a sudden end,
as if the violinist hand had been chopped off.
The whitened fingers were still clenching the bow tight,

but the music grew out of itself and played on and on –
in our minds, in the silence.

Who are we?
shipwrecked, on the islands of souls,
we don't venture into the depth of the jungle.
We stay put on the beach where we can be rescued (do you believe it?)
and where there are no leopards.
We swim, fish, and sunbathe.
We argue and suffer from loneliness,
but we never exactly know what's hidden behind our backs,
how many ways can lead to other worlds.
Sometimes the starry hunger
pushes us to a secret door,
however no one but impostors has the key to it.
For we and only we are the keys to all doors,
to all holes in time and space.

(translated by Sergey Gerasimov from Russian)

Dmitry Blizniuk is an author from Ukraine. His most recent poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *The Pinch*, *Salamander*, *Willow Springs*, *Grub Street*, *Magma Poetry* and many others. A Pushcart Prize nominee, he is also the author of *The Red Forest* (Fowlpox Press, 2018). He lives in Kharkov, Ukraine. Member of PEN America.

Poets & Writers Directory:

http://www.pw.org/directory/writers/dmitry_blizniuk

Baobab
—*an Eintou, an African form poem*
by Paul Brooke

Inside
the elephant,
the seed churned, acid burned,
germinated by brutality.
We learned from misery,
a stone deep in
our guts.

Process notes: Elephants love to eat the seeds of this tree and they say it tastes sour and surprisingly like yogurt. The seeds are dispersed far from the baobab and this prompts a better chance for them to survive (in terms of resources such as water consumption).

Umika

—an Eintou, an African form poem
by Paul Brooke

I am

the vessel placed
under the palm tree to
tap the sap. Emptied, I remain
uncherished. Far off, the
party roars with
palm wine.

Paul Brooke is the author of six books including *Arm Wrestling at the Iowa State Fair* and *Jaguars of the Northern Pantanal*. These poems come from a collection of form poems from every continent. The book comes out in March 2022.

Trestle
by Jeff Burt

We had gone as far as the trestle that led to the pond
with its rickety boards and missing wood
 that left holes to look down into the creek
and wondered if we had enough daylight left

to walk across and watch the sunset
sparkle the water, the few geese swim
 without wake, the duckweed once brilliant
turn to a lesser shade of neon.

The dog wanted to run across, frightened
of the tremor of loose footings.
 naked bolts and crossbars,
but head up, seemingly aware of each paw-trap,

never slipped, not in gracefulness,
but in awkward strides, in the manner a tether
 of a boat in a storm pulls taut, relaxes,
pulls taut, and the boat lurches, survives the storm.

Emerson's divine animal came to mind,
the body, but our mind and eyes
 looking into the near future
were too far from ground to be trusted.

Perhaps the republic has traveled
just so, ignoring the missing architecture,
 the gaps in justice and equality,
a trestle made for the train of commerce

but not the evened path for others.
Perhaps we have wanted not bliss
 but ignorance, pretending not to look,
to keep our heads trained and vision up.

My mother told me often as I wiped dishes
to only see the good in people
 because the bad will be evident
whether you try to see it or not,

and perhaps that is like crossing
an old trestle, a blithe unawareness
 until your sole fails to find firmament
and your ankle scrapes against a ragged board.

The dog feels tremors, and moves.
If we avoid seeing, we plunge.
 We choose to cross. For the others
who traipse this trestle, I count the missing

and damaged planks that float without anchor,
the planks with wooden spirit worn
and split, make a date to return,
a list of lumber and coated common nails.

Ramps
by Jeff Burt

The coon froze on the fence as if sculpted,
a taxidermist's art, not a flinch or tic of muscle,
not a wandering eye of inspection or fear.
I was no enemy, so moved, but fixed the coon remained,
and I saw two wet waifs on the bottom of the other side
of the fence waiting for cues to cross from their mother.
They could not stay still for long, their cells animate,
climbed, slipped, and climbed again,
never drawing a turn of neck nor hiss of disapproval.
I spoke, said time to get along in a low assured voice,
and the mother broke, the two young slow to master
the top of the fence, tripping, going backwards.
How exhausted she appeared, clean but haggard,
not frightened or anxious. One young fell,
could no longer climb, so the mother took the strong one
toward a trail behind my neighbor's house,
looking back as if to orphan the weaker one.
I took a wide board saved for repairs
and made a ramp to the fence top and poked
the little one with the handle of a rake
until it used the ramp to make the top of the fence
and slip off to the other side to join mother and sib.
The mother turned at the corner of the house
and looked back at me and I wish to say
I saw acknowledgment, perhaps an animal thanks,
but it was weariness I saw. She was beat.

I remember this today as I disengage from work
serving a mother with children who escaped Syria
on a boat to a camp in Italy where she said she played
the part of shepherd for her kids, herding them here
and there, protecting them from human wolves,
entire days spent at times in lines for food
or haggling for a transport to where her uncle lived,
and I saw those eyes again, not thankful for my assistance,
but weary, fixed on a place in a landscape I could not envision,
a stare into nothingness, a blank.
Today my ramp was words, direction,
of assistance, grants, aid for her children,
a slow elevation of her vision to find
the point of escape, of rescue,
in the worn and faded future she beheld.

I remember my daughter eight months pregnant with Covid
walking the hills of Vermont for ramps,
wild allium, leeks, so her husband could make a pesto
that cannot be purchased, home-made,
and thus avoid human contact.
She converses internally with her child

at all hours, tired, ready to birth, yet
not, the fear of the virus, the apprehension,
the ignorance of not having a predictable outcome.
Her voice on video is monotone except for when she speaks
to her child in utero, when like music
it falls and rises, rises higher to an almost clarinet's squeak,
or when she speaks of finding clusters of ramps,
fistfuls, the pearls of the soil taken from the clam of wet dirt.
so I study allium, study pesto, pull a few wild leek
from the corner of the yard by the same fence
the raccoon had almost lost her young,
and my daughter and I talk of harvesting ramps
for ten minutes, and this is all I can provide,
not absolve the fear of separation, of illness,
but a slight elevating lever from her distress to the joy
that the world could provide for her and her baby,
a bridge for all of the internal discussions she has
to take root again in the external world,
to which she will, as I have done, yield.

Jeff Burt lives in Santa Cruz County, California with his wife. He has contributed previously to *Red Wolf Journal*, *Williwaw Journal*, *Heartwood*, and many other journals.

Hammer of History
by Joe Cottonwood

Let it be known
you of future century
finding this note dropped in wall cavity
of this cabin built by miner 49er
who never struck it rich —

Let it be known that
while remodeling this cabin,
my hammer slipped from sweaty fingers
to fall beyond reach
within walls from a century plus half
being of tight grain heart redwood
milled from trees of millennial age —

Let it be known
when my spirit has flown,
when walls finally fall
you of future century
who find that hammer, this note,
it's my old Stiletto framer
with handle worn to the fit of my grip,
never struck gold
now yours to hold.

Joe Cottonwood has repaired hundreds of houses to support his writing habit in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California. His latest book of poetry is *Random Saints*.

The Turning Wheel
by CS Crowe

I found a tire abandoned in the woods,
And I wondered how this was possible:
Who would carry a twenty pound tire
Off the road and into the ditch,
Out of the ditch and up the hill,
Up the hill and into the woods,
And every step of the way, sweating,
Spitting, cursing, never stopping.

I have found so many tires
Abandoned in the woods these days;
They increase in number until I cannot
Count them without cutting off my fingers.

When a daddy tire and a mommy tire
Love each other very much,
You are born, little tire in the woods,
Doomed to fade in the sun's harsh light,
But never to die, only to grow older
With each passing day, like an oak tree
That has never known the ax or drought.
There are no such trees left anymore.

I find nothing but tires in the woods these days,
Until all the world is rubber and glass and steel.
The blue-less sky waiting
To be carried off the road and into the ditch.

CS Crowe is a storyteller from the Southeastern United States with a love of nature and a passion for writing. He believes stories and poems are about getting there, not being there, and he enjoys those tales that take their time getting to the point.

One Less Sun
by Mary Anna Scenga Kruch

The draft beneath the back door
called attention
to sun-shaped metal
crafted once into wind chimes
now half gone from neglect
after Jenny left for college
yet still struggling
against its own existence
on weak links
that scrape the down spout
clank against a corner
of the house its backbone
a noose denoting loss
ignores new shoots
on maple trees whose spring wish
rests tenuously on each twig --
only the wind chimes
grow watchful:
a reminder that snow and wind
may again overtake
the roof the door
suspend new growth
threaten to destroy
then hang
one less metal sun.



Wingbeats
by Mary Anna Scenga Kruch

If her wingbeats could unhinge the cage
and if once out the gate
escape lockdown
she could migrate north
to Lake Michigan shores
would nest deep in the woods
in a place of pine needles
rest upon a telephone wire
await the creamy light
of a last quarter moon
and from her nest
sense the early morning stir
and quickened beat
of hawk's wings.



Photograph © Ron Dudley

Mary Anna Scenga Kruch is a career educator and writer, often inspired by her Italian family and the natural world. She has published a textbook, *Nurturing Motivation in Young Adolescent Writers* (2012), a poetry chapbook, *We Draw Breath from the Same Sky* (2019), and most recently a full-length collection of poetry and prose, *Grace Notes: A Memoir in Poetry & Prose* (2021). She is widely published in state and national literary journals. *Poetry in River Heron Review* and *Wayne Literary Review* are forthcoming.

Looking Glass
by Ron. Lavalette

It seems like all the windows
we used to look through
to see our bright futures
have turned into dark,
accusatory mirrors
intent on reminding us
of our failed yesterdays
and our current miasma.

It seems like yesterday's
beneficent light-givers
have turned into dark
foreboding crystal balls
into which we're forced
to gaze at tomorrow's
inevitable nightmares.

Qi
by Ron. Lavalette

I think I remember feeling it,
silently ebbing and flowing,
altering everything about me.

I recall my first encounter,
ages ago, at the University
in that meditation class,

OM-ing and focusing on breath
under the blue-sky maples
with Professor Gurumeister;

and I guess I sailed, then,
unanchored, adrift, imagining
I could avoid current events.

But I'm almost ancient now, and
the Morning News reminds me
I've forgotten the Guru's name.

No matter; no matter. Nothing
matters anymore; I breathe deep,
unfurl my inner sail, and I'm gone.

Ron. Lavalette is a very widely published, award-winning writer living on the Canadian border in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. His first chapbook, *Fallen Away* (Finishing Line Press), is now available at all standard outlets. More than 250 pieces of his poetry and short prose have been published in both print and pixel form in journals, reviews, and anthologies ranging alphabetically from *Able Muse* and the *Anthology of New England Poets* through the *World Haiku Review*. A reasonable sample of his published work can be viewed online at EGGS OVER TOKYO.

In Seclusion
by Joan Mazza

Isolated and confined in extreme environments,
polar researchers sometimes enter fugue states,
unable to do more than stare when spoken to.
They sleep and feel disoriented, lose track of days,
are easily confused. Depression and boredom
settle in like chronic pain. Motivation skates
outside out of reach. The natural state is lethargy
with torpor seem. No wonder bears hibernate.

Expeditions and remote stations reveal who thrives
and survives in quarantine or exile, who knows how
to dive inward into the unknown self. During this time
when we're asked to keep our distance, stay home
even if alone, we find our inner resources, discover
who can entertain themselves, who must talk and text,
or turn to TV for company to tamp down
thoughts and feelings before they surface.

Those summers of my childhood in Sound Beach
alone with my mother, no other children near, I read
through all the Reader's Digest Condensed books
left by the previous owner of that decrepit cottage,
kept a diary, learned to fish, and how to shuck
clams and slurp them on the half shell with lemon
any time I pleased. I played my 45s, set my hair
and polished my nails, although there was no one

to see me preparing for future dates and dinners
I could not envision that summer I was twelve.
Who would have guessed those summers of long
walks in the woods where imagination grew
like the wild grapes and poison ivy on the verge,
would serve me well sixty years later? Confined
to home, I'm reading books I hauled from Florida
to these Virginia woods where only birds call.

Becoming a Hermit
by Joan Mazza

Whoever thought a day of solitude,
thoughtful hours spent quietly alone
would nourish and restore my fortitude?

Back when I greeted others with gratitude,
I couldn't stand the silence, grabbed the phone
to spare myself one day of solitude.

No plans, no calls, days I spent confused
by the freedom to please myself or roam.
No way do I restore my fortitude

now by being with others. No platitudes
from advice givers who think they're grown.
I make art for a full day in solitude.

Reveling in wildness, coming a tad unglued
is now a pleasure I would not have owned,
when I needed others to find fortitude.

Call me, if you like, in the interlude
between the crowds of people. Now a crone,
I anticipate a day of solitude—
the best way to restore my fortitude.

On Solitude
by Joan Mazza

Two days alone and I call up the past,
dates with Archie, after dinners out, time
at my house, the other's quiet presence
a comfort. Sometimes he played guitar
while my dog gazed at him in adoration
and I could read or doze or float in the pool.

Even then I needed extra sleep after
company, no matter how I sought him
out, placed ads to meet more men, looked for
someone better. The bliss of solitude
when they disappeared or I did. I'm older

now, and Archie's dead, along with his third
wife—a proper wildness match. They lived
apart and got along, compatible,
content in their quirky ways in separate
houses. Balanced solitude without
loneliness or longing. They had just enough.

Joan Mazza has worked as a medical microbiologist, psychotherapist, and taught workshops on understanding dreams and nightmares. She is the author of six books, including *Dreaming Your Real Self*, and her poetry has appeared in *Rattle*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Adanna Literary Journal*, *Poet Lore*, *Slipstream* and *The Nation*. She lives in rural central Virginia and writes every day.

Bad-Bad to Good
by Karla Linn Merrifield

Bad.
Bad men.
An army of bad men
liked up confront me
even now
DraculaFrankensteinBluebeard
Bigbadwolf.
Why so many monsters?

All we'll have is Medusa
to seduce with wisdom
signified by writhing snakes
idea serpents
pythons of woman power
to slay monsters.
Hey you, look at all my thoughts
slithering toward you.
I'm be getting into your head.
No more asps of brainwash,
of propaganda reflecting
your own lies.
Let's do the snake dance, bad boys.
Truth is fanged.

Karla Linn Merrifield has had 1000+ poems appear in dozens of journals and anthologies, with 14 books to her credit. Following her 2018 *Psyche's Scroll* (Poetry Box Select) is the newly released full-length book *Athabaskan Fractal: Poems of the Far North* from Cirque Press. Her newest poetry collection, *My Body the Guitar*, inspired by famous guitarists and their guitars; was published in January 2022 by Before Your Quiet Eyes Publications Holograph Series (Rochester, NY). Web site: <https://www.karlalinnmerrifield.org/>; blog at <https://karlalinnmerrifield.wordpress.com/>; Tweet @LinnMerrifield; Instagram: <https://www.facebook.com/karlalinn.merrifield>.

Nocturnal Journey
by Peter Mladinic

Their nocturnal journey almost over,
the coyotes' melodic yelps wake me at 5,
the Big Bend, in the distance the Christmas
Mountains. Yesterday I saw a ridge
where Javalinas had eaten the hearts of
low to the ground lechugillas.
Hiking Terlingua Creek I found a rock
I could see through: flat land for miles
dotted by sage and bladed plants,
not standing cacti but low to the ground,
oval-shaped, leaves like pillows to beautify
a sofa. Needles struck to my thumb and
index finger. Both bled a while. Later
I felt a hardness, a soreness in my thumb
and thought poison but nothing to worry
about. Here, the beginning of March,
at dark the wind died. What trees are waist-
high have branches we turned to firewood.
I remember: mesas at sunset,
part red, part blond, the vein Jim found
in a rock wall in Terlingua,
moist mountain lion tracks and tracks of
deer above a badger hole. God forgot
to make badgers humble, Scotty said.
The ghost town's stone walls of houses,
and above them the wedding's guitar music.
The rabbits, roadrunners.
Jim and Scotty hurled stones across the Rio
Grande into Mexico, Pas Lajitas marsh
grass and scrub, the other side.

St. Francis
by Peter Mladinic

Katie Zwerling, leave everything behind
and come with me to St. Francis,
a little town way up in Maine, way up
there, way out there. When people say
out in the middle of nowhere they mean
this place, surrounded by logging roads

cleared a hundred years ago so trucks
could haul logs to populated places.
You've seen roads surrounded by trees.
These roads are really surrounded by trees!
You drive on, it's a bit scary. Nothing's
around these winding dirt roads but trees

and this town, where we could settle
in a house with heat, air conditioning.
Would the house have central air? Maybe.
But it would have electricity, plumbing,
and we'd be close to the logging roads,
get to know them so we wouldn't get stuck

or lost. People want to be near the ocean,
or a lake or a golf course. I'd take these
logging roads any day over a golf course
or a mall, roads with trees around, pines,
evergreens, no vehicles, except us in ours,
my jeep with a GPS, so as not to get lost.

So much snow in winter, a snowmobile
would be needed. I could buy one!
Snowsuits to keep us warm. Go out
on those roads, not too far, and come back
to our house in St. Francis. Both of us
stripped naked I could kiss you all over.

We could make love, then go to a local cafe,
come home, watch *Reign* on Netflix.
St. Francis has WiFi. We could call people
on our cell phones. When logging roads
were made, did they had telephones way up
there? It's way, way different from here.

Peter Mladinic's fourth book of poems, *Knives on a Table*, is available from Better Than Starbucks Publications. An animal rights advocate, he lives in Hobbs, New Mexico.

The Winter People
by Misky

Winter wrapped us in a blanket,
into foggy black and white trees.

Twig-fingers, a writer's ache
on sheets of white paper.

Fog. Fog. A silent semaphore
language

that reduces
the sun to a small white stone.

It tosses ice on my flame, and
turns rainbows black and white.

And the clouds
are hanging upside down,

floundering in frozen fields,
and in-between tufts of weeds.

Winter. It's no longer looking
for a place to settle.

'Misky' lives in the UK surrounded by the rolling hills of West Sussex. She never buys clothing without pockets. Her work is regularly published by *Waterways - Ten Penny Players*, *Visual Verse Anthology*, and Vita Brevis Press. Her photography is published with *Unsplash*.

Leaving
by Larry Oakner

Autumn falls and dances
spinning pirouettes.
This is the season's ballet
of death and awaited resurrection.
What was once verdant
is now sere
and clutters the gutters
in shades of crimson, salmon,
mustard, golden, orange.
I am grey
and when my Fall finally comes
and I am swept away
there will be no greening sprout of me
come Spring,
only memories
on these leaves of paper.

Larry Oakner draws his sources from his life and popular culture. With a Master's Degree in Creative Writing from UCLA and training to be a professor, Oakner has written and published poetry for well over four decades. He is the author of two books of poems, including *SEX LOVE RELIGION* (Blind Tattoo Press), *The 614th Commandment* (under his pseudonym, Eleazar Baruch) (Blind Tattoo Press), along with the chapbook, *The Canticles of Private Lucius Swan*, (Pen & Anvil Press). His poems have appeared in *Red Eft Review*, *WINK*, *The Oddville Press*, *Pink Litter*, *Tricycle: Buddhist News*, *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*, *Lost Coast Review* and many others. Oakner lives in New York.

Night Attack
by Frederick Pollack

We had cut the wire.
Advanced in loose order
across that landscape for which there are
no more adjectives. Rain had smoothed
the contours of shellholes and further liberated
bone from sodden uniforms and flesh.
Despite the endless unseen pitfalls, night
appeared not quite itself, or day,
but a third thing, bright in an unhelpful way.
Machine-guns, snipers, searchlights, flares
held off, as if a god
had sealed their eyes and mouths;
in the silence, we heard each other think.
In that silence, our thoughts made too much noise.
Promotion, a blighty, letters to or from,
dry cigarettes, erotic views so distant
they might have enticed another species,
and someone's picture of a whole world bad
as our small part of it ...
As if we were officers, we tried to
bring order to our thoughts, to make
them march more smartly than we ever had.

As the strange light increased
and we, in our perpetual crouch,
still stumbled on, the realm we crossed,
grew somehow smoother, simplified,
and birds, the sparrows of our homeland, hopped.
Among them one, in no way distinguished,
said to the rest, Let's fly –
one final vast formation, singing
as beautifully as we alone perceive.
But shells and bullets shred the air,
the others objected. Better turn worm or lizard.
Brothers, those things can't threaten us,
the first bird said. We do not hunger
for life like these dead stinking creatures;
we belong to sky alone.
And the small birds stood amazed,
for none had ever spoken to them thus.

Author of two book-length narrative poems, *The Adventure and Happiness*, both Story Line Press; the former to be reissued 2022 by Red Hen Press. Two collections of shorter poems, *A Poverty of Words*, (Prolific Press, 2015) and *Landscape with Mutant* (Smokestack Books, UK, 2018). **Frederick Pollack** has appeared in *Salmagundi*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Fish Anthology* (Ireland), *Magma* (UK), *Bateau*, *Fulcrum*, *Chiron Review*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, etc. Online, poems have appeared in *Big Bridge*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *BlazeVox*, *The New Hampshire Review*, *Mudlark*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Faircloth Review*, *Triggerfish*, etc.

Marie, apartment 5C, floor 11
by Emalisa Rose

Seldom at ease, in a world that forgot her, now becomes norm for the spinster, 5C, floor eleven. The walls growing flowers, robins are wearing their wings for her, on day 99, paused in the funk and the fury of what's become now. Through the filigree of branch over branch, birds become focal point, morpheme and muse to her state of attrition, as life leans towards parody. In the semi-charmed state, Marie becomes numb, embracing the reign of recluse, this Tuesday, dark morning, seeking the sparrow's song.

Process notes: It is based on observations of living in a neighborhood, sometimes for years, yet many neighbors remain nameless. Sometimes we are fearful to get to know someone other than giving a quick 'hello' or nod. In these most troubling times, behind the closed doors, someone may be hurting emotionally, feeling alone, without anyone reaching out to check on them. This is sadly more pressing for the elderly. My great-aunt, who lives alone, very far from me, is fortunate to have someone that does look in on her, unlike Marie in 5C, floor 11.

When not writing, **Emalisa Rose** enjoys crafting and birding. She volunteers in animal rescue. She lives by the beach, which provides much of the inspiration for her art. Some of her work has appeared in *Mad Swirl*, *Literary Veganism*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice* and other wonderful places. Her latest collection is *On the whims of the cross currents*, published by Red Wolf Editions.

A Sketch of a Wilted Flower
by Timothy Resau

Somewhere in this city, she stares,
spending her dreams like pennies.
Months are between us—
Slowly we've become strangers.
I can only wonder where she is?
Who listens to her voice?
She remains constant, steadfast, the same—
a memory.

Timothy Resau has been internationally published. Most recently his poems and prose have appeared in *Sideways Poetry Magazine*, *Sylvia Magazine*, *The Beautiful Space*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Babel Tower Notice Board*, *Native Skin*, *Better than Starbucks*, among others, and forthcoming in *Fictional Café*, and *Burrow*. He's just completing a novel *Dirty Blonde*.

What's Left on the Plate
by Rikki Santer

We are low watt bulbs dangling and disordered
discounting the skies with our hungry tycoons
who lust after zero gravity through their gift-wrapped
launches that trail space junk behind them.

We are oceans of soup-like swirls filled with plastic
flotsam or glaciers that can't hold on any longer.
We remain captivated by atlas of backyard, existential lives
of creatures wide-eyed in rain forests and savannas.

We are stuck in our orbital lanes whining on TikTok
or cable TV, reasoning through conspiratorial barks
and huddled head-to-head below cornices of appetite and pride.
We burrow into the faint history of reading, the squall
of internet, so many magnets for our attention, dangerous
nonsense we don't know what we're tracking, our
mouths half shut ready to descend just around the bend
onto whatever will be left on the plate.

Rikki Santer's poems have appeared in various publications including *Ms. Magazine*, *Poetry East*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Slab*, *Slipstream*, *[PANK]*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *RHINO*, *Grimm*, *Hotel Amerika* and *The Main Street Rag*. His work has received many honors including six Pushcart and three Ohioana and Ohio Poet book award nominations as well as a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities. His tenth collection, *How to Board a Moving Ship*, has just been released by Lily Poetry Review Books.

In Apollo's House
by Emil Sinclair

Pan's forest carnival got too wild
and noisy for me;
too much joy and pain.
So I live here now in Apollo's house,
where reason rules
and cosmos is king.
Here truth casts no shadow into lies;
and ideas are clear and distinct,
as Cartesian as Descartes.
Words mean what they mean,
and not what we say.
It is cold here now in Apollo's house;
the sun he lifts for others
brings no warmth to him.

Sometimes at night,
under moon and stars,
from the wooden deck out back,
I listen to the sounds of the woods.
I can hear Pan's pipes,
and your sweet voice whisper;
I can feel your breath
on the back of my neck,
in the warmth of the evening breeze.
But when I awake in the morning,
after a fitful broken sleep,
I can no longer remember
my nightly dreams.
Now that I live here alone
in Apollo's house.

Making small
by Emil Sinclair

“Trees are
so very tall;
they make us
look
so very small.”
—Anonymous

So, have you heard the news?
The rivers are overflowing,
or drying up;
the icecaps are melting,
as the seas rise
to the chins of our cities;
the forests are on fire,
burning down the house
of no shame.
The rains come
and do not go;
the graceful elands
wither and die
on plains of dust and ash,
as we play cost
accountant
with Mother Earth.
The Blue Man
of greed—
the fat-taker—
was not banished
by the red seer,
after all.

I heard the crows
this morning,
singing their hymn
of supplication.
The grey squirrels
run along the top
of the fence,
clucking their prayers.
Where is our humility?
Can we surrender
our own hubris
and sacrifice
our self-love
to Persephone
and Great Pan?
We cannot remain

until we have made
ourselves
very small.

Emil Sinclair is the pseudonym of a sometime poet and longtime philosophy professor in New York City.

Lights Above Bridges
by Ivor Steven

Bridges span our invisible years
And carry our many fallen tears
Crossing over old hidden fears

Bridges are burnt over time
Years turn to ashes in an instant
And time is our only constant

Beyond the longest bridges
Under the ocean's deepest blue
And above nature's darkest green
Love's evolving hues renew
And Aurora lights are on debut

New Mushrooms
by Ivor Steven

After the storm
Old boundaries were transformed
Fences were moved and torn
Fields smelled of rotting corn
Patient vultures remained airborne
Above the drowning longhorn's

After the storm
I rested under the peppercorn
And I saw new mushrooms rise with the dawn

Ivor Steven was formerly an Industrial Chemist, then a Plumber, and has been writing for 20 years. He is a member of Geelong Writer Inc (Australia), a team member with the on-line blog-site 'Go Dog Go Cafe (America), and is a writer for the *Coffee House Writers Magazine* (America).

The Covid Years
by Debi Swim

are evergreen fog, grey-green
tranquil it would seem to some
rather it is a surrender to drab,
dull, bordering on disillusionment.

Follow the science became a corn-
maze of miscues, lies, guesses, hopes
leaving people in a fog of uncertainty
and pointing fingers, scared into total

collapse of sanity, commonsense,
political power gone amok. Shortages,
hoarding, disinfectant seeping into
the rugs and atmosphere – we are afraid

to take a deep breath. Evergreen fog
shades us all. Here's hoping in years
to come for some sunny, enlightened
hues of health and trust and good will.

Process notes

Sherwin-Williams has named its "Color of the Year" for 2022, and this time it's Evergreen Fog – a tranquil gray-green hue that takes inspiration from nature.

One Long Summer is Not Enough
by Debi Swim

Now. Now, I need the change
It used to be they were abrupt,
a shock, a dread because I was
young and youth wants sun,
fun, long days in which to play.

Now, I crave each season as it comes
and as it ages comes to the end
I'm ready for the next to begin.
Continuity is what I love as the year
slips gently into its fourths
and forth again, again, again, again.

I need the spring of shoots and buds
the summer of flowers and slinky days,
the fall a time to wind down
and winter a time of rest and mending.

I need them all as the earth needs rain
and sun and harvest and a cooling down
They seep into my innerness and connect –
a symbiosis of life to life, content.

Debi Swim has had poems published in two anthologies, online publications and in the *Bluestone Journal* for Bluefield College. She is a persistent WV poet who loves to write to prompts.

Nothing is exempt from resurrection.

—Kay Ryan