

MUSING PUBLICATIONS  
ISSUE 3



# BLOOM & BLOSSOM



# Contents

03	<i>spring mantra</i>
04	<i>Pastry Pastoral</i>
05	<i>Why I Press Flowers</i>
06	<i>Sunrise</i>
07	<i>...Can Spring be Far Behind?</i>
08	<i>color pop</i>
09	<i>afternoon tea</i>
10	<i>garden alone</i>
11	<i>Persephone</i>
12	<i>Pampas Hill</i>
13	<i>kindred spirits</i>
14	<i>Message to my body</i>
15	<i>God in the Garden</i>
17	<i>The Soccer Freak</i>
19	<i>Daydreaming at Midnight</i>
20	<i>love language</i>
21	<i>spring skin</i>
22	<i>Yucca Blooms</i>
23	<i>Leap to Life</i>
24	<i>Here Again</i>
25	<i>Nucleus</i>
26	<i>Inferno</i>
27	<i>From the Garden</i>
28	<i>Lilac Longing</i>
29	<i>Bough to Bones</i>
30	<i>Bloom</i>
31	<i>Little Girl Moonrise</i>
32	<i>Tonight</i>

# Contents

33	<i>Pink Ladies</i>
35	<i>Concentric</i>
36	<i>The After</i>
37	<i>I could break into blossom</i>
38	<i>Both Sides Now</i>
39	<i>Bloom</i>
40	<i>Poppies I</i>
41	<i>Lilly's Backyard</i>
45	<i>Vintage Blooms</i>
46	<i>Efflorsece</i>
47	<i>From the Night's Window</i>
48	<i>Chance</i>
49	<i>In Memory of Spring Rain</i>
50	<i>Sunflowers</i>
51	<i>Queen</i>
52	<i>Mononoke</i>
53	<i>Late Tulips</i>
54	<i>Bee on Artichoke Flower</i>
55	<i>Romantic Gestures</i>
56	<i>Dandelions</i>

# s p r i n g m a n t r a

*Ink*

remember, it is the rhythm of spring  
to bloom and be romanced by the distant sun;

remember, evergreens are destined to outlive us all,  
the deciduous only pretend to suffer;

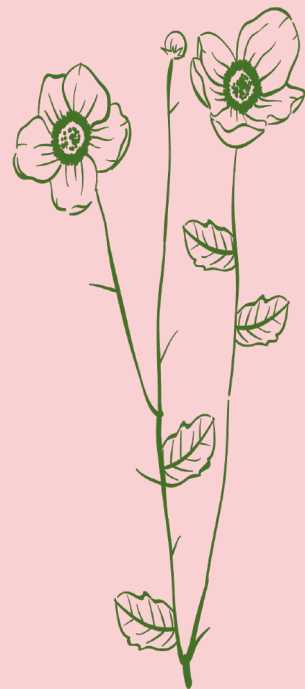
remember, only envy bursting from resurrected boughs  
colors our loins;

remember, we learned the fuck-and-run mentality  
when shooed away from The Garden;

remember, the funky perfume of pheromones  
is the invisible hand pulling noses into armpits, asses;

remember, desperate songs propagating in trees  
are but lovesick poems from feathered troubadours;

remember, monogamy is for the birds,  
and we are mammals.



*Pastry Pastoral L.M. Cole*

# Why I Press Flowers

*Beck Anson*

The year before you left us,  
you moved to the tundra of Alaska

to reconnect with your wildness, to find  
healing among the brown bears and salmon.

But instead of connection in Katmai,  
you found yourself standing on the edge

of a wilderness so vast you couldn't  
tell which way was home anymore.

Instead of healing in the Last Frontier,  
you found yourself on a bridge between

giving up and seeing how much  
more you could take. I wrote you

a letter while home alone recovering  
from what was supposed to be a life-affirming

surgery. It was. But a week after the surgeon  
cut lifelines across my chest to bring me closer

to who I was meant to be, I found myself holding  
an alluring arsenal of narcotics in my left hand,

a glass of water in my right. I was supposed to be happy,  
but instead was entirely convinced I was a lone wolf.

I wrote to you what I needed to hear at the time,  
that the depression wanted us to believe

that we were alone, but we weren't.  
A letter arrived to me two weeks later

postmarked Anchorage, AK.  
You said that you were in a better place

but fragile, like the pressed hawkweed flower  
I had slipped into my letter to you,

a delicate token of love. You tucked red flags  
into your letter — a pressed bog-star flower,

a print of a raven. You signed, *let's live through this,  
shall we?* I never got a chance to write you back.

At your memorial service, I read a poem  
whose metaphors I could hide behind,

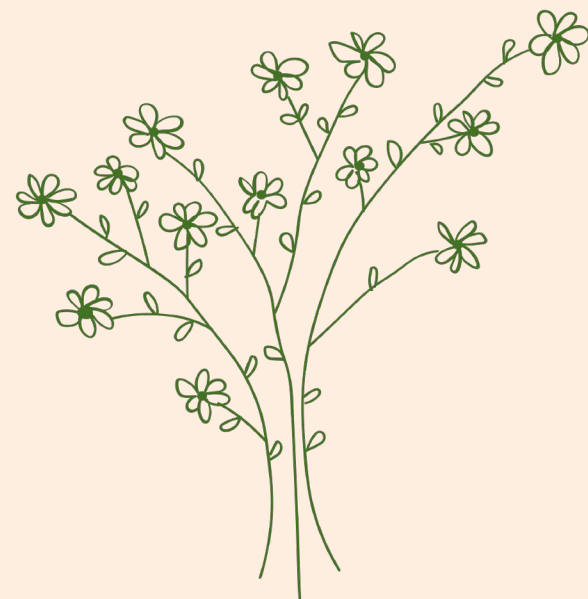
too afraid that I would suffocate from  
my own grief, from love unspent. But suicide

is not a flower you can press; it is the kind  
that leaves bitterness on your tongue.

Nothing feels like healing yet. Not the rain,  
not the robin nor the redbud.

I just know I'll never leave another letter unwritten,  
never leave my words to dry between blank pages

of words unsaid, every pressed flower  
a promise I intend to keep.



# Sunrise

*Beck Anson*

When I awake, the daylight trickles  
through the blinds & onto your skin,

infuses my mind with a line  
I can't get out of my mouth.

You fill my frame with sweetness,  
and my heart with all of you.

I want to be close to you.  
show you today — where

the bales of hay are painted amber,  
the trees blossoming with promise.

I will take you to the untold feeling of when  
the earth turns towards the light —

when the night falls asleep,  
when the sun blooms again,

when you are laying next to me  
underneath the glow of a new horizon.



# ... Can Spring be Far Behind?

*Kresha Richman Warnock*

The daffodils are poking their pointy green heads out of the soil. The first spring we were here in our new, Pacific Northwest home, as Covid descended on the land, thousands of glorious golden daffodils regaled the center lane of our busy main street for miles. A year later, along with our first vaccine, they came back in the early spring. I learned that a founder of our only twenty-five-year-old suburb-town, had the vision to plant these bulbs. He died in 2021. Not a bad way to be remembered, as the Johnny Appleseed of daffodils; a man whose legacy of beauty lives on for years as bulbs multiply silently under the ground each winter and then burst out with great dancing joy in the spring.

Last fall, I added dozens of bulbs to my own little yard. Now I stand in the courtyard, where the hydrangea bush that bloomed a dark blue in the summer is cut back to its bare branches, and take deep breaths of the foggy, crisp morning air. I am joyously anticipating the golden mass that will light up the yard and the streets soon. I have done my tiny part to blast through the doldrums of winter and add to it with the promise of a golden spring.



color pop *Amy Harrison*



# Garden, Alone

*Silvia Rose*

I am here, in the garden, the only one that matters.

With insects as company –  
flies, and the red-and-black spider  
hanging from my glasses.

*Cuckoo. Swarms.*  
*Bleats. Swallows.*  
*Buzz. Barks.*  
*Whines. Calls.*

The smell of nothing at all.

A confetti of magnolia petals – all stages from virgin to crone.

Bracken reaches out in plumes.

I want to lie naked in a field full of women.  
And lunch on benches, chatter on rungs.

People have died.  
Sheep walk the tracks.  
Bluebells wash over in slices.

I have no money, no job, no children, no husband.  
It is now and only now.

I dive in deep for the sword at the bottom.

# Persephone

*Ashley Washburn*

It was no secret that he planned to steal her.

Gossip amongst the gods spread quickly, and her mother heard of the plot almost as soon as it had fallen from his cursed lips. Of course, she heard the rumors too, but her mother's hushed conversations and stern orders confirmed the whispers as truths.

Each time they visited the river, her mother told her, *Stay away from the flowers. They're as evil as they are beautiful.*

And each time, she listened, never straying from the banks, afraid of how her mother would react if she disobeyed. She knew she did not need protecting, as her mother insisted. Nor a guardian angel hovering over every misstep. She could think for herself and act for herself and save herself if she needed saving at all.

He was unpredictable, chaotic even, that much she knew. The other gods criticized his actions as impulsive, his character as unbecoming of their palace of thrones. Yet, even the most powerful among them rarely raised a mighty finger in protest.

*Fruitless*, they swore.

After all, how do you tell the king of the Underworld what he cannot do? For once, she hoped, that the words they spoke were true. Too many girls were the victims of selfish gods and she did not want to fall prey to them, as well.

So, as the river flowed across the rocks and lapped against the muddy banks, the sun warmed the soil. Her mother left her alone, just for a moment, while ribbons of golden silk folded against protruding bulbs that taunted her, like sirens on an island's shore, singing of the freedom she craved.

She ripped the flowers from the earth. First one, then two, then a dozen all at once. They promised to open up the ground and swallow her whole, but it didn't shake or swell. He didn't appear out of a fissure and drag her to the pits of Tartarus. He had only planted the seeds, but she watered them with an unquenchable thirst.

She waited, afraid she was too late. Afraid that she had fallen head first into a gilded trap, like they had laid for so many before her, built of fabulous lies and unfathomable consequences. She cursed the dirt and the flowers and the misfit god her mother warned her about. And still, he waited, just for a moment, because he, more than any other god, treasured the art of timing.

*Useless*, she swore.

Then, the petals, crumpled in her fist, burned against her palm. She watched as the silk transformed into an ember and then grew to a flame that engulfed her. He welcomed her, as the fire dwindled and the ash collected in her rich brown curls.

*Beautiful*, he thought.

She knew her mother would do anything to find her and bring her back, to keep her under a watchful gaze. And still, she stepped across the threshold of the world beneath the earth, where souls finally rested and the other gods held no power. None, except him, and now her.

“Will you not offer me some fruit?”



*Pampas Hill John Laue*

# kindred spirits

*Diana Raab*

On the small porch  
beneath her bedroom window,  
where she took her life,  
my grandmother and I  
used to sit for hours watching passersby.

She taught me  
the art of people-watching-  
inspiring the writer in me.

Now, decades later, I sit  
on my own porch and see  
how narratives form life's tapestries.

I never got a chance to thank Grandma  
for her gifts: teaching me to type,  
and her nurturing while my parents  
worked long hours in their retail store.

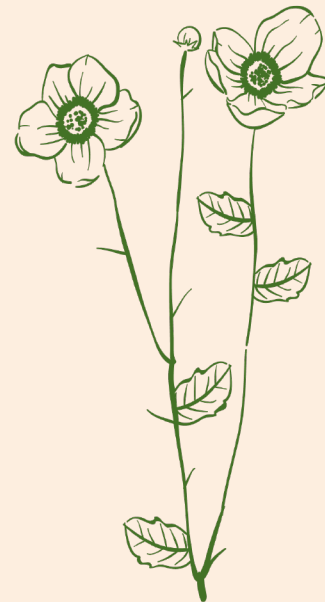
No chance to express gratitude  
for her teachings:  
like how to look pretty wherever I went,  
even when putting the garbage,

and to not burn any bridges,  
to write my thoughts in a journal,  
and to smile when sad,  
to be with those who inspire,  
and to listen to my heart.

But in the end, I did get to thank her,  
as last week during my pandemic  
similar to hers  
back early in the twentieth century,

she returned outside my writing studio  
as a fluttering hummingbird  
to offer more wisdoms and guide me  
during my lost moments.

Oh how I wish she can hear me sing  
this song of love  
like she sang to me  
on my childhood porch.



# Message to my body

*Diana Raab*



It took a long time  
for me to say this

but I do appreciate you—  
you have tested me

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

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

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

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

*Previously published in Paddler Press*



# God in the Garden

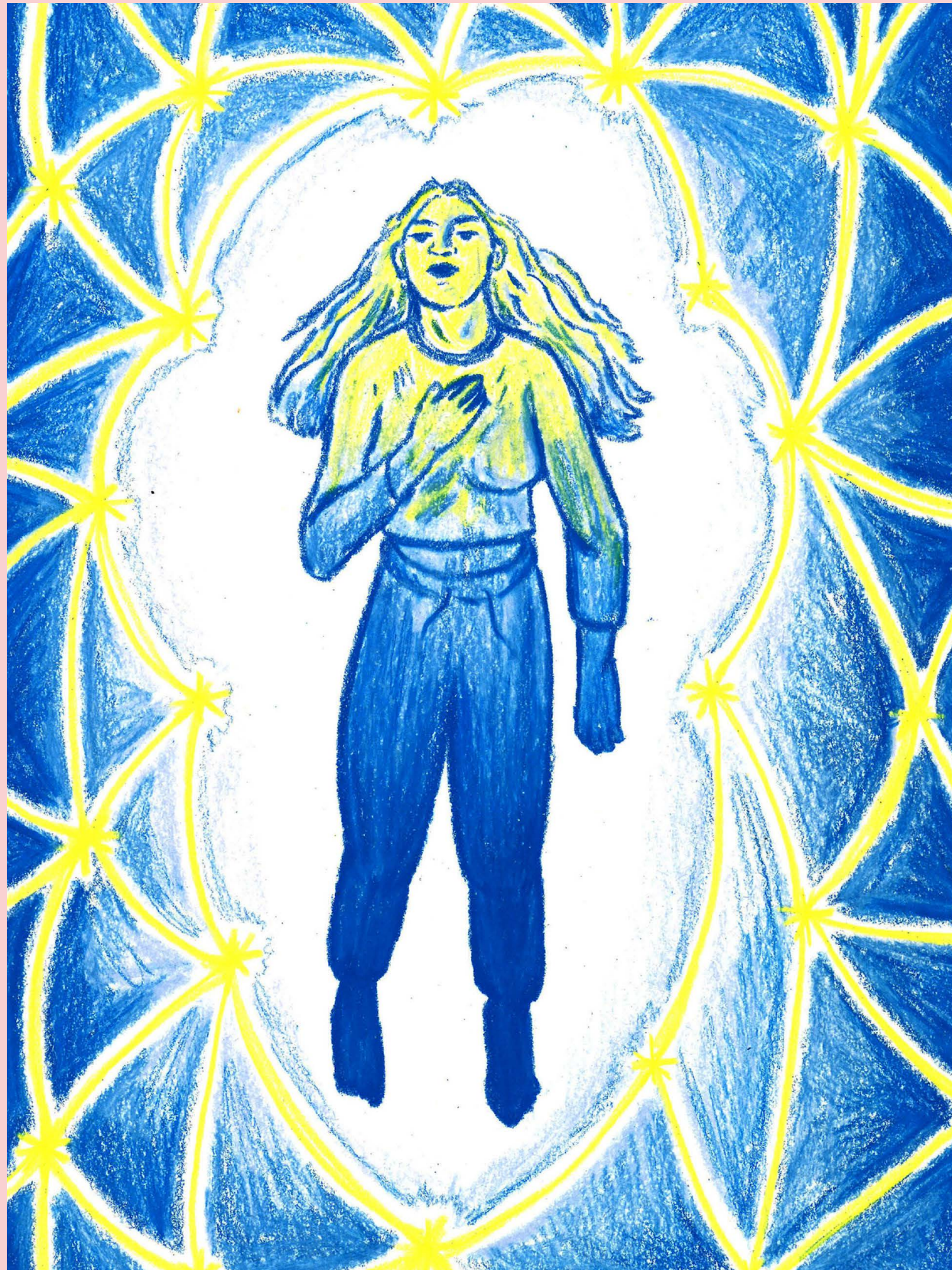
*Joy Raines*

In the ball of my belly,  
far below sensibility or reason,  
spirituality sings.

It creeps up like a shiver down the spine,  
moves without command,  
and it's work is at hand  
when my chest heaves  
in icy cold choirs at —  
    the sound of the city's voice in my ear,  
    the river's rushing 'good morning' smile,  
    skyscrapers catching light all orange and gold,  
    and even strawberries standing red and proud.

I know the absurdity in saying  
I can hear ghosts in the stream  
and see God in the garden.

But that's the thing about belief —  
even in mundanity,  
even as I shut it away,  
it sings



*God in the Garden Joy Raines*

# The Soccer Freak

*Jean Duffly*

My husband calls me a soccer freak. I'm 64 years old and I play soccer twice a week.

I'm excited to watch the upcoming 2023 Women's World Cup and cheer on the U.S. team. I recall the thrill when our women brought home World Cup titles, Olympic gold, and won historic battles for equal pay. But still, I prefer to play than watch.

When I'm on the field and the ball comes to me, I'm off and running. A soccer freak doesn't notice weary legs or a racing heart. Laughing with my teammates, keeping fit, and occasionally placing the ball in the goal are the sweet rewards.

I found this passion almost twenty years ago. I recall my simmering frustration as I stood on the sidelines watching my daughters play soccer. My husband and I cheered them on in blistering heat, soaking rain, and even snow flurries. All the while my desire to run onto the field grew from a simmer to a full boil.

*I can run five miles. How much harder could it be to run while chasing a soccer ball?  
Why didn't she pass? Her teammate was wide open.  
Could I have made that shot on goal?  
Let me on the field!*

Coffee in hand, I chatted with other mothers on the sidelines. "Is there a women's soccer group in town?" I asked. "Don't you want to play too?" Mostly I received blank stares. Occasionally I found an enthusiastic recruit.

In the spring of 2004, a group of women who shared my crazed desire assembled for the first time. We practiced dribbling, passing, and shooting on goal. "Don't kick with your toe. Use the inside or the outside of your foot; you'll have more control," the one experienced player instructed. The soccer drills left us sore, but we came back for more. Meeting weekly through the summer and the fall our numbers grew by word of mouth. All from Lexington, Massachusetts and honoring our coffee-in-hand origin, we named ourselves The Lexpressas.

As winter approached and temperatures plummeted, we layered on jackets, hats, and gloves. Soon enough those same items littered the sidelines as our body temperatures rose.

We joined an indoor futsal league to keep playing even when snow blanketed the ground. Futsal is a version of soccer played on a basketball court with two teeny goals positioned under the hoops. The ball is slightly smaller and softer than a traditional soccer ball. On the Sunday morning of our first league game, we packed seven women into a minivan and drove to a school a few towns away.

I had never played a team sport as a kid. Not in junior high, high school, nor college. Here I was, at age 47, about to participate in my first-ever refereed game of any sort. "I'm so nervous. I tossed and turned all night," I admitted to a teammate.

"Me too. My husband made me promise not to get hurt," one of my carpool buddies replied.

I eyed our competition, the Banshees, warming up in their matching scarlet shirts, shorts, and socks emblazoned with a lightning bolt. In our eclectic mix of blue and bluish tank tops and T-shirts, my teammates and I giggled on the sidelines and made final dashes to the bathroom.

Catherine, who played and coached, attempted to reassure us, "You ladies will do fine. It's going to be fun." She selected the first five players to take the field. I took my usual position as right forward.

As the game clock started, our nascent skills vanished. It was as if we had never seen a soccer ball before. In a state of panic, several of us dashed to the action. We intended to help, but our mass rush on the ball meant we left the other team's players wide open. The Banshees passed and weaved around us as if we were bluish cones set up for a drill. Except these cones were gasping for breath. The other team scored again and again.

"Mark your player," Catherine hollered, when the Banshees had the ball. "Spread out, you are bunching up. Get open for a pass," she yelled in the fleeting seconds when we had control of the ball.

In an act of kindness, the referee froze the scoreboard at 10-0. Fifteen minutes into the game, the other team suggested we put an extra player on the field. Humbly, we accepted their offer. Still, we were pummeled. On the car ride home, we laughed at our foibles and strategized for the next game. "We can only do better, right?" I asked with a laugh.

Determined to improve, we attended soccer clinics and slowly gained confidence on the field. More often I felt the thrill of placing the ball in the goal. Now it was me playing in the sun, the rain, and the snow, and this freak was loving it. Soccer became a treasured time of the week. No matter what was going on in my life, for that hour I focused on chasing the ball and forgot about everything else.

As the years passed, the Lexpressas welcomed new players—neighbors, friends, and co-workers. Word spread of our team to younger ringers, the beneficiaries of Title IX, who had played soccer in high school and college. We *actually* began to win games.

Twenty years after that first fledgling practice, there are now opportunities for the Lexpressas to play soccer almost every day of the week—whether it is indoor or outdoor leagues or friendly pick-up games. We attend tournaments, near and far, and meet older women who share our passion for the game.

Our team spirit extends off the field. If a player is out with a soccer injury or other life emergency, the team delivers casserole dinners, runs errands, or shovels snow. More than just a game, soccer has become a caring community.

This soccer freak is grateful I found my way to the pitch.

Oh yes, and "Go team, USA!"

# Daydreaming at Midnight

*Melissa Martini*

I.

Last night I looked in the mirror and saw / myself for the first time. Veil lifted by plant- / based medicine, the mirror screen shifted / clear, high-definition and overly focused.

After examining each feature on my face, / categories formulated: rose, round, peach- / tainted skin. They sealed away my magic / moons ago; it eats away at me from inside.

II.

Before it was buried deep beneath my skin, / casting spells conjured itself as poetry- / tainted marble notebooks, carefully curated / away messages, and buddy list drop downs.

III.

Sunlight shifts through blinds, shadows / your face with gray stripes, illuminates / each individual color within the sunflowers / adorning your eyeballs. Slice each piece of face like a birthday cake

sans birthday candles - frosting and sprinkles lovely, even, like a fairy / pink, plump, and doused in sleep powder / mixed with pixie dust. Can he be / my something borrowed if I'm my own

something blue? Nostalgic yet unfamiliar / formation of three blossoms into something / new, if only written into the script of pillow / talk while daydreaming at midnight, new.



# love language

you don't bloom like you used to  
a plump carnation in late spring

petals pink and soft, fanning out  
morning dew, moist and sweet

yet you lay limp, leaves chapped  
and curling inward at the edges

he waters you but april showers  
become eucalyptus baths, may

flowers blossom lily of the valley  
bells, white tepals velvet smooth

you lured honeybees to their deaths  
now you bleed out, stem snapped

leaves rolled and fingers pruned  
bright red berries bloodlust burst

he picks you over and over again  
displays you in a vase centerpiece



*Melissa Martini*

# spring skin

*Faith Thurnwald*

I'll shed my skin of you,  
Because it's what I do best:  
I undress.

Although you've never seen me naked –  
Not really.

I'm done with my hibernation,  
My ruminating  
*Of all that we were and could have been.*  
Shit, you didn't even know me.

I want to shed you,  
Leave you out in the hot sun.  
You dead carcass

All of you is gone and you should see my spring skin.  
I'm fresh and I'm free  
- Waiting –  
For a human to come step on me!



*Yucca Blooms John Laue*

# Leap to Life

*Ina Nedić*

Sometimes, she'd have to beg.

Plead with them to rise off the ground, to spring to action, to act like true beings of flesh and blood, or even those of enchantments and shadows. She needed them to walk through her world with confidence, not with stiff limbs and monotone voices. Redundancy needed to be purged. Flatness colored in. Their perpetual coldness, like that of a harsh, biting winter wind, had to be expanded, explored, explained.

She would grow desperate, furious, rain down flaws and mistakes and side-quests, but she couldn't always breathe life into them all by herself. Chipped nails scratching the keyboard, over-sweetened coffee curdling in her veins, she could be forced to ask for some heart.

"I need you to come alive," she'd whisper in the quiet of her room. "Please."

Sometimes, no one answered. They remained as flat as the barren Earth. A tangle, a chore, left to gather dust.

Perhaps, some day, buds would gather under the thick layer of snow, peek out, call her back.

Most often, though, it was not such a frustrating, tiring affair.

In all honesty, she usually didn't need to do much.

An inkling of an idea would form, shy and small, and already they would leap to life, more real than anything around her. Only when they took the reins did true magic unfold. Her own life turned upside down because she knew that, and she wanted, no, needed to be there with them.

Laughing, yelling, "Slow down," she let them guide her.

Creativity was not something that needed to be pulled anymore, like a stubborn radish that refused to leave the warmth of its soil. Creativity was a spring that came and flowed, steady, reassuring. Invigorating.

Amused and perhaps a little annoyed that no one seemed inclined to listen to her anymore, she observed, barely aware of her fingers flying over the keyboard. Forever indebted to them, she was glad to watch over them as they soared towards the Sun, daggers in hand, spells at the ready. Dimensions stretched, understanding grew, new paths opened. Adventures strung together, reminding her of daisies spewn across a newly-green meadow. Love stories, friendships, antagonisms, all of that and more hid among the pages, previously blank, now flooded with words upon words.

Four-leafed clovers, there for the taking.

Tales, there for the taking.

An idea blossomed into a whole world, inhabited by them, who took it and made it their own. It was a kind of agreement between the writer and her characters, but she had to allow them their freedom if they were to grow.

And when that spring of creativity overflowed into something nonsensical, she was there to tame it.

Smile blooming upon her mouth, she continued to write.

# Here Again

*Mona Mehas*

Emerging from the darkness of multiple lives into the latest interpretation of lightness, I'm here again. The warm womb-cave where I sleep between lives allowed blue sky to break my slumber, birdsong to wake my ears. A sapling at the entrance grows tall enough to reach the sunlight dappling through overhanging branches. Multiple lives behind me, the original authentic self is overshadowed by subsequent incarnations, each impacting the next. Images of other times, other lives flash before me, memories guide me into this new existence. I am a dance, a collaboration of poetry over time. Like the young tree reaching for the sun's warmth, I'm connected to everything around me, influenced by my elders. I am an elder. I am universal and self-absorbed. I'll conjure my own image for a new self, authentic to the moment.



# N e c l u e s

*Azure Arther*

Every bone feels shattered,  
skin savagely bloated and there is a trickling inside,  
flowing from shredded gaps in my psyche.  
I am broken  
but  
I am the original crusade, robed in a kaleidoscope of scars.  
Superhero Frankenstein.  
I am savage joy found in  
ridged skin, an aftermath of dried crimson, flaking and puckered, memories fractured.  
I am trauma, and the rebirth found within it.  
I am death, and the reincarnation from it.  
I am the r words,  
even the dark ones, even the ones that wound, even the ones we don't talk about,  
but whisper  
when we find other victims who share our shame,  
even though we are not supposed to be ashamed,  
but we are -until we are not.  
There is no in between.  
We are the reversal,  
but turnabouts are not easy;  
they aren't supposed to be.  
This is what it means to be strong,  
even when strength is passive healing,  
even when strength is dragging into and out,  
even when strength is just a word.  
This is how you, how I, how we, become,  
and in becoming,  
we, I, you, are the paradox, the sad and glorious, violent and repressive, the known and the unspoken.  
We, I, you, are the truth behind what it is to survive.

# i n f e r n a l

*Azure Arther*

Burnt trees, ash on the wind, wildfire season on the plains.  
*I only stay because of the kids*, he screamed.  
The fires started as they always do,  
something small, a match, a cigarette butt, tiny sparks and flares.  
Now, it is unstoppable.  
No rain. Just dry grass and parched earth, waiting for its turn to finish.  
Neglect permeates the soul, where even our clothes are stained with ichor,  
marked by teeth that shredded and tore into the bare bones left from childhood.  
An upbringing that fizzled under the heat, desiccated and gasping for care, that damp elixir that  
growing things beg for.  
Sustenance denied.  
Love is finding kindness in your predator's gaze when he's finished with you.  
Love is taking a beating not meant for you.  
Love is shredded carpet stained by the previous tenant's pets, but at least you have a room of  
your own.  
Love is.  
Confusing. Easily mistaken.  
Love looks like kindling.  
The fires come during the last days of April and rage all summer long,  
like you raged all summer long.  
and found the beauty in flame.  
Not every ember can be a hearth, warm and content.  
Some infernos exist to christen, to baptize, to make anew.  
Scorched earth and the taste of winter on the air, so the trees that are left have changed their  
leaves.  
But beneath the crust, tender shoots of hope survive on melted drops of tomorrow, that taste like  
asphalt, and smell like pain, and subsist on the simmering magma of what it is to be broken and  
what it feels like to heal.



From the Garden

# Lilac Longing

*Cori Howard*

my hands are in the dirt again  
sunken in a mineral gospel  
and here i am  
kneeling,  
decomposing,  
wailing  
to

the cedar we planted  
the cedar we lay our promises under  
and swept back into the mud  
to rot among the flowers

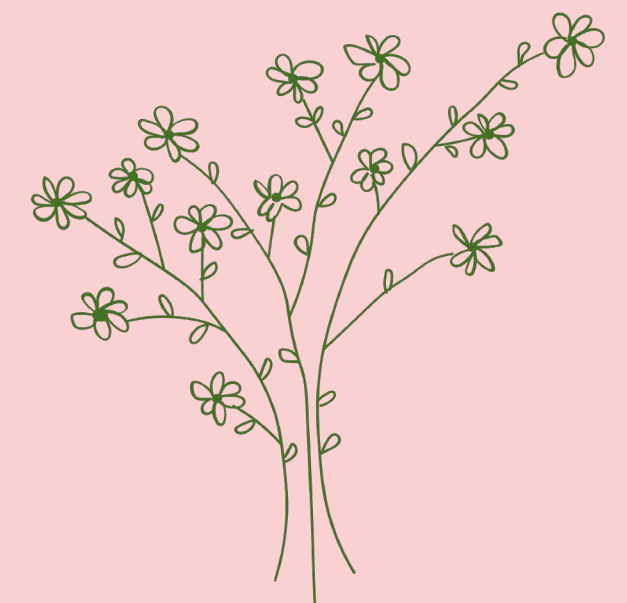
under its shadow  
i play chemist  
sifting through the decaying bones  
of our memories here  
steaming shit  
as crows caw  
me back into loneliness

i have hunched over this same heap  
before  
when you and i did not need crows  
or flowers  
or dirt

now hungry for a new garden  
i crave its scent  
its lavender summers  
its sprinklers  
and strawberries

i need its nourishment  
to fill the ashes of former feasts  
for my annual supplication  
at this sacred altar  
of lilac longing

my hands are in the dirt again  
awaiting  
you  
awaiting  
my  
seedling salvation



# Bough to Bones

*Rachel Canwell*

The drive home from the lab takes longer than usual. And every mile is marked by a different face, drifting through Miri's mind.

She switches the radio on, and then immediately off.

Remembering it is easier to drive in silence, from city, to motorway, on to familiar twisting lanes.

Arriving home, Miri lets herself in and sets the laptop down. Gently. Mindful of all the names held within. Determined they won't get any more bruises. Not today, not from her at least.

Changing her shoes, she calls the dog and steps out into the last of September sun. In less than a fortnight it will be dark at this time, then these walks will be problematic; then her husband's winter worrying will kick in.

It won't stop her.

Through the gate and into the wood, dog in front, nose down and pulling. Miri thinks about unclipping the lead. Then decides against it. Instead, she flips the switch and lets the cord run out.

They walk and Miri breathes. Her feet gripping, slightly sinking. Adjusting to the change. Unyielding stone turns to softest mulch; each new step bringing a quiet, welcome release.

Until there, in the purple cool of the evening, Miri lets herself remember and quietly recite their names. Slowly she starts to conjure them.

Clearer now, sharper, every feature defined.

Lined up. Like bottles, books or spines.

Each child, each woman, each broken smile.

With every pair of distant eyes fixed upon her, Miri steps off the path. She moves slowly and searches for their voices, reassembling each detail, there deep amongst the trees.

Takes her time, always choosing carefully.

With determined hands, fingers light and tender, she traces each and every name.

Looping their stories over knots and branches. Lifting the whisper of leaves to imagined laughter.

Fitting bark to the texture and colour of skin.

Matching boughs to bones.

Caught up in her daily act of remembrance and hoping for peace, Miri lingers. Trailing souls in her wake.



*Bloom Amy Harrison*



Rows of deep pink crescents  
on both palms;  
often, too often, the moons of me.

I unfurl aching fingers  
and watch the moons rise.  
Though my nails are deeply bitten,  
they still make moonscapes  
when fists clench and clench again.

I let rigid arms go limp,  
releasing trembling ribs and legs.  
First deep breath over raw throat—  
eyes fill.  
At last safe to cry,  
no longer wrapped so tight.

Crouched in the corner, again and again,  
I gather up rocks shattered by the moon-quake,  
meteorites, moondust,  
bits of shadow from crater-edges—  
try to figure out how they fit.

Each time, so many times,  
I put the pieces back together,  
more or less—  
a cobbled-together self,  
until I am old enough to get away.

I will not be eclipsed.  
I will have a life,  
afterwards.



# Tonight

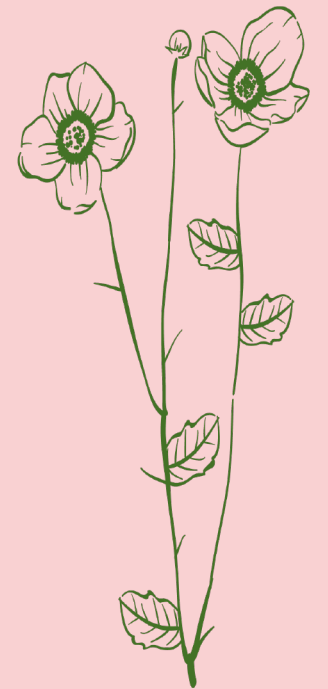
*Cynthia Bernard*

I'm circling the wagons tonight,  
declaring a truce in the ongoing war  
against myself.

Save those potshots for tomorrow;  
I'll still be fat and flabby,  
sometimes clumsy, often running late,  
still too slow with the perfect rejoinder,  
frequently anxious about almost anything,  
still waste time, money,  
still owe apologies,  
and still eat ice cream till I'm more than full.

It's just a temporary reprieve.  
Those barbs and more can all be flung tomorrow.

Let's have a moratorium tonight.  
The winds over the ocean have calmed down  
after a very blustery day,  
and a waxing crescent waltzes across the sky,  
reflection sparkling on the waves below.  
We ate salmon by candlelight  
and laughed as we did the dishes.  
The second camelia blossom of the season  
is floating in a bowl of water,  
grandchildren smile on a video call,  
and friends chitter-chatter on texts.  
My Beloved is here beside me.  
I sit with myself-as-I-am,  
complete, knowing nothing needs to change,  
feeling sweet contentment  
and the arising of joy.



# Pink Ladies

Melissa Nunez

My daughter loves to scavenge the natural detritus of the great outdoors: sticks and leaves and acorns. She constructs fairy fortresses and concocts campfire meals. The longer we've lived in this suburban South Texas subdivision, the more variety has crept into our yard and her play. I've never had a green thumb and we are not the most meticulous about upkeep. The unexpected cold fronts, the times we've forgotten to turn on our sprinklers, and our lack of gutters have resulted in patches of dry grass and moist, bare earth. Prime real estate for plants that don't need the assistance of human hands to grow.

I didn't learn to call any aggressive growing plant that cropped up in unkempt gardens or lawns by name. They were all weeds. Long and thin, topped with feathered tails, yellow petals or what resembled spider legs. Short, squat, ever-expanding. Even if native, they were considered invasive. The raucous textures and colors unwanted in the smooth sea of green.

I remember working in our yard carpeted in Bermuda grass with my dad on weekends. Attempting to pull out the cabbage-looking weeds that sprang up and multiplied seemingly overnight when we weren't at the ready. We started with the small ones. The ones that slid out easily with a generous tug. The thicker, more mature ones were harder. They held fast, pulled back. There was something satisfying in the battle, yanking this way and that before finally feeling the give of roots like the release of fingers. When we began ripping the top leaves to a stump, unable to dislodge the plant in its entirety, my dad would call us off the job, do what he could himself before spraying the rest with weed killer.

I was always drawn to flowers found in unexpected places. Colorful jewels scattered along roadsides, creeping up through cracks in cement or asphalt. My favorite had mute magenta petals like a cup cradling thin golden stamens, the pistil—a white X to mark the spot. The beauty to a child's eye not to be contained, a treasure to be shared. Both my older sister and I hold memories of picking bunches of what I now know as pink ladies to lavish on women we adored. For my sister it was her second-grade teacher, and for me my mother. We both hold the rejection in our hearts like the translucent hairs of weeds that pierced our skin when pulled without gloves.

My sister plucked her bunch from the field at school during P.E. "What's this? These aren't flowers." Discarded in the trash.

My handful scavenged from our near barren yard. "They are weeds. Don't bring me these." Left to wilt on the sidewalk.

We didn't pick them again. And I wonder how many hold memories like these. I almost bequeathed them to my daughter.

"Look at this beautiful pink flower," she said.

"That's not a flower," is what slipped out.

"What do you mean," she asked.

How to explain my astonishment at realizing there was a plethora of distinct taxonomy hidden behind the four-letter word. Weed: dismissive label representing the drought resistant and displaced, the stubborn survivors, the assertive breeds that flourish when you stop watering. It was not the name I wanted her to learn.

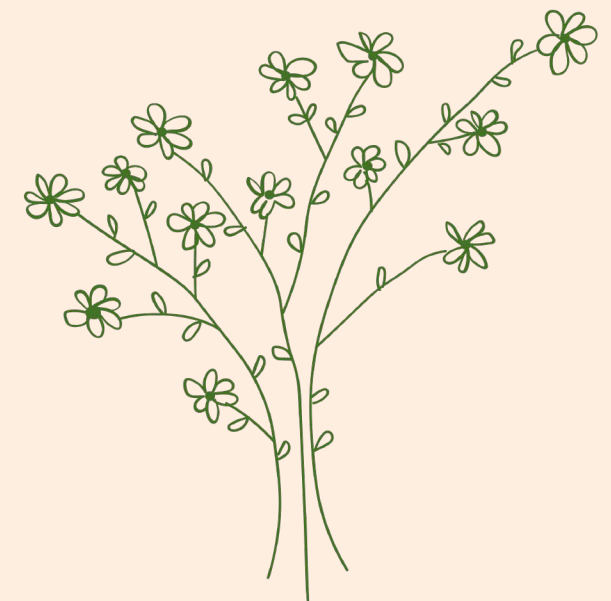
"I mean, some people don't like them growing. They find them a nuisance. But as you can see, they bloom up so pretty."

And she continues to pick them for me. I see her clearly before me. One hand filled with purple-pink blossoms, the other holding back from her face her dark shining curls. Down her back like Spanish moss on branches, whisking in the wind, wild and free.

Our yard is slowly being overtaken. Patches of creeping wood sorrel and straggler daisy—"Look at the yellow flowers!"—flocks of pink ladies disrupt the once uniform green blades. And so many redseed plantains, the cabbage of my youth.

"Those yellow ones are daisies," I tell her. "You can bring me more."

Bring me weeds. Give me nightshade and oxeye, dandelions, coat buttons, even the false Rhodes. Bring me the weeds and we will watch them grow.





concentric *L.M. Cole*

## The After

Sunset comes unhinged  
from the blacktop sky.  
All day long I've heard the singing  
of girls who wanted to be free.  
And when the moon bobbles up like some  
contained, perfect egg, a telescope eye -  
the voices dim to a whisper. I hear  
them still in the shadows. The water trills  
brook over calm rock, reeds wild with sky.  
Her voice, their voice,  
a conspiracy of melody and sin.

*Lauren Meir*





for an archangel limping in paradise,  
one wing crippled, tripping over a storm cloud,  
missing seeing my rainbow petals far below  
where, regardless, I open, quivering-

red trellis rose, climbing;  
orange marigold, bordering;  
yellow coreopsis, sunning,  
green hydrangea days before blooming

variegated blue, bobbing;  
florid indigo iris, frilling;  
wild wood viola, violeting.  
But then, as if by spring miracle,

my beloved, my archangel,  
floats into the prised empyrean—  
is flying—to my earthly garden  
at the promising end of my holy arc.

*Karla Merrifield*

## Both Sides Now

Clearly, they're two yellow coreopsis blossoms,  
one sepal view, one anther view  
compose the pair, pinned to a desert's  
blue sky of scanty clouds photographed  
inside the casita's adobe-walled garden  
in New Mexico's enchanting June sun.

But I insist in perceiving, instead, the greens  
of cecropia, the sky-high broad umbrellas  
crowning the moist Monteverde cloud forest.  
Not dainty petals but a giant's twin palmate leaves  
splayed stoma view from above by harpy eagle,  
cuticle view from below by two-toed sloths.

*Karla Merrifield*



# Bloom

Sadee Bee

Drops of rain cover my face  
Blending with my tears as I face the sky  
Mother Earth understands my pain  
Her soft droplets a gentle caress on my cheeks  
Her wind a subtle embrace  
Holding me while I fall apart

Clouds cover the sun  
The way a shadow shields my heart  
I haven't seen the sun in so long  
I've tried so hard to find it  
Only to be smothered by shadows that cling

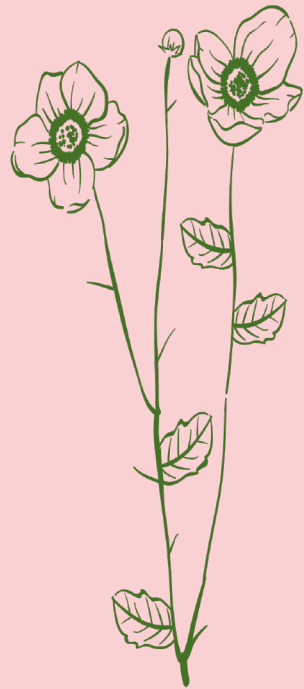
I scream into the sky  
Begging Mother Earth to show me the sun one last time  
To part the clouds and ease the rain  
The manifestation of all that I have become  
She responds with the wind and,  
more smooth raindrops with the subtle smell of petrichor

I know she means me to weather the storm  
Her ways are not difficult to understand  
Only to accept  
As this storm has raged for many years  
Under her watchful eye

Mother Earth, why must I suffer so?  
I respect her power, her grace, her process  
Still, I grow weary  
The rain soaks every part of me  
I am at her feet, pleading to be dry  
She says I am not ready

How would she know?  
She's been ignoring my cries  
Battering me with a constant struggle  
Haven't I grown?  
Have I not learned the lesson she means to impart?  
Perhaps I've given up too many times

I was able to cope in the beginning  
My singular umbrella, carried away by the wind  
Leaves of trees provide little comfort  
Mother Earth is nourishing them while drowning me  
I shall become what she aims to save  
Roots run deep, channeling the rain, my tears  
I shall take refuge with them  
Leave my body beneath the damp dirt  
Only then will I be able to bloom



Poppies I John Laue

# Lilly's Backyard

*Rosemary Twomey*

Lilly pierced the May ground in her backyard with an old spade.

She found the spade in the shed that leans far too much to the left, and wondered about the last time someone used it to garden.

Her yard is free of grass, or really anything green for that matter, except for two maple trees that are too close to the house. “The foundation...” her dad had said wearily as he inspected the knotted roots winding towards the exterior of the old home she lived in. Well, technically it’s not her home. It’s the home she shares with two other tenants, but it’s more her home than theirs because her parents own the house and she rents the main floor.

The backyard doesn’t match the three-floor, elegant English-style house that was built in 1913. The likes of Margaret Atwood and Toronto councillors call this area home.

Lilly’s parents were pleasantly surprised when their only child wanted to redo the backyard for them.

“Great initiative,” her dad had said, and her mom told her she was happy that Lilly was adopting her green thumb.

“I knew at some point your obsession with gardening would wear off on me,” Lilly laughed. This was not true. Lilly did not actually enjoy gardening all that much and it was one of the many hobbies she had taken up that month.

Lilly had tried:

1. Painting, specifically abstract watercolour pieces of her tabby cat named Roger
2. Bullet journaling
3. Crafting, including but not limited to: crocheting, scrapbooking, and making custom bookmarks
4. Baking bread
5. Becoming a coffee enthusiast
6. Gardening

Each hobby lasted around two weeks and then she dropped it. She now associated the smell of bread with tears and the cold bathroom floor.

Lilly was manic to find a pastime to fill the 185-pound hole left in her life by one Spencer Malone. Spencer and Lilly dated for 2 years and 4 months, and one rainy Valentine’s Day Spencer decided he didn’t love her anymore.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t that straightforward. It was weeks of distancing and rejection that was devastating for Lilly, especially considering that he too lived in the first-floor apartment at 414 Bernard Street.

Lilly had begun nesting, subconsciously knowing that her life was about to be uprooted. In the days leading up to Spencer’s departure, Lilly reorganized the entire apartment, cleaned the kitchen cupboards, scrubbed the salt stains off the travertine tiles at the entrance, windxed the old stained glass windows by the front door, even colour-coordinated her books on the floor to ceiling built-in bookcases.

When Spencer told her he didn’t want to make any Valentine’s Day plans because he would be studying late at the university library, Lilly cried. She didn’t tell him this though because Spencer didn’t seem to care. It crossed her mind a few times that there could be another person in the equation.

Lilly wanted so badly for their equation to stay Lilly + Spencer = Love, but soon it turned to Lilly + Spencer + Samantha = Unhappiness, and then to Spencer + Samantha - Lilly = Love. Lilly had known about Samantha (a.k.a Sam) for a while. Lilly refused to call her by any short form of her name. The name Sam didn’t sound villainous enough. It sounded like the name of a loyal labrador, not the name of a PHD student okay with openly having an affair.

On February 15th Spencer moved out and Lilly sat alone with her very organized bookshelf.

Feeling the urge to pull up Spencer’s Instagram and stalk his latest posts, Lilly quickly diverted her attention to the bag of grass seeds and chucked handfuls of the small grains across the back half of the yard.

Her best friend Cait had told her going “no contact” was the best way to handle a breakup, especially one as messy as hers. But when you have access to so much information through numerous apps and platforms, it’s like asking a starving child not to eat the food in front of them.

Spencer was a notorious Instagrammer. His story revealed his location at all times. She would begin to type in his Instagram handle, see the pink ring around his profile picture indicating a window into his daily movements, and she would have to tear herself away from the screen. The last thing she needed was to see a picture of two lattes with the Oslo filter geotagged to their favourite cafe, knowing it was Samatha clutching a dirty chai instead of her.

Rummaging in the shed, Lilly pulls out a small spade, the rubber handle has been peeled back. She wonders if her parents ever used these tools. Her dad hired someone to come every other Monday in the summer to mow the front lawn but, apart from that, very little manicuring went into the property.

Lilly had picked out five bundles of feather reed grass to go along the back fence. It was four feet tall but could grow to cover all of the sun-bleached wood posts.

As Lilly knelt, picking away at the muddy ground, a voice called out to her from a second-floor window.

“Hi,” the voice said.

Lilly whipped her head around to see a gray-haired lady hanging out of the window smoking what looked like a cigarette but smelt like skunk. This lady clearly must not know that Lilly’s parents own the building or just didn’t care about an indoor smoking fee.

“Hi there,” Lilly called back.

“Nice of you to clean up the yard.”

“It’s no big deal. I’m trying to grow a green thumb,” she laughed.

“Good for you,” the lady cheered with a great inhale from her joint. “I’m Lorraine.” “Lilly.”

“Lilly.”

“Nice to meet you, Lilly.”

“Nice to meet you too.”

Lilly stayed smiling at the window for a moment and then swiveled back towards the small hole in front of her.

“My mom’s name was Rose,” Lorraine called out. “Do you people with flower names feel some sort of connection when you meet?”

Lilly turned back to the open window and thought about it. “That’s an interesting question,” she said. “I’ve never met anyone with a flower name before. Well, I knew another Lilly in elementary school but having the same name made us enemies.”

“Ha!” Lorraine laughed. “Kids are so weird.”

Lorraine’s long gray braid hung out the window and had some sort of a red scarf knotted around her head. She was probably in her late 50’s.

“So what’s your story, Lilly?”

Lilly grew uncomfortable. She knew Lorraine was looking to converse for a while by the way she settled into the sill.

“I live on the bottom floor. My parents actually own the house,” Lilly didn’t know if it was a mistake admitting this detail but she thought maybe Lorraine would cut the interaction short if she knew she had to behave.

Lorraine was unphased.

“Really! Bob and Sharon are your parents? I love those two. I’ve lived here for 14 years, but I’m sure you probably knew that”

Lilly had never heard her parents mention Lorraine before but she nodded anyway. She had a feeling Lorraine would be offended by the lack of discussion about her.

“What do you do Lilly? You’re such a quiet girl. Not like that one upstairs. I swear she rearranges her furniture every night, and the laughing — God, it’s a never-ending party up there,” Lorraine says rolling her eyes.

For some reason, this detail upsets Lilly. How she longed for enough friends to throw a party.

“I work at the university as an archivist.”

Lilly was primed to tell Lorraine what an archivist was.

“Ah! A fellow history lover. I work for the Toronto Historical Association.”

“Very cool! What do you do exactly?”

“Right now I just manage volunteers. I’ve had a lot of different careers in my life though.”

“What kinds of things have you done?”

Lorraine looks up at the sky as if trying to gather all her past lives into a single thought. “Well let’s see,” she huffs. Lilly knows Lorraine secretly loves the questions. “I actually started my career as a teacher if you can believe it!”

Lilly can’t.

“Then I quit ‘cause I realized I despise children, then I was a music teacher but exclusively for adults.”

Lilly doesn’t bother asking which instrument because she has heard Lorraine’s clarinet before.

“Then I was a waitress, a writer, an interior designer, and most recently a masseuse before working for the Historical Association.”

“That’s a lot of jobs, and all so different!”

Lorraine takes this as a compliment. “I’ve loved every single one for different reasons. I can’t believe people try to do only one thing their entire lives. I would’ve died. How do you like being an archivist?”

“Oh,” Lilly begins, “archiving isn’t really what I want to do. I wanted to work in a museum coordinating galleries. Archival work just has the most job openings.” Lilly thinks about her 8-hour days in computer labs and storage rooms. Many times, she would go a whole day without talking to another person.

“How long have you worked there?”

Lorraine’s question surprisingly makes embarrassment wash over Lilly. “Almost 6 years. I started right out of university.”

The moderate gap of time Lilly has spent working in something she openly admits to disliking makes her dreams of becoming a gallery coordinator seem minute and far away.

Lilly thinks of her parents, both almost 70, still working with very loose plans to retire in the next few years.

“It seems natural to want a change,” Lilly says, looking up to the old woman in the window.

“Honey, I think everyone secretly wants to change but thinks they’ll ruin their lives if they quit their job.”

“You’re so right,” Lilly agrees. “I work alone most of the time and I miss being around people every day.”

Lorraine deeply inhales, lips wrapped tightly around her joint, then reaches beside her to crush it into an ashtray. A gust of smoke leaves her lips. “How old are you? If you don’t mind me asking.”

“I’m 28.”

“Oh hun, you’re a baby.”

Lilly feels the curiosity and urge to ask Lorraine her age before the moment passes. “How old are you?”

“75.”

Even with the gray hair, Lorraine looked a lot younger than 75. “You look great. I thought for sure you were in your 50’s.”

A thin smile spreads across Lorraine’s lips. “I never settled. When you settle the wrinkles set in.”

Gazing up at the woman with the spirit of a 16-year-old but the wisdom of someone who had lived dozens of different lives, Lilly realized she had settled far too young.

“I’ve loved chatting with you hun but I have to go to an association meeting. You have a great day.”

“Thanks, Lorraine. I’ll see you later.”

Lorraine pulled down on the old wood and double-paned glass window and it closed with a thud.

Lilly set the feather grass into the hole and patted down the soil around the base of the plant.

She thought of Spencer and his ability to think solely of his own desires, Samantha’s ability to go after whatever she wanted, and Lorraine’s ability to be ever-evolving.

Lilly had the ability to change her life and transform it into something new. She had been attempting to cover her own splintered posts, unpleasant memories, and sunbleached exterior with new hobbies.

Looking at the feather grass ready to grow into its new home at 414 Bernard street, Lilly realized change is unavoidable. She couldn’t ignore her situation any longer and would face it head on, starting with an email to her boss Monday morning.





vintage blooms *Amy Harrison*

# *Efflorsece*

*Kersten Christianson*

Today I broke the spine  
of Mary Oliver's *A Poetry Handbook*.  
while contemplating sound and device.

My finger traces its even seam, words lay  
down like train track - aligned, avoiding dips,  
spikes driven gently into the heartwood

of their meaning. The book's crack,  
crumble, an alliterative soundtrack to the dog  
outside eating dandelion greens

before their orgasm of bloom and seed.  
And if this annual coming of bud and scatter  
carries any real resonance, I imagine it

to moan like the night buoy at sea:  
rounded, breathy, prolonged – late  
into the dark morning hour.

It is book. It is paper. It is leaf.  
Verdant, temporary, I ask,  
*Who hungers for you?*

Previously published in *Capsule Stories*, Spring 2021



From the Night's Window

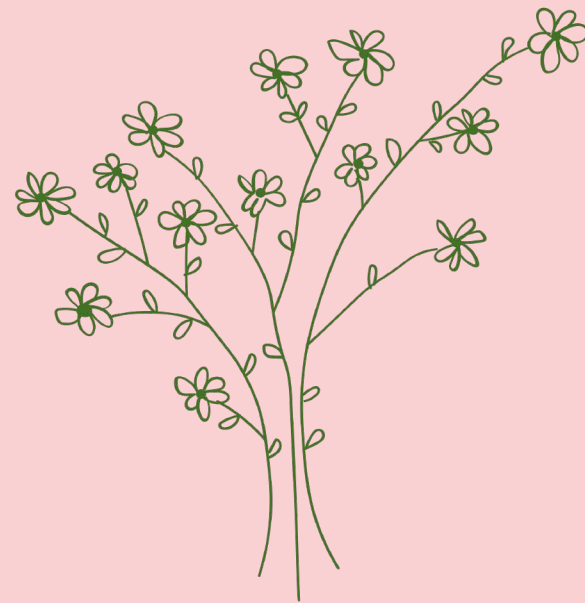
Bee balm & forget-me-nots,  
lupine cluster bloom  
by north's long sun

Thin, white cuticle  
of shape shifting moon  
won't be viewed

from this June mountain  
of birch trees and burls  
crinkled vellum, pregnant

belly knotted wood.  
Pack up your magic & drive;  
wander widely the pockmarked road.

Find the place where you think  
you can translate the wind,  
the silence.



*Kersten Christianson*



*chance*

*Let the mystery be." - Iris DeMent*

One step after another you list  
into the wind that draws song

& sway from new bud-leaving  
alders. Bear spray, the dull weight

you carry given the dark beast  
emerges from behind foliated curtains.

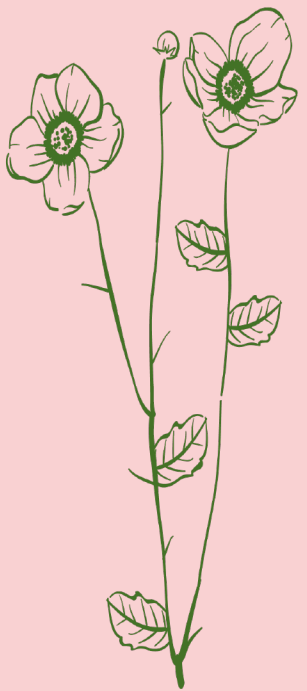
Someday on this trail, bear and I  
will eye-to-eye. We'll contemplate

a mandala reflection: petals of salmon-  
berry bloom, the peak sun of dandelions,

of lush summer greens. On this well-  
traveled trail, one day, either bear or I

will sidestep the other, sniff the breeze,  
footfall into our next breath.

*Kersten Christianson*



# In Memory of Spring Rain

*Miranda Clarity*

I sit here—coffee in hand—green eyes staring  
out my window watching the rain, reminded  
of a most pleasurable moment, still branded  
in the memory of my mind:

the happy image of being curled up in the  
nook of my couch, snuggled up close against an  
open window, listening to the first rhythm  
of Spring rain.

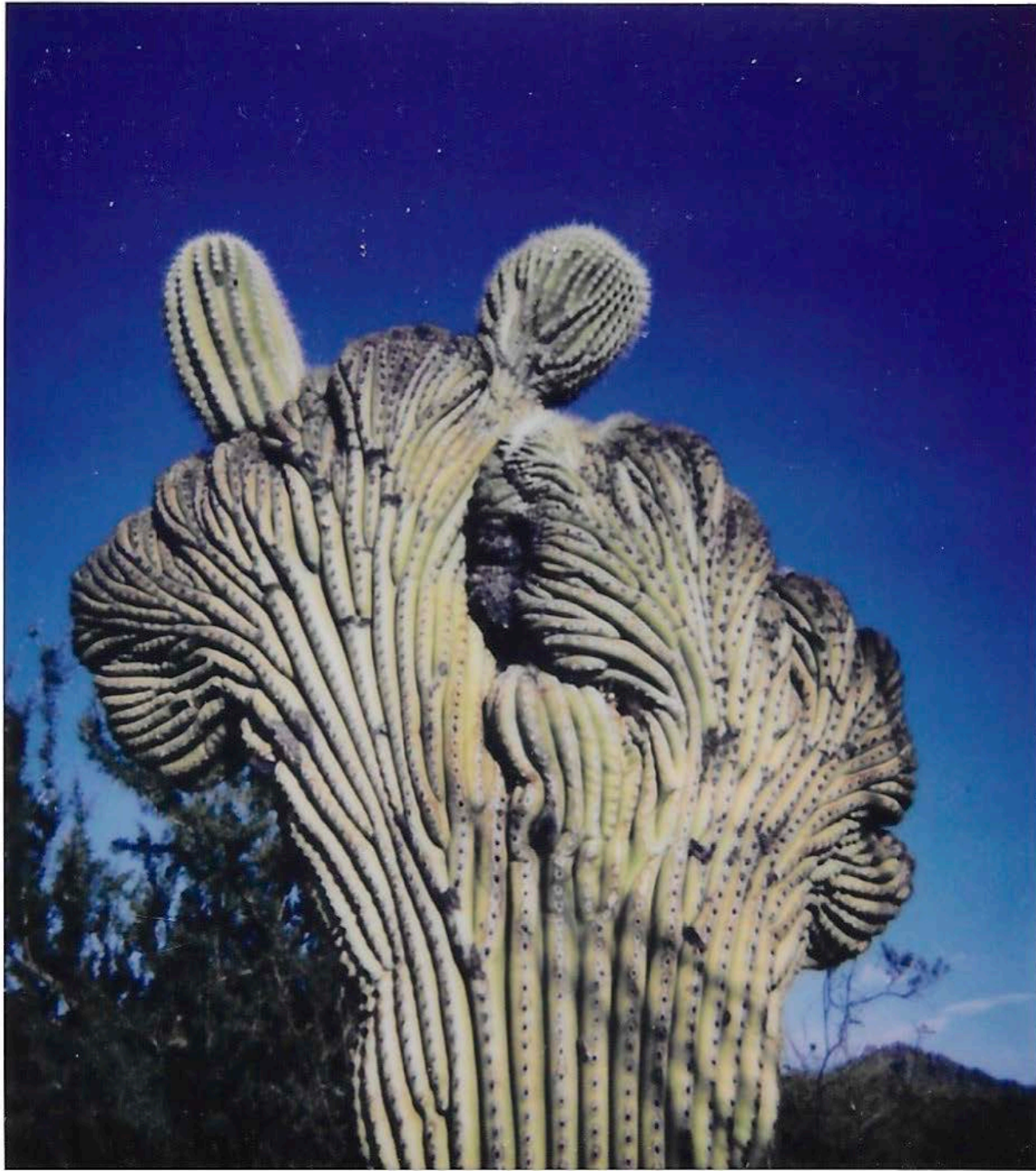
An open fire ablaze  
before me, its warmth at variance  
with the fingers of chill  
that float in from the rain  
to graze my skin—  
I'm caught within the perfect harmony  
of their embrace.

My tiny hands caress a steaming mug  
of coffee as my eyes follow along the path  
of words imprinted across the pages of my book,  
while seeing within me the grand images  
they evoke—

images of Tolkein magnificence and grace  
as I witness the bittersweet sadness of elves  
and the simple happiness of hobbits amidst  
grim determination of man—  
battling together—taking a stand  
for the future of Middle Earth.



*Sunflowers John Laue*



## mononoke

i'll never get tired of the view from up here,  
venus pressed against the ground and it's been seeped in warmth ever  
since.

the pilots have it best, though,  
looking down through the smoke over this iron-bloated peak.  
their propellers whirring like a symphony.

lightning teases the ends of our hair and i can feel the  
earth shake in my lips and down my spine.

from here, you can even see the ghosts.

[we were taught by a secret how to spread sunflower seeds over the  
crimson meadow and how to dice mushrooms into hearts. we've  
been carrying this tradition ever since the first seed formed from soot.]

here are the ruins of war. the residues of red rage. a million  
years ago there was nothing here but water and sounds.

there are gods all around us.  
even if there's plastic lining our lungs and oil swelling in our eyes.

*Rebecca Herrera*

# Late Tulips

*Abigail Myers*

The tulips tight in buds till May  
spoke of knowing their time.

A cold early spring crusted leaves and shoots  
with ice and snow,  
and the soil held them close.

They said: We will wait,  
and when the light came and stayed,

they burst open, cupped petals  
in the usual symphony of coral, rose, mauve, red,  
butter-yellow, linen-white.

And the wave of heat came after so swiftly  
that the edges of their petals  
curled like aged wallpaper  
already having seen its happiest days of  
holding family portraits, receiving children's  
sticky handprints.

Oh, that was a long time ago,  
said the tulips, three days later.

What can we say? Sometimes  
a flowering comes late, though brilliant,  
though beautiful.

Are we less so for it?



*Bee on Artichoke Flower John Laue*

# Romantic Gestures

*Dana Knott*

*for Kip*

Is it too easy to pay  
\$19.95 to name a star  
after you, another \$20  
for an extra bright star?

Or, should I rearrange  
the craters of the moon  
into dusty cursive letters  
that spell out your name?

But the moon belongs to all  
lovers and night creatures.  
Instead, I will divert comets  
to circle our blue earth

as fast as Superman  
breaking the laws of physics  
(and love) to turn back time  
and save the woman he loves.

For you, I am willing to break  
every law, natural and human.  
Undermine gravity and walk  
on clouds or currents of air.

Terraform Mars with forget-me-  
nots. Nudge a planet killer  
on the right path, to destroy  
all that I know and love

for the cosmic bloom.



# Dandelions

*Beka Santrock*

My fondness of weeds began when I was young. I once told someone that dandelions were my favorite flower. I would gather them in bouquets and place them in cups of water throughout my parents' house, and would then stand back and swell with pride. The dandelions added color to the bathroom sink, beauty to the dining room table. Back outdoors, I loved closing my eyes and making wishes as I blew on the white heads of dying dandelions, and opening my eyes to watch the seeds float away into blue skies. I found dandelions to be beautiful, captivating, worthy of admiration.

And that is where my madness began.

Before I knew it, dandelions were not the only thing I was admiring and collecting. I let other weeds in, placed them on pedestals, and made room for them in the home of my heart. I didn't know when I started picking flowers that intoxication and destruction would follow. But slowly these weeds, that I found so elegant, so promising, started to poison me. In secret, they wrapped their delicate roots around mine, and slowly, they tightened their grip until I suffocated. They cut off my water supply and instead fed me lies that I believed to be true. I was so captivated by the beauty of the weeds that I never noticed the signs that they were killing me. Parts of me started dying, turning yellow, shriveling up and falling apart. The weeds acknowledged the change in me, but called it growth instead of death. And I believed them. I always believed them. I thought they could be more than just a small yellow flower that pops up everywhere each spring. I was convinced that with the proper care, the proper attention, these weeds could grow to be so much more. If I believed in them enough, they could change. I never once thought that they had another plan. It never crossed my mind that they were poisoning me, polluting me, suffocating me.

Until it was too late.

The thing about dandelions is they're only around for a season. I never picked dandelions or made wishes with them in the middle of winter. So when the weeds I let in had finally done their most horrendous work, they left me. It was only then that I realized I was dead. I picked up my barren branches and I looked at my reflection. I didn't recognize what I saw. Who had I become?

The good thing about winter is that it is a chance to rebuild. The weeds dried me up and stripped me naked, so now I have a clean slate. I hibernate, rest, reflect, meditate. And then come spring, I am ready to reintroduce myself, the self that I have worked so hard to recover, to the world.

But just as I begin blooming again, I see them. The dandelions pop back up, ready to intoxicate me once again. This time, however, I will not fall for their beauty, their lies, their false picture of reality. I have finally learned what a weed is, what a weed does, and what a weed looks like.

And I won't lose myself again.

# BLOOM & BLOSSOM CONTRIBUTORS

ABIGAIL MYERS  
AMY HARRISON  
ASHLEY WASHBURN  
AZURE ARTHUR  
BECK ANSON  
BEKA SANTROCK  
CORI HOWARD  
CYNTHIA BERNARD  
DANA KNOTT  
DIANA RAAB  
FAITH THURNWALD  
INA NEDIĆ  
INK  
JEAN DUFFY  
JOHN LAUE  
JOY ALICIA RAINES  
KARLA LINN MERRIFIELD  
KERSTEN CHRISTIANSON  
KRESHA RICHMAN WARNOCK  
L.M. COLE  
LAUREN MEIR  
MELISSA MARTINI  
MELISSA NUNEZ  
MIRANDA CLARITY  
MONA MEHAS  
RACHEL CANWELL  
REBECCA HERRERA  
ROSEMARY TWOMEY  
SADEE BEE  
SILVIA ROSE  
T. FLYNN SEYBOLD