

prune juice

Issue #41

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Cover Art: our thomas ([@our.thomas](#))

Founded by Alexis Rotella in 2009, *Prune Juice Journal* is recognized as the longest-running international literary journal dedicated solely to exploring new directions in English Senryu and related forms, including Kyoka, Haibun, Haiga, and Rengay.

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Best of Issue

Each new issue of Prune Juice features a best-of-issue senryu chosen by one of the co-editors.

lovebirds
a little boy
with a stone

Robert Witmer, Japan

Since taking the helm of the journal, the new editorial team of *Prune Juice* has marvelled at the fine quality of the submissions received. Issue #41 was no exception. We've curated poems that promise to delight, challenge, amuse, nudge, and inspire. Selecting the standout senryu among such a remarkable collection is a daunting task.

As I immersed myself in the draft of this issue, Robert Witmer's senryu "lovebirds" refused to go dark each time I closed the lid of my laptop to attend to my day. This poem was with me in the shower, on my way to work, and as I walked by the elementary school animated with children on the playground. In the evening, I'd read this poem between the lines of wars and rumours of wars in the news.

I am captivated by the simplicity and timelessness of this senryu, the subversive surprise of its third line, and the space it leaves for the reader. Remarkably, there is no action in the poem. At all. Not a single verb. Just a pair of lovebirds and a boy. And a stone. A stone that may or may not unite the destinies of the characters, much like the snowball in Robertson Davies' novel *Fifth Business*, which, when packed with a stone, triggers a chain of events leading to the eventual demise of the boy who threw it, as well as the demise of his unintended target.

Witmer's senryu places us on the precipice of potentiality, creating palpable tension. In this liminal space between now and not-yet, questions beyond the immediate "will he or won't he" arise. The poem prompts contemplation on the origin of our dark compulsions, the reasons behind our turn to violence, and the need for transformation from an "I/It" to an "I/Thou" mindset.

The conclusion of this brief story remains elusive, as the questions it raises mirror the enduring quandaries we grapple with in our shared human narrative. In a time when the world calls for reflection on what it means to be human and to coexist with all sentient beings, Witmer's senryu invites that challenging conversation.

For these reasons and more, this poem is a deserving recipient of the Best of Issue award for Issue #41. Thank you, Robert Witmer, and congratulations on this well-earned recognition!

P. H. Fischer, Co-Editor
December, 2023

Senryu & Kyoka

will
read to heirs
in the syntax of hail

Dennis Andrew S. Aguinaldo, Philippines

hiding
our estrangement
filigree window

Wanda Amos, Australia

dna results
tonight I run
with the foghorns

Myron Arnold, Canada

forever
 searching
 for
 beginnings
 Scotch
 tape

Ingrid Baluchi, North Macedonia

travel agency
beside the spinning globe
a lone goldfish

Ingrid Baluchi, North Macedonia

early menopause
dry leaves fall
into my lap

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

famished between breaths a star posing as dead
beyond body the after-gloom reeking of genesis

Rowan Beckett, USA

ho
ho ho
the text reads
involuntarily committed
again

Jerome Berglund, USA

last view of the sea
from the prison bus
windsurfer

Steve Black, UK

Columbine: a perennial

Alan S. Bridges, USA

—later
the sword swallower
brushes his teeth

Gordon Brown, USA

love?
after sex
with an alien
his tentacles
still inside me

cat's eye moon his affairs with thing 1 & thing 2

Susan Burch, USA

opening remarks
at the county meeting
lizard push-ups

Alanna C. Burke, USA

fruitcake recipe
Mom's last ingredient
an etc.

Thomas Chockley, USA

halfway vegan
the meat
on my breath

Elan Chogan, USA

second marriage—
growing into
hand-me-downs

Mary Ann Conley, USA

baby shower
a rain of
gifts

Shane Coppage, USA

snowman
a homeless guy eats
the carrot nose

William Cullen Jr., USA

social
media
feeds
the
need
for
silence

Timothy Daly, France

grandson's questions . . .
my mother mobilizes
all her wrinkles

re-fastening the tie
of my dripping umbrella . . .
psychologist's office

Maya Daneva, The Netherlands

backstage
her whole body sings
the blues

wants vs. needs
the hoarder's
blank face

Pat Davis, USA

waking to her warmth
distant trucks
on the interstate

M F Drummy, USA

democratic elections
the crowd chooses
Barrabas

Keith Evetts, UK

for good luck
I wear my Everest t-shirt
pulmonary lab

Bruce H. Feingold, USA

mama clouds
the softness
still inside

the little strip
that keeps her alive
allotment garden

Katja Fox, UK

ghosted again
the herky-jerky descent
of a spider

Lisa Gerlits, USA

after rehab
this strange tenderness
of my parents

Alexander Groth, Germany

stuffed lion
on my bed
he comes anyway

Shasta Hatter, USA

his approximation of love statistically

Patricia Hawkhead, UK

worm castings the shit we go through

Kerry J. Heckman, USA

nursing home
her restraints more visible
than mine

Robert Hirschfield, USA

should you clip my rorschach's wings

making
its own weather
hearsay

Jonathan Humphrey, USA

performative exuberance a convocation of falutins

Peter Jastermsky, USA

cactus bloom
gentle words
are an option too

Ravi Kiran, India

frugal to the end
he chooses
pine

Kim Klugh, USA

bloomless orchid
she's sorry I feel
that way

Kimberly Kuchar, USA

friday morning
a few dates
in my blender

K.G. Munro, Scotland

kodokushi every single star

Eva Limbach, Germany

back to school this year's forever war

Eric A. Lohman, USA

leftovers
papa seasons
the grace

Bob Lucky, Portugal

hi!
hiya!
hyacinth!

olive tray
she picks
the lonely one

Mary McCormack, USA

empty nest
I give the cat
a little wave

Laurie D. Morrissey, USA

thigh-high meadow
naming the monster
that made it rustle

car track
our son practices
his road rage

Ben Oliver, England

the whites
of his lies
stump speech

Roland Packer, Canada

nurses' station
the crossword puzzle
always unfinished

John Pappas, USA

softening my otherness in Rome

Madhuri Pillai, Australia

changing the channel
from the news
to pro-wrestling
I grapple with
not growing up

Dave Read, Canada

don't text back I love you

Bryan Rickert, USA

midnight diner
an extra chair
for my demon

Jenn Ryan-Jauregui, USA

just in time
for Independence Day
an imaginary enemy

Julie Schwerin, USA

negating the pre-programmed self red yellow blue

Shloka Shankar, India

first time everything in pianissimo

Raghav Prashant Sundar, India

the hard ch'i of Santōka's heels

Patrick Sweeney, USA

secret recipe
the meal she makes
out of passing it on

Herb Tate, UK

blood moon suddenly she matters

Elisa Theriana, Indonesia

red envelopes
her middle-aged kids
get lucky dollars

Richard Tice, USA

how many spoons
for this meal
autism

C.X. Turner, UK

prairie wind
a herd of buffalo
becoming dust

Joseph P. Wechselberger, USA

suburban growth—
the Cascade View apartment
blocks the view

Michael Dylan Welch, USA

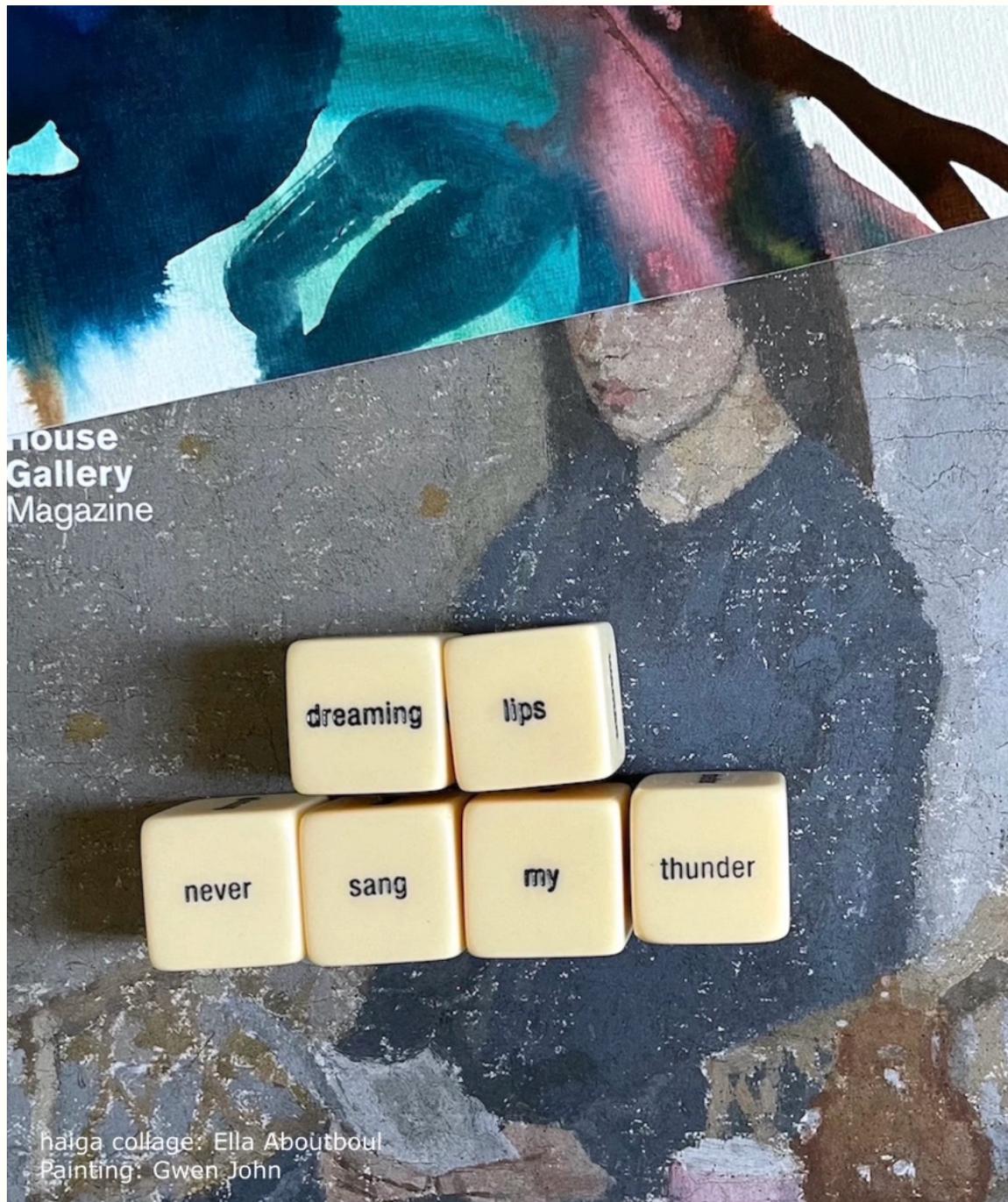
boa
what started
as a hug

Mike White, USA

lovebirds
a little boy
with a stone

Robert Witmer, Japan

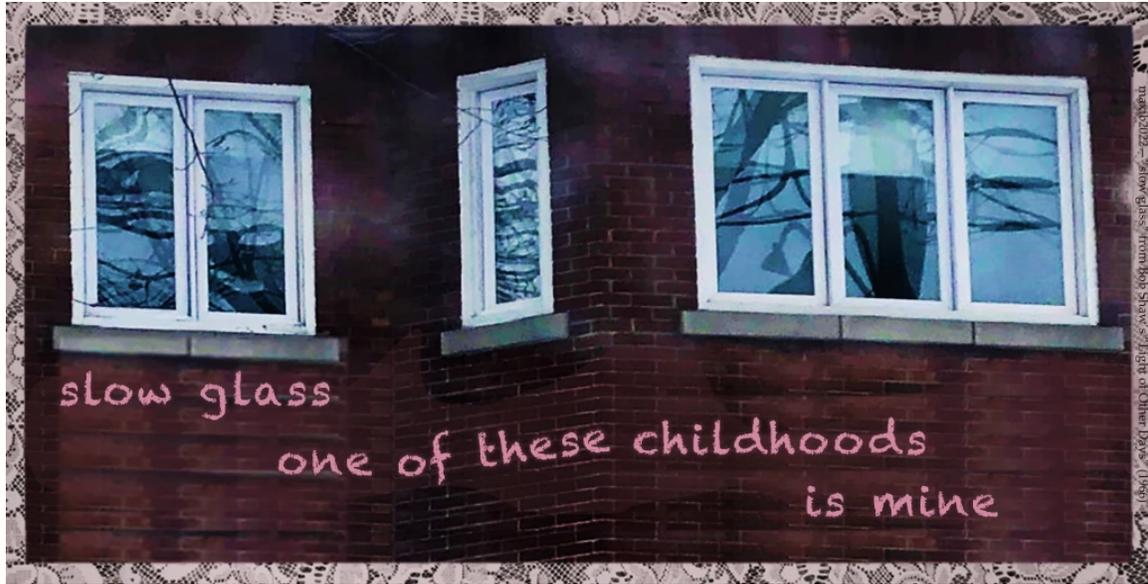
Haiga



Ella Aboutboul, UK



Wanda Amos, Australia



Maxianne Berger, Canada

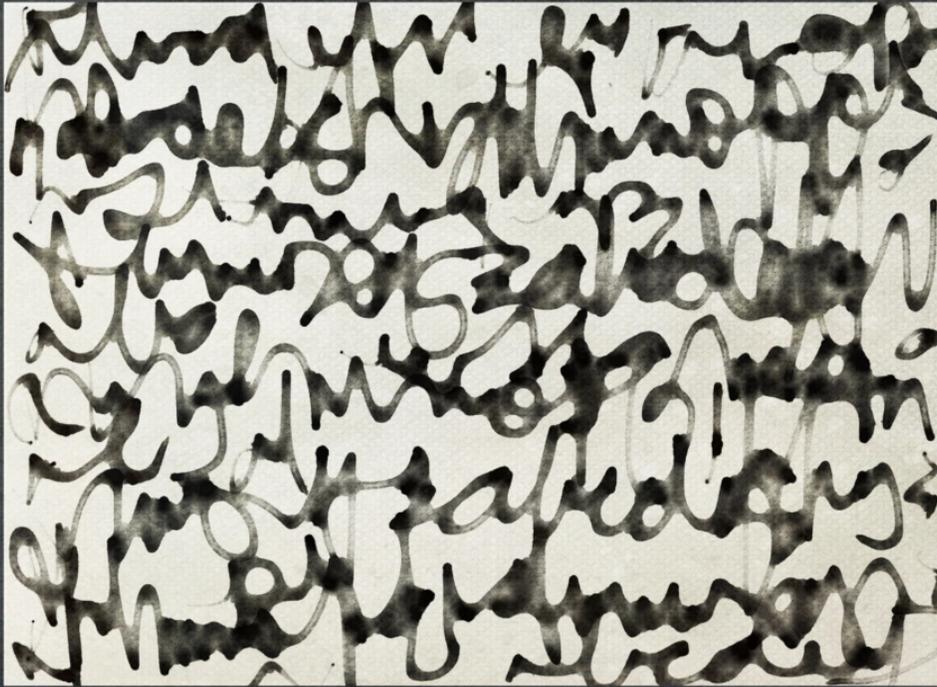


Michael Henry Lee, USA



Christopher Patchel, USA

brainwriting today everything is a trigger

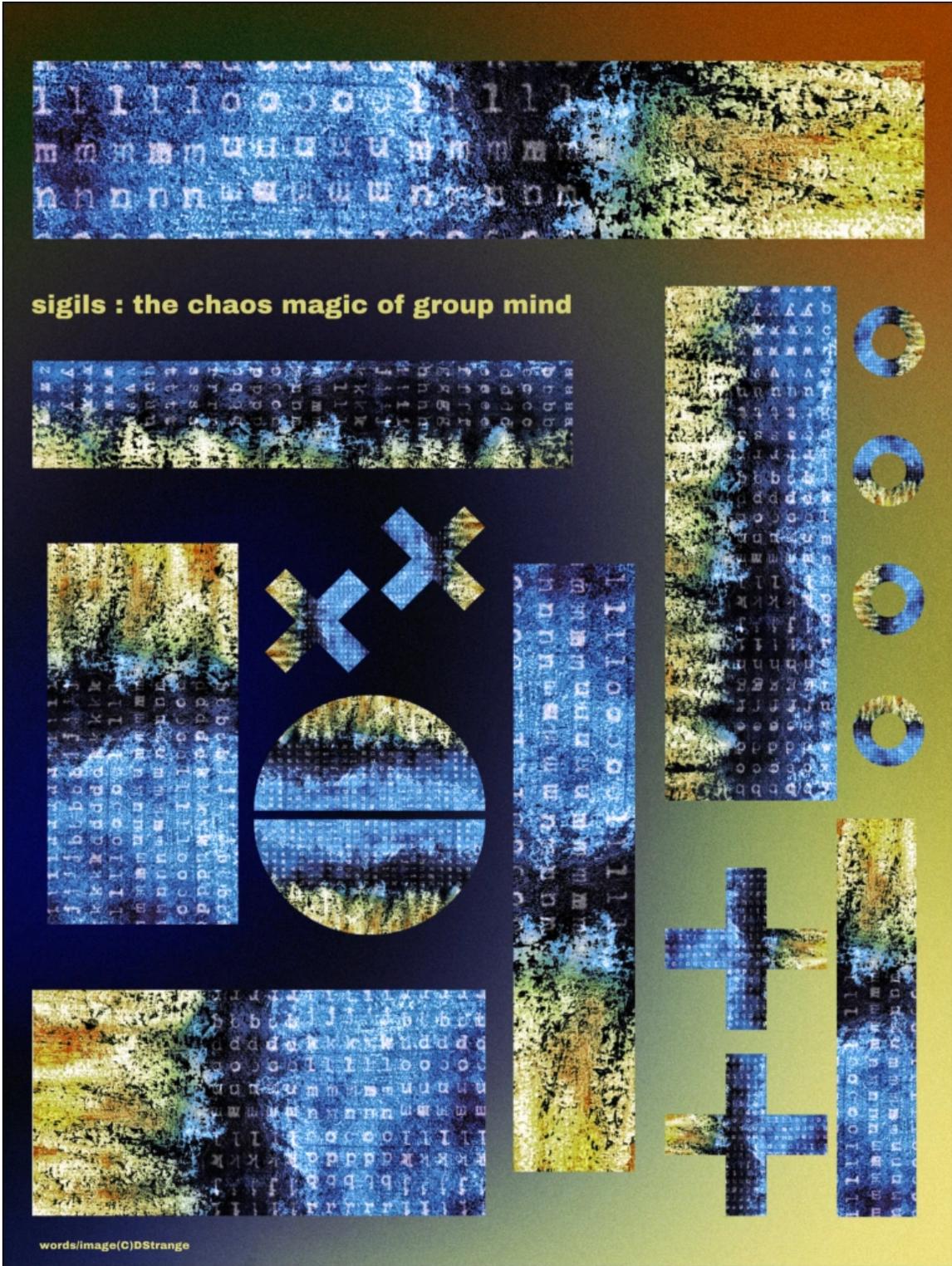


words/asemic(C)DStrange

Debbie Strange, Canada



Debbie Strange, Canada



Debbie Strange, Canada

Haibun

Next Services 100 Miles

From nowhere to nowhere:
a straight ribbon of road, aimed
east and west through geologic
time. Rocks once under water.
Sand once solid rock. The rise
and fall of dust devils.

beigeness
blasting jazz funk
to stay awake

Distant horizons, unforgiving
and unforgiven. On a tall pole,
hand-lettered signs tell how far
to Gallup, Anza, Kalamazoo.
Parallel to asphalt, long lines
of abandoned boxcars.

rite of passage
names spelled in stones
by the tracks

Come afternoon, a flood
of petrichor over creosote flats.
Clouds pile up, then let go,
clumps of graphite rain
streaking down, the runoff
dousing roadside datura.

black and white
the turkey vultures
circling

Cynthia Anderson, USA

silent protest

nice to see these finding their way into bourgeois sectors more
upscale neighborhoods all the college kids sitting quietly
cross-legged on the campus president's lawn mean well for
certain playing "changes" politely on their boom box at a
reasonable volume . . . they'd achieve better results if they broke
one of those many windows over yonder i reckon but will keep my
opinions to myself and observe respectfully

writing
a good poem
in bad light

Jerome Berglund, USA

Scarabian Nights

So my friend sent me a meme about how 1 in 3 people is a beetle, so I MUST be one. And instead of refuting them, I started thinking about what kind of beetle I might be. A June bug? A tansy? Something iridescent?

opal moon
the veins in my leg
shimmering

Susan Burch, USA

Neonatal Care Unit

Suck my finger. Atta boy—your veins are thin. One day, you will grow like the giant jackfruit tree in our backyard, beside where barrel cactus seeds were sown.

ambu bag—
white balloon outside
in sudden wind

Ashesh Das, India

Merger

Across this ocean of a coffee table, I ask if he would have ever
thought of marrying me if I hadn't asked him.

pitching boat
the crash
of a breaching whale

Eavonka Ettinger, USA

Holy City

As I walk down Star Street towards Manger Square, I spot the stainless steel rotisserie oven across the cobble stones. An older gentleman in a white short-sleeve shirt and gray slacks looks up at me.

“Hello, I’ll take a chicken. How many shekels?”

“Thirty-eight,” he replies.

I smile, “Okay.”

“You want it cut?”

“No, Whole is good.” I laugh.

He slides a browned baked bird off the skewer, sprinkles it with sumac, wraps it up in aluminum foil, and plops it in a plastic bag. I hand him a fifty.

He drops 14 shekels into my hand saying, “36 for you.”

I’m surprised. “Thirty-six? Why? Because I didn’t have it cut?”

“No, because you laughed. Most people are...” He makes a grumpy face . . . “You smile.”

prayers echo
through the streets of Bethlehem
desert breeze

John S Green, Jordan

Paradise Lost

In the cramped bomb shelter, the eight-year-old dozing in the crook of her mother's arm awakens with a start, as she always does these days.

She looks at the faces of the women around her. They seem cast out of the same mould—furrowed forehead, empty eyes, sagging shoulders . . .

Bored, the little girl wriggles free and ferrets out a notebook from her bag, along with a few stubs of crayons they had saved. She scribbles intently.

The open notebook with the girl's sketch passes from hand to hand.

dream home
a circle of smiles
at the dinner table

Anju Kishore, India

Confession

Even when I know what I should do—for my own good, for the good of others, for the good of the world—I'll hop in a car and drive 25 miles to scarf what may be the best burger in the world, accompanied by craft beer, and top it all with a dessert worth more than a week's worth of recommended sugar, assuming any health authorities commend sugar. Back home, I feed a can of chicken-of-the-lab to my sorry excuse for a wolf before I turn on my devices, tune in to the drivel, and drop off to sleep.

guilt dump
laying plastic flowers
at the recycle bin

Bob Lucky, Portugal

Waiting for Great Granny to Say Something

Nothing is what we say it is, but we have to call it something.
There is no stone in the stone, no fire in the flame, no Chinese
food in China. We name things to possess them.

family reunion
the adopted baby
not yet sweetie pie

Bob Lucky, Portugal

Up the Creek

The red-eared slider sits atop a rock misted by waterfall. The turtle's at the end of a long formation shaped like a mermaid, the slider at the tip of the tail, the mermaid's torso and head part of the waterfall's face. I wonder about the hydraulics moving his turtle head up and down, side-to-side. The motor, gears, springs, the oil in the thing. Are there noises he hears inside that shell, does his neck stiffen if he doesn't move it, do the limbs go numb?

end of summer . . .
the surgical spine center's
reminder text

Richard L. Matta, USA

Her first fishing camp

herring fry
along a beach gutter
the isosceles of a fin

Scarlet lichen finger-painting black granite outcrops
bone-white sand necklaced burnt-umber by bull kelp
Abalone jemmied off rocks in knee-deep surf breaks
black-frilled and rubbery muscle fed into hand grinder
Oozy pearls of chopped flesh stirred with flour and salt
pan-fried crisp-golden in embers blue mussels
Frizzle-bearded yawn wide to orange-pink folds mud oysters
big as open hands spilling milky sea juice, swallowed raw.

live bait
what comes here is
already spoken for

Steady blows from off the strait roaring forties
driving swell after swell hard into musselroe bay
Hunting for crayfish, claws snag-wedged in sublittoral cracks
tossing back females, egg-heavy for another year
Soot-encrusted cast-iron pots boiling water over coals and
spiny carapaces in erubescence agonies, fast-chilled on ice
Tail after tail snapped off—more more, still more rich sweet flesh
until every bite becomes part pleasure, part disgust.

coming of age
a discarded diary
salt-flowered

Marietta McGregor, Australia

Procedure

Afterward, my sister said she would do it again if someone paid her ten dollars.

The best thing I could say about it was that most of it was not offensive.

eating our feelings
at the hospital café
0-calorie parfait

Sarah E. Metzler, USA

Dolorosa Street* again

Another sudden death in the family and day after day of dutiful obligations. Sweat and teardrops evaporate under a magnesium white-hot summer sun. Distant thunder, but the rain never comes. So, just a brief note: yes, I'm still down here working within this infernal Texas *horno*—exhausted, bleached to the bone, desiccating, call it what you will. Each day I roam his many rooms, sort his possessions one-by-one. For amusement I watch the silent mockingbirds drop from the dead live oaks, a scorpion scuttle under the shadow of a mesquite in the molten asphalt parking lot. We know there's more death in the air—everyone here can smell it, this malarial anti-petrichor. I gotta *vamonos*—
¡Buenos noches, mi corazon!

thermodynamics
skeletons dance the jig
to the mission bells

Mark Meyer, USA

*a street in San Antonio

Bird Brain

I don't remember if my real father ever actually referred to me using those specific words. In any case, I wasn't very bright, and he seemed to like to remind me often. But none of that matters this morning. I've put even my most important prayers on slight hold so I can walk over to the robin's nest (new tender eggs) that's on the back end of the house. A womb unto itself. A miniature mother earth bursting with stories. Deep knowledge about all the things a bird needs to know to survive. Or a person, for that matter. How to turn dirt and wood—if even just for a short while—into a warm home. Into beautiful family and its precise songs.

That sure don't seem dumb to me.

spring chores—
the whole world dust
and dandelion fluff

Andrew Riutta, USA

Timeline of Tattoos I Didn't Get

1984: Great-grandpa St. Claire's fading green heart

1991: My friend's Anton LaVey-lookalike uncle's inscrutable "got 'em in lockup" squiggles

1996: The American flag of the odious, mouth-breathing bully who was always trying to goad me, unsuccessfully, into fisticuffs

1997: The Tasmanian devil stretching to infinity of the roided-up jock in my gym class who bleached his hair to copy me when I bleached mine first (and who ultimately got the credit for starting the fad)

1998: The tiger face inscribed in a swallowtail's wings of the blonde girl who sat at my lunch table and was always offering me acid and hash

1999: The inscrutable swishes of the "it's Chinese for energy" on the neck of that aloof girl who flipped burgers with me and only acknowledged I existed when she wanted to talk about her tattoo

2000: "Heather" (her name) in gigantic, grand calligraphy, inscribed over a magnificent, pink pansy, on her lower stomach, right before she got pregnant after a one night stand with "American flag" (see: 1996)

2001: The praying hands on my stoner boss's shoulder who I worked with for four years and only saw sober twice

2002: The horimono (and pierced nipples) of the chaw-chomping ex-marine I never liked but who always seemed to think we were friends

2004: The bouquet of daisies on my boss's calf that she was fond of showing customers

2005: The temp's not-a-tramp-stamp tramp stamp

2007: The black polygons of the tribal tattoos that my gym rat coworker got done in suburban Baltimore

2009: The permanent eyeliner that my friend's girlfriend got from her mom

2010: The Rilke quote that the girl from customer service got on her forearm

2011: My peer's wedding ring

2012: The unfriendly barista's murmuration of starlings that turned into dandelion seeds that turned into clouds that turned into falling maple leaves that turned into starfish

2013: The other manager on my team's baby sonogram heartbeat

2014: My VP's Confederate flag

2015: The CFO's wife's "isn't it tasteful?"
just-another-night-out-with-the-girls bracelet of roses

2016: The monochrome sleeve of the waiter at the country club, about whom the CEO says, "I guess they'll hire anyone now"

2017: The cross on the wrist of the girl in the WIC office

2019: "I'm my own worst enemy" on the calf of the young man waiting for a table at Olive Garden

2020: The "mistake" on my direct report's backside, which finally got removed after 12 laser sessions with the dermatologist

2021: The skull and crossbones on the face of the kid behind me in line on Black Friday who was complaining about being unemployed

2023: “Guy’s Weekend 2023” surrounded by a few loops of chain
link that the guy friends I don’t have didn’t get

different
just like everyone else
mockingbird

Joshua St. Claire, USA

Safe?

As humans continue interspecies warfare, we only have 35% more non-human animals to go.

Are you in?

spent cartridge of a fox
wagner's ring cycle plays
through the night

Alan Summers, UK

Poet's note: "*spent cartridge*" alludes to the astringent smell of ejected excrement by foxes, plus simultaneous smells emitted via glands placed all over their bodies. It's also a metaphorical image of spent cartridges (ammunition) lying around.

Gembun

all I did was watch a pelican dive for food nearly 100 times

island paradise
even here
writer's block

Bryan Rickert, USA

Linked Verse

Rengay

Old-Time Religion

clinging to faith
an outdoor nativity
in late winter rain

*behind the steeple
a guns and ammo sign*

guarding baby Jesus
a metal chicken
with rusted wings

*cracked pew
giving up
on the rapture*

two surnames
in the whole cemetery

*wrapped in kudzu
the old rugged cross
leans right*

Terri L. French, USA
& Peggy Hale Bilbro, USA

Replacements

dental chair
the drill designer loves

Marathon Man

*the faultless grip
of custom pliers*

empty sockets . . .
robots perform
eye puff tests

*deep learning
all the crevasses
mapped*

a chin tuck turns into
rhinoplasty

*facial recognition—
everything fades
to white*

Richard L. Matta, USA
& Lorraine A Padden, USA

Travel Insurance

the process
of getting a visa
morning haze

*her maiden name
considered an alias*

no space on
the multiple choice form
to explain why

*still unclear . . .
removing her glasses
for her photo*

her different colored eyes
could be a problem

*misreading the signs
maybe I am
a robot*

Angela Terry, USA
& Julie Schwerin, USA

Tan-Renga

sinking sun
casting dry shadows
across hunger stones

*breeze lifts topsoil
single-sheet broadsides*

petro c. k., USA
& *Jerome Berglund, USA*

majestic mood
yours becoming
ours

*whilst the booze
lasts*

Jerome Berglund, USA
& *Christina Chin, Malaysia*

bath time
a paper sailboat crumples
in the tub

*mom folds another
piece of junk mail*

Christina Chin, Malaysia
& M. R. Defibaugh, USA

long night . . .
her screams restrained
to the icu bed

*the fall and rise
of Hannibal's tongue*

Amoolya Kamalnath, India
& Robert Kingston, UK

autumn noon—
a pelican's beak full
of the backwaters

*among parietal figures
at the Cosquer cave*

Amoolya Kamalnath, India
& Robert Kingston, UK

Sequences

Ever Before

between fairy tales—
telling Grandma
what a voice she has

father's words
the scrape of a butter knife
across burnt toast

old tree house
handing down his dream
to be a pilot

unlocked diary
his i's all dotted
with open hearts

Tonka truck
digging out
her inner child

just past midnight
Cinderella and
her bunions

Edward Cody Huddleston, USA
& Terri L. French, USA

late day blues

growing o^dtd

memory l^mane

waiting r^loom

global wⁿarming

faith m^uatters

mobile d^data

f^fbucket list

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

Middle Ages

a new lease on life vasectomy

draining the swamp my indiscretions

Sex Pistols the needle worn through

tempted a well-placed squeeze

half my age this fine vintage

last button opening the lily

Bryan Rickert, USA
& Peter Jastermsky, USA

Reality Show

Instagram insists
leggings are pants
the Anthropocene arrives

exploitation
is the new black
Anthropocene constellations

Anthropocene moon
fussing over daycare for her
goldendoodle

scheduling surgery
for his deviated septum
Anthropocene snow

Anthropocene spring
a Bud Lite six-pack ring fascinates
the hawkbill hatchling

finding another doctor
to misdiagnose her hypochondria
the Anthropocene deepens

marketing consultants
discuss different shapes of plastic
Anthropocene blossoms

you can't burn
books that don't exist
Anthropocene autumn

Anthropocene trillionaire
little hands get the most
lithium ore

selling used haute couture
as a side hustle
Anthropocene economics

Icarus just shrugs
and lights a scented candle
Anthropocene sun

Joshua St. Claire, USA

Split Sequences

From My Navel to the Cosmos

in my mind's eye

lotus flower
base jumping
into the ether

the cliff-notes version

a constant
act of returning
prayer beads

of reality

grounding
the mountain
inside myself

Shloka Shankar, India
& rs, USA



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