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Cover
Sarah Miller “Koi”
Bernie sat quietly in the dark, head lowered, resting in his hands. He recognized that he had been overwhelmed since Mable’s funeral. Distraught, some would say. But the feelings of impending doom had been weighing him down all day. His fingers, snarled and twisted from arthritis, were useless for typing words. Bernie needed to find a new way to keep in touch with his kids or they would worry about him, maybe even come all the way back just to check to make sure he was okay. He didn't want to be a burden to them. He turned back to his phone and tried once more to follow the directions so he could use the dictation feature to send messages.

Joan stared at the back of Bernie’s house through her kitchen window. She thought Bernie had been sitting in the dark for hours and wondered if something was seriously wrong. The last time she had spoken with Bernie, he had seemed distracted and not at all like himself. As Joan looked out again towards his house, her stomach clenched and she began to experience a visceral sensation of dread. What if something was really wrong with her neighbour? She knew he had been struggling following the death of his wife but thought he was bouncing back. Joan thought hard about this and realized she hadn't actually seen him leave his house for weeks.

Bernie felt a strange tingling at the base of his neck. It felt like all of his nerve endings there were on fire and he noticed that the tips of his fingers were numb. Bernie was feeling uneasy and was certain someone was watching him. The more he thought about it, it seemed like someone had been watching him for quite some time. It crossed his mind that his paranoia might actually be a symptom of grief, but he didn't really know for sure. Bernie found himself moving from window to window in his house as he tried to figure out if someone was out there. He couldn't see anything other than shadows in the dark. Feeling foolish, Bernie moved back to where his phone was so he could continue to try and figure out the dictation feature.

Joan turned out all of the lights in her house so she could try and see more clearly what Bernie was doing. She stood stock still and vaguely felt her upper lip perspiring as she stared out the window. The visions running through her head scared her. She wondered if Bernie was suicidal and her sense of fear continued to ratchet up as she watched his house. What if she didn't do anything? Joan didn't think she would be able to live with that, so started thinking through what would happen if she called 911. How would she explain herself so that someone would come out and check on Bernie?

Bernie tried the dictation feature one more time. He couldn't figure out why it sounded so straightforward in his Google search but when he actually tried to follow the steps, found it wouldn't work. Pacing back and forth while re-reading the steps again, he sat down for one last attempt. Success at last! He had finally dictated a real message and sent it to his daughter. Bernie experienced a strong sense of relief, which was abruptly cut short by someone yelling and pounding on his front door.

Rushing down the hallway to see what was going on, Bernie passed by the front picture window and stopped in his tracks. He was astonished by what he saw outside his house. Bernie was stunned to see that there were three police cars, lights flashing, and it appeared that several officers were in the process of surrounding his house. Shock and fright conspired to prevent him from even opening the door, as he had no idea whatsoever why they might be there. Peering through the window, Bernie watched in amazement as the police officers began to move towards his front door.

He glanced up as something briefly caught his eye from his neighbour's house. Bernie was both puzzled and surprised to see Joan hiding behind a curtain watching him.
Your Cat Watching Empty Air
by D.S. Martin

Let me set the quiet scene  Logs
crackled from the fireplace  as you
gathered around the dinner table

Perhaps you’d just said grace  & as
you reached for serving bowls  your
peace was pierced by your cat’s

howling screech  Unable to perceive
what had changed  you all turned  to
where the cat sat strangely watching

empty air
  You all turned to face  us
angels  whose intent had simply been
to observe without being observed
equally startled by that caterwaul  &
then the curious stare  of your whole

family  before someone shrugged
There’s nothing there  Your cat’s eyes
burned  with a narrowing glare  that

seemed might yet give us away  so I
turned her way  & she went yowling
up the stairs
I stretched slowly, opened my eyes.

_Blink, blink._

I looked around the room I was in.

_Still here, still alone._

I stood up and walked over to the smaller door that connected my room to the bathroom. I scratched at the dirt for a bit before doing my business.

_At least this box is clean when I need to use it._

Soon enough there would be lights and humans would start coming to the door of my room, poking and prodding, trying to see if I was friendly. Most of the time I would just lie in the back corner on my little black blanket, confused as to why I ended up here. What is this, now, day 40?

I remember the first day as if it were stuck in my head like a bad dream. I was caught in a metal cage as I was trying to get some food. I had been in the alley behind this place that smelled like chicken. My parents had left me and my brothers to fend for ourselves. I must have only been 50 days old and I didn't want to leave, but they insisted that it was time.

"You will be fine, now go and see the world," Mother said as she walked away down the alley behind the chicken place. I tried to run after her, but she climbed a tall fence and was gone.

I was scared. It was my first time being alone in the alley by myself, and I didn't know what to do. All my brothers ran off without me. They always did leave me behind as I am smaller and have shorter legs. I tried to find some food behind this big can that smelt good but a scary bird screeched at me to go away because he was already eating from there.

I walked down the alley slowly, trying to avoid any trouble. When I heard shouting coming from the back door of the chicken place. I saw one of my brothers get smacked with a big straw thing on a stick. He took off running, as the tall human was shouting, "Stupid strays!" That was the last time I saw any of my brothers. I hid for the rest of the night and it got very cold and wet as water started falling on me. I was scared, alone, and very hungry, but I was also very tired. I woke up to the sound of the door of the chicken place opening and closing; this time there was a big square thing with something that smelt like food inside. I walked over to it and that's when it all happened.

The square thing snapped, and I was stuck inside. I was so scared. My hair stood up and my eyes went big. I tried to act tough and hiss and growl, but the tall human reappeared and yelled, "I got one! You nasty strays always knocking over my garbage cans!" Then a big thing on wheels pulled up, opened the back, and put me inside. It was dark and smelled like so many other animals. I tried to see if any of my brothers were there, but I couldn't move inside the square box.

I cried and cried. All I could think about was how scared and alone I was. The next thing I remember is a human in white, with a funny smell, checking in my ears and eyes and poking me. I tried to be nice, but I was so hungry and scared. The human in white said something to another human and then they put me in this room.

I get food twice a day and I also have a nice blanket, but I can't run, and I don't know where I am or where any of my family is. I do know there are lots of other cats like me here, though, but we can't see each other. We can try to talk across the room but there are so many other noises that we can't hear each other. Sometimes I see humans pick up other ones like me and then they never come back. I don't know if that is good or not. The humans in green that feed me say that one day I will get a home, whatever that means.
When Animals Meet

by Brandon Fick

Out for a stroll, I happened upon a fox, a bushy bandit
Darting among the cushy snowdrifts like a housecat;
I crept on aching knees towards him, unafraid, inching
Over dead pine and thistles to say hello to Senor Zorro.
Three feet away I stopped, sunk, he raised his angular face,
Nose probing, eyes green emeralds on a red seabed,
And his mouth opened: I thought he might ask if I was lost.
Instead, he yipped, cut through the air like a bat without wings.
Recoiling, I swung the butt of my rifle at the oncoming triangle,
That face, so cute from afar, gnashing for my stubbly jugular;
Crack went the bone of the fox as he fell, forever dead
Because I presumed we could chat, be friends, we scavengers.
A tear froze on my cheek to see the cold little body:
Life snuffed out for no reason except that I too was an animal.

Fishing for suckers

by Sarah Trevor

In spring creeks
fish mass
like kids in malls
drawn by
instinct
hormones
longing

No bogeyman
this
guy next door
slips a net
the crowd barely sees

Timing perfect
the place
the plan
leaves no space
for mercy’s balm

If one escapes
there’s plenty more
every minute
a sucker born.
I had just got up. My head was still a mess from the dreams I had just walked through. I looked at my phone to check the time, but, my unfortunate eyes told me, it was only 6:45 in the morning. I let out a guttural noise and lay back on my off-white sheets. My small room in the basement never let me go back to sleep. It was always far too noisy. Pipes grunted like they were in a grudge match with the furnace, screaming its name over and over. It felt like a circle of Hell in Dante's Inferno. I hated the basement, but I was left alone. Even with the shrieking pipes and the growling furnace, I was alone. The past summer I had had no real human interaction, just the odd time, but mostly I just stayed in my room. I sat up and my bones creaked as if I were not the 18-year-old who lived in a cold basement but rather an 80-year-old who lived there. I groaned as I saw a friend request from someone I didn't want to talk to anymore. I groaned at the thought of actually talking to someone. So, as I went to press the block button, my phone lit up and my heart started to move. This past summer I had never really felt my heart at all. I felt dead in a lot of ways. But this text made my heart race like I had just run 10K. The smell of mold and mildew on wet paper that the basement always reeked of suddenly hit my nose, like a shark ramming a boat.

Hey

was all it read, a smiley face with its stupid tongue hanging out. I blacked out my phone's screen, not sure if I wanted to reply. My headache started, as it had each morning, to tell me I had had a nightmare I could barely remember. I looked past my small pain and turned my phone on once more, seeing the word. I hadn't talked to her in years, a whole decade, in fact. I stared at my phone for a long time, and sighed. Through my 'better' judgement I chose to reply, even though each fiber of my being screamed at me not to talk to people today.

Hey

I pressed send and closed my eyes. My inner thoughts were so jumbled I didn't know if it even occurred to me why she, too, was up this early. The light hadn't even come out to take the day shift for the moon's watch over our world.

What ya doing?

I read out loud and looked around. My sleep-deprived eyes must have looked like I'd gone a couple of rounds with Rocky in his prime.
unlocked her car door, which was a bit odd in the small town where I grew up. I sat down in the seat and had to move it back. The smell of pine from the little trees hit me much harder than the odor from my room. She sat there in a white tank top and camo shorts with a ball cap on. I was trying to find the point between anger and confusion.

“Hey Deej.” She sounded quite husky for a girl, more like a man than a woman. When she turned to look at me, I was both surprised and scared. In my sister’s gaze, there was just a pool of darkness. Most people have a light behind their eyes. It’s the old tale; the eyes are the door to the soul. But in my sister, there was just a void of sadness in her brown eyes.

“Yes?” I asked, quickly checking her hand for a ring, but seeing it was bare. My mind started to question what had happened.

“How have you been?” Her voice was shaking. I knew I had let a face of aggression slip for a second. I saw true terror behind her eyes. What was once empty had been filled like a rain pool with pure fear. Now I was worried; was she in trouble and people were coming after her?

“How have I been?” I didn’t know what to say; how do you sum up a decade of your life? “I guess I’ve been good, I mean I’m kind of fighting with some stuff right now, but I’m okay.” I paused and sighed. “How have you been?”

“Not great, but I’m free.” She had such sadness to her voice, it made my summer-long battle with depression seem like toddlers in a park.

“Free?” I asked, as it dawned on me.

“I was with some bad people. Well, bad relationships. I…” she trailed off.

“Erin?”

“Oh sorry, I just got kicked out like a week ago.”

“What do you mean bad?” I regretted asking, even as the words came out. Tears formed in her eyes and I put a hand on her. “Ya know, it doesn’t matter; you’re free, right?” The look I got from her wasn’t like any look I had ever gotten from any family member, or any person really. It was a look that said a thousand words in a second. A look that I saw in her eyes of the times she would later tell me of being tied to a bed and just raped all day; beaten for speaking; thrown down stairs. The days when her exes would keep her from leaving the house and threaten to murder her family if she ever saw them again; those times the worst days of her life, days when all she wished for was death. These days I saw in this one look that lasted a half a second and then I knew that everything I was going through I could survive. My depression was nothing. She ran from these monsters, real monsters. Creatures I don’t even want to call human. People who took so much pleasure in breaking a young girl to the point her brain could no longer cope, her mind fractured itself into other personalities, and she developed a case of Dissociative Identity Disorder because of the horrors that she endured. In a single glance I knew that even though ten years had passed, even though some days I had to force myself to remove sharp objects from my room, because I didn’t trust myself, it didn’t matter anymore what I was going through. I would get over it, no matter what. I had made a promise to my sister that I would protect her and look out for her.

I asked her to pull over the car and without saying anything I gave my sister a hug, but not just any hug. There is a kind of hug that is reserved. You don’t give this hug to just anyone. This hug is for people, family in particular, who are in so much pain they can’t put it into words. This hug is the last act to show this person that no matter what happens or where they go, you will always be right beside them.
I tossed and turned all night long, looked at my phone as I turned on the power. The bright light burnt into my eyes. It wasn't long until my eyes adjusted to it. Twenty-three missed calls, it said, from a person I wished would just leave me alone already; I was trapped with her for 10 years. She kept me away from my family, my friends, wouldn't let me talk to my birth parents or brothers, and then, about a week ago, she kicked me out...after 10 years, like really, so many thoughts ran through my head as I just stared at the 23 missed calls...should I call her back? Like I do miss her, but she was abusive to me, she did kick me out...but I did love her...or did I? No, she kicked me out. No, I should change my number...it was too early in the morning to talk to my mom and dad about this...and because of all of my past, I had no friends...so I decided to see if there was anyone on Facebook to talk to, just to clear my head about this. As I looked on Facebook, there was this name, DeeJay Waldner, a person I could never talk to, I wasn't allowed to. Thoughts ran through my head...sure, he is my brother, but he'll be mad cuz I never talked to him in forever...I couldn't...but we did have good times before, didn't we, we played with Lego and talked forever...maybe he isn't mad at me...

As I clicked on his name, my heart raced at such a beat I was sure it would stop. I slowly typed out hey, didn't press send... still wondered, is this a good idea? Maybe I could wait until my parents got up. As I thought about that, a call came up on my phone...it was that number, that number I wish that would just stay away, that call that...shivers ran over my body and I thought, no, I really need someone, so I pressed send...and to my surprise...I saw the typing bubbles. I was actually excited: maybe he wasn't mad at me at all but scared, also maybe he is mad at me, and is going to tell me...

The word hey popped up. I just sat there, looking at it, and thought why is he up at this time? Jeez, it's like 6:45 in the morning. I know why I'm up, but really...

So, I asked him if he wanted to go for breakfast, cuz I really needed to talk, even if he didn't care or didn't even listen.

The typing bubbles came up again. Butterflies flew around my stomach as I was scared he might say, no, you didn't even care about me for the past 11ish years...

But, no, he didn't. Sure, was what the bubble said.

As I drove out to Muenster to pick him up, I was so scared of what he was going to ask me, where I was for the past how many years? I didn't really know how I was going to tell him or what I should tell him.

As I turned into Muenster, my phone buzzed, scared me. I didn't know if I should even look at it, but I did and quickly turned off the phone, so I didn't have to see that dreaded number, the one that won't leave me alone. I pulled up to this white house. The house looked as I remembered it before. Some paint was chipping off the sides, there was a big tree in front, but the vehicle was different outside; there was a red Jeep. The last time I even saw this house there was a blue van...I hoped I had the right house...as I thought, I saw this young man but he looked almost older than me, which is impossible as he is 20?? I think, and I am 27 years old. He had long hair and a beard, his hair tied back into a ponytail. I unlocked the car doors he got into the car.

I turned and said, “Hey, Deej.”

He said, “Hey,” back. I asked, “How have you been?”

He said he had been not too bad. He turned to me with this very worried look on his face, almost panic...the face the police officer gave me when I told him everything that had happened to me. DeeJay asked me, “How have you been?”

The words cut into my ears. It felt like a rock was in my throat even to speak...I kinda panicked...I was hoping it wasn't too noticeable. I opened my mouth and told him I was not great at all. I was back living with my parents; I got kicked out a week ago from an abusive relationship that I was trapped in for 10 years...

As tears ran down my face, I just couldn't hold it back anymore.

Deejay gave me a hug, a tight hug, the sort of hug that made me feel safe, like no-one will hurt me again, that I was safe where I was. The type of hug that made me know that, no matter what, he did forgive me, and my brother would soon tell me that no one will ever hurt me again, not as long as he is around.

I was so happy that my brother forgave me for not talking to him for many years. In those years I felt so alone, like I was never going to get out of that, but now that I am out, I am never going to go back, not ever, and if I can't make sure of that, DeeJay and my parents will make sure for me.
Bloodline  
by Mandie Hagel

I wonder where you are inside me  
if every twist of me is a mere  
abstraction of  
you  
is that why the enzyme dries up before my  
DNA can river it  
is it you snaking around my kidneys  
constricting the life from my  
heart  
is it your muscle spasms jerking  
my brush strokes  
texturizing this paint  
maybe you  
are the burning hot in my  
anger  
is this your self-loathing I feel surfacing  
beating my temples in time  
with my murmured heart  
and spitting venom off my tongue

Where are you, grandfather  
because I’m sure the grave you sleep in is  
awake in me.

Mountain Notebook, Page One  
by Gerald Hill

Mud-rich, dragonfly daddy  
ousy with breeze, I could breathe  
a lake full and empty. I could catch  
and eat the quiet things,  
give my body air.

I could spark my birdsong motor,  
preen and eat till the stars come home,  
could dissolve to sand, come back  
as current pressing the bottom  
of a feel-good canoe, come back heard.  
I and the bunchberries pacing  
each other’s sightpath could fake petals,  
fr or carry cloud debris,  
run for blue, tell shadows what  
tomorrow’s sky will be. If rain  
picks up I will draw myself  
in rainstrokes if I want to or sleep,  
O how lovely the sleep  
sensation, nothing but natural cause.
Elegy
by Christian Riegel

a. 
feet crumble crust
    of snow every foot/
    fall black hole in white

in the distance 
coyote hugs prairie 
horizontal to my vertical 

my stealth/my fear 
    stops me 
in tracks 
I want to approach 
furtive marauder 
prod absence 

b. 
we carry our dead with us 
want to write them present in Orphic gesture 
recreate on white black figuring 

hear the whisper 
    pluck strings 
sing a song 
    find a way to surface 

but where to bring them? 
unseemly resurrection black on white 

flat light and 
a snowy field 

coyote doesn't even howl
icing inside the cookie
by Helen E. Herr

Between the venetian blinds,
sunshine covers lovers
as they roll towards each other
oblivious of outdoor scraping
sounds. They’ve seen Sally draw
snow designs on car windows before;
vertical lines, horizontal bars,
precise matching boxes
become public art.

As temperature climbs, snow melts
each square over door handles,
drips into puddles at her feet.
Sally stands and watches as she licks
icing from inside her chocolate cookie.

When Sally plants her garden
each row is measured
with architectural precision;
carrots snuggle marigolds
and hold hands with peas,
potatoes are five inches deep
and twenty inches apart,
corn stalks labyrinth paths
spaced for children
to play hide-and-go-seek.

Neighbours press command start.
Never give Sally a glance nor do they
think about Sally when wind tosses
her window drawings or corkscrews
corn stocks into ropes that criss-cross
her path like snakes?

Ravens
by Carrie Ann Schemenauer

I’ve always been afraid of not being loved
for all the good I have in me
the times when I give
the times when I am nurturing
and gentle and forgiving
there are lots of these days

but I fear my bad days
they threaten to obscure the good
the days I say things
I strip my loved ones to the bone
say things that should never be said
my words a winter wind
leaves them
chilled for way too long

later I hang my head
and cry shameful tears
but I can’t take back my words
can’t heal the wounds I made

I worry those words will be the only things
I am remembered for
like a menacing flock of ravens
they will darken the sun’s rays
and I will sit and shiver
alone in a corner
with no one to comfort me
because it will be my own fault
Speck of Dust

by Ted Haas

giant Antares hangs in
speckled darkness
far-distant stars bow their homage
even Jupiter of Milky Way

Earth, invisible in its cirque,
knows its tiny place
before its own sun, and
seizes the galactic fire that
infuses this speck of dust
with the fire of life while
floating across the
echoless universe of
my bedroom.

(February 2010)

We Are

by Vernie Reifferscheid

We are the numbers of stars
that light up the sky
and darken the night’s skies.
We are the people in this world
which brings up sadness and happiness
like the seasons that come and go
early fall and winter peeking through
hoping to see spring and summer time.
We are the life of native plants of the world
we come seasonal and leave behind memories
cold winds of the north
battle with the south wind year round
like the singsong of the birds
leaving messages behind them
only the fir trees try to keep green.
Jack Frost, he makes the appearance
and Mr. Fog trips a special coated mark
and at last every spot has it done.
And at night we sleep under the twinkling stars
and the moon rides the sky while we all sleep.
Recycling Universes  
by Oliver Green

Stars implode, their fuel exhausted,  
nuclear fusion and gravity unbalanced.  
General relativity meets quantum uncertain-  
ty.  
The truth of the very large  
unified with the truth of small  
in black hole’s intense warm density.

Where light’s held hostage  
to gravitational persuasion.  
Regurgitated in fiery vomit.  
From black hole’s gluttonous appetite  
oozes quasar’s hot, white, brilliant light  
and sub-atomic energy in motion.

From dinosaurs to our demise,  
a momentary tick in time,  
like a repeating rifle, the bangs  
of black hole’s unseen authenticity  
continues re-purposing lives in  
perpetuity in universal universes.

We Are Made of Stardust  
by Elizabeth Greene

Truth’s a practice, less visible than yoga or dance  
where every step, every arm extension  
shows years of training, muscle memory,  
embodying the body’s ancient wisdom,  
making it live in blood and bone.

Master musicians play true in every draw of the bow,  
touch of the piano, breath into the oboe—  
so powerful that the violinist’s frail frame  
vibrates with sound that expands through  
the great hall, maybe, unheard, beyond.

When Rembrandt paints his face  
over and over, young and old,  
he is painting truth.

And maybe even more in writing,  
where every breath fills every word.  
The poem is always forming.  
Truth chimes with the music of the spheres  
And reaches out to the vast stars.
The Day We Stole the Train

by Robert Currie

It’s a bit like a dream, Dave Margoshes and I walking beside the Pullman cars on this line that hasn’t seen a passenger train in years. People gesture from the windows, complain that they should have been gone an hour ago. A porter stands in the doorway of the first car, tells us the engineer must be asleep on the job. Will this train ever get moving again? Dave and I walk to the engine, a hiss of steam by the tracks, but no sign of an engineer or any other railroad man. We climb into the cab and take control, Dave checking the pressure gauges, me grabbing a shovel and beginning to feed the fire box, though there’s no coal in the tender, but thousands of crab apples which are light and easy to fling. Pressure building, the locomotive shudders ahead, the sound of cars jerking down the line, Dave blasts the whistle, and we pull away from the station, picking up speed, passing a low-slung edifice that must be a library, patrons looking up from books and magazines, every one of them flashing their thumbs up, and it’s into the countryside now, fields of canola yellow as sunshine, a single blue field of flax, and wheat flowing towards the horizon, Dave and I leaning out the windows, wind cool on our faces, a level crossing ahead, a Mountie car with its lights flashing, a man in red by the car, slashing his hand up and down, but we’re by him, rougher country here, clumps of bush and rock, rolling land that’s never been ploughed, and half a mile ahead the land drops away, the rails running level and straight. We slow the train to a stop, dismount from the engine and walk toward a canyon with a river boiling below, the tracks on a trestle of timber, old and weathered, and we doubt if it can possibly carry a train. That’s when the Mounties arrive, four of them flourishing handcuffs. Three surrounding Dave, they pin him down and get the cuffs on his wrists, the other guy grabbing me, but I shake him off just as I’m shocked awake, and I worry, will Dave ever get out of jail?
Writers are visualizers, educators, weavers, dreamers, maestros, detectives and so much more. Writers have a voice and a way of expression unlike any other. Join us. There’s a place here for you.
Linda Meyer
*Remember Holodomor*

Reighan Royeras
*Demon*
Hryon Bautro

After Hals
Gabrielle Webb
*Head in the Flowers*

Allan Neilsen
*Member of the Wedding*
Millie Puetz
*Degas Dancers*
Emma Eckdahl
Baddeck

Jenna Buryniuk
Billie
Michael Langhorst
*Japanese Studies*

Sharon Rubuliak
*After The Storm*
Clinton Hunker

_Smuts Road I_
Jeanne Dark contemplates the sky

by dee Hobsbawn-Smith

What is sky but intention before it touches down?

A cauldron where heavy weather brews, bitter
as over-steeped oolong, black sails in the north wind,
cumulo-nimbus with a cutlass in its teeth.

A sea where red-tailed hawk loiters against the updraft,
buccaneer in wait. Behind it, a single cell tower,
modernist Emily Carr tree, backlit by ripples of corrugated cirrus.

An aerial beach where dreamers and renewed dreams
board white sloops on currents bearing the newly dead
to the river's edge.

Host to a dervish tornado, and me, the Sufi dancer
attuned to its spin, whirling on a hillside in high summer,
my body a kinetic antenna, truths bound into bones, synapses fired by motion.

Bury me where lilacs and cherries rest their heads,
linen scarves stitched in cerise and lavender and forget-me-not blue.

Daytime sun-halo asks
what does this woman want?
Sky. A cup of clarity.

A simpler song. A garden to sow and harvest,
full jars on the shelves, handmade quilt on the bed, my beloved
beside me, sons safely grown.

Two orange orioles alight on the apple bough,
the flickering colour of joy after anger
has finally burned away.
Giving Thanks
by Peggy L. Kelly

In the west end of Ottawa, a medical clinic serves people who have environmental illness, as well as those with more traditional allergies to pollen from trees and flowers. It occupies a bungalow that was renovated according to the highest standards for healthy indoor air.

The clinic's cramped waiting room is furnished with solid leather chairs along one wall. The opposite wall, a mere three feet from the chairs, holds a huge notice board plastered with sales brochures for air cleaners and safe cleaning products, Health Canada reports, news releases, and the results of studies. One study caught my eye. “Save the Boys and Girls” warns against carrying cell phones in pockets because low-level radiation from phones can lead to sterility.

The tiny waiting room also serves as a hallway connecting Reception at the front of the building to the Testing room and the basement stairway at the back. One Tuesday last fall, I sat in this hallway, filling in complicated forms, including the ironically titled Quick Environmental Exposure and Sensitivity Inventory (QEESI). There were twenty-seven questions to answer before seeing Dr. O'Reilly, such as please list all your medications with dosage and frequency, and how often do you wake up tired?

A young woman came in, found the questionnaires in her name, and sat a few chairs away. Her long brown hair was loose, and she wore a dark green sweater that emphasized her pale complexion. After exchanging a smile with me, she balanced a clipboard on her knee and began to write her answers calmly and deliberately.

A minute later, she asked, “Do you know where that buzzing noise is coming from?”

I listened. “Buzzing?” I asked. “I don’t hear any buzzing, but I wear hearing aids and they don’t catch everything. Could it be the fax machine?”

Reception was located in an open space next to our waiting area, close enough that we could hear the receptionist talking on the telephone or typing on her computer. The doctor would sometimes call Reception from her office phone and the printer was frequently active.

We turned back to our forms and sat quietly, intent on answering accurately. Beth, the nurse, said hello and called me to the counter where she records blood pressure and temperature.

In a barely audible voice, the young woman said, “I don’t feel well.”

Beth didn’t hear. I looked at the other patient. She’d stopped writing, resting her hand lethargically on one knee, as if she’d given up.

“What’s wrong?” I asked her, as I motioned to Beth, saying, “She doesn’t feel well.”

Beth touched the patient’s forehead with her right palm.

“You don’t have a fever,” she said. “Are you nauseous?”

“No,” said the young woman. “But I feel dizzy.”

“Stay seated,” said Beth. “Put the clipboard down and rest a bit. There’s plenty of time to finish that before you see Dr. O’Reilly.”

Beth returned to her office, and I went back to the endlessly detailed forms. The young woman was silent. Minutes passed as we waited to see Dr. O’Reilly.

I heard a sudden movement and turned to see the other patient slipping down in her chair. She couldn’t hold herself up. Her arms and legs began to jerk in short punches and kicks. Her limbs seemed dislocated, their movements following no pattern or rhythm. Her chin touched her upper chest, and her straight hair fell over her face. She was outside herself, letting the storm possess her, watching from somewhere else. She was out of control.

I called Beth and she called the doctor. They stood in front of the flailing young woman, Dr. O’Reilly’s face full of horror and concern.

“She said she was feeling dizzy earlier,” Beth said, “but she wasn’t febrile or nauseous.”

“She heard buzzing noises before that,” I offered.

The young woman heard us. She was still for only a second, but it was noticeable. Her awareness was intact beyond the chaos of her limbs. Someone had heard her. Someone had listened.

I held my breath. The doctor called for intravenous fluids. The young woman’s arms and legs continued their unpredictable, robotic dance for a short while longer. Gradually they slowed down, and she leaned back, limp and exhausted. Dr. O’Reilly and Beth helped her into the intravenous room. The whole clinic was quiet and subdued.

About thirty minutes later, the doctor was satisfied that her patient was recovering and safe in the care of the nurse, and I was ushered into the doctor’s office.
office. When my appointment was over, the young woman was still resting. I never saw her again.

The next day, I walked in the forest behind my house, surrounded by brilliant fall colours. I looked closely at young saplings next to established Maple, Birch, Cedar, Pine, and Ash, all rooted in the soil and reaching to the sky. Deep orange, red, and gold leaves shimmered in the sunlight before releasing their grips on branches. Twigs and branches broken by strong winds lay rotting on the forest floor, while damaged Birch and Maple leaned against their sturdy neighbours. The upright trees dwarfed tall grasses and wildflowers at their feet: Goldenrod, Asters, Queen Anne’s Lace, and Black-eyed Susans, all past their prime. The flowers, grasses, and fallen leaves were turning brown, curling up, and drying out.

The forest scene reminded me of the young epileptic woman's collapse and recovery. I took a deep breath and stood a moment, witnessing the circle of life and death.

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**Fried Potatoes and Orange Juice**  
_by Mikayla Buryniuk_

I imagine God will ask me how the human experience was for me. As if I had spent the day at school as a child, and returned to my mother asking me how my day was over dinner—fried potatoes and orange juice. Only this time, I would have to come up with something better to say than “fine.”

How was the human experience for me?
I would love to tell Him that it was painfully splendid. Oh my Lord, it was painfully splendid. My heart was taken out of my body over and over again, and dissected with knives.

Heartbreaks, like ice shatters in April. But I learned to love the pain and I suppose I have you to thank for that. What was given to me through hurt has reinforced me in strength. What was taken gave back, in twofold. I learned that water is still water, frozen and cracked, or liquid and flowing.

Blessings are still blessings in whichever form You gave them to me. So thank you Lord for the ability to have felt all that you gave me to feel.

However, I imagine less is more when conversing with Divinity. So instead I will tell Him simply, that the human experience was like standing on a mountain top. The peak of the rock piercing my bare feet, but the view making the blood running down the mountainside worth my very life itself.
Continuations CXXIV:
by Doug Barbour and Sheila Murphy

a shout or
a murmur divergence
of intent intense
growing susurrations of a crowd
ing cowering mass in
surrection long hoped for

uneven skies show cold
while broth on stove
top shifts
focus as though inner
daylight might still
arrive intact

a bubbling up or over
how to keep the steam
in as out
ward show a no go
there it is as
so often (un)intended

tendered in a blink
latticed relief spanning
tendril to thought of
new mown something
sheltered from distraught
mind s(t)et opening

hold that thought less
than emotional economy
can allow or will
full (of the usual
unrendered material
spread across all roads leading

or following the fallow
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to expectorate non
givens as material wit
turns gymnopedic
in unlikely fields

of song off tune
someone will say off
the radar read
outs in sight
but beyond comprehension (that app)
singular astonishment
leveraged b.o. read
under par
let us count the hen scans
in and around the Adirondacks of layoffs
laid on too thick
to think through
that message spun
like gossamer webs
layered laundered
leveraged they might say

clean getaway from
the yurt with
standing photographs upon
mind walls
in later years
and still the fray

or frayed ropes never quite
holding on to what
last chance pose
held (against or on to
for the best back
grounds for refuse all

granular views elude
foundation of a trusted source
at last let go
the nerves require
quiet to retain their hold
so shot tonight a quote will serve to set the scene unseen unheard of lost intentions lots in tension fail that test revealing answers at the service of asemic flight apart from words to form perceived precision disturbed by middling fact meddling facts fail to meld the oppositions in operational all systems down to zero (h)our hopes feared too fanciful to do to do ta da
disturbed by middling fact
two
disturbed by middling fact

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place mats places ("everyone")

person if I(e)d and only buying unsold status stents stamps

the latest (in) ostentation stint of ease

fixed not faxed less viral then than now new yearning allows stopped or stoppered a control assured as seared into

hand over hand nothing stops the sure move together rallying cry sans crimp control sears its own lack

that theory at best bosses all others their lesser psychologics no arguments so tough so sewed up in that old bag full of (whose) wind

cinders make our way across them sonic vigorous determined the brain lights fireside chats sewn into psyches tough with thee or why
ex ratings raise some stakes
where questions fall into the dark
of minds too clouded
crowded a susurration
say insects parading through
an empty cavern (craven
having a stake in
enjoying a steak
once quests are left
to whisper (to wit)
nest over nasty
patch along the cold parade
ground of being anywhere but
here(after) float that
hoped for speculation
now spoken for by
whom (the bolt tells

bellwether fortress
strapped down in mindset
no hopping about
spoke on spoke protecting
from the gloating
whims of influencers influenza
as sickness spreads no pro
phylaxis feels enough
a step by step operation
into or out of such depths
of whateverness a waiting
game on edges
direction notifies the game
comme ci comme ca as rules
emerge step wise
and pound foolish waiting
for and waiting on
a weighty same

finding time
by Sharon Bird

a mug can hold the world, start minus forty mornings
with coffee stronger than the north wind
that blows through uneven door frames and spaces
where light, too, seeps in
lifts darkness, shifts cold to another place

an empty plate forgotten
sticky with remnants of jam trapped in crumbs
as if sweetness could be held in sharpness
last bites more real in absence

a slow walk in the forest to listen for green
sometimes carried by breeze
more often found in silence of shade
each leaf a wordless consolation
the grace of a fern
reminds us to dance when the wind moves us
each brown spore hiding underneath
as testament to the eternity of now
April Field
 by gillian harding-russell

Your paw prints in the dried mud
at the corner of the field where we would walk, big
as a cougar someone remarked of your ample foot marks
and so now I follow their trail following
a scent from several days past, stale
and gone like the light we receive from stars
that have pulsated years before it reaches us
and so I remember the deer skull you lighted
upon in June a year ago, daisies threading
their recent lives through nooks of eyes and jaw
and now I cannot get out of my head

your princely silhouette against the wind,
nose uplifted to catch heady scents in this April air
following the thread of a particular skein unwinding
its trail through the dead
grasses – all that intricacy of message and
language I lack the olfactory sense to read

and find myself catching an ethereal glimpse
of your familiar shape, tan fur patches
of sunshine in darkness
behind the scrub bushes, still bare, out the corner
of my eye – and the possibility you might watch me
as the ghost of the scent might become
aware of the one fast on its trail?

Death, Be Not Proud
 by Dave Margoshes

Death is cruel to children and something should be done
about it, beloved grampas and grammas be given
exemptions from the allotted four score to spare
the little darlings the trauma of their passing until
better equipped to handle it. Death is subtle in middle-age,
the distant aunts and occasional friends falling behind
with an irregular rhythm easy enough to ignore, but
death announces itself to old age with temper and tantrum,
the blare of trumpets. We attend more funerals
than weddings, bar mitzvahs and baby showers combined.
Yet there is some comfort in all this death around us,
it is theirs, observed by us, and not ours. And when
our appointment comes, it will be the survivors
who gasp with relief, even as they mourn.
**Lunch in America**  
*by Kelley Jo Burke*

excerpt from manuscript-in-progress  
“To the Lighthouse” (I know. I need a Different Title)

Oh god he's got my keys.

The old man lost his license after my grandmother Teen died. Arthritic and with almost no discernible circulation to his feet, he had been a questionable driver for years, unable to shoulder check, or temper his speed. A drive through a plate glass window and into the ten items or less till at the local grocery had been the final nail in his driving coffin.

But now, Day Three of my visit to York Beach, Maine, having suggested lunch out, the old man is at the wheel of my rental car, honking.

“Hurry up.” (honk)

“Grampa. You’re not s’pposed to drive--.”

(Honk) “Never mind about that.” (honk)

“Grampa, I really have to--” I open the passenger door. He starts to back out. I am thrown into the seat. The next honk is the oncoming car whose path the old man backs into, but he ignores this, gives the car a grinding shift, and heads down Nubble Road.

He's doing 50 miles an hour, which, on the narrow winding cliff-side road, bustling with early summer traffic, is suicidal.

I'm never going to see my husband again. I will never see my children.

“Grampa, you're really not supposed to drive my car. Please switch with me.”

The old man shakes his head, taps his hearing aids.

“These don't work too good over the car. Tell me when we get there.”

I try to speak louder, but then I notice that he is speeding up every time I try to get him off the wheel. Off the shoreline, and up Cape Neddick Road, winding up to where? The turnpike. Oh god. Without shoulder checking, without even decreasing speed, he swings us onto the six-lane highway.

We're using two out of three northbound lanes, and cars are honking in fury--the speed limit’s 55, but no one is doing less than 70. I start to cry a little. One more time:

“I want to drive.”

Up to 80.

“--shut--I'm fine.”--the other cars are frightening the old man, so he is running away from them, his feet so numb that he probably can only guess at how much he is accelerating. Where is the hell is the highway patrol?

At the speed he's going it's less than 10 minutes to Ogunquit, and the exit. Clutching the dashboard, to me 10 minutes is something outside of time. Rushing impossibly. Never beginning or ending. A country that only answers to NO.

Then I see the sign. Stunning happy thought-- I may survive.

“There’s the turn-off--” I see the panic on the old man's face. He doesn't know if he can brake. Drags his foot off the gas. Slams over lanes. Car from behind swerving, drivers putting whole bodies onto car horns-one Neon full of terrified teenagers, perhaps out for their first try on the turnpike, actually follow the rental, kids shrieking and giving the old man the finger. He seems not to see. I am paralyzed, watching us head for the trees, the harbour beyond the turnoff. Then the foot finds the brake and slams right down to the floor. I grab the wheel and crank it over. The old man doesn't even see me, has his eyes closed, pulling against my yank.

And then we are sitting, idling, about 20 yards down the turn-off. A restaurant dead ahead. The old man hits the gas again and bangs the car over to the parking lot--really over--two flower beds and a white decorative plastic chain are history. We stop with a thunk and a shudder. The old man heaves himself out of the car, and stumps towards the restaurant without a backwards glance.

The restaurant is windowless, WASP, and dark. This is the kind of American restaurant that grows summer-fat on unadventurous middleclass tourist dollars, and keeps from growing too winter-thin by serving the retired population at a discount the rest of the year. Makes it like they like it. Flour and Crisco thick. Low sodium tasteless. Heaped and stacked and mushed onto plates bigger than hub caps. Yum.

An elegant man in his forties smiles at me. Our waiter. He gives the sense that he has sussed out the entire situation (my red cheeks, Grampa's set jaw, his hammer fists hanging from his sore shoulders like meat clock pendulums) in the time it took to gracefully walk us from the entrance to our table.

I order chowder because it is the closest thing I can think of to medical intervention. My grandfather

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*“To the Lighthouse” (I know. I need a Different Title)*

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I order chowder because it is the closest thing I can think of to medical intervention. My grandfather
gets something easy to chew—Salisbury Steak? The waiter smiles, writes nothing down and knows better than to ask if we want a wine list. I want one badly. But Grampa’s not popping for booze when there’s plenty at home for free. Brings everything exactly right, with a clean, full bottle of Heinz without being asked.

He is gay, without a doubt, and achingly urbane in contrast with this 1970’s rec room-flavoured space. We both know what the old man is (sexist racist homophobic and just kinda mean), and the value we have in his world. What he would do to us if he knew our full minds. When the waiter talks to me, there is a slight shared arch to the eyebrow, the barest of winks (perhaps wishfully, but as a chubby, smart-mouthed hag from way back…it seems there to me). I start to feel like we outnumber the old man. That we are in it. That we are us. It even starts to feel funny.

But as I try to swallow the watery, clam-less mess that lands in front of me, the thought of the drive home dries my throat, pummels my stomach.

I look over to the cash register. There is my friend. I make eye contact, not in a more tartar sauce kind of way, but in a “you cannot believe the day I am having” way. He gives me an “Oh honey of course I could” back. And the plan comes fully formed.

The bathrooms are past the till.

“Scuse me for a minute,” I say to Grampa, who grunts, digs down into his mayo-white coleslaw. I walk over towards the bathroom, and without preamble, lean into my friend, like I have been leaning in, and on him, since puberty, like he is the only thing that got me through Grade Eight dances.

“He’s got the keys to my car. I’ve got to get them away from him. I’m going to pick his pocket on the way back to the table. Can you distract him, when you see me go by?”

He accepts the lean in, accepts the whisper, in a first-slow-dance-of-the-night, arm-around-me-like-he-wasn’t-actually-hot-for-my-brother kind of way. And thank god, lifts an eyebrow.

“Got you.”

I go to the bathroom. Start my slow stroll back. My friend crosses to our table. As he leans down to talk in my grandfather’s good ear (he figured that one out in the first five seconds too) I bend to put my purse on the floor beside the old man’s coat, hanging off his chair. Slide my hand into his right coat pocket. Wrap my fingers around the rental car key. With one smooth move I put the key in my coat pocket.

In a few moments, my friend is leading the old man up to the till to pay. Helping him on with his coat. Asking gracious questions about the rest of the day. I head straight out the door as my grandfather bends over his wallet, cash only of course, and he doesn’t tip to speak of so I should go back and leave everything in my wallet for my friend, but I am fighting for the life of the mother of my children, and I can’t risk the detour.

Bolt out to the car. Jump in, strap in as if that will make it official enough to convince him, and pull up so that the car bars the exit. I reach over. Throw open the passenger side door. He cannot go anywhere but in.

My now grinning friend ushers him out the door. My grandfather stands staring at the open seat.

“Jump in Grampa.”

He hesitates, not understanding. My friend is oh so courteously holding the car door for him now, offering a hand, not in any suggestion of infirmity, but as the deference offered by a servant to a master.

“I’ll drive.”

“No Grampa. I’m the only one legal in this car.”

He can’t fight with me without betraying his discomfort to the help. He ignores the offered hand and drops heavily into the seat. I throw it into drive, and look out the window. Lock eyes in silent conversation with my friend, tall, elegant, steady. And who, like me, will just outlive the old man.

(“I will love you forever.”)

(“Oh honey, you gals always say that.”)
Forge
by Sally Ito

For death is no more than a turning of us over from time to eternity. –William Penn

The autumn tree is a forge, the fire-flicker flames
licking at the long limbed branches, making them
red-hot in the waning days of this season’s light.
Eventually, the branch cools, hardens, becomes black.
And then, when frost arrives, its silver coats and plates
the bony, pointing arms with their sword-tip barbs,
to make them javelins to pierce the darkness of the heavens --
that carcass from which the spirit of the sun has already fled.
But I am still here, caught in the web and stickiness of Time.
I have not entered that fire yet. The fog from my lungs
is a mist I breathe out, and like steam off the freshly
defecated, a sign of the stench of me, that consumer of the
world’s wonders in the shutter-ball that is the eye, in the print-press
of the brain, the forge that fires the type and gives name and word
to stuff that eternal may be if only for the one who reads and remembers.

Ode To Elsa
by Arlene Mighton

My love for you is like a rose petal
Opening with a fragrant scent to your touch.
My love is that of a massive field of blue flax
Catching your cobalt-blue gaze with lofty delight.
My love is that of a red maple leaf, wafting to earth
Teasing your delicate hand, causing a gentle caress.
At even, my love blows the scent of lilacs your way
And you stop to embrace the delicate aroma of heaven.
At night, you lay there in the meadows, waiting...
Waiting, midst the scent of fragrant flowers
For my passing; to touch, to embrace, to hold.
**Snow on the Ground**  
*by Laurie Muirhead*

Something about this day, the low  
spark of November, no snow, no ice  
the geese with their long, slender necks  
haggling in the slough, seemingly  
non-observant to the finality of autumn  
the pull of pathways only they perceive

And so, I scrutinize them, water–diving  
preening, sunning themselves on the shores  
of short days, and think, perhaps I too  
can sip a slow read on the sun-porch  
the last few pages of *A Clear Summer’s Night*  
oblivious to the waning equinox and the precise  
deception of a much-lamented clipper

But oh! I am so much wiser now, been fully  
caught with my Stanfield underwear down  
and my toes frozen in rubber boots, cattle  
storm-stayed miles from home, furnace filter dirty  
carrots in the ground and the gutters full of leaves and I  
know...

Just as my wishes scatter amid the galaxy  
of cold stars and migratory song, the geese  
will surely take flight at midnight and leave me  
the vacancy of slough water and thin ice  
their soft, downy dreams... snow on the ground

**Frost Comes**  
*by Beth Gobeil*

In September,  
like it’s been waiting in the shadows  
behind the garage, pushed up against  
the wall,  
waiting till I am too tired one night,  
and forget to cover  
the tender plants, the bowl of succulents  
on the patio table, cucumbers climbing  
the chain link fence,  
it bludgeons the tomatoes  
lays waste the lilies,  
smother all living things  
with its thin and poisonous vapour,  
skulks off at first light  
and I am sulking, my head hanging  
like the shrivelled sweet peas,  
struck down like dowagers  
for daring to be beautiful  
beyond their season.
I Was There, Man
by William Robertson

I was there, man, in ’63
When Lee Harvey Oswald shot John Kennedy
My mother was crying
When she said to me
They shot the best man that will ever be.

I was there, man, in ‘64
Watching the Beatles kick down the door
Our parents couldn't believe it
Or the parents next door
Millions of us watching TV on the living room floor.

I was there, man, in ‘68
Watching the demonstrations against war and hate
I was in my bedroom with my Rolling Stone
Putting off homework till way too late
Reading about the brothers and the movement and smashing the state.

I was there, man, in ‘69
Dancing at Woodstock on orange sunshine
I watched it at the local theatre
We got ’em to play it a second time
Digging those hippie chicks and the grass and the wine.

You ask me, man, I’ll tell you
I was where it was at
By a TV, a movie screen
Or the cash register's rat-a-tat-tat
I bought all the records
I read about the scene
I could feel the world changing
When I bought those magazines
I was there, man, tucked up in my room
With those right-on magazines.
Do Something
by Emma Eckdahl

Virginia Beach
Stoneman Douglas
Las Vegas
Pulse
Columbine
Have these taught you nothing
So many people have died
So much blood has been spilled
And yet you do nothing
Can you not hear them screaming
Do you not see them dying
Are you blind to this
Or do you just not care
Thoughts and prayers are worthless
These horrors keep happening
People keep dying
And you keep doing nothing
Are you proud of yourselves
Protecting some outdated amendment
Letting children die every day
So you can get a cheque
Is it even worth it
Can that money bring them back
So the next time someone fires a bullet
And kills people, American people
Don't just think
Don't just pray
Do something

Nuns in the Night
by Dee Robertson
from her home in the Elizabeth, 2019

I hear the nuns in the night
Praying in their silent cells
For a world not of their making

I hear the nuns in the night
Crying in their shattering loneliness
For the family they left for God.

I hear the nuns in the night
Walking the cold and empty halls
Surrounded by deep, dark silence.

I hear the nuns in the night
Whispering treaties to their God,
Begging for strength to serve.

Then, come daylight, I hear the nunnery door unlock,
As we new residents enter our crowded day
To a world of hurry and self-concern.
Aunt Leah Visits

by Debbie Sawczak

I am five and my favourite aunt
is down from the Soo with my half-dozen cousins;
my sweet proud mother is demanding I wear
my red velvet frock with wide white yoke of lace
that my other, unknown, long-dead, long-cold old aunt
first made for my sister,
and I have inherited;
but I don't want to.
I stamp leotarded feet
and flee to the darkness of my bedroom closet,
foolish, theatrical.

But Aunt Leah comes.
Down comes Aunt Leah,
tentative enters,
and crouches till we two are eye-to-eye among dresses
still swishing, swishing, swaying
round my tense-shrugged shoulders
and tells me how much she would love to see me
in the soft crimson dress whose hem is caressing my
forehead just now
unless that's her fingers pushing my bangs aside

and I nod solemn;
she gets it down from the hanger for me
and helps me on with it,
smiles with sincere admiration;
and I smile at her
with sincere admiration
and nestle my hand in hers to go back
upstairs enveloped by the warm sweet scent
of mince pie.

Imaginary Friend

by Catherine Fenwick

In our farmyard, my tiny friend Betty
took flight in bright morning light,
rainbow colours sparked dewdrops
on breeze sussed grasses,
leaves rustled the wind amid
harvest hay and sweet silence.

Today I threw a large wrench
into the gears
of my neighbour’s air conditioner,
damn wall rattler, peace destroyer.
And wouldn't you know it—
my neighbour’s name is Betty.