

Kitchen Sink Magazine



Issue IV

Summer 2021

Editor's Note

This has been an incredibly busy time for Kitchen Sink Magazine! We are releasing our fourth issue, commemorating one full year as a literary magazine, hiring a volunteer editorial staff, and developing new projects. As always, we are extremely thankful for your support as we continue to expand.

We have also made new social media pages for Kitchen Sink Magazine! Check out our Instagram @kitchensinkmagazine and our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Kitchen-Sink-Magazine-100587998886808>. Please like our upcoming posts and follow us! We will be uploading information about the magazine and some of your work there.

The fourth issue of Kitchen Sink Magazine contains a beautiful, eclectic blend of poetry and prose. We are incredibly impressed with our contributors, and we hope that you look at their author bio to further support their efforts.

As the world slowly begins to reopen, we hope that our magazine continues to resonate with readers as their lives become hectic once again. The magazine is a place to unwind, enjoy the presence of other writers, and engage with the arts.

Stay safe and be well,

Isabella Dail

Editor-in-Chief of *Kitchen Sink Magazine*

Contributors

Interrupted (cover) ~ Candace Meredith

Underwater ~ Minoti Vaishnav

Isosceles ~ Julie Allyn Johnson

Autopsy Retort ~ Jeanne Lesinski

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Kind of Like Demeter ~ Robert Allen

transparent 45 ~ Paul Tanner

Woodman, Don't Spare That Tree ~ Darrell Petska

Credits ~ Michael Brockley

All Gone ~ John Grey

Stamped Out ~ Ann Privateer

Underwater ~ Minoti Vaishnav

in the darkness
painted by
the moonlight,
your body
lying
to you
is similar to feeling
flooded,
in sorrow you cry, but
you will boldly ascend
like the sun,
bright. you will recover.
when you're immersed
and holding your breath,
and dark thoughts
float in your head,
you will learn to
call on your power,
and trust that you will be fine.

you are submerged.
illumination like
a dull glow inside
radiates, while your head is
upside down.
this is claustrophobic and
as if your lungs are
filled with shame.
never fear, for tomorrow
out of the water,
you will rise and shine
and realize that
underwater
memories of a bad life
may swim in your heart,
but they are dead.
forgive yourself and
strengthen your faith,
for you are worthy.

Isosceles ~ Julie Allyn Johnson

Hubby has golf on —
some major minor —
as I look up from a bowl
of Cheerios to see Cameron
Tringale hit into the drink,
slow smile arcing the distance
between my ears,
the supreme pleasure
of recognition
that with just a few alterations
his surname approaches
geometric proportions

Autopsy Retort ~ Jeanne Lesinski

Though he died eleven years ago,
my father haunts my thoughts; grief
is cyclical, they say (who is "they" anyway?).
Maybe so, yet after all these years,
I didn't expect to be this tearful.

I spent the weekend rummaging
moving boxes for his autopsy report.
The mystery of his death compels
me to seek, if not the why, the how.

Finally reading the autopsy report,
I learn facts about my father
no daughter should ever know.

Amateur of corporeal jigsaw puzzles,
the forensic pathologist tried to measure
the essences of a man: *brain: 1600 grams*
spleen: 300 grams, left kidney: 250 grams
right kidney: 230 grams, right lung: 680 grams
left lung: 550 grams, heart: 490 grams

Yet these numbers ill describe my father.
I will not leave him slabbed, locked
in a cabinet like currency in a vault.
The doctor wrote, "Heart: 490 grams,"
but I know this figure to be false, for

I have seen his tough heart far heavier
as he gazed upon his comatose first-born,
as he struggled in a second-choice career,
as he tried to embrace his father—
stubborn German—and was rebuffed.

I have seen his delicate heart lighter, too,
when he and my mother shared secret smiles,
when he celebrated our grades, trophies, medals,
when he and I waltzed on my wedding day.

Though I learn figures about my father
I never desired to know,
this reverse alchemist never knew
any father figures that were true.

The Palmenov Institute Isolation Experiment ~ Graham Goff

March 13th marked the first anniversary of Valery Zvonov's appointment to the Palmenov Institute. Since his appointment, he had only left the testing and experimentation complex twenty-three times. He lived in his testing wing and worked tirelessly around the clock on the sole condition that he be subjected to as little supervision as possible. Enticed by his outstanding results and unparalleled dedication, Valery was given considerable funding and, best of all, considerable independence. What happened in Doctor Zvonov's wing was his concern alone.

Doctor Zvonov grew so accustomed to his solitude that he hardly knew how to react when his supervisor, Doctor Rublev, visited his office. Rublev did not bother to knock before entering, and he seated himself before Zvonov with an air of authority. Occasionally glancing at his clipboard, he addressed his subordinate curtly, showing no trace of emotion.

"Doctor Zvonov, I am sure that you are aware that your research had been incredibly useful to the Institute as well as the national interest."

With this pronouncement, Zvonov's stomach lurched; such lavish praise rarely qualifies good news. Rublev continued.

"Your research has been so useful, in fact, that I received a personal request from the State Committee for Science and Technology to review your ongoing experiments. And don't worry about providing documentation, because I will be making my own."

Rising from his seat, Doctor Zvonov gestured to his supervisor and asked if he would like coffee. After the stoic supervisor politely

refused, Zvonov poured himself a cup and strode to his office's doorway.

"What would you like to see first?"

"Surprise me."

As he left his office, Rublev close behind, Zvonov doubted whether anything had ever surprised Rublev. He reached the first row of observation rooms, saying,

"This is a fascinating experiment that I have been conducting for the past four months. I requested the transfer of four patients from a hospital only a few minutes away. All four test subjects represent a demographic quadrant- one old man, one old woman, one young man, one young woman." The only feedback Rublev offered was the scratching of his pencil on his clipboard. Zvonov continued.

"All four were suffering minor ailments like the flu or broken limbs when I received them. After running a few mock tests, I informed each patient that he or she had a rare form of aggressive brain cancer and that they had approximately six months to live. I then told them that they qualified for experimental treatment that could save their lives, but they would have to submit to daily medical and psychological testing and they would have to live in isolation. For four months, they have had no entertainment of any kind, or human contact except for their daily checkups."

Rublev ventured a glance inside one of the patient's rooms. The bed linens were white. The floors were bleached. The walls were painted eggshell. But most pale of all the room's contents was the shriveled, pale body of a young girl, bent double on the bed.

"Do you know what I have found?" Zvonov awaited no response to his query.

"Two of the patients have inexplicably developed brain cancer since the diagnosis. Fascinating. Physio-psychological research to be done on the subject." He waved his hand in a lighthearted gesture.

"Well, there I go rambling again. Shall we see the next one?"

Rublev nodded his affirmation, but lingered at the observation window, transfixed by the young girl's pallid complexion and hollow cheeks.

Sipping his coffee, Zvonov encouraged his supervisor to follow him further down the corridor.

"Don't spend too much time on them, Comrade Rublev. We're just beginning the tour." Zvonov whistled as he continued down the hall.

Rublev increased his pace, attempting to catch up with Zvonov, who had just rounded a corner into a small wing of three observation rooms and a small office. Turning on his heels to face his superior, Doctor Zvonov spread his arms, gesturing to the entire wing.

"Comrade Rublev, welcome to the Palmenov Institute Isolation Experiment." The one-way windows faced the corridor's interior, ensuring complete visibility of all patients at all times. Of the three rooms, two lie eerily empty. The observation rooms shared their layouts with the cancer trial rooms; the floors, walls and ceilings were all ghostly white and devoid of all color and shade. The only difference were the furnishings; the isolation cells had padded walls, a chess table, and a steel bench bolted to the floor.

As Zvonov stood back from the glass, reveling in his creation, Rublev drew closer to the window, recording his initial impressions on his clipboard.

"Isolation experiment- Test subject initial observations:

-Notably underweight

-Unresponsive- has not moved during initial observations

-Shows signs of sleep deprivation."

Breaking his own stoic silence, Rublev looked up from his notes and addressed Zvonov,

"Him in there. What is the subject's name?" Rublev pointed to the despondent, gaunt figure slouched before the chess board.

"Subject three. Subject three is his name." Doctor Zvonov's previously amiable disposition turned to poorly suppressed hostility. He always took precautions not to humanize the test subjects.

Frowning slightly, Rublev asked,

"What happened to subject one and subject two?"

"Allow me to explain the Isolation Experiment first. It began with my hypothesis that isolation could be strategically utilized as a sorting method for mental fortitude. So, for example, if two mathematicians were placed in separate isolation rooms with nothing but an equation to solve, they would react differently. My hypothesis was that the more mentally sound of the two would utilize the isolation, and use it to concentrate fully. The mentally fragile would become distressed and would be unable to concentrate on the task at hand. This sorting process could be useful in determining ability to adapt to adversity, propensity towards mental illness, and emotional

weakness. My test subjects were equally distinguished chess players from the National Chess Academy. They were given chess strategy books and every week they would play a leading chess master from the Academy and I would observe and document their performance. As Subject Three is the only remaining subject, he is the only one still undergoing experimentation, of course.”

As Zvonov spoke, Rublev jotted notes, nodding slowly to indicate that Zvonov should continue.

"So, to answer your question about subject one and two, they did not respond favorably to the testing." Zvonov's ears burned red hot as Rublev furiously scratched notes on his clipboard. His facial expression betrayed that his observations were not favorable. Rublev inquired further, fixing him with a piercing stare, much to Zvonov's discomfort.

"In what way did they react poorly to the isolation?"

"Subject two suffered psychological trauma, ultimately resulting in temporary mental incapacitation. He was relocated to a treatment center and intends to return to the Chess Academy within a few weeks." Zvonov paused briefly, shifting uncomfortably on his feet.

"And subject one?" Rublev prodded.

"Subject one committed suicide after only a month. Took a chair, broke off one of the legs by bashing it against the floor and then impaled himself with it. As I was sleeping down the hall at the time, I did not hear the commotion. I found subject one dead on the floor in the morning. Since then, I have taken increased safety precautions, including replacing the wooden chairs with steel benches, which are now bolted to the ground. The subjects are at no risk from themselves

anymore, Comrade Rublev." After pausing briefly for effect, Zvonov continued.

"But all of this was expected. In my hypothesis, I stated that some test subjects would respond positively and some negatively. Subject three has responded positively." Zvonov pointed through the glass pane to the semi-conscious man with hollow cheeks and sunken eyes.

"He is playing quantifiably better than he was before the experimentation, Comrade Rublev."

After concluding the observations and verifying some information with Zvonov, Rublev left to submit his findings for further review by the Committee for Science and Technology. He promised to return by the following week. Not one to disappoint, Rublev returned to visit Zvonov in the early hours of the following Monday morning.

Rublev's second visit began similarly to the first. Inviting himself into Zvonov's office, he loomed before Zvonov's desk. After clarifying that he had spoken to the chairman of the State Committee for Science and Technology, he requested that Doctor Zvonov accompany him to his office to verify some paperwork.

The two men walked side-by-side through the nondescript corridors wordlessly, accompanied only by the clatter of their shoes on the white tile floors. Rublev did not speak because he simply preferred the calm and Zvonov remained mute because he dare not interrupt the silence. Only after reaching the end of the psychological testing ward, scaling several flights of stairs, and arriving on another floor, did Rublev address Doctor Zvonov.

"The committee was impressed with your isolation experiment. They have referred my documentation of your observations higher up the chain of command for use in some experimental academic and military applications." As Rublev paused, Zvonov's chest swelled with pride.

"However, due to your limited exploration of practical applications and perceived misallocation of resources, they have decided to indefinitely withhold future funding towards your research efforts." They rounded a corner, entering a dimly-lit corridor. The dim, flickering ceiling fixtures made Zvonov's head throb. Or perhaps it was the panic. He could not tell. Unlocking a side-door, Rublev swung the door open and gestured for Zvonov to enter. Zvonov complied reluctantly, inquiring,

"Does that mean I am to be relocated, Comrade Rublev?"

"Not exactly, Doctor Zvonov. Please step in here."

Rublev unlocked yet another entryway and Zvonov entered, but as he did so, the door slammed shut behind him. He found himself enveloped in darkness. Suddenly, a lonely light fixture flickered to life, casting the room in a cold blue haze. Frantic, Zvonov turned and pounded on the door, screaming, but to no avail. Only after several frantic minutes of fruitlessly attempting to topple the solid metal door did he turn to appraise the room. When he did, Zvonov's furious desperation faded into inconsolable despair.

The room's only contents were a metal table, an accompanying wooden chair, and a small bookshelf. The bookshelf's volumes bore the names of Gannushkin and Kozhevnikov and other famed psychologists. Suddenly overcome by frenzied terror, Valery Zvonov

realized where he was: an isolation room. Glimpsing a note on the table, Zvonov snatched it, reading it aloud.

"Dear Comrade Zvonov,

The Committee for Science and Technology found your experiments to be promising, but could not justify further funding. However, you now have an opportunity to advance your own research. So, I would recommend reading some of those books, because you and two other psychologists have a retention assessment soon."

Doctor Zvonov feverishly discarded the note and grabbed the wooden chair, slamming it against the floor until a splintered, jagged leg became dislodged. He pulled it free, pressing it to his stomach.

Swan Song for Brown Boys ~ Cris Eli Blak

I come from the city of cardinal crumbs,
where the world turns the same way everyday
and the people generally look the same,
their activities unchanged because the world around
them has been consistent since the day they laid eyes
on the earth.

I come from a woman who weaved her children
in-between her fingers,
trying to design the best lives for them as possible,
occasionally pricking her fingers but never
straying away from making a quilt from her love.

This same woman would warn me to step back inside
by the time the night got to the moment between
dog and wolf,
when I wouldn't be recognized as nothing but a shadow
in a world of pastel models.

Streetlights on.

Body home.

I was not afraid of any man when I was birthed
but now I can't walk down the street without
the anxiety of facing someone who doesn't see
me as a gift from up above,
who only sees me as what I am on the surface level,
but since when did we judge the sea because it was a

blue reflection of the sky?

Every February we repeat King's dream
and yet you still ask for my vision as if
tomorrow will be better if I make pictures
in my head.

I have been doing that my entire life.

My vision is for my
mother not to worry about me as if I were
her own heart losing blood,
to know that my sister and her sisters won't
be objectified due to myths that shouldn't still be
seen as gospel.

My vision is for peace,
by which I mean a full night's sleep
and one less pill to take to try to
achieve it,
it's not someone sending me a video of
blood on my streets,
educating me on my own history all because
they read a book that I've lived.

My vision is for our funerals to stop
being your fun houses,
what makes you feel temporary guilt
over our lifetime of persecution.

It isn't a question of if we were free
because half of us have been since
Adam met Eve,
if it's a question of you and me
then you're already taking advantage of
the question posed in my face.

I need space.

I need to know that my place in this
world is not to be either your hashtag
or your cautionary tale.

We will never be fully free
because we are already too deeply stained
to find a resolution.

But we can be strong
and we can do work
and we can do prayer,
even if we are not always sure there is
someone listening to us.

I come from the city where men like me are killed.
I come from the county where men like me are killed.
I come from the country where men like me are killed.
I come from the planet where men like me are killed.

I have been hurt and therefore

my imagination has been too
but I'm still a young boy and so
my optimism outweighs my ocean of pain,
my openness makes me a vulnerable target
but the only way for me to go on in this world
without being a shell of myself is if I
believe.

I need to believe.

Because maybe my vision
is what the world needs
to put on their glasses
and change their own.

In Autumn When the Leaves Don't Fall ~ Gerald Yelle

Grass grows and before you know it
it's time for lunch.

There's leftover fish in the fridge
and you don't want to say what you think
but people you once thought funny
are sad and nobody wants a sandwich
of leftovers –so watch this

Nan says –She can't believe you
hadn't thought of it yourself.

She goes to the smart wall and starts
ordering coupons
clicking on the blue –Oh, what did I do?
She says, I meant to click red.

I step into the yard, dizzy
from all the busy screens –the leaves
still up in the trees –even though
the wind is blowing and threatening snow
and the grass continues to grow
even though it's brown and yellow.

I go in and Nan is ecstatic:
her coupon came through to the tune of
four grand –Won't Will be thrilled
she says. I'm glad. They're good
neighbors –not the kind who make you
laugh then cause no end
of embarrassment.

I look out the window. Birds are
stirring up the wind, darting
around branches. A few leaves fall.

If You Cry in Fairbanks ~ Kate Flannery

The white blinds you during some days. It's everywhere. If you cry, your eyelashes will freeze and be three times their normal weight. Blinking turns into weight-lifting. Out there it's more than frost; it's a kind of ice-specter lurking around and waiting to latch on to you like a minus-40-degree parasite, sucking what's normal off of your skin and burning you in the process. You're ten miles from the arctic circle, living in a dry cabin and now it's dark most of the day. You had signed up with Ed to train dogs for the Iditarod, but this was not what you had in mind. Fairbanks: a place where a good supply of beautiful men was supposed to live. Men at one with nature. Your friends had warned you about men in Alaska: "The odds are good, but the goods are odd."

Ed's idea of training the dogs was to ignore them for most of the day, leaving you to feed and exercise them. Ed taught you to shoot in case you ran into a bear on your runs with the dogs. Thinking some more effort on your part might smooth things over, make things softer with Ed, you had tried making bread for him. Your mother's recipe. But the dough had refused to rise in the cold, and you gave it up.

A moose's bellow from a nearby field is pitch-perfect, a warm smear of sound that lingers on the air, until Ed reaches for his gun and says he's going after that buck and shut him up once and for all. You look over at your bear gun. The one he gave you. Then you look back at Ed.

Do that, Ed.

Seasons of Love ~ Pat St. Pierre

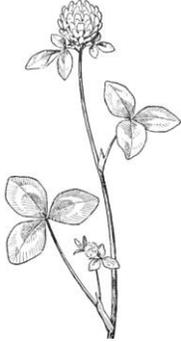
It was in autumn that we fell in love
the trees were an impressive array of colors.
As their leaves touched each other it was
almost as though the heavens opened their arms
to capture splendor for all time.
When the season turned cold and frigid
we became more distant and chilly toward each other.
We continued on afraid to end and destroy our feelings.
But when the sun started to warm the air
And spring flowers burst forth from the ground,
we had new feelings for others.
Pulsating and pushing through our hearts.
our new loves were exciting and unfamiliar.
They continued on until the intense summer heat
suffocated and smothered us.

Memories ~ Ramesh Dohan

One late summer evening
When the wind off the lake
Stirs the day's memories
One of my thoughts eloped
With a leaf
The wind blew of the tree
While a sparrow distracted
Went in hot pursuit
Across the fading landscape

Trapped ~ Tiffany Lindfield

Triche let the screen door flap violently. She slammed it again, so hard it boomeranged, and she slammed it again. She could've torn that damn door right off the hinges. She imagined flinging it so high, and so far, that it went over the tall oak fence tracing her back yard; a yard empty of everything but grass, now turning a bright green. Instead, she squatted on the ground, caving her face into her hands, weeping hard for a life unlived, for what should've been, wept for the misery that had defined her life—and wept because her marriage was so unhappy.



“I’m leaving him,” she said out loud, through her teeth, gritted so hard that bone dust accumulated in the side pockets of her mouth; she spat it out beside her.

When the sun rose in the sky, tickling the yard with rays of light, she lifted her eyes, mistrustful at first, like raccoons leaving dens at dusk. And there on the fence post sat a red Cardinal singing its heart out. The birdfeeder was empty. Beyond empty; it was rusted. She pulled it from the shepherd’s hook and scrubbed it clean. She tossed canned goods around in the cupboard but there wasn’t anything to feed a bird.

At the local grocery, she stared at the shelves stacked with bird seed. So many choices. Were there this many birds, and did they all eat different things? A short woman rang her up with glittery nails so long they curled under. Triche tilted her head, wondering how much stuff could get caught under spoons for nails.

“You got birds?” the woman asked.

“A red Cardinal.”

“He gonna be eatin’ for a year.” The woman bagged several feeders and bags of seed.

Triche screwed hooks into the fence. She plunged the spiked end of shepherd hooks into dry dirt, pretending the dirt was her own wrist; the roots stubborn, unlike the fragile blue veins that peeked from under her skin.

She hung the feeders of all sorts: Basket feeders, tube feeders, hopper feeders and more. The original feeder—a mason jar feeder—was now lost in the crowd. Triche squatted down on the ground and watched for the Cardinal. She watched so long that she got hot from the spring heat, and realized the birds would need water, too. “A bird bath,” she said, an eureka moment with a voice sure, and sturdy.

A hippie ran the local nursery. He wore a diamond earring in one ear, talking in a demanding voice. He told her that if she wanted birds, she would need insects. He talked a blue streak about the web of life, and how humans had messed it all up. He helped her load pots of pollinators, and other flowers meant to attract bees, butterflies, and the like. Dirt too, and gloves. All this sat alongside a terracotta bird bath in the back of her car, equipped with a fountain.

The sun was an hour from setting, and she was exhausted, but kept working. Her back ached, and she kept digging holes for the new flowers and arranged some in pots. Finally, with sweat dripping down the arch of her back into the crease of her pants, she squatted. “*And Triche made the yard in seven hours,*” she pattered, her stomach growling for food.

Oddly, it felt good. The hunger. The ache in her bones made her remember them again, made her feel alive. She crawled in bed, savoring the feel of the vertebrae in her spine, the itch of the mosquito bites on her legs, and the bread she ate barely touching the acid in her stomach. And then she remembered, “hummingbirds need to eat, too!”

She rolled over in the bed with her phone, pulling up Amazon.

Her husband elbowed her hard. “I’m trying to sleep.”

She got out of bed, went into the yard, and pressed her bare feet on the ground still wet from having been watered, ordering paradise for hummingbirds.

“Somewhere for me to sit and watch the birds,” she said, ordering a wrought iron table and a chair set for the patio.

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Triche sat proudly and comfortably now that the wrought iron chairs were adorned with soft cushions. The summer sun was about to rise, and she was front and center with a cup of cold tea in one hand, and a marijuana joint in the other. She sat there for hours, watching Yellow Finches squeeze Nyjer seed from a mesh sack, an American Robin stress over two fledglings, the Monarchs devouring Milkweed, and the bees nuzzling their heads so far into sunflower blooms that their legs became caked in yellow. She imagined her fingers dipped in lemon icing; her face submerged into the crease of someone who cared about her.

She lit the joint and focused her mind on the feet of the bees with their faces buried deep into the armpit of flowers, into the belly

of their lovers. She focused on the sunflowers, loving the tallness of their stalks, their spring faces that had upturned to the sky, now their summer faces in full bloom. She knew their fall faces would bow beautifully. She loved the grasshoppers that nibbled their leaves, and the beaks of birds on their crowns.

She watched the Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds and Yellow Jackets fight each other over nozzles of sugar, and Blister Beetles swarm the small flowers of Mountain Mint. All this made her forget heart ache.

“I’m gonna leave his ass before summer ends,” she said aloud to the Lantanas falling out of pots, and to the Crepe Myrtle’s bounty of pink and purple blossom’s spilling from small buds.

Then fall came, and she set up a squirrel feeding station. A chipmunk she aptly named Chip would eat from her hand, and a family of raccoons would depend on her harvest to make it through winter’s hibernation. Even a growing deer, orphaned, aptly named Bambi, nipped milk from a bottle she prepared every morning and noon. Sweet Potato vines ran up two lattices she found at a yard-sale and had painted sea green. The summer sun had traded Shasta Daisies and Black-Eyed Susans for Marigolds and Cosmos.

“I’ll leave him when the Marigolds die,” she said.

And then winter came, and the Witch Hazel bloomed, reminding her of sea urchins, Snow Drops peeked from a light blanket of snow in satin dresses while Viola’s blasted her senses in deep purples and blues. The birds flocked to the feeders still promising spring’s harvest, even in winter. The squirrels would awaken from long winter naps for fresh corn, and sunflower suet. The bird bath needed a warmer, and the house built for Bambi needed straw.

Triche shivered. “Too cold to move. I’ll leave him in spring.”

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He stepped outside, looking for her, contempt in his voice. She didn’t answer. Her hair had become tangled in the climbing rose vines; her feet morphed into the pine needles that had fallen from the two evergreens east of the yard. Her hands remained rooted in the Weeping Willow. Her face had drowned in the small pond for the raccoons to dip their paws, and her legs had morphed into the prickly branches of black-berry bushes, and her stomach cast into the compost pit.

He walked inside, and her lips bubbled from the pond water, thick with algae, “I’m trapped.”

Black Passport ~ Kevin Stadt

I know this message finds you
unwell
hunkered down and locked in, borders bricked
from both sides
sick airplanes unwelcome worldwide
webs of cold mobile morgues on top of
anger in old voting lines
obese SUVs in food lines
churches in lines for faith infections
elderly arms in overnight lines for salvation
wild-eyed rumors of illuminati cannibal antichrists
obstinate inches stretching into
insane miles
rockets docking in space over
screaming seething streets and
bearded flags swarming government buildings
the I+me+mine nexus of the West
unmasked
gasping

with 20% of the last breaths hoarded by 4% of the earth's population,
how to stay safe from Americans in America?

study the symptoms,
the choking plastic airways
crammed down deep
but not reaching the root
disease

the Father's selfsong suddenly
reads all wrong
yawp fallen hush
ashamed on the shelf

The Storm ~ Craig McGeady

The lake that rose from wooden floors
soon reached above our knees
but still we smiled at reflected clouds
scattered by a reflected breeze.

'Twas not a beat in longing heart
before waters breached our waists
smiles turned to warp each thought
on each distorted face.

Through the doors you sought respite
but what good can come from breathless night?
Upon the morrow of your return
wind had found its bitter tongue
and once again you must adjust
to the storm that we've become.

Don't Think Twice ~ Mark Konik

James got out of the car and walked to where he'd arranged to meet Bianca. He was instantly irritated by the amount of people and wondered why they weren't at work. With the lighthouse over his shoulder he waited. James read the plaque that explained the birds that nested in the area. Learning about coastal birds never felt more irrelevant. There was something ironic he thought about the Sooty-Oystercatcher always returning home to roost.

From the kiosk end of the beach, James saw his friend Liam coming towards him. He didn't have the energy to talk him today. So James put on his sunglasses and turned the other way. Even though it meant looking into the sun.

Purposely running late, Bianca walked to where James was waiting. They nodded hello and avoided giving each other a kiss. Their arms dangled awkwardly at their sides, feeling like they should have just greeted each other with goodbye. It was a million miles from when they'd first met. James with shabby jeans and Bianca wearing a Bluebottle Kiss t-shirt, both fumbling around the Hunter building after watching You Am I play a show. Now he felt overdressed in a shirt and tie and she looked like a walking billboard for Lorna Jane apparel.

Out past the breakers James could see a swimmer. Alone, with their arms rhythmically moving through the small waves, nothing below them but the cool water and sky above. He would have done anything to trade places.

"How was your meeting?" Bianca asked. She was always the first to speak, even when they first met. The silence never bothered James.

"O.k."

“What about your day?” James replied.

They both leaned against the white railing as the people kept walking past on the promenade. Even though they knew there was an inevitability to the situation there was a sadness painted across their faces with thick lead paint. There was no Pasha Bulker landing on the sand to disrupt the whole scene.

“I’ll move out,” said James.

“You shouldn’t have to.”

“It’s fine, you and the kids love the apartment.”

“So do you.”

James lied, “It’s just a place.”

“We could be happy in the knowledge that we lasted longer than any of our friends.” Bianca looked down and tucked her hair behind her ear.

“But not as far as the end.”

“I guess not.”

The conversation stopped. Neither of them wanted to be here, but were unsure how to leave. From behind they heard someone call out, “Bianca, James!” They both turned and saw Liam. Bianca sighed.

James knew Liam from cricket, they’d played firsts together through most of their twenties. He tolerated him, but never really liked him and had no time for him today.

“Hey, what are you both doing here?” Liam was panting and started to do some stretches with his arms as he spoke.

James baulked, “Not much, just going for a jog. What about you?”

“What, you’re running in a tie? That’s a new look.”

“My exercise gear is in the car.” James felt stupid as soon as this left his mouth.

As if sensing their awkwardness Liam continued, “I’m able to work from home most days now. So I like to go for a walk after lunch. I find it just clears my head. It’s been ages since I’ve seen you two together.”

Bianca shrugged.

“Lola and I should have you two over for dinner.” Liam turned his attention to Bianca, knowing where he was going to take the conversation, “Lola’s been meaning to call you. We heard that you got fired and that it was pretty vicious. These are tough times for business.” Smirking he kept talking, “She was worried about you.”

James felt a great urge to punch Liam right in the jaw as he smiled like a hyena. Even though he and Bianca had hardly talked in months, and for weeks he decided that he owed her nothing he could read the despair in his wife’s face.

“You’re listening to some bad gossip mate. She used it as leverage to get a better position at the University. She played it perfectly well.” Bianca looked at James and smiled.

Liam looked annoyed. “Well, that’s great to hear. Anyway, we’ll have to touch base. I better get going. Bye.” They said goodbye and Liam jogged off towards the baths.

Looking relieved Bianca said, “I always hated him and his wife.”

“Well, on the plus side you never have to see them again.”

She tried to smile, “Every silver lining comes with some cloud.”

“Lots of cloud sometimes,” replied James. An air of comfort fell over them.

Still without looking at each other Bianca asked, “When are we going to tell the kids?”

“Not today. I don’t have the stomach.” James tried to find the swimmer from before, but there was no sign of them. He looked out towards the lighthouse, trying desperately not to look Bianca in the eye. “Besides, I think they know.”

“Probably.” The conversation paused.

“We could have done this over the phone,” James said.

“No we couldn’t. We started face to face, we may as well finish the same way.”

“True.” And the act was done. The line was cut.

James paced back to his car, got in, and felt the air conditioning wash over him. He turned the radio off and drove off towards his office.

Walking back to the harbour, Bianca saw a tanker that she’d previously noticed, was now headed out to sea. The enormous boat that looked so heavy before now seemed to float effortlessly past the lighthouse and through the waves.

Kind of Like Demeter ~ Robert Allen

California
summers' dahlias
grow tall here
like corn in Ohio.
You can hear
them whisper
as they climb;
thick stalks
without popping
impossible petals
that hang on.
So delicate.
So dangerous.
Then fall
and winter
comes and
sogs them
and they
all die
for a while
to the world.

transparent 45 ~ Paul Tanner

the 45th customer that hour, she said:
you need more staff here, don't you?

yeah, I said, scanning her stuff.

well why don't you get some then? she said.

because I don't make those decisions, I said.

I know you don't, she says. I'm just saying.

why'd you ask then? I said. to remind me how low I am in the food chain?

I couldn't help it. It just came out.

I looked up, ready to be eviscerated ...

thankfully, she just kind of half-smiled and did a little shrug:

thankfully, she didn't agree or disagree with my accusation.

it's terrible you have to be open

at this time of night

on a Sunday

isn't it?

she said, just saying

as customer 46 peered over her shoulder,

biting what looked like

an awfully sore lip,

as did 47

over his.

Woodman, Don't Spare That Tree ~ Darrell Petska

How innocent they appear, standing stark and shrunken during the cold months, then brandishing greenery and birdsong in warm weather and extending their cloaked arms above us as if to protect our heads from sun and rain. It's a ruse! By now, we should know.

Cold months or warm, are they not likely to be in league with the wind, dropping their massive girths upon our cars and even our heads? A strategic flop onto main street can tie up commerce and travel for hours. Even a lesser branch cast against our roofs can dislodge the satellite dish and prevent us from discovering who won Dancing with the Stars.

Such recalcitrants! On a whim come spring, your beloved maple might decide to grace you with a mere pittance of viable leaves. Or worse, the darling may grow tired of bearing its load of leaves and dump the lot prematurely in June, then die for the ultimate insult because it'll cost a thousand bucks to cut the damned thing down.

Deviousness is certainly not beyond them, plumbers and builders will tell you. Your long-standing sycamore's apparent tolerance of your kids' discombobulating swing is merely a subterfuge: underground, its roots are scouring every inch of your sewer pipe to discover a leak. Once located, penetration and blockage occur. Hey Roto-Rooter!

An exaggeration? Admittedly, that tree root snaking through your foundation and reaching for your loved ones can be dispatched nicely with a pruning saw. But just a warning: tree roots don't know when to quit, so be prepared for an extended conflict. As a corollary, more problematic is the tree root that lifts the edge of your sidewalk slab just

enough to trip someone inclined to sue you penniless. Roots are relentless and insidious.

They're also beyond unkind. Daily they shake our kids loose of their branches, then quiver with glee as little Johnny and Lily writhe on the ground. And baby birds naked and defenseless in their nests—shameful how trees pluck them from their mothers and cast them to the ground, only to be adopted by children who sob when the little babes die or to be gulped by cats who show no remorse. Trees have no use for cats, either, luring them to the topmost branches and blocking their descent.

Trees call down lightning on our heads, scratch against our windows like a Hill House ghost to frighten our children, conceal beneath their fallen leaves spiky rakes and ankle-busting dog stakes, and stuff leaves into the gutters so we'll fall from our ladders trying to dislodge them.

Fortunately for humanity, trees are regularly executed and hacked into lumber to build our homes. Yet, even in death they plague us by inviting to dinner every termite, carpenter ant and house borer in the neighborhood.

“Name one good thing...” my mother always scolded when I reeled off litanies of complaints. Shade? Too transient. Heat source? Natural gas burns cleaner. Photosynthesis? Rain forests are disappearing but we're still breathing. A subject for poets? Like Kilmer's “Trees”? There's a fail. Sorry I wasn't a better son, Mom.

Credits ~ Michael Brockley

“Vampires in Blue Dresses,” Margot & the Nuclear So and So’s

“The 8 Gods of Harlem,” Roseanne Cash

“Change the Sheets,” Kathleen Edwards

“House Full of Empty Rooms,” Kathleen Edwards

“Book of Lies,” Bettye LaVette

“Whisper in the Dark,” Jennie DeVoe

“Cigarettes and Coffee,” Otis Redding

“Cigarettes and Truckstops,” Lindi Ortega

“Rosemary with a Bible and a Gun,” Drive-By Truckers

“Singing with a Stranger,” Tim Kahane

“The Week of Living Dangerously,” Gil Scott Heron

“Torch Song,” J. S. Ondara

“Hands on the Wheel,” Norah Jones

“Rear View Mirror,” Mark Knopfler

“Heaven Has No Vacancies,” Lindi Ortega

“Faded Gloryville,” Lindi Ortega

“The Firewatcher’s Daughter,” Brandi Carlisle

“Barefoot to Babylon,” Jennie DeVoe

“Black Swan,” Rhiannon Giddens

“Failer,” Kathleen Edwards

“Shakedown,” Valerie June

“Velvet Elvis,” Kacey Musgraves

“Down Past the Bottom,” Lucinda Williams

“Pushin’ Against a Stone,” Valerie June

“Water in the Fuel,” Kasey Chambers

“Sleepwalking,” Molly Tuttle

“Dime Store Cowgirl,” Kacey Musgraves

“The Cafe of Tears,” Li’l BeeDee and the Doo-Rites

“Outta Time,” Natalia Kills

“Bring My Flowers Now,” Tanya Tucker

“If I Should Fall Behind,” Faith Hill

“What a Little Moonlight Could Do,” Cassandra Wilson

All Gone ~ John Grey

Yes it hurts
to walk everyday
by the place
where something
else used to be:

a musty second-hand book store,
a non-chain coffee house
where I knew the names
of all the wait-staff,
a club with a stage
and actual bands,
a curiosity shop
that sold everything
from metal soldiers
to humane mouse-traps
and hand-painted vases –

I find
more and more
that I prefer
something else's
to the here and now –

yesterday
a riverbank
for romantic walks –

today
a strip mall –

a guy in the tattoo parlor
is inking a heart
on some young woman's
right shoulder –

there used to be the places
where you came by hearts naturally.

Stamped Out ~ Ann Privateer

with a road map glued to my forehead
sick of unanswered questions
and watermarked days
with overly catchy phrases
looping in my head while I try
to keep it special, sometimes

even spectacular before rejecting
old hats, discarded words
leftovers in the refrigerator
in the hothouse of my mind
where the light comes on
after I bang my toe.

I find my keys, run away from people
that harass on the telephone
sleuth for words no one's heard
eat locally where nothing grows
feel exhausted in the kitchen.

Author and Artist Bios

Candace Meredith earned her Bachelor of Science degree in English Creative Writing from Frostburg State University in the spring of 2008. Her works of poetry, photography and fiction have appeared in literary journals *Bittersweet*, *The Backbone Mountain Review*, *The Broadkill Review*, *In God's Hands/ Writers of Grace*, *A Flash of Dark*, *Greensilk Journal*, *Saltfront*, *Mojave River Press and Review*, *Scriptic Magazine*, *Unlikely Stories Mark V*, *The Sirens Call Magazine*, *The Great Void*, *Foreign Literary Magazine*, *Lion and Lilac Magazine*, *Snow Leopard Publishing*, *BAM Writes*, and various others. Candace currently resides in Virginia with her two sons and her daughter, her fiancé and their three dogs and six cats. She has earned her Master of Science degree in Integrated Marketing and Communications (IMC) from West Virginia University.

Minoti Vaishnav is a South Asian writer living in Los Angeles. Primarily a television scribe, Minoti has developed content for History Channel, Discovery Channel, and NatGeo among other networks, and was most recently a staff writer on *The Equalizer* for CBS. She is an alumna of the ViacomCBS Writers Mentoring Program and holds a Master's degree in Creative Writing from the University of Oxford. Her poems have been published in *Projected Letters*, *Brickplight*, and *Verve Magazine*.

Julie Allyn Johnson started to write poetry in 2017 after she retired and joined various writing groups in the area. Her poetry has been published (or will be published later this spring and summer) in *Lyrical Iowa*, *Persephone's Daughters*, *Typishly*, *The Esthetic Apostle*, *Chestnut Review*,

SPLASH!, *The Loch Raven Review*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Typehouse*, *Into the Void*, *Phantom Kangaroo*, *Coffin Bell*, and *The Briar Cliff Review*.

Jeanne Blum Lesinski has written books for adults and children as well as articles for encyclopedias and lifestyle magazines and websites. Her creative nonfiction and poetry have appeared in such publications as *Drash*, *Binnacle*, *Tusculum Review*, *Still Life*, *Dunes Review*, and the anthologies *Ginosko* and *Poem, Revised*. When not at her computer, she can typically be found on a bicycle or in a garden.

Graham Goff is a 17-year-old high school student in rural central Texas. He collects and repairs typewriters, avidly consumes Russian literature, and will play tennis in college. Graham is excited for his inaugural publication to be in *Kitchen Sink Magazine* and anticipates a future career in writing, professorship, or diplomacy (depending on who's asking).

Cris Eli Blak is an award winning and internationally produced writer for the page, stage and screen. His writing has won the Christopher Hewitt Award for Fiction and received a Pushcart Prize nomination. His work has been produced, performed and/or published around the world and he is currently developing new work as a season 6 playwright with Derby City Playwrights, as part of the Under Construction 2 group with The Road Theatre and with Et Alia Theater Company. He continues to strive to create work that reflects the world that we live in, with all of its different and diverse colors, creeds and cultures.

Gerald Yelle is a member of the Florence, Massachusetts Poets Society and lives in Amherst, Massachusetts. His books include *The Holyoke Diaries*, FutureCycle Press, and *Mark My Word and the New World Order*, Pedestrian Press. He has an e-chapbook at Yavaneka Press: “Industries Built on Words” and a chapbook forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

Kate Flannery lives in the small college town of Claremont, California, where she also practices law. Her work has been published in *Chiron Review*, *Shark Reef*, *Ekphrastic Review*, and *Golden Streetcar* as well as other literary journals. Her heart remains in the Pacific Northwest where she grew up and returns occasionally to breathe.

Pat St. Pierre is an author of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. She is also an amateur photographer. Her fourth poetry chapbook “Not As it Seems” will be published in 2021. She is widely published both online and in print. Some of her poems have been published in *Three Line Poetry*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Jellyfish Whispers*, *Pangolin Review*, *Scarlet Leaf River*, *Highland Park Poetry*, etc. Her fiction and nonfiction have also been widely published while her photography has adorned the covers and pages of *Mountain Tales Press*, *Minute Magazine*, *Poetry Pacific*, *Touch Journal*, *Plants and Flowers* and others. Her blog is www.pstpierre.wordpress.com.

Ramesh Dohan hails from the city of Toronto. He earned a BA from the University of British Columbia. His poetry often slips into quirky, tender, or profound observation on the everyday, reading and writing, and poetry itself. He has also seen his poetry published in several literary journals, including *South Ocean Review* (2007), *Osprey Journal*

(2008), *Boston Literary Magazine* (2011), *Ascent Aspirations* (2011), *Bywords Journal* (2012), *Allegro Poetry Review* (2015), *VerseWrights* (2015) and *Bosphorous Review of Books* (2021).

Tiffany Lindfield is a social worker by day, trade, and heart advocating climate justice, gender equality, and animal welfare. By night, she is a prolific reader of anything decent and a writer.

Kevin Stadt holds a master's degree in teaching writing and a doctorate in American literature. He currently teaches writing at Hanyang University. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *Nixes Mate Review*, *Rust + Moth*, *The Sunlight Press*, and *Trouvaille Review*, among others. He lives in South Korea with his wife and sons, who are interdimensional cyborg pirates wanted in a dozen star systems. You can visit him online at kevinstadt.com.

Craig McGeady is from Greymouth, New Zealand and lives with his wife and two daughters in Dunedin. His writing runs the gamut of length and form thanks to Mr. Miller, his high school homeroom teacher. He has poems published or forthcoming in *The Wild Word*, *Genre: Urban Arts*, *Roanoke*, *Apeiron Review*, and *Meniscus Literary Journal*, among others. He is winner of the 2018 Given Words 'The Spanish Connection' Poetry Competition and was shortlisted for 2020 takahē Monica Taylor Poetry Prize.

Mark Konik is a writer from Newcastle, Australia. His plays and short stories have been published and performed in Australia, The UK, The

US, UAE, Canada, India and New Zealand. The short film he wrote, *A Million Times Before*, was produced in San Francisco and was selected for several film festivals in Europe and North America.

Robert Allen lives and loves in northern California, where he writes poems, takes long walks, and looks at birds.

Paul Tanner has been earning minimum wage—and writing about it—for too long. He was shortlisted for the Erbacce [2020](#) Poetry Prize. “Shop Talk” was published last year by Penniless Press. “No Refunds” is out now, from Alien Buddha Press.

Darrell Petska publishes fiction, poetry and non-fiction. View his work in *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Nixes Mate Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Soul-Lit*, and elsewhere. Darrell has tallied 30 years as an editor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 40 years as father (eight years a grandfather), and longer still as husband. See conservancies.wordpress.com.

Michael Brockley is a retired school psychologist who lives in Muncie, Indiana. His poems have appeared in *Young Ravens Literary Review*, *The Thieving Magpie*, and *Visiting Bob: Poems Inspired by the Life and Work of Bob Dylan*. Poems are forthcoming in *Fatal Flaw*, *Flying Island*, and the *Indianapolis Anthology*.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Orbis*, *Dalhousie Review*, and *Connecticut River Review*. His latest book, “Leaves On Pages” is available through Amazon.

Ann Privateer is a poet, artist, and photographer. Some of her recent work has appeared in *Third Wednesday* and *Entering*, to name a few.