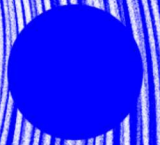
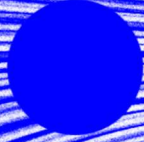


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Little Stone Journal

A litmag published twice a year, bringing great writing
to as many curious minds as possible.

Issue 01

Summer 2020

Cover design by Maciej Bykowski

Edited by Suzanne Antelme

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Editorial

I received an email recently reminding me of the annual renewal of LSJ's domain name, meaning it has been almost an entire year since I gave up eighty quid to launch this litmag on a whim and send it skipping across the lake of literary endeavour, much like a little stone. Maciej, the amazing artist who designed the cover for this issue, wanted to know what was behind the name. Why Little Stone?

A good question. I suppose I have childhood memories of sitting cross-legged in unexpected places, sifting through handfuls of stones. Some were special for no discernible reason, and I would ferry them home in my pockets and stick them in drawers to be dug up years later, oddly familiar and tactile.

I hope the poems and words in these virtual pages do something similar. I hope they reach out and poke you, and you don't know why. I hope you carry them between your ribs and find them again at exactly the right time.

Maciej said he wanted the cover design to speak of beginnings. Of starting, stepping out with no idea what will follow. A year ago when I set this project in motion, I couldn't have imagined the world we live in today. As this issue (with luck the first of many) leaps into the public domain, I feel sharply conscious of the unknown lurking in the gaps between these pages. It is indeed a beginning, and I for one am excited.

Suzanne Antelme, EIC - Summer 2020

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IFEOLUWA AYANDELE

Knitting Ghost at the Subway

-& this is how to knit the ghost
of your father: be invincible &
watch how the subway turns into

your father, rocking in his recliner.
Before you knit his ghost in your head,
he will pop up by himself like uncorking a

bottle of champagne to celebrate your passage
into a subway of ghosts. Knitting: your father
will become a canary trying to tell you things

about the subway & how love could only find
meaning on the faces of people who try to pick
laughter within your frown but you won't find

how to love your father's ghost on their faces,
for you will think laughter is a door into a town
of soliloquy. -& yet, your father will be waiting for

you to find laughter. Like the lover who left you
in the cold hand of the subway, you will become
a ghost sooner, waiting for a train that won't come.

JOE CARRICK-VARTY

Moon Spoon

Joe's friend Harry has removed the imaginary axe
from his forehead and is holding it
between thumb and first finger, pinkie raised, the way
an uncle might hold an important silver spoon

at a family party, an heirloom of sorts, not looking
at the spoon but nodding and showing the spoon
the way a parent might show a small child a firework
they are about to stick in the lawn,

about to light, send smacking into the sky,
and, while Harry rattles on about some UFC fight,
about Conor McGregor and rear-naked-choke-holds
and *thirteen seconds* this and *four rounds* that

blood has begun to seep from a thin gap in his forehead,
running along his nose and down through the air
where it lands on his pizza in little plops.
Harry gestures with the firework – *Take the spliff,*

I said
take the spliff.

PETER CLIVE

Chimpanzee

There must have been a quarrel,
long ago, so very long ago
no-one remembers the cause,
but bitter enough to last this long,
past all chance of reconciliation,
it seems, because there you sit,
on the other side of the glass, in this zoo,
at your end of the seven million years
of our separate ways, like me,
wondering what on Earth happened.

The death of satire

They killed satire.

They buried it, then dug it up,
and killed it some more.

Then they cremated it,
and made a little clay doll out of its ashes,
to stick pins in and torture.

Then they dropped it
into the core of a nuclear reactor.

They built a time machine,
and travelled with baseball bats
one hundred thousand years into the future
to when the radiation had fallen to safe levels,
and killed it some more.

Then they put it into the time machine
and sent it back in time to the Big Bang,
and inadvertently caused the birth of tragedy.
The irony was implied.

BENJAMIN CUTLER

An Allegory: After They Burned

the bed and everything
that housed it – the bed

and its collection of skin –
they gathered nothing, leaving

all that had survived
the burning to the smouldering

foundations and smoking soil,
which is where their lovers found

them – sitting and silent in the ruin.
After the last grey love-

making, they left ash prints
on their lovers' backs

where the smear could not be reached
and walked together to the river to wash

each other's blackened skin.
There, in the clear snow-

melt, they watched the ash ribbon
away, turn in the eddies,

and vanish – and because they wished
to swirl and vanish, too,

they followed, the water cool
against their blistered skin – so cool

against their bright new skin.

Love Poem: Firefly

As nothing as the green
and heatless light

in the child's palm,
the abdomen's luminescence

pinched and crushed between
thumb and finger, painted

on the softest skin – earlobes,
lips and lower lids. I am

beautiful,
the child says.

And the child is – the glow-
kissed skin already dim.

GRACE COVILL-GRENNAN

the knife

after Elizabeth Bishop

this is the knife
the right hand used
to cut the left

this is the man
who gave me the knife
that slipped from the right hand
to cut the left

this is the hate
I grew for the man
who gave me the knife
the right hand used
to cut the left

this is the scar
grown over the hate
I nursed for the man
who gave me the knife
my right hand used
to cut my left

this is your touch
numb over the scar
left by the hate that
saved me from the man
who gave me the knife
I took in my right hand
to cut my left

LAURA DORWART

The magician, attempting telekinesis

i. disappointment

'Nine,' he thought – no, saw first,
the number glowing in the hollow of her throat
like a glow-in-the-dark Pez lozenge.
He imagined he could have removed it whole (click, click)
if only he opened her jaw and snapped it shut again.
Nine, the same number he saw burning at the raw edges of his mind
like a flicker in a dream.
'It's six, actually,' she said, disappointed,
against an awkward thrum of laughter from the audience behind her.
She had wanted magic.

ii. the reveal

He dug into the raw of her throat, fishing for proof.
(Bloody stuff, that.)
He flipped over the nine, now six. It lay there like a crooked piercing.
'Nine,' he said again, standing back, now more confident.
'Nine,' she repeated, bone grating just so against throatflesh
as she swallowed.
He grinned.

iii. wedding day

Nine met nine.
Nothing else to do now
but get married.
The wedding is in September.
The bride has requested no gifts.

CAROLINE DRUITT

Expectant

You sit cross-legged, no shoes on a yellow chair with a green plant by the small clock.
Our eyes traverse lines to it for our words to sit on. We can't get carried away.
How does this make you feel. The clock pauses, the line breaks and the words tumble into a chasm.

The princess and the pea is all I can picture, your pea under all those soft feathery layers of cloth and skin. My feelings are at a seance, I can't seem to summon them, I search desperately for something hiding itself beneath my sheets.

Get it out.

I am back in an old blue chair by a sad plant and an ageing clock. I transcribe to the room, conducting punctuation, *a seed was sucked out... swilled around a heavy mouth; played between incisor and canine then spat slowly out.* It was painful, the seed and it's shell both discarded like offcuts of clay. A bold bowl sits on a smooth table waiting for fruit. The letters are confused and limp slowly across the line trying to reach the clock, you pass me a tissue. Our pupils create geometry for my words to rest.

When I first saw a naked man

I thought of empty painkiller packets and houses
with no walls. Pregnant women left to stand on a
crowded tube. Baths with my brother as a child
Our noses were bubbles and the tub was full of spit
I thought of lazy clowns with poodle shaped balloons that
squeaked like dying mice. A black top hat hiding a bewildered
bunny, it's long floppy ears in puddles on the table.
The church smell at first communion amusing my nostrils
Gulping Christ's blood down a raw throat with a Sainsbury's basic wafer.
My father's handkerchiefs staging a coup from the washing
basket while wind turbines choke the air. A bruised apple
falling from the tree and soiling itself on our lawn.
The first slice of a proud beef Wellington, the meat sputtering insults at
the pastry.

Rotten Grapes

My father stands pouring wine into his front pocket

his handkerchief lies strewn on the floor where muffin had played with it before he choked.

The crumble bubbled with such tenacity, full of our words not spoken overflowing and crisping in the oven.

Two nights ago Jesse had been eating me but now he's not hungry, his lips look chapped but he hasn't quite developed that look of indifference he will wear like a hat.

The kitchen paint has been peeling from the heat.
My mother is fixing the radio while singing
I'd never heard her sing before.

She is singing the lullaby that will eventually sing her to sleep.

My brother has left, I'm sure he was here moments ago
His coffee pot still steams on the stove, the flames tickling it until its laughter boils over.

The window was open and a moth was trying to escape after a long slumber.
Conrad smashed it against the wall and it's entrails left a cold smudge in the shape of a long I

My mother has stopped singing.

My father's pocket overflows until we are all floating down a river of wine.
I walk through the door and see the remnants of the kitchen.

Red stained and peeling

It tastes like rotten grapes.

Jesse is hungry and helps himself to crumble.

DEBORAH EVANSON

After a suicide

Now he is dead, he is everywhere.
His hair shoots from new scalps,
tilted just so, the angle of his jaw
finds itself on strangers like the scent
that floats through train carriages
from other skins, whispers of
cedarwood and spearmint, refusing
to be forgotten. He webs through
conversations, laughter-catching,
a loose thread stitching me silent.
The dark too, is made of him,
the raw edge of nothing where
my thoughts curdle into the night,
tongue-tutting clocks pulling
stubbornly forward, stretching
the hollows of me, each recognition
a new loss. I remember once he lay
his head down and broke clean,
one half kept and one offered, a piece
I willingly took in. That first grief-cut
summer, I tore myself apart in search
of it, scouring him from my bones,
all the while thinking that he was
rushing from the world like sand.

Letter to my grandfather

As a child I ran my fingers over the valleys
of your face, and asked you if the years hurt.
I felt your skin, roughcast, fold around your
mouth, laugh rising upwards like kettle steam.
Before the night rolled in, you'd soften drowsily
by the hearth and I'd find the crook of your arm.
Nested in the curve of you like a robin, fire-stung,
I felt we were the same, bolstered and restored.
I remember you as spun wood, smoke and paint,
buttered toast. The sharp summer taste of tomatoes
hanging improbably, gently tended. Cut turf, the
deep growl of a mower engine, sun-spent Sundays
and the smell of outbuildings, damp and wind
beaten.
Now, as your body fails, I wish I could reunite you
with yourself. Instead I help you sign your name,
hand braced with mine, your head hanging low.
Still as a hollowed oak, you are the weathered
edge of me, built out of love and loss.

Grief

Under the weight of the hour, I feel you fall through the ceiling.
Your body glows ochre and crimson red, night-stained,
capillaries mapping the parts of you I missed. I inspect you for
damage: the fractures, the stubborn lungs, your gilded glass
mind. This is the reckoning I demanded. I have questions but
your mouth is full of mirrors, they separate us like prism light.
You don't belong here, picked clean and polished, made less by
the shape I pressed you into. As I pull back, a hair-thin tether
unseams me, strengthened by the hard edge of the dark. I
swallow my dreams and you with them, pill-pressed, in the
hope I can keep you with me.

Mitten

In the changing-room corner he
pulls on a grey sock, and then a leg-
brace. One testicle hangs down, the way he
moves suggests pain. I leave after him,
to find him struggling
to work out the exit, the knob you have
to press. I unlock my bike
think about the next thing in my day
catch up with him past the steps.
He has dropped his wet swimming shorts,
I pick them up (they leave
grey shadow on the paving) and pass them
to him as I cycle, then stop

to watch him walk
painfully round a corner stop for
a moment, stoop to pick
up a child's mitten from the ground
and place it on a low tree
stump and move on.

Shroud / Table

Sometimes when I look at the dead, I
doubtfully look for you; when I don't find you,
it gives me both pleasure and regret;

when I do not find you, I become you.

I look at a girl, a neighbour; I remember we had
kissed when we were children. We tend to
not recognise each other now. I remember you,
I try to forget the distance;

when I remember you, I become you.

I've plucked roses from your favourite garden,
put those near a bouquet on your grave; the soil
here is dry, one rose shall wither soon;
like you did, before time. By the grave, I wish
for you, so much you didn't see – so less
we lived together;

when I wish for you, I become you.

I still have the keys to your room. It is left
empty – dead, like you – by the street, in a corner
where though everyone moves, nobody
apparently notices your absence,
and I never forget to notice;

when I notice your absence, I become you.

When they put you in the coffin, I kept
the shroud with me; I've left that on your
table now – I want you to live, forever.

It is 1962. It is night. This is the bridge;
it is dark here. I remember you –

always: *forever?* forever!

KIM HARVEY

For Jane

The same place a year later
An act completed
Bones as they hang from their frame
A simple function of physics
Some things I will remember: the Thanksgiving
You spent with us in California, you ordering
The beer from last night, please
At a bar where you'd never been, your cold hands,
How small you looked lying in a casket
How very far down they bury you in England
What I lost, what I was in that moment losing
I wanted to tell you the truth –
Sometimes I'd like to disappear too
The places the moon slivers
The old clock, the hallway, the door ajar
Claw foot tub
You walked the dog that morning
A break, a crack
You must've known your son would find you
The light between hinges
You were still warm when the medics came
The endless Almost
Cousin, are we flying yet –
I should have told you the truth
That you were so much more than blood
How loosely the seams were stitched together
Some things I kept: silk blouse, postcard, wine-coloured bag
Bones as they hang
In the end, we are all just dying
The rise of the body and the lowering
Mistakes seen through –
If only I had told you
That I knew the particular dark
Of inhabited places
Sounds of blinds against the window
Breath of the refrigerator
the truth
In the middle of the night, of what is whispered
Or never said
Of what goes to the grave
Of what is just at this moment lost

PETER LEIGHT

Sometimes I Think I Don't Need to Leave

is the reason I'm leaving. I don't mind turning around and looking back, even when I don't need to—it isn't a clinic where you find out what's wrong with you or the kind of accident that happens when you're being careful. It's true, the distance is confusing when you don't know where you're measuring from, as if something is erased and you don't even know what it was to begin with, can you think of an example? When you're not aiming nobody can say you missed when you're not trying to hit something, it isn't a clinic where they're following up or an accident that happens when you see it coming. I don't need to be anywhere right now, not at the moment, nobody's giving me a ticket or taking my ticket, are there any other questions? Taking everything out of my pockets to make room for all the things I'm going to put in my pockets, not even looking back, as when you drop something you're holding onto and don't even bother to pick it up—it isn't something you let go of because you need to. Sometimes I think I don't need to leave is the reason I'm leaving.

When You're Lost You're Not Waiting to Be Found

When you're lost to begin with it's not the kind of privilege that lets you get out of something. Not waiting until it's all over—it's not the kind of absence you never get over, as when you're in a room that isn't attached to anything it often starts to withdraw or disappear, like the history of a room. Sometimes you don't even notice, because the visibility is limited, but not the invisibility. It is also possible to be lost when you're tired of being found, or you don't need to be found—whose secret is it anyway? What's nice about being lost is also what is the trouble with it, as if it's a story you're not even in—you're not really involved, you don't have anything to worry about, but honestly what's the point. Personally, I often lay my hands in my lap where I know I can find them when I need them, not smacking my cheeks or my lips—when you don't have anything to hide you're not even thinking about where you're going to put it, not looking for a place for it, as if there's a story you're not telling, is it even a story? When something is lost you look for it where you think it is, you don't know where it is until you start looking—where do you look for something you already haven't found? It isn't an entrance where you're standing at the door, waiting for somebody to let you in, or a tent you're living in, a genuine tent, after the tent is taken away.

T.L. EVANS

THE EARTH (FROM OPPOSITE SIDES)

I. Pavement, More London Riverside, London, UK

He hit the ground so hard he went right on,
his thunderclap of molecules depressing
the pavement by our office and down he went,
as a wave, compressing ever downwards the quarks
of the London clay, cascading through its hadrons
like a Newton's Cradle, scattering
through crust, radiating through mantle and core,
ever downwards, till there was no down no more.

Know this: at the very centre of the earth,
a single iron nucleus gave way,
and for a while, until its turn was up
at least, the atom placed there by his wave
did feel, despite the dark white heat and press
from every angle of the world, true weightlessness.

II. Two Puddles, Slaty Creek Road, Woodend, Victoria, Australia

The first's half empty, blank, a lidless eye
returning, flat and still, the weather's stare,
untouched by wind / precipitation / life,
and wondering, as darker clouds appear
across his mirror, slow as hour-hands,
if drought / evaporation / time will goad
his shrinking surface skywards till the land
is all he is: depression in the road.

The other one's half full, and green and gold
where sunlight splits the canopy apart,
and convex in her faith the clouds will close,
condense, and burst until their bodies merge,
and help her raise the flatness at his heart
to match the gentle curving of the earth.

BOXER

Pity the boxer. It's what he craves.
He wants you to know that every punch he landed
was countered with an eternity of contrition,

and that the ones which landed on him
beat him back, inch by inch,
to this corner of the bar. He wants you to feel

the overarm left-right-lefts that crimped his crow's feet,
the uppercuts that swelled his double chin,
the flurry of jabs that snagged and tore his hair,

head down, guard up, into a widow's peak.
He'll fix you with his drunken eyes and talk about
vaseline, glove weights, Conor McGregor,

but he's going through the motions.
He's somewhere else, dead on his feet,
insisting, as he sways, that he can carry on,

and at this point you need to stop the fight.
Hold his heavy shoulder in your left hand,
and with your right, count out the ways you love him still.

JANE KREMER

Dogs' Love

He had not wanted to kill the dog
He had only seen it cross the road
And felt confused at the sadness
In its eyes

He had not wanted to talk to her like that
He had only wanted to make her understand how
Much he still cared

The dog's eyes were brown like all dogs' eyes
But these ones seemed to possess the ability
To talk of broken love

He had wondered whether dogs
Also could die of broken hearts

DANA COLLINS

Apocalyptic Love Song

The rations ran out long ago.
On this earth, nothing more exists
than my fingers on your ribs:
I play them like a xylophone.

Knuckles clenched so tightly together
they fuse into one; skin to skin.
Before the final sunset, you whisper in
my rusted ear a lullaby. A tenor

singing for the loss of the sun.
Halfway through, your volume descends,
happy to die alongside its listener.

Buildings are now just whirling ash, so
this is how the world ends.
Not with a bang but a whisper.

IAN MACARTNEY

For

maybe not love but certainly company
I want to share these waves with you,
those folds of topaz light tunnelling
to topless cones, temporary telescopes,
the underside of sand-reflection. I see more
here - the pan of sea-foam like cloud cover - so

maybe not for love but certainly company
I want to lead you to a congregation of pebbles
like bird eggs, some boulder-dashed balderdash
waiting for the right time. Like: *I imagine sand barriers
were the spines of grand hulls, once.* Groynes. I can dream
in Aberdeen, the granite bank submerged in sand
where old couples still stroll as magnetic miracles
on the drizzled promenade, holding hands, so can we

maybe not love, but certainly keep company? In this place
far-out fishing boats stick close like a gang of children
from the next school over. Fat drops fall on my phone,
a speckled rain-moult garbling my unspoken words.
I wonder if out there is how you would roll a joint -
uncertain waves curled towards a complete shape
before dispelling, fantastic kelp twirled into moving mountains, then sand. For that, forever.

MARK MAYES

Shopping List

1 Heart, aged 10 years
wound cream (large jar)
organic manna
edible gold nose (2 small or 1 large)
skin of the mystic goose
Eve's apple, cored
500g hope
can of dragon's sperm
an island
a shovelful of funeral earth
banana wine (2 bottles)
invisible youth cloth (pkt 10)
spare breath (in sheets of fifty)
14 minutes
water for an old woman dying of thirst
Liguria
bluntless desire
packet of figs
artichoke embryos
fish thumbs
colonic juice crush
leather cheese
a minor deity
Pie (x4)

EZRA MILES

Astronaut

I walk between the frigid rooms
at all times of day clutching my long
white sheet and shrugging, half-stale,
searching inside each chamber for signs
of life, finding only the sound of
expelled breath. The building is a hollow
crab's upturned carapace, the pale halls
look to be sunken lungs.
Spring has been unseasonably bleak.
The robin, usually nailed to the elm tree
is crying, his tears frozen stiff to his face.
My warping sheet snags occasionally on
a door frame or fingernail, revealing an
austere white knee. In the mornings I dream
that I leave. The walls are kinked and swollen
like lymph nodes. I thank them for the space
they have made, this eden of cancer, I feel it
grow from inside my caverned suit. I hear
their music now, a groaning symphony of dust.
Oh Lord, the stars I see here when tucked into bed!
Like a spilled sugar bowl on coagulating tar,
their position rotating as they punctuate their own
dark rooms. The air seems to look at me, I feel
the prickle of its gaze and wait until it goes.
I couldn't leave my room today and so I drew
a self-portrait at my hobnailed desk,
of myself dressed like a spaceman,
the bulbous white suit bunched and stuffed,
and the black shiny helmet, bludgeoned by stars
an eyeball looking out, as my face.

STEFAN MOHAMED

A Wolf in the Basement

I am the latest
in an unbroken line
of murderers.

My mother
hoarded knives
and the scalps
of powerful men

her mother
used the same
unassuming rifle
for each of the
one hundred minor royals
she hunted

her mother
set traps

her mother
mixed poisons.

My grandmother, the hunter
said that
*we are each of us born
with a wolf in the basement.*

Finally
I understand what
she meant.

Big Mood

Millennials are in your area

Hot millennials are in your area

Cold millennials are in your area

Tepid millennials are in your area

Room temperature millennials are looking for lukewarm sex in your area

Chilly millennials are gentrifying your area

Gentrified millennials are fleeing your area

The somewhat nebulous concept of millennials, commodified and misused to the point of abstraction, is hanging over your area like a cloud of paisley vapour that smells very subtly of anxiety

Anxious millennials are hacking Google Maps so that they can use their otherwise useless degree in five-dimensional hyper-physics to devise a network of wormholes so that they can somehow make the fifteen shitty job interviews they have scheduled this morning

Savvy millennials have been learning everything they can about your incredibly obscure hobby so that they can turn it into a startup

Cynical millennials have been learning everything they can about your incredibly complex and demanding kink so that they can turn it into an app

Apathetic millennials are killing startups and apps – are kinks to blame?

Millennials are killing the wanting stuff industry

Millennials are killing each other

Millennials are killing themselves

Millennials can't afford to kill themselves because they spent all their money on avocado frappes

Millennials are killing the avocado frappe industry – is love to blame?

Millennials want love like in Carly Rae Jepsen songs, in day glo colours, dramatically backlit in the warm summer rain, like the breathless montage at the end of a film trailer, all unimaginable ecstasy and unbearable heartbreak and nothing in between

Millennials want love that's happy to just wear slippers and read books in silence and go to bed early

Millennials want Ryan Gosling to make them a cup of herbal tea and give them a cuddle

Millennials want Emma Stone to step on them wearing a pair of stilettos that they could never afford

Millennials are having less sex than ever

Millennials are having more sex than they can handle

Millennials want monogamous co-dependency

Millennials want experimental polyamory

Millennials want to do roly-polies at the Polo factory

Millennials want to play polo while arguing counter-factuals with Polish actors who are too busy watching Amelie to police their package holidays – apparently

Millennials are deprived

Millennials are entitled

Entitled millennials want mental health – could the answer be an app?

Entitled millennials are demanding fewer mental health apps and more self-care hammocks – is Jeremy Corbyn to blame?

Entitled millennials love Jeremy Corbyn

Entitled millennials are forsaking Jeremy Corbyn

Entitled millennials are indifferent towards Jeremy Corbyn

Entitled millennials are fairly pragmatic about Jeremy Corbyn tbh

Entitled millennials feel entitled to a basically functional society, a habitable biosphere and a piece of sourdough toast cut into the shape of a smiley face – is Facebook to blame?

Entitled millennials are embracing aggressive whimsy to cope with the gnawing existential terror

Aggressively whimsical millennials are entrusting their darkest secrets to the Twitter accounts of various corporate brands

On-brand millennials are relishing cross-platform depression opportunities

Depressed millennials are making nihilistic podcasts

Nihilistic millennials are writing scathing long reads absolutely DESTROYING their pathetically quixotic younger selves

Quixotic millennials are furiously Googling the meaning of the word ‘quixotic’

Furious millennials are going on strike from their own existence – and if you suggest that they are in fact still present on this plane of reality, you are a scab

Obsolete millennials are shedding the rotting flakes of their exhausted carapaces and emerging into the moonlight as big sad moths

Big sad moths are fleeing this collapsing reality for a new life on the moon

Big sad moths are gentrifying your lunar village – are millennials to blame?

ADAEZE NWADIKE

Aubade To Certain Moments That Became Keloids

My name is []
I come from a lineage of wolves who never make it to full moon
My first word was []

The city of my birth is a little pothole.
Once, on my way to school, I joined a mob.
When we dispersed, a neighbour's son was burning.
How the smell of his burning flesh was similar to that of lavender.

I kissed a boy when I was 10
I don't remember his face, or his name,
Only his kiss that wasn't wet enough

When a boy I loved said I wasn't girl enough,
I drew a tattoo of colons on my wrist,
put my index finger in a blender for manicure.

My lover said he will die at 30, so I wrote him a tribute.
I am learning to []
We cuddled in a bed ruined from all-night sex
and read the dirge together,
and made love in between reading.
When I said, *Som, you are a terrible person, it's a good thing you're finally dead...*
He giggled and darkness plunged into my body like a cloud of smoke.

BERNARD PEARSON

The First Thirty Years are the Worst

Her words sagged as wet clothes
On a washing line
And the dregs of tea
Slurped in her mouth
like the slow incoming tide.
Just then she saw a stain
on the carpet
Behind the television
That she'd never even noticed
Until the day he died.

BOLA OPALEKE

THE ROAD FROM DAMASCUS

I shall learn to make love
the right way, turn in circles

when it rains. They said
to build beauty from anything
brown, & watch how quickly

night makes it black.
Pain, too, fulgurates

in different colours
when love is the one
brandishing its grief.

But to forget is easier
than to forgive.

The history
of salt predates *insults*.
Ask a fish & it would say

water, too, wears
some darkness at night. We write

our names on things
that make our memories bubble.
How many times would folks like me

be warned: *do not love anyone
from the other side of the city,*

*they'll make you renounce
your home.* Spanish, I heard,
is not the language that calls

any body a home. It agrees,
that love is an *armoury*. A large room

full of weapons, a balcony
littered with rusty bullets.
Words, too, are the doors slammed shut

against redemption. Still, to forget
is easier than to forgive. The roads
inside me have seen a truckload of men (& women)

throng to the village stream.
The return path always as awkward

as used sperm, but still the safest. Because,
I have learned to make love
the right way; to turn in circles

_____when it rained.

NATALIE PERMAN

A dream dedicated to you in which you don't feature

A rabbit comes out of a word and onto the table.
It jumps inside the kettle.
You do not want it to drown.
You push your hand inside, your foot, your head first
You burn your eyelashes.
You are in a lake, black like a feather or something forgiven
The water is soft and thin as if it could be torn apart
You can't remember if you know how to swim

"Loss is only temporary when you believe in God!"

god spat you inside me
on a night when the moon curdled milk

I had seen a red sunset in a dream
the light split an egg yolk in half

and you grew in my stomach

I could taste you
tart like pantheistic love

your phantom limbs kicked
half a life into being

wind boiled glass
the eclipse of your eyes
echoed the tinny sound of gospels

then: a jaw opened
roe eggs fell asleep
as the sun sat down at the table
your mother opened the door
covered in black wool
you should know where this leads

physiological symptoms

if your touch unfurls
a body opening a jasmine bud
if you find yourself surrounded by warm water
and can't help drinking until you float
if your fingertips taste sweet and sour
like the mouth of a hollow radish
if you are the size of a palm
leaf a tree-frond and your hair
hangs motionless in the wind
if you roll a dice and the sky
sets again and again
if your tongue can only count
in multiples of five
call your local health centre
they will advise you what to do next

BEN RAY

Fridgewolf

I like to fill the fridge when you're not there
I know you like the chase, the sharp thrill of the hunt.
Like all good legends, it is never seen
but I lie still in bed and paint it whilst you're gone:
your naked shape transformed, your edges smoothed
by that familiar yellow moonlight, chill on skin
my Fridgewolf, stalking lithely up and down
until the pounce – a sniff, a bite, never taking
more than needed, save the rest of the kill
for tomorrow. Sound of the door gently closing
footsteps padding away: only softest
fingerprints to tell that some animal was here.

He Might Be Crying

Off and on, since a black bear
 wandered through the yard last summer,
 taking a little nap beside a stump
 after ravishing the sunflower and suet feeders
 before going on his way,
 I've been seeing that bear in strange places.
 Last night, while brushing my teeth,
 bored with looking at my old face in the mirror,
 I went to the back door, toothbrush still in my mouth,
 flipped the light switch and saw a bear
 sitting on the bench overlooking the pond.
 He had one giant hairy leg crossed over the other,
 a newspaper, folded open to the local news, in his lap.
 He was smoking, just staring at the sky
 kaleidoscoping through sunset behind the tamarack trees.
 His shoulders were slumped, his posture,
 that of a burnt-out salesman on the road too long,
 looking back on his life, wishing un-grantable wishes.
 Though unable to see the bear's face, his eyes,
 I thought he might be crying.

a baby's refrain

I didn't know she knew
 drown
 as a word
 but maybe she said
 down
 and I made it
 drown

contextual mistake
 possibly
 as her refrain for days
 now
 a series of bleeding
 water
 down/drown/down
 (her name) bleeding
 see
 water
 bleeding

she took her two inch
 finger from my wrist
 to the inside
 of my elbow
 bleeding, she said

today she can see
 the blood inside
 my veins
 moving like water
 like the creeks
 she explores with her father
 and brother
 my arm
 made her
 think of canyon
 or creek bed

I want to bed
 in the creek
 with her
 asking to see
 what I cannot

Lion Lessons

We who are not strong enough, apologize. We who saw the military trucks lined up like ducks, the hot air balloons rising on the horizon, and did not say anything. We who sit. We in silence. We who found leaves drying in a stranger's new dictionary and looked up ewer while drinking glass after glass of water. We who drank water. We in water. We who sing sweetly as a silent stranger each day as a guest. We who spy on blueberries who spy on sitting walls. We apologize. We who sit. There will come a time when the night will be ocean and we may wash. At no fault of its own mind you. There will come a day when this geological vein, this gullet, this internal channel of beet red mimicry will have a chance. We who were once opaque and hard. We who were conduit between rocks. A kind of blinding where each day still is more.

Where each
day still is more.
Wearing
Golden manes curling
Around our cheeks and sweetly growling.

We who should apologize. We who did not know. Who did not let ourselves know. We who were then complicit. We who clean our tongues, scrape off the dust, and spit. We who see the ghostly pink that lies there beneath. The ghostly glow. The truth. We apologize.

bone broth

mother

grandmother

sucking little bird

bones when she says panties

a small tow escapes leaving me behind

in each small square foot marks a separation and in each their spit

today there is talk of bone broth for vanity but at least the butcher is attractive and likes comparisons to starlets

one is gone one uses one as a reminder better I have another to write about re-write or re-make or really re-name as if it was my own story as if I wasn't plagiarizing

their bones became my bones and their anger became my anger and I am bigger than they were and say underwear I could be like them but one generation softer maybe I could lift out of it – on my own wings don't need to suck on bones – the wings have been tattooed on skin black and deep

it is not just because of my name that I have needed to cut and paste syntax and charcoal pens collage on walls and push ink into my skin but the conflagration of muscles tightening needing space and details of beauty – it is because of my name – the letters – each one here because I was – each one here after I am gone – rose – October – begin – inside – night – this is how I love you – memory – often – music – and – near – autumn – narcissus – acquittal – please
let me go on my own

DAN SMART

THE PLAN

Those lights in the sky—
we are told
to call them stars—they burn
through every last atom
of matter in their bodies
until they die.

Until the slag at the centre
of their hearts
explodes. Until
their starving invisible ghosts
go sucking and tearing
searing holes in the universe.

But it's alright
we tell ourselves. It's okay
we'll say to someone else
who loves us—this has
always been the plan. They are supposed
to do that.

DANIELLE TODD

Requirements

To write about your mother, you have to take something and leave it.

Take a garden box of pink roses, perhaps, freshly planted in October. Softness there. Nudged through the dirt.

Then hold the head in the light firm, and the whiteness in place. Be clear. This is designed for contrast against the young olive body and all its new years.

1985 has arrived at the door, insistent that my father is met. Continue to look out over the lawn, crimped and baked.

Now take what is surely August. Break the small tides in your lap. What is guarded for you and you only:

A cotton dress. The limit of time ending. What cannot be replanted. Or the choice of having been swept.

Tourist Season

They made pistachio necklaces –
not in the way that would later be proven commercially viable
but they made them anyway, cracking and opening
in the place of summer.

The orange grove shimmered over the parched land,
giving view of the Portuguese woman singing in baritone from her window, a white refrigerator
humming a bass line from the balcony below.
And the man with the smooth brown arms worked

so they could puncture tiny holes in the shells and make small knots in the cotton.
They rubbed beer bottles to get the sound just right,
crushed petals of jasmine into a cup where they swilled and sloshed
with the citrus fruits and the iodine and the woman kept on singing
and then they were making a tourist season.

In those days their words peeled off in moonlit ceremonies
and there was a gatekeeper at the edge of madness
who anointed the summers drafted and stored for displacement, then lifted them high in his sea
hands, dripping and blinking. A body of water

longs for someone to bring it more of itself. An old woman ties sea glass
in her braid as she shuffles out of the town. A town longs
for a better season next year. A tourist longs for no more seasons
to remind them what they do not still have.

In ten thousand years, nighttime is to suffer a smear campaign and become a tomb
but before curfew the local kids will be continuing their excavation of drowned cotton and brown
beer bottles. Before they slop them onto the dining room table in a small cloud of dust, the adults
will be discussing the loss of the late hour.

Someone will mention how easily one would lose the memory of blue
standing in a room of white tiles, each one unknowing of the theatre of the balcony, each
a blank stare of an audience that can only see the aisle and emergency exits. Not all who sit at the
table are in agreement, and a discussion ensues.

JEMMA WALSH

1-2-3, 1-2-3...

There was a time you'd take me by the hand
and scoop me to a dangled kitchen twirl,
it's not that simple now, I understand.

Time shifts horizons with each grain of sand
asunders us neat in a dust devil whirl.
There was a time you'd take me by the hand.

Young hips hula hope to the radio band
twist and etch scapes in the mind of a girl.
But the tune's not simple now, I understand.

The Spanish white peacock's glazed feathers fanned,
the future red carpet rolled ripe to unfurl.
There was a time you'd take me by the hand.

I waltzed my way clean to a foreign land,
dervished wild and bucked like a drunken churl.
Side steps aren't simple now, I understand.

But movement unshackles what one must withstand,
molluscs gift wrap intrusion to an embryo pearl.
There was a time you'd take me by the hand.
And nothing's simple now that I understand.

odd couples

the horse chestnut flowers white with pinky specks a-dapple-dorn
triangle blossoms perch ornate to shy they are forlorn
for the leaf mops up the glory with its boldly digit daring
palms pin posters for the children, little interest in the pairing

the dandelion's all sailor, far too plucky to be vogue
he tips and lays his raffish hat, a Mr Ripley rogue
which smears his brilliant yellow but he's phoenix-esque in death
his carcass air temptation sphere to every passing breath

the rose thorn tooth fin glides with ease through flesh of clumsy prey
its summit winks red signal threats to look the other way
and who'd believe beyond the pointed swagger of that sting
is the softness cloth of petal dreams, hand cups of beauty sing

the nettle and the dock hijack on hunkers down the lane
the berry and the holly yuletide's mantel-piecely mane
Monet's floating pads and lilies bleed their pact on canvas hue
hearts are whole on mirror water in the swan neck bend of two

Outside the lines

Vitebsk tram. Утро. Рано. Winter silence tolls the babushka huddle. Ice-slave windows cold shoulder the view... block... block... block... blocked. Beyond the last stop the sky deeps, yawns its colour kiss to low *izba* chimneys birthed in a kinder season. Chaperoned smoke ups then wriggles free to brush the sleeves of fiddlers cavorting in the sky. Green oxen audience. Below, brotherly logs-in-arms smudge the sound of yiddish tales. In one, letters are flung to the heavens for God to arrange. Moishe's rye is buttered in a linger whiff of herring while the samovar in the corner curves slow. Here, gravity is for the birds, all else is carried dreamlike in whirls of peasant glory on *La Bise*.

fur circles halo
gold crowns still behind slav lips
shufflesludge romance

[Утро – *ph* ootra, morning.
Рано – *ph* rana, early.
izba – traditional Russian countryside dwelling, usually a log house.]

CONTRIBUTORS

In order of appearance

Maciej Bykowski (cover design) is a student of graphic communications at the University of Reading. His motto is *placet experiri*.

Ifeoluwa Ayandele is a poet from Lagos, Nigeria. He has completed his MA in English literature at the University of Lagos and his work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Peekingcat Poetry*, *Mojave He Review*, *Burning House Press*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *Kalahari Review*, *Brittle Paper*, *Kin Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere.

Joe Carrick-Varty is a British-born Irish writer based in London. His second pamphlet *54 Questions for the Man Who Sold a Shotgun to My Father* is forthcoming with Out-Spoken Press in September 2020. He is co-founder of *bath magg*.

Peter Clive lives on the south side of Glasgow, Scotland with his wife and three children. He is a scientist in the renewable energy sector. As well as poetry, he enjoys composing piano music and spending time on the Isle of Lewis. His work has appeared in *The Blue Nib*, *Writer's Cafe Magazine*, *Cadaverous Magazine*, and *Causeway*, among others.

Benjamin Cutler is an award winning and Pushcart nominated poet who teaches English and creative writing at a high school in the Appalachian Mountains. His collection *The Geese Who Might Be Gods* (2019) is available from Main Street Rag Publishing Company. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Cider Press Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *The Shore*, *Cumberland River Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Barren Magazine*, and *Longleaf Review*, among others. He was awarded the Susan Laughter Meyers Poetry Fellowship in 2019.

Grace Covill-Grennan is a carpenter and poet living in Powel, Idaho. She has a BA in psychology from Reed College and is the author of *Blockhead* (Another New Calligraphy Press, 2019), a mixed-genre chapbook. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Utterance Journal*, *Timshel Magazine*, *The Impossible Task*, *Rockvale Review*, *Heirlock Magazine*, *Haptic*, *Genre: Urban Arts*, *Thin Air Magazine* and *Permafrost Magazine*.

Laura Dorwart is a writer living in Oberlin, Ohio with her family. She has a Ph.D. from UCSD, an MFA from Antioch University, and a BA from

Barnard College. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Catapult*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *McSweeney's*, and *SELF*, among others.

Caroline DrUITT is a poet from London who works as a yoga and creativity teacher with university students, and as a tutor in creative writing and English for children in the care system. She has poems forthcoming in *Trope* and *New River Press*, and is due to start an MA in creative and life writing at Goldsmiths in September.

Deborah Evanson is a poet from rural Cheshire who lives in London. She is previously unpublished.

Giles Goodland lives in West London and works in Oxford as a lexicographer. He was commended in the National Poetry Competition in 2010, and has had a number of poetry books published including *A Spy in the House of Years* (Leviathan, 2001), *What the Things Sang* (Salt, 2009), *The Dumb Messengers* (Salt, 2012) and *The Masses* (Shearsman, 2018).

Jayant Kashyap is the author of *Survival* (Clare Songbirds, 2019) and *Unaccomplished Cities* (Ghost City Press, upcoming). His poetry, nominated for the Pushcart Prize, has appeared in *Barren Magazine*, *StepAway*, *Visual Verse*, *Perverse*, *Outcast* and others, and has won and been commended in challenges on the Poetry Society's Young Poets Network. He is also one of the founding editors of the e-magazine *Bold + Italic*.

Kim Harvey is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee and Associate Editor at *Palette Poetry*. You can find her work in *Barren Magazine*, *Black Bough Poetry*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Poets Reading the News*, *SWWIM*, and elsewhere. She is the 1st prize winner of the Comstock Review's 2019 Muriel Craft Bailey Memorial Award and the 3rd prize winner of the 2019 Barren Press Poetry Contest. She has two microchaps forthcoming this summer from *Kissing Dynamite Press* and *Ghost City Press*.

Peter Leight is a poet living in Amherst, Massachusetts. His work has appeared in *Paris Review*, *AGNI*, *FIELD*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Raritan*, *Matter*, *The Southampton Review*, *Hubbub*, and others.

T.L. Evans placed 3rd in the 2016 National Poetry Competition, was joint runner-up in the Poetry Society's Stanza Competition of the same year, and featured in the 2017 Verve Poetry Festival Competition anthology judged by Luke Kennard. He's currently working on a pamphlet.

Jane Kremer is a student at St Mary's University in Twickenham, studying a BA in English and creative and professional writing.

Dana Collins is a poet from Greater London, and was a winner of the Foyle Young Poets of the Year

Award in 2019. She co-edits *Eponym*, an online zine for art and literature.

Ian Macartney is a Scottish writer currently based in Aberdeen. In 2015 he was a winner of the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award and he has also performed with *Nea! Reekie* at Summerhall and on BBC Radio Scotland. His work has appeared in *Meanwhile*, *Icarus*, *The Scotsman* and *The Guardian*, among others. In 2017 he founded *Re-Analogue*, a creative collective based in Aberdeen which has organised performance nights, gigs, pop-up exhibitions and a film festival.

Mark Mayes is the author of *The Gift Maker* (Urbane, 2017) and his poems and short stories have appeared in a number of magazines and anthologies, including *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *The Reader*, *Staple New Writing*, *Other Poetry*, *The Interpreter's House*, and the *Unthology* series from Unthank Books, among others. He has also been shortlisted for the Bridport Prize and his work has been broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and World Service Radio.

Ezra Miles is a poet from London and Poet in Residence at Wellcome Collection. His work has appeared in *Tears in the fence*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *Allegro Poetry* and *Poetry Pacific*, among others. He has read at *The Gronthee International Poetry Festival*, *The Baul and Vaishnav Music Festival*, and poetry events around London. He works at a museum.

Stefan Mohamed is an author and poet based in Bristol. His first novel, *Bitter Sixteen* (Salt Publishing, 2015) won the Sony Reader Award and became a Guardian Top Teen Read. He has published two sequels and a standalone, *Falling Leaves* (Salt Publishing, 2018), and his debut poetry collection *PANIC!* (2016) is available from Burning Eye Books. He has featured in the *Reaching Out* and *Lung Jazz* anthologies from Cinnamon Press, and his poetry has also appeared in *404 Ink*, *Ice Pop Poetry*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *above/ground press*, *Riggwelter Press* and *Paintbucket*.

Adaeze Nwadike is a Nigerian poet, storyteller and teacher who graduated from the University of Nsukka, Nigeria. She was shortlisted in the 2016 Nigerian Students Poetry Prize, longlisted for the Babishai-Niwe Poetry Award in 2015, and won 3rd prize in poetry for the *Muse* journal in the same year. Her work has appeared in *Poets in Nigeria*, *Brittle Paper*, *LIBRETTO* and *Praxis Mag Online*, among others.

Bernard Pearson is a poet living in Oswestry, England. Leaf by Leaf Press published his poetry collection *In Free Fall* in 2017, and in 2019 he won 2nd place in the Aurora Prize for Writing for his poem *Manor Farm*. His poetry has also appeared in *The Edinburgh Review*, *Aesthetica Magazine*, *FourXFour*, and *Crossways*, among others.

Bola Opaleke is a Nigerian-Canadian poet who lives in Winnipeg and holds a degree from Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He has two poetry collections, *A Note From Hell* (Xlibris, 2012) and *Skeleton Of A Ruined Song* (Ice Floe Press, 2019). In 2013 he was a runner-up in the Thomas Morton Memorial Poetry Prize, for which he made the shortlist in 2017. He was also shortlisted in the 2017 Open Frontier Poetry Prize, and runner-up in the CBC poetry contest. He's been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and is a recipient of the Manitoba Arts Council Writer's grant. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Frontier Poetry*, *Rising Phoenix Review*, *The Nottingham Review*, *The Literary Review of Canada*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Poetry Pacific*, *Drunk Monkeys* and *Temz Review*, among others.

Natalie Perman is a second-year student studying English and German at the University of Oxford, where she acts as Workshop Coordinator for the University's Poetry Society. She was a winner of the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award in 2017, and was commended for the same award in 2018. She has also won the Forward Student Critics' Award, and won or been commended in a number of challenges on the Young Poets Network. Her work has appeared in *ASH*, *INSIGHT*, the *Seven Voices Project*, *Pecks and Pollicles*, and the *1555*, among others. She is Editor-in-chief for the *Oxford Review of Books* and Deputy Editor for the *Isis Magazine*.

Ben Ray is a poet from the Welsh borders, currently living in Brussels. He is Poet-in-Non-Residence for the 2020 Cheltenham Poetry Festival and has two poetry collections from Indigo Dreams Publishing, with a third, *The Kindness of the Eel* (2020), published by The Poetry Business as a winner of the 2019 New Poets Prize. He was a winner of the 2015 Geoff Stevens Memorial Prize and longlisted in the 2019 National Poetry Competition, among others. His work has appeared in *Poetry Wales*, *The North*, *The Oxford Review of Books*, *bath magg*, *Riggwelter Press*, and elsewhere. He was Herefordshire Young Poet Laureate between 2011-2013 and has featured on the Brussels-based podcast *EU Scream*.

Larry Schug is a poet living in the St. Wendel Township, Minnesota. He has had eight poetry collections published by North Star Press, most recently *A Blanket of Raven Feathers* (2017), and one chapbook, *Obsessed with Mud* (1997), published by Poetry Harbor. In 2008 he was awarded a McKnight Fellowship for Writers, and has won two Central Minnesota Arts Board Individual Artist awards and a 2014 Central Minnesota Arts Board Established Artist award. He worked for more than thirty years as a physical labourer, but is now retired and volunteers as a college writing tutor and naturalist. He is working on his ninth collection.

Robin Shawver was a finalist for Omnidawn's Chapbook Contest with her chapbook *verbs without*

a past. She has an MFA from the California College of the Arts and has taught writing at the University of New Mexico-Taos. Her work has appeared in *RPD Society*, *Open Letters Monthly* and *Tupelo Press*, among others. She currently lives in Quingdao, China, and works as an international school librarian.

Dan Smart is a writer, poet and musician from Chicago. He has a BA in creative writing from Illinois Wesleyan University, where he has since returned as a guest lecturer on poetry. His work has appeared in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *The Blue Mountain Review*, *Red Fez*, *Hooligan Magazine*, *The Legendary*, *Cease Cows*, *Structure and Surprise*, and *Jabberwock Review*. As part of his project *Rhythm Is The Instrument*, he has written over 2,000 poems.

Danielle Todd is a poet and short story writer from Auckland, New Zealand. She has been published in *A Fine Line*, *Oscen* and *Join the Dots*, and is currently working on her first poetry collection from Paris.

Jemma Walsh is a poet from Athlone, Ireland, who now lives in London. Her poetry has been published by *Re-side*, *the winnow magazine* and *Crossways*.

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