

THE RAVEN REVIEW

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Ace Boggess
Self-Esteem

Not the chilly mirror self; it's colder still.
Freckles dot your doubt-face.
Hope? Get rid of it early—mean-
spirited child that taunts & takes your toys.
Try hardest to disbelieve
lies you tell yourself about yourself.
So many cruelties shrink you
or shrink-wrap until you cannot breathe.
Self-esteem has its god-side, too:
do more, go further, drink marrow
from the bones of your tormentors.
Let's be rock stars together
in this in-between space
where grave & clouds shake hands.
It's finding a balance, comfort,
though more times than not, we can't.
You know, don't you, as do I?
We've punched ourselves in the silver eye
until our hurt reflections turned away.

Andrea Sanderson
Haiku to the Comforter

i

Precipice of doubt
urgency of your fingers
tugging at my spine.

ii

You saved me from me,
beckoned me to fall back fast.
I land in your palms.

iii

You blanket my heart.
Swaddle my thoughts as infants
with warmth and wisdom.

Anne Gvozdjak
Imagine for Me

an annihilating vengeance
and a vicious roaring in my body:

a sound of something shattering
through dust jungles as i smash this visceral
museum of a past apart,

and an ecstatic hysteria of rusted
neglect finally coming back alive:

violent blazes of a disjointed resurrection
only for every stunted feeling to be swallowed
by the old plaid loveseat,

overstuffed with a century's worth
of scraped knees buried in gnarled wool,
of playing beggar to the pounding rain,
of the yearning to start over

and over again,
until this tomb of a body screaming blasphemy
suffocates itself

back into cacophonous desolation

Anne Mikusinski
In Composition

No words adorn
The page before you
Instead
Space is filled
With staves and bars
And decorated
By the intricacies
Of the notes
Within
Soon to be translated
Through talented hands
Into a story
Happily received.

Ben Nardolilli

Do Yourself a Favor

You may be a subscriber,
But the days of being a follower
Are soon coming to an end

Here is prophecy in an email,
The promise of liberation
In a pitch to you

Soon, the time will come
When you will no longer be beset
With illness or cubicle demons

Soon there will be freedom
With writing, yes,
Your art will lead you out

To the land you have sought
At night in between lines
You never though good enough

And yes, there will be a guide
To download and to follow
So you may have your freedom

And its price will be set
By the all other writers you know,
Well, surely you know some, right?

Charlie Brice
Relationship Haiku

He only saw the “I,”
not the “we.” One cup
in the cupboard.

45 years together.
Who cares where
you put my iPod.

She held him like a
Ming vase covered in feces.
Nostalgia.

Upset because we argue?
Peace and quiet:
The grave’s caress.

Diana Raab

How Returning to School as an Adult Changed My Life

The day my mother gave me a journal to help me cope with my grandmother's suicide undoubtedly changed my life forever. That seemingly benign gesture, when I was ten years old, laid the groundwork for my life as a writer. Following this continuum, and after a serious health crisis, I became riveted to make a decision which went against my character and one which I never thought I would do.

My cancer journey began in mid-2001 when I was called back to the hospital for a repeat annual mammogram and eventually diagnosed with an early form of breast cancer called DCIS. At the time, my husband, three kids and myself were living in Orlando. My doctor suggested I obtain a second opinion from Dr. Mel Silverstein, a Los Angeles specialist in this type of breast cancer. Within a couple of weeks, my husband and I boarded the plane out to Los Angeles and after enduring all the necessary tests, Dr. Silverstein presented my options – either to have radiation and chemotherapy or a mastectomy with reconstruction. After years as a practicing nurse, I learned that the best way to make a decision when given a choice by your physician was to ask what he'd suggest for his own wife. Because of his answer, I opted for a mastectomy and reconstruction.

While in California, and a few days following my surgery, I sat in my hospital bed surrounded by orchids sent from loved ones dispersed around the country. Tear-saturated tissues lay piled high on my bedside table and the early morning sun peaked through the large window. The emotional pain of losing a breast had hit hard. When my surgeon said he would soon remove the corset-like bandage tightened around my chest, I feared seeing what lie beneath and the new condition of one of the breasts that had nursed my three now teenaged children.

Just days after my surgery, my husband reached out across the sterile white bed sheets to take my hand. Simon, an engineer and a "fixer," had a difficult time watching me navigate through this intense physical and emotional pain. He nestled up close and wrapped both his hands around mine. He looked deeply into my eyes like he did years earlier on the day of my father's passing.

"Right now," he asked, "if you could do one thing which would make you happy, what would that be?" Aside from transporting my children across the country to be with me, I confessed that I wanted to return to school for my Masters in Writing. For years, this had been a dream of mine and the recent surgery suddenly slapped me face to face with my own mortality and my apparent race against time. I wanted to make this dream to come true. "Well then, we'll make it happen," he said.

It is not that his offer healed the deep psychological wounds of having lost a breast, but the idea of returning to school gave me something to look forward to. It was also something my mother never thought I would do. After a fair amount of research, I applied to some out-of-state, low-residency programs. I was ecstatic to be accepted into Spalding University's charter class

lead by Sena Jeter Naslund, which was to commence on September 25th, 2001, about a month after my surgery.

Since that day in my childhood when my mother gave me my first journal, I had always found solace in the written word. Journaling became a passion which I turned to during other turbulent times, whether my own adolescence, difficult pregnancies, or cancer. To meet the requirements of my graduate work, I decided to gather my journal entries, reflections and poems written during my post-operative recovery and shape them into a book.

The collection chronicled my breast cancer journey and the physical and mental anguish associated with it. My initial instinct was to prepare this document for my family to help them understand my passion for writing and also how strongly I felt about the healing power of journaling. I wanted to inspire them to write through their own turbulent times as well.

After returning home to Florida and before heading to Kentucky to begin my first brief-residency weekend, the horrific events of 9/11 occurred. On the morning of September 11th, I sat in my living room awaiting a visit from a dear friend. While anticipating the sound of the doorbell, the phone rang.

“Oh, dear Diana,” my friend said, “Are you watching TV?” I told her I had just turned it on and with the rest of America, watched the horrific images of the planes crashing into the twin towers. Images of lost lives and lost breasts alternated in my mind. I thought about all those severed lives and my own severed breast. Not only was I mourning the loss of my breast, but I was suddenly mourning the huge loss to our country and the city of my youth. Physically I was still weak, but emotionally this traumatic event affected me down to my core. I didn’t want the pain and anxiety of this tragedy to kill me. I continued to reach out to my passion and lifeline of journaling.

In view of all the chaos surrounding 9/11, we weren’t even sure if our MFA program would begin on time. I was delighted to hear that it would. As a group of graduate student writers, our first assignment was to write a poem addressing our impression of the events of 9/11. As we sat around the large conference room table, our eyes became watery and emotions pour onto the pages.

It took the full two years for me to pull together all the information and journal entries into a book that my mentor suggested I publish. The surprising part is that it took eight years for me to find the courage to actually have it published. I simply was not sure whether its personal nature was something I wanted to share with the world. For me, revealing the intimate details of my story was akin to hanging my underwear on a clothesline outside my window. As someone who has always been a relatively private person, exposing myself seemed neither intuitive nor a good fit to my personality. In the end, after speaking with my mentor and some colleagues, it was decided that the process would be cathartic and most importantly, beneficial for others, particularly my two daughters who would one day have to face the torment of possibly being affected by cancer.

My emotions were raw and in addition to prose and journal entries, the book includes poems composed during my journey. Here’s a sample:

To My Daughters:

*You were the first I thought of
when diagnosed with what
strikes one in eight women.*

*It was too soon to leave you,
but I thought it a good sign
that none of us were born*

*under its pestilent zodiac.
I stared at the stars and wished
upon each one that you'd never*

*wake up as I did this morning
to one real breast and one fake one;
but that the memories you carry*

*will be only sweet ones, and then
I remembered you had your early traumas
of being born too soon, and losing*

*a beloved grandpa too young. I have
this urge to show you the scars
on the same breasts you both cuddled*

*as babies, but then I wonder why
you'd want to see my imperfections
and perhaps your destiny. I cave in*

*and show you anyway, hoping you learn
to eat well and visit your doctors, but then
I wonder if it really matters, as I remember*

*what your grandpa Umpie used to say,
"When your time's up, it's up."
May he always watch over you.*

I'm so glad my husband inspired and pushed me to return to graduate school which led to the publishing of *Healing with Words: A Writer's Cancer Journey*. I knew that my writing life would not stop there. Daily journaling continued to be an integral part of my well-being and a key to my survival. I became inspired to help others heal and transform through writing. At the age of fifty-eight I again returned to school for my Ph.D. in psychology. The focus of my research was the healing and transformative powers of memoir writing. Like my MFA, my research became transformed into a book, *Writing for Bliss: A Seven-Step Plan for Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life* (Loving Healing Press, 2017). Returning to school as an adult was one of the best decisions of my life, and quite possibly saved my life as well!

D.S. Maolalai

Calgary

we stopped at every fruitstand
winding around the mountain,
squeezing raspberries,
peeling oranges
and pausing by the roadside
to piss out tomato juice.

to the south
wood burned by acres
and the air filled
with a light grey smoke,
feeling like cotton and smelling
of fried and cracking bacon.
sideroads cut off
by emergency vehicles
and animals
going wild on the wind.

once, breaking cover
a heron glided the lake
and at night
bats whispered in snickers while we slept,
chasing after moths tied to the lamplight.

we were headed
for Calgary from Vancouver,
eating fresh apples and blackcurrants,
drinking milk mixed with watery
vacuum-flasked tea
which leaked soggy
into every pack of sandwiches.

over us
woods poured like flowing water
and across them
silence rolled,
lumbering and ancient

like a great-legged thing
come rising
and stinking from the sea.

Elizabeth Stoessl
Collision, Monday, 3 PM

Out of his open Jeep he flew—
aerial spiral, tossed rag doll,
splayed body
face down on the roadside, crime-scene silhouette.

We have killed a man—my first thought after
we crawled out, hugged and exhaled—
Why did we dawdle so long at the farm stand?
One minute sooner and we'd have missed him.

When he opened his eyes and he lurched to his feet,
stood up, staggered and bellowed,
assaulting us with his hot whiskey breath,
I feared he could kill us instead.

I don't recall
much of what happened before the sheriff
put him in handcuffs, before
we were cared for and our crushed car towed.

All I remember is this:
A yellow school bus passed by,
filled with untethered children
peering out at our wreckage,

hit taken for them by one lucky drunkard
and two folks who lingered too long at a farm stand.

Ernie Brill

My Mother's War Story

You young have no idea what it was like.
We lived for letters, for the slightest word.
I remember one night—I'll never forget it!
It was rough times, early in the 40s,
We heard about your father on the radio,
His name was in the news, an article
The storming of Kasserine Pass in Africa.
An article by a one Glen Fadden
Who turned out to be an A-one phony
Describing a raging battle in Tunisia
Fighting Rommel, and that Rommel was tough.
They said your dad stormed the pass with a machine gun!
Such nonsense: he barely knew how to shoot!
But there we were: cold January, rationed heat,
And I didn't know where he was or how he was,
Or if he was dead or alive, or what!
I didn't know what would happen to him
Or all of us I was always worrying
If we could get to Europe soon enough
To save those in the concentration camps.
That evening I heard on the radio
The Germans had retaken Kasserine Pass.
It grew colder. I was miserable.
I wrapped the one blanket I had tighter
And tighter, like when I was a little girl
I won't forget that night as long as I live.

Fred Pollack
Algonquin

There's style again; the rags and stains
of alienation are passé.
Camelhair, cashmere, turtleneck,
bright shoes and watch—I catch
the eyes of women, gays, and connoisseurs
as I walk the last few blocks to
Our table. Ambulant readers
look up – not from those dreadful plastic bricks
I hallucinated for a time, but books;
some recognize me, start to want
an autograph but, famously, I'm gone.

Beyond the Deco door,
between the beveled mirrors, my friends,
exalted and still sober, sit. Avoiding
the topic of my latest, which they've all
reviewed (they'll praise it with a parting grunt),
we dish upcoming talent. Some I defend,
some destroy; word will spread. Then, mostly
pleased with the struggles of the young, we turn
to the auxiliary art
of film—geese referencing Bergman's
(or Ozu's?), other recent subtleties.

But instead they're discussing The Author –
who isn't there, as I don't seem to be –
and Language, which, like a ninja
in the movies they admire, is dressed to kill,
and has eviscerated poetry.
Talking around and around me, they raise
the issue of a certain gaze
(what could it mean? I keep my head down),
and whether any attempt to “capture”
the Other (other what?) is itself oppressive;
apparently one should only listen,
the better to agree, not to imagine.
Silently I drink, and could

be drinking anywhere, or anything.
Then walk out onto newly sordid streets
and find myself as sordidly accoutered
but comfortably so,
being no one again, and they nothing.

Hibah Shabkhez
Embers Unglowing

The shadows upon the inner
Screen-stage of her eye
Were the demons that made her scream,
Azuring and obscuring the
Sweet blue of the sky.

Everything that happened to her
We deemed a foul lie:
And so, laughing demons in dream
Worlds jeered till she shrank into a
Single wordless cry.

J.S. MacLean
Remembrance

August draws the clan to beach-fire circles.
He is centered like the nightly blazes
where the glowing logs resemble faces.
They have character but they are not him.
One must hold the inspirations dreams bring
here to us, before the ashes whiten.
Kingfishers on breezes spy and target,
slitting Satan's throat to catch and survive,
casting over for one more to snag on.
By the Irish channel, by the graveyard,
on the mound of Saints, his legend lives on.
But I saw no shooting stars this August.

John Grey

Kayaking the Alaskan Coast

We're kayaking close to the coast,
a greenbelt of spruce
to the towering mansion mountains beyond,
gliding on chilly water,
(the warmest it ever gets)
in and out of the granite coves.
Sun laps against ancient stone,
its temperatures more pale and lingering
than full on
in these long days of light,
of bobbing gulls and living relief maps.
Up close, we see barnacles that blacken stone,
limpets and lichens,
in narrow inlets,
foolhardy moss battered by cornered waves.
High above, sea eagles soar,
eyes on watch
for the tiny lives
embedded in their niche
or moments of fish bravado
as they skim too close to the surface.
We drift into the intertidal zone,
minute biomes clinging on between the splash and spray,
hardy survivors of the all-round roughness,
constant colonists, persistent pioneers,
seeking balance in an unbalanced world.
The air prickles, salt smears the nostrils
but, just beyond the breaker line,
a pod of orcas performs for an audience of two,
bursts of black and white, of tail,
of heads that treat the surface
like a curtain to their stage.
This is a land of giants
but also of the minuscule,
of predator and prey,
small movements, glacial caving,
two men, paddles in their hands,
a wilderness, everything else.

Joy Asbach
Hot and Cold

The cracking sound
ice chips make
as they drop
into a hot
cup
of tea

The steam dances
on the liquid
surface

twirling
with its
arms
outstretched
as it
escapes

from the cup smooth honey
and tart lemon meet
my lips taking

the first sip

Keith Moul

Every Improving

My fondness is not hard to express
here at the waterfront. I come often,
my eyes tearing in combined currents,
purposing a benign, mystic flagellation.

I walk nearby new aluminum turbines
rotating in wind, producing no power.
I approach the old fishing pier and see
cottonwood stumps from earlier time,
cut and milled to restrain fishers past.
The old pier warps in ways weird for
wood, and sits in a decrepit condition.
The new city pier may be used, strong,
sunk deep in the shoreline by the creek,
“improved” per city elders (not fishers),
being pestered by boat and public traffic.

I especially note the galvanized chains
looped around the edges of the pier and
carrying a motif to the sculpted octopus,
freed from ubiquitous rust from salt air.

Now that almost all the fish are gone,
now that fisher numbers have reduced,
tide waters roil, new barnacles grasp,
the breezes hoist on me a sting of loss.

Kersten Christianson

Luminous

Preferring the dim
light of late November
afternoons, I light
the candles, work
by flame.

My friend Vivian calls
this bluedark, magic hue.
Against it, I read the day's
mail, offshore forecast,
tarot.

It isn't strong enough
magic to restore
all that has been lost,
but the star shadows
flicker,

flash mango,
wildfire my periphery
with surprise and something
that feels a bit
like hope.

Kersten Christianson
Not Yet Snow

First the hoarfrost
then the arrival:
Trumpeter swans.
And when I walk

the beaten path
through the estuary,
my arms sporting
gooseflesh, my boots

trailing a wake of fallen
alder leaves, I search
the sky for its flurry
of wings & words.

Kira Marie McCullough
Too Much TV, You'll Go Blind

Dinner's leftovers had been stored neatly in Tupperware containers and placed in an orderly fashion in the fridge. Not even a slice of roast beef was left behind on the counter for Lorna.

"You're my little Cinderella," said Peggy. "But nothing for you to clean up tonight."

She kissed Lorna's cheek and nudged her towards the living room, shuffling behind her until they reached the overstuffed burgundy easy chair, where Peggy lowered herself with a sigh. Lorna sprawled on the couch.

In the kitchen, Vince scooped generous servings of chocolate Blue Bell ice-cream into bowls and brought them to Peggy and Lorna. As they began to eat, the clinking of spoons against the whalebone china dishes could be heard faintly—like distant church bells—above the din of the television.

Lorna quickly finished eating her bowl of ice-cream and watched greedily as Peggy and Vince slurped the last, sweet drops from their spoons. If not for muscle memory developed over 70 years of using silverware, Vince and Peggy would have missed their mouths because their eyes never wavered from the TV, which blared with ads for Zot's Used Car lot and Jake's Panda Garden Restaurant.

"It's almost time for the news. Why aren't you on channel 3?" Peggy asked. Vince and Peggy watched Tim Terry and Karen Walker religiously every night at 7 and 10.

"Hold your old bones," Vince said. "I'm on channel 5 because Channel 3 News comes on right after Vanna's wheel of crap, which I prefer to miss."

From outside, a rumble of thunder could be heard, like a timpani drum slowly reverberating and echoing, moving ominously towards the house. Vince put down his bowl, stood up, and walked to the French doors leading to the patio, where he examined the backyard.

"We've got almost a foot of water out there, and it's still raining. We may be riding out the storm in the attic," he said.

"That nice Channel 3 weatherman will give us the forecast, soon," said Peggy. "You know, I dated him back in high school.

"That squirt?" asked Vince. "What's his name? Winky Waterhose?"

Peggy ignored him. Her eyes were focused on a commercial for hearing aids. "Vince, you need some of those. You've got terrible hearing."

Vince grunted and sat down in his Lazy Boy recliner.

"When you see a commercial for a new wife, let me know."

As the clock chimed 7, Vince aimed the controller at the TV. Suddenly, the tat-tat-tat of the Channel 3 News theme music boomed into the room at higher decibels than the commercials. Tim Terry's square face filled the screen, his wavy brown toupee barely concealing the white hair beneath it. To Lorna, the top of his head was mashed potatoes slathered with meat-colored gravy. She wondered if his hair tasted like roast beef.

“Stay tuned for Channel 3’s exclusive reporting on today’s shootings, arson, and impeachments,” he said. Behind his oversized head flashed pictures of crime scenes, fires, and Congressional hearings.

“Mayhem and murder,” said Vince disgustedly. “The world’s going to hell in a hand-basket.”

“Global warming,” said Peggy. “It’s making people crazy.”

“Climate nonsense,” snorted Vince.

The camera cut abruptly to a dowdy gray-suited man with a flushed face, looking nervous and uncomfortable in front of a map.

“I’m Walter Sprinkler. A long night of thunderstorms and possible flooding ahead. Keep it here for 3’s Storm Watcher Radar, up next.” The screen shifted suddenly to a commercial for flea and tick medication.

“See,” said Peggy. “The weather’s getting weirder.”

Vince huffed and got out of his chair, heading to the kitchen. As he passed Lorna he muttered to her sarcastically, “What do you think of global warming?”

Lorna shrugged her shoulders and sniffed. She wouldn’t dignify such an obnoxious question with an answer, especially as she hadn’t yet got the second bowl of ice-cream she wanted.

Peggy squinted at Lorna. “My, your nails are getting a little long. Mama’s taking you to get them trimmed and prettied up next week,” she said.

After a few minutes of slamming cupboards and searching the dishwasher for clean bowls, Vince shuffled in from the kitchen, carrying a bag of potato chips and a bowl of ice-cream.

“Why do you call yourself mama?” he asked.

“That’s what the doctor said when he brought her to me after she had that terrible surgery,” answered Peggy, “Here’s your baby, mama.”

Vince set the bowl on the table beside the couch where Lorna sat.

“Here,” he grumbled. “Don’t say I never gave you nothing.”

Lorna felt like biting his hand, but the sight of more ice-cream made her reconsider.

As Vince stuffed his mouth with potato chips and Lorna delicately consumed more ice-cream, Peggy stared at the beauty unfolding before her on the TV—Karen Walker’s toothy smile had appeared, her shiny face framed by shimmering gold curls.

“Rain forced the annual citywide Pet Parade inside the Convention Center downtown, where hundreds of people showed up to escape the storm and see the crowning of this year’s winner,” said Karen Walker in her sing-song voice.

Images appeared of proud owners with prancing poodles, a slobbering Doberman dragging its owner across the stage at the end of its leash, and a Shiatzu sitting smartly in a tuxedo, wearing a ribbon for first place.

“Wasn’t Len’s wife winner of the Pet Parade last year?” asked Peggy.

“She’s ugly enough to win,” said Vince.

“No, moron,” Peggy said, “I meant her Labradoodle!”

“Whatever it was, they got it blessed or something at their church,” said Vince.

“Maybe that’s why it won. They must be Episcopalian,” said Peggy.

“Episcopalian is next to being nothing.”

“Maybe they’re Methodist?”

“Methodist is next to being nothing,” Vince grunted. He turned up the volume. “Shh, the weather’s on.”

The dreary-looking weatherman wearing a tight-fitting suit stood in front of a blue screen crawling with red, orange, and green blotches. A massive red amoeba-like blob inched towards the city where they lived.

“A severe thunderstorm warning is in effect until midnight, with the chance of flooding and tornadoes,” he said.

A swift gust of air swung the wind chimes outside. Startled, Lorna looked up and saw crackling white light sketching the sky, jagged sparks flying from the electric lines beside the house. Her skin tingled, and she thrust her head under the couch pillow.

“Should we bring in the plants and patio furniture?” asked Vince, nervously.

Peggy didn’t answer, her eyes transfixed by the television.

“Isn’t he beautiful?” she sighed, gazing at the pudgy weatherman pointing at the super cells marching closer to the word, “Taylor.”

“To think that he once took me to Homecoming...” Peggy stared at Walter Sprinkler with a dreamy, faraway expression. “And now he’s a famous weatherman...,” she murmured, her body perched on the edge of her chair, motionless.

Lorna thought Peggy looked like a frozen grasshopper stuck to the icy pavement after a freak snow. Very unappetizing. Shuddering, she turned away from Peggy to peer outside at the darkening sky and steady gray showers. Another sharp and sizzling crash of thunder shook the house, this time closer, and the Live Oak in the middle of the backyard lit up like the gray and white skeleton they had hung on the front porch during Halloween.

Something visceral, ancient, almost animal-like gripped Lorna; a primal sort of fear shooting through her entire body, making her feel she had to escape. Even ice-cream couldn’t hold her back.

In sudden panic, Lorna leaped from the couch and ran towards the French doors.

Vince, who had risen from his chair to throw away the empty potato chip bag, saw Lorna furiously pushing and bumping against the door.

“Peggy, your baby wants out. Should I let her?”

Peggy didn’t answer. Tim Terry had taken over the television set. Fascinated, she watched his potato and gravy hair as it slipped to one side of his head. The wind and rain were beginning to sweep into the Channel 3 studios; Tim’s jacket fluttered, and his red and white tie had begun to flap.

Vince opened the doors, which jerked back violently against the wall as the pressure of two feet of water suddenly rushed into the living room. Gray and frothy, it crashed against Vince

and Lorna, pushing them backwards in its raging torrent. Lorna screamed and scrambled up Vince's leg and onto his shoulders, wrapping herself around his neck.

"It's a flood!" he shouted, bracing himself against the current.

He waded forward to grab the door handles, but another enormous swell hurtled towards him. It came pounding like the ocean before a hurricane, and Vince lost his balance, falling headlong into the deluge, which receded rapidly, dragging him outside, with Lorna now clinging to the top of his head. He was pushed against the Live Oak tree in the middle of the backyard. Reaching out, he grabbed its slick trunk with both arms, hanging on desperately. Above the noise of the television, the wind chimes flapped fiercely, like an off-key requiem played by a black-suited organist.

Inside the house, Peggy exclaimed, "I do believe he's going to lose his toupee!"

As Tim Terry's hair blew off, the camera panned to the weatherman clinging to the top of the desk, shouting, "This is a regular Noah's Ark kind of storm, folks! Better get your scuba gear!"

Peggy's burgundy easy chair had begun to float on top of the water, her pink slippers feet dangling above the swirling flood. Her eyes were fixed on the screen.

The TV remained immutable and cold, holding steady on the bookshelf as the water grew higher.

Lorna jumped off Vince and clawed quickly up the Live Oak, scrambling to find a thick branch. She reached the crook of the tree, scrubbed and glistening, the bark scratchy and wet. Her fur flattened to her body in the pelting rain. She was a skinny, four-legged creature wondering who would feed her ice-cream tomorrow.

As the TV sparked and went silent, upending, floating mute and dark against the water, Peggy stayed in her chair, aiming the controller at the set as it bobbed past her.

"Damn this remote," she muttered.

Vince and Lorna watched as Peggy swirled out the French doors, frantically punching buttons and cursing the television. She sailed past the tree, swept into the flooded fields beyond the house, disappearing into the night.

Lorna's green eyes never blinked.

Kylie Martin

Dream One: Crawling



Linda Crate

Kindness Costs Nothing

all of our sins
stand in our way
all of this blood
on our hands

i cannot endure
to see all the trauma
and destruction
in this world,

and i pray for healing;
i pray for peace
want something more than
nightmares

dancing down the streets
i want people to remember the
dreaming as i was able
to—

i want everyone to realize
that people matter
regardless of who they are
no matter what

we all bleed the same,
must we argue over things that
don't have any bearing or importance?
there are things that matter more—

we need to save the planet,
and we need to save one another;
we are all human
and we are all connected

it is time that we remember
to treat one another
with respect
because kindness costs nothing.

Lorraine Caputo
Saint Dancing

Inside the market, between crowded stalls, a band plays. Amongst the vendors dance women in bright blue *pollera* skirts, high-crowned hats banded with black ribbon, & men with scarves wrapped around chests, hung with baskets, jugs, toy llamas. Food, drink given to them dancing by, towards the exit.

The beat & shrill off-notes of the band follow behind, into the rain-wetted streets. Weak sun pools in the dents of tubas & French horns. & so they honor their saint this day, dancing through snarled traffic, through fume-bathed streets, dancing, dancing through the clouded noon.

Marc Darnell

Forecast: Increasing Visibility

This could be the year that someone sees me,
exposed beneath this fogged skin of fear
now tearing slightly in a state of frailty—
this could be a gratifying year.

Instilled in me that all endure the same
trials of living, whittles of the will,
the only way I'm standing is to claim
I survived a harder cut of hell,

and climb a sharper angle of ascent.
I wish I'd grown more vivid from the people
clouding me, who blanketed and went

with fractions of my worth, but I will find
the strength to light a flame so I am seen
as wiser than the bullies I left behind.

Mary Stojak
The Door

Tom found the green door under the pine paneling in his father-in-law's house. It was a foot high and half as wide, six-paneled, with a knocker and knob of tarnished brass. He thought about trying the knob. As a child, his wife Elaine had a bedroom in this attic, and her father, seeing a mouse hole, might have covered it with a door to amuse her.

The attic was full of junk like the pine paneling he'd been prying off the walls except for some books he'd set aside including a first edition of *Alice in Wonderland* and an old trunk. Two leather straps crossed the curved wooden top, and the tarnished brass latch attached to a short strap was locked. The key to the trunk had not been on the ring of keys the lawyer had given him.

A spider appeared on top of the cracked leather. Not a big furry one that begged for killing, this one had long legs attached to a small reddish body. He brushed the harmless creature to the floor and smashed it with his foot.

Tom could almost hear Elaine urging him to open the trunk. She was always coming up with these what if scenarios, her blue eyes widening as she talked. Tom had loved her red lips and her smooth, fair skin that had been so soft. The door was perfect just like she'd been before she disappeared.

The attic walls weren't thick enough for the small door to lead anywhere, not like the walls in his house. Elaine, wrapped and taped into a plastic sheet, had fit nicely into the space where he'd closed an extra doorway into the dining room. Opening it up again had been easy enough after he lost his temper with her. He'd driven her car into Dallas in the dead of night and left it in a parking lot before he reported her missing six years ago. The police had watched him for a while until they lost interest in her case.

His father-in-law had accused him of killing his daughter, but he'd still left him everything, including the trunk. Tom slid his screwdriver under the latch and popped it open. Under a bunch of frilly dresses, a small vial with a label that said "Don't drink me" had rolled into a corner. This must have been another game his father-in-law had played with Elaine. After Tom plopped down in front of the green door, he drank the vial's bitter contents while Elaine whispered how much she'd loved him. He was still big when he tried to turn the door's knob, but the world around him had begun to fade.

Mason Nunemaker
Water

I drink water
to stay hydrated,
ward off hunger.

I'm trying not to eat
so much. Trying
to trick my body
into thinking it's full.

My body is an empty
pantry, cobwebs where
the food should be.

My grandfather's brain
is a large, empty house
with all the pipes burst.

When he opens his mouth
it is unintelligible.
He only speaks
in water stains.

How easily our bodies
betray us. His mind
withering the way
my body won't.

He can't remember
my name anymore.

I can't remember
the last time I ate
without feeling guilty.

Maybe if I inherit the rotting
floorboards, his waterlogged
mind, I will be one
cohesive thing.

Mike Lee

A Language of Silence

In the hospital room at Morningside Heights, Stacy and I stared at each other. With the constant mergers and closings, I keep referring to the hospital as St. Luke's, when it is actually Mt. Sinai. Likewise, my neighborhood hospital was Beth Israel, and now Sinai and the old hospital where my daughter had taken ill as a toddler—St. Vincent's—was being rebuilt as condominiums. Change happens in a hurry.

In Stacy's case, it was in a series of moments leading from waiting for a plane in Austin when her heart began to race, to a taxi ride from JFK to her hotel in Manhattan when there was so much going wrong, she told the driver to take her to the nearest emergency room.

Later, she told me she remembered being on a table surrounded by perhaps as many as twelve doctors and nurses, stripping her blouse, tagging her with tape and such. They told Stacy her heart had stopped momentarily.

She was above it all, she recalled. I thought of the twelve Apostles. I'm Catholic. I easily think of those metaphors.

When I entered the room, Stacy sat up in bed, smiling, her eyes sparkling. I forgot the hospital gown, the IV in her arm and the surrounding monitors. She was seventeen again. How I wanted to remember her.

Stacy asked about my mother. What she was like. My mother died sixteen years ago.

I began to answer and then halfway through it, I asked about her.

Stacy began to cry.

I rose from my chair and held her, climbing up into the bed as she sobbed in arms.

Stacy only cried once before around me. This was over the telephone on Christmas morning, in 1979. She wanted an electric guitar for Christmas. Her father instead gave her a Hohner electric piano. She told me her father did not understand why she didn't want the piano, and through the tears expressed how disappointed she was.

That was what Stacy told me over the telephone that Christmas morning. In retrospect, she did not tell him, instead probably held those emotions in and let them burst out when she called me.

I remembered Stacy as the one who held it all in until she could not anymore. Now, at the age when you cannot not anymore, she let go and allowed herself to fall off the cliff.

For me to catch her.

Historically, Stacy found it hard to give trust. That was what I remembered.

Change happens often and quickly in New York. I walked into a semi-private room in a cardiac care unit in a hospital I often confused with another on an autumn afternoon.

Stacy is a great guitar player.

Naomi Flores
Dark Days

Dark days call for dark words.
I knew it would be cold.
Icy winds blowing across my rosy frozen face as I stand high and tall above the town I've loved
for years.
I am at the edge of sanity,
Again,
The place I've dwelt for nearly a year.
I wish I could say that I didn't know how I managed to get here
To this point
At the literal precipice of my last day of my life.
But I do.

I knew it would be cold.
Maybe other suicidal people black out or let their subconscious minds meander their way to
where I am,
At least metaphorically.
I am all alone up here on the top of this tower overlooking Belton dam.
I used to drive every Sunday past this tower, not even seeing it because of the beauty that lay just
beyond it as the sun broke through the sky and painted it with its colors.

A place locked in infinite beauty that I only could see through peripheral glances as I drove
across the two-laned road that bordered the still waters.
No, I know exactly how I got here.

My therapist always asks when I'm suicidal if I "made any plans."
I know it's to assess my risk,
and I know I'm not lying,
because I didn't plan this.

I didn't plan to buy the bolt cutters that broke open the gates to the very tower on which I now
stand.
I didn't plan on writing letters to the people who love me
and the man who lives in my dreams.
I didn't plan on slashing open my skin to relieve the pain that already ached inside me.
no.
I never planned any of this.
I chose it.

And sometimes, it seemed to choose me.

I used to be afraid of heights.

I used to be afraid of dying.

This used to be my favorite drive.

Where I once saw beauty, I now see opportunity.

Opportunity that I can't let go of anymore.

I knew it would be cold.

It's early.

It took much less time to get up here than I had anticipated.

The sun is still sleeping,

Waiting to wake the sky.

I can't decide if I want to see just one more sunrise or not see another dawn.

Dealer's choice, I guess.

Fuck it.

The past year has been hell. I think I'll give heaven a try.

One step.

That's all it takes.

The cold air numbs my face.

I wake from my thoughts.

I look down at my hands.

My pen rests gently on my thumb as I sit safely at park table 21.

Words scratched on the journal pages in front of me,

I look to my right and I see the tower.

Cars drive by

And I take another breath.

One step.

One mistake you can't take back.

Hundred of choices to get there.

Dark days call for dark words,

because dark words are better than dying.

Penny Jackson
Shredding

Who would think
such an ugly machine
so solid and dull
would be capable of
such violence?
The destruction of
each page
explodes in my ears like
a hydraulic drill.
Such steady industrious
sounds as each page
is neatly pared in
measured clippings
like the mowed grass outside.

He has shredded them all.
The letters when he was in Korea
The letters when she was graduating high school
The letters when she thought he died
And the letter
When she discovered he was alive.
All the letters my mother wrote to my father
All the letters my father wrote to my mother.
Two hundred and fifty letters.
What once were words
could now be confetti.

There is no explanation
why he bought this machine
exactly six months since my mother's
death.
It would have been better
If my father had just gathered the letters
in a trash bag
and left them by the curb.
Slicing them shocks me
as if a body had been

brutally mutilated.

My father walks outside
In the yard.
Stares at the freshly mowed lawn
And starts coughing.
He loved her but
Did not love what
She had become.
Dementia transforming her
Into something unrecognizable,
Not human,
Not her.

I kill
the horrendous machine
by turning off the switch button.
I wonder if I can gather
All those scraps of lined paper
Inked words
and fit them together
like a jigsaw puzzle,
but it's hopeless.

I join my father outside
who is standing beneath
my mother's favorite elm.
A sharp wind stirs
a charcoal cloud
into blotting out
the summer sun.
I take my father's hand
but it shakes so
like the leaves in the tree
that now shadows our front lawn.

Rachelle Bramly
Remembrance

Saguaro cacti, organ pipe cacti, prickly pear cacti—
they bloom too! Waxy white petals—
those reds, pinks, yellows—
instead, all I remember: tumbleweed: diaspora
detached from root system

rolling in the hollow windstorm. Desperately
I broadcasted my plea, but
the desert went on without me. I—
dwelt within a concrete valley.
Synthetic

lakes masked as oases
fake front lawns of rolled out sod
air-conditioned
cars, homes, and malls —
it was easy to forget the desert.

It was impossible to forget the desert.
Purple sandstorms, dehydrated monsoons
heatstroke at the waterpark
a panic attack on the twelve-lane highway
Once, a coyote in a parking lot.

I saw my first shooting star there
I saw the Phoenix Lights
I took sleeping pills during the day
& finally slept through the night.
It was a dreamless dream. When I awoke

sandstorms had sewn my eyes shut
stitched them at the seams. Sand
settled in my lungs, my nose—
pharynx & larynx coated thick—
I lost both my breath and my voice.

I did not see, I did not smell

the barrel cacti bloom. Or the cholla,
the brittlebush, the desert marigolds,
the scorpionweed—
I did not learn their names. I did not

Speak their stories—what was there to tell?
Sometimes we imbibe best through memory
the heart follows suit and starts to yearn
to thirst with a sand-parched throat. Rawness
requires revisiting to maintain control.

So I revisit. The evening primrose
the indigo bush, the blue palo verde—
I will return to you!
vast Sonoran Desert.
I will see your flowers.

Rachelle Bramly
Ode to a Found Feather

Found fallen by a felled tree—or was it a grave?—
in the curvature of bark shaped like an inverted drum
you waited for me to arrive.
You, plucked by a windstorm
from the tail of an osprey hawk,
twirling and whirling like the seed of a maple tree
came to rest by decomposing branches—
fluffed-up plumage presenting itself
like a permission slip to be sacred, whole, and wild.
You, who traveled in wide-open skies,
a passenger aboard a ship-in-flight,
an appendage shed like autumn time—
now tucked behind my ear.
You are my headdress, my crown:
your plumage is henceforth my own.
I dance to imagined percussion
barefoot in a Gary Oak meadow,
and you dance along.

Robert Beveridge
Session

Only saloons and the mental wards
of hospitals have those doors that swing.
The day room lacks a bartender
but is oversubscribed with cap guns.
Patients leap to their deaths
from tabletops while the head nurse
juggles pantyhose eggs
half-full of Compazine and dirt.
Seven times a day the whistle calls
group therapy sessions.
An hour of silence: we listen
to our own voices, watch the shadows
of bars move across the floor
sun the color of rye.

Robert Beveridge
Bloodletting

It is time
to take the razor
and score the binds

it is time
to stop the minor wars
that hide our mouths

it is time
to sever the flesh
that conjoins us

the blood released
to fertilize the earth
could be true
and thus, we could face each other

Robert Okaji

Nothing More Than Everything

I wait, but only leaves brush the door.
Longing for one fragrance, another finds me.
The gray sadness blankets my dwindling hours.
What comforts more than the bird's flashing wing?
Two numb fingers spell the elbow's failure.
The choice of no choice.
I demand nothing more than everything.
Distance gnaws its trapped foot.
The fretboard lies cool under my hand.
Tea lurks in the ceramic cup.
Freedom lives where the sun sets.
Your lips will fill the emptiness.

Sarah Henry
Pin Oak

The tree in my yard
is clamorous.
It riots each fall,
shouting,
“Look at me!”
The racket never stops.
It runs on in perpetuity
like an endowed chair
or attention to a grave.
Jays call from
the branches, noisily.
Squirrels abound.
Leaves cover the ground.
I’m a raking machine.
This afternoon
will end soon.
Panting, I rake faster.
The leaves become
waves heaving
to a curb like a shore.
There are more where
they came from,
making the usual
demands. As always,
I knuckle under
to their weight.

Sean William Dever
Body as Husk, Being as Disease

morning's mist
trudging through
the enclave of shells
roach-like creatures
feelers, antennae,
multi-legged monsters roam
down Boylston
off to work at big-money marketing firms
grab a bite of overpriced happiness
or to buy the newest Nespresso

i found this
molted mass
new/used costume
discarded, no longer in use

this husk, not my own
not as man or monster
me as disease embodied
disease as soft form
eager to breathe
however caustic air
polluted atmosphere
keeps this shell wretched over

once i escaped the container
large metal cylinders
where me and those alike
are tossed
when born without exoskeleton
relocated outside of medical wards
living to wait
and wait to be drained
of our sweet lifeblood
inadequate, unable to bathe in the outside air
our bodies, sacks
means of survival for the roaches

i nestled inside this shell
four tentacles on my upper-half, two on the lower
slid my ballooning form inside
this found, lucrative means of hiding

i wade across the Public Garden
sift through the trash
discarded wrappers, containers
eat the abandoned gelatin quick

they approach
i coil my tentacles back inside
stiff-bodied soft mass
nod and salute my “fellow breed”
but they sniff
and sour their noses
aware of my charade
one thrusts their pincer-like arm
into a space between this home

blood trails behind me
sweet, sugary, glowing florescent yellow
suckle me, a flower blooming, bursting

the cracks in my tentacles seep, deflate
as i hurry this husk away
lead them down the street
until I am backed against an alleyway along Newbury St.
littered with other hollow corpses
the roach-people pry my body open
shell breaks, punctured
they pierce my would-be torso
crack my spine
and spill me out, shucked
i expand

the sunlight stains what’s left of me into the sidewalk
crescent into the air that stains the soft bodies born to die

Vanessa Caraveo
A Nightingale's Ballad

Dusk gradually makes its
intriguing presence
with vast stars above
 an abysmal dark sky
each representing a hopeful wish
from a foolish soul that will never
 come to see the light of day.

I can hear him
singing the same song as last night
for he too wishes to annihilate his solitude
with an exquisite serenade
 in such somber abyss.

Through his ballad
I feel I am one with him
 the same heart
 same soul
same naïve faith for a change of fate.

My sorrow is infinite
just as those boundless stars in the sky
uncontainable tears and endless regrets
are my forlorn symphony
 of yesteryear.

His alluring melody
echoes through the obscure abyss
in the distance now
becoming more difficult to hear
 his serenade becoming only a
beguiling memory
of a dismal night without end.

Vivian Wagner

Falling

He only saw the “I,”
not the “we.” One cup
in the cupboard.

45 years together.
Who cares where
you put my iPod.

She held him like a
Ming vase covered in feces.
Nostalgia.

Upset because we argue?
Peace and quiet:
The grave’s caress.

W.B. Cornwell
Another Autumn

It is time for summer to rest, entering its long slumber
Autumn brings with it a brush to paint the leaves red, gold and umber

The sky changes as well into patches of grey and white in various hues,
as it gradually forgoes its soft and innocent blue

The air transforms becoming chilled and crisper
and wind ever so gently rushes, just above a playful whisper

The harvest-toned leaves will quickly be falling
as time moves forward knowing soon a new season will be calling

October is but a flash of outrageous opalescence
November is too over swiftly leaving a nostalgic presence

Just like that, another autumn is over and will be forgotten
As it ushers winter with white snow that falls like cotton

W.B. Cornwell

Hidden

In the weed-covered and nearly all but forgotten, once hollowed land,
I search for them — William and Eliza.
Their blood courses through my veins and I am part of their legacy.

I walk the long path of patchy gravel.
I enter the lot of land where many bones are at rest.
The lawn is full of fallen branches and debris carried by the winds.

I look at the headstones, once grand and marvelous works of craftsmanship,
Now chipped, crumbling, and forgotten.
Many unreadable, some slowly swallowed by the earth- those that remain at all.

How did we let this happen?
Here, where Civil War soldiers lie, where town founders ended their journeys,
and where babies, taken by the scarlet fever epidemic, sleep.

How do we let legacies die?
How do we allow our ancestors to be lost in time?

How do we let their burial places become ruins?

As I walk row by row, I try to make sense of it all.
I read their names, the names of some of the streets in town.
I see the faded dates and I wonder, will I be forgotten in 100 years?

Finally, I find her name and the dates match the family Bible notes.
An obelisk marble monument, now moss-covered.
Hidden by weeds and marked with a lightning-bolt-like crack.

Next to her, I see his stone, her husband who followed years later.
His stood tall on a slab of puddingstone, rough but intact.
It showed his company and regiment, an honor to his service.

I stood there for a moment in the country silence.
I removed the weeds and cleared their area.
I left flowers and him a flag, a sign that they were still remembered.

William Doreski

The Last New England Elegy

We won't feel the same about ferns
bronzing in the October gloom.
We won't smell the burnt blue gossip
hazing above the village.
These modest deaths have wrung us dry
and left us fragile as wasp nests.

Vermont has become a monument,
while Maine has stuffed its pockets
with stones and stepped into the sea.
New Hampshire's flannel shirt has torn,
Rhode Island has paved itself flat.
Connecticut no longer cares,
Massachusetts repents in sighs.

You read the map from south to north
while I scan it west to east.
We will never feel the same
about the snarls of numbered routes,
about the folds and tears and stains
and the mapmaker's famous colors.

These little deaths have severed
interstate highways and stranded
motorists who were driving drunk
with all of their zippers undone.
The grief has sickened the maples,
which will fail to bud in April
when only flowerings count.

Can the outer planets console us?
Tonight, they'll shrug right up to us
and lave us in toxic ammonias
as we sleep off the steepest angles.
What's left? Our surviving pets
mutter in their private language
as the good garden soil turns over
and over, restless and gnostic
as it sorts its worms and grubs.