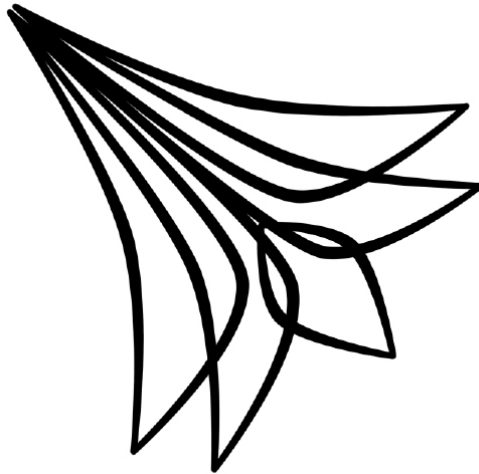


AGAPANTHUS COLLECTIVE



Fall 2022

HEARTH



The Agapanthus Collective
Issue # 4: Hearth
Fall 2022

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

Hearth is the home and the fire, the crackle of familial drama and the blaze of places that belong, places unforgotten.

Thank you for picking up this issue, which celebrates the theme of hearth and explores its various meanings with the works of our lovely contributors. As always, we're so honored to share this issue with others, and we hope this heats up your cool winter days.

Much love,
The Editorial Team

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A Kind of Gathering

Greg Bell

Shall we gather at the river?
Can we gather at the well?
For this moment, we must forbear

It's winter now, the river's frozen
Isolation keeps us from the well
—this strange cave of hibernation—

Here we gather in the ethers
digital hearth of our clever devices
connection without touch

And so we zoom & zoom & facetime
and plot to find a way
of reaching through the screen

To touch the home
of your hand

**for the opening of "The Village Well Bookstore" during the pandemic*

Getting Lost

Ed Ahern

Alders and scrub weed,
once pushed through
yield to popple and firs,
crouched under moving in.
The crows and buzzards,
flies and wasps,
are left behind in sunlight,
but the mosquitos abide
and bedded down deer.
The hot breath of long grass
gives way to damp rot
splayed out in the bowels
of mature hickories and oaks.
There are no trails
nor anyone alongside,
nor sunlight allowing
guesses at direction.
Shapes without pattern
decayed aromas enveloping,
sounds muted into silence.
Gentle upwelling of fear
sharing me with delight.
A forest to which
I can't belong
but want to.

In This Soil

Sonia Charales

The coconut tree
Swaying with their coconut leaves
Reminds me of home

Do I belong here?
In this soil
When my roots are planted
In another nation

They say,
"You can't plant a coconut tree
Not in this soil"

If I make this soil my home
I can plant new roots here

Thengende bungi
Rajyattinre ormakal

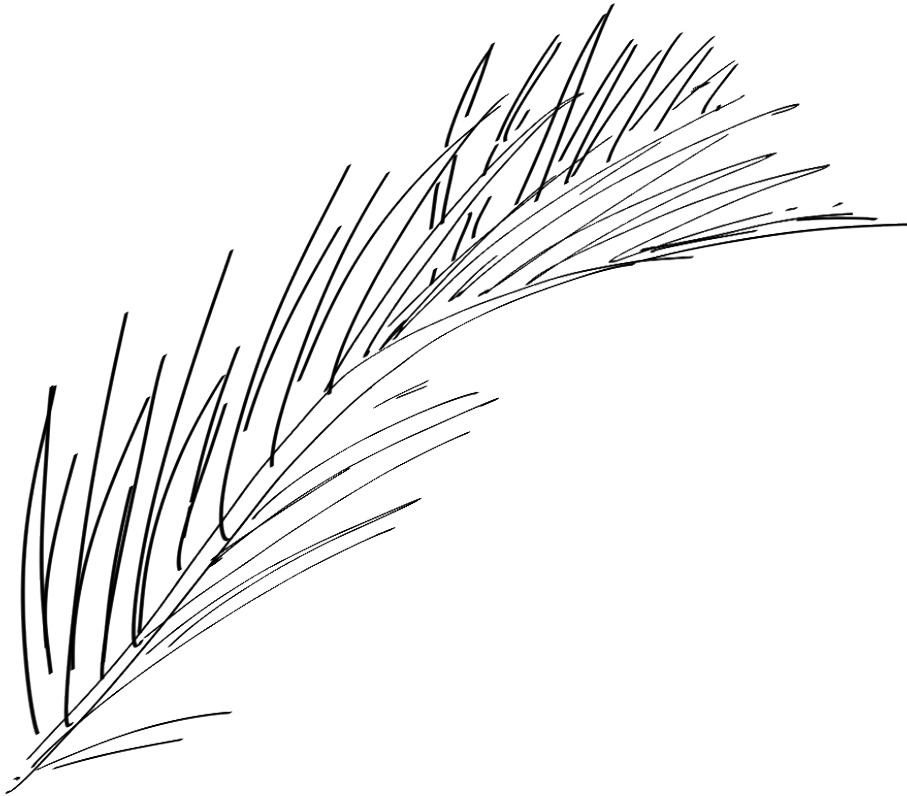
Theng poyal
Veedinde sookam illa
Ente veede alla
Evidai anne ente veede?

Apole njan parayam
Sramikkukam
Njan sramicall
at valarum

Thengende bungi
Pinne ondagam

But then they will say
"You can't grow a banana tree here
Not in this soil"

Apole njan parayam
Sramikkukam
Ee mannil



In This Soil (translation)

Sonia Charales

Theng

Avarute thenngeyute ilakalumayi sanycarikkunnu
Veedinekkuriche enne ormappettunnu

The beauty of the coconut tree
Memories of country

Njan ivitte untēā?

Ee mannil

Ente veerukal natumpoll

Matroru rajyatte

If the coconut tree leaves
The home loses its comfort
It is not my house anymore
Where is my home?

Avare parayunnu,

“Ninnalku oru theng maram natan kariyilla

Ee mannil alla”

Then I say,
I will try
If I try
It will grow

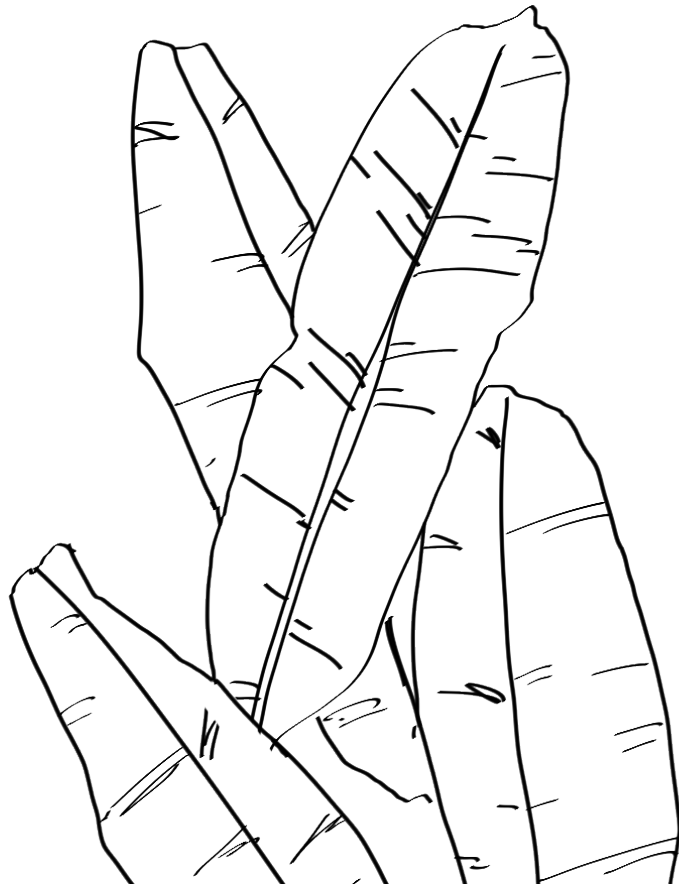
Njan ee mannine ente vittiakki marrukayanenkil

Enikk ivitte puthiya veedukal natam

The beauty of the coconut tree
To have it again

Pakshe avaeer parayunnu,
"Ninnalku oru varamaram natan kariyilla
Ee mannil alla"

That is when I say,
I will try
In this soil



Two Dreams About My Mother

London Johns

April 4th, 2021

Tonight, it goes like this:

in the long line watching her back,
both waiting to disappear without return,
she turns and stares across my face
and I feel towards her what in my grief
I had almost forgotten:

pity.

Like waking in the darkness on the floor,
like the cobweb in the MRI,
the black dog snarling in its sleep,
the splash of coffee from the shattered cup,
her remembered face is damp
as she begs me to explain
that most important question.
I wake without an answer.

April 13, 2022

Stumbling again with the grim promenade,
the light of disappearance
opens to us, a welcoming mouth.

The grayness of the air
scrapes at my throat, the grayness of her back
and of her cotton shirt, her hair, her life
dripping from my eyes, the gray knowledge
that all the time containing both of us
was never enough to say: I know you and I love you anyway.
The distance between two human beings is as assured as a last conversation.
The impenetrability of light is as sure
as a second breath. Her memories slip
off, sacred until they aren't.
This time, before she leaves, she doesn't turn around.

Yogurt and rice

Swetha Amit

Your hands were full of care and tenderness. Your palm stroked my cheeks. Your fingers were dipped into a bowl of frothy white yogurt, craftily mixing boiled rice with it. Sprouts of mustard seeds embroiled in the creamy white rice. A dash of salt. Your pink wrinkled fingers held the tiny balls of yogurt rice, coaxing me to take a bite. Cools your system, you'd say. And what stories you'd tell. Tales of the jungle and faraway kingdoms.

Your face always wore that smile. Even when I'd push the bowl away. Even when I'd say how your yogurt and rice tasted like vinegar. Even when I'd holler for that bar of chocolate. Never did I once see a frown on your face. Never did you raise your voice like my parents. Not when that time when I cut your hair while you were sleeping. Not even that time when I accidentally drowned my newborn baby sister in the tub. You'd always call me your princess. Despite my tantrums. Despite my impudence. Despite my surliness. You'd always lock me in a tight embrace even when my parents almost disowned me.

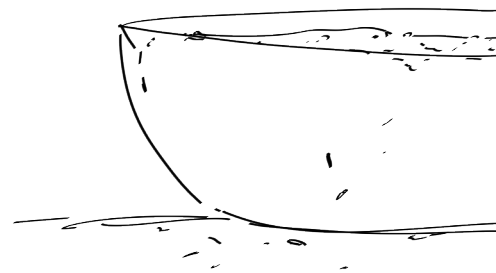
Your loving face, grey streaks of hair in a bun, adorned with a string of jasmine flowers. The scent lingered in my nose as I'd swallow a bite of that yogurt rice. Over time, I learned to relish the creamy white balls of rice, masticate them, and let the taste of the mustard seeds linger in my mouth. Sometimes, the salt in the rice interspersed with the salty droplets of water that occasionally trickled down my face. You'd rub them gently, leaving a trace of a white streak across my flushed face.

The yogurt and rice did eventually soothe my nerves. A sense of tranquility emerged with a bite of the yogurt rice ball. Was it just the frothy liquid or the warmth of your

hands? I couldn't tell. Maybe it was the latter.

Probably that's why after you fell sick, I experienced fits of rage, and violent outbursts, resulting in nights at the juvenile home. While you were on the hospital bed, counting your days. I still remember the day I came home to your still body, eyes closed, your face so tender and loving. I never touched yogurt and rice again. Not when I was grounded for playing hooky at school, not when I was slapped for trying my first cigarette, not when I was caught drunk driving. Until today where I was served some at the juvenile home.

Hot tears run down my face as the nurse hands me a bowl of yogurt rice. Spruts of mustard seeds, exactly how you'd mix it. I long for your pink wrinkled fingers to stroke my cheek. To feed me that yogurt rice, tell me stories, and call me your princess. As I take a bite, the fragrance of your flowers lingers, and I feel your tender fingers wiping the tears running down my flushed cheeks.



Dr. Mukherjee's Magic Gas

Nick Sweeney

"Somewhere warm," Nana parps over American Idol. She worries at a tooth with her tongue. I see a stab of tooth pain. I know what that is. She crams a cookie in her mouth anyway, then almost in the same movement stuffs one in mine. She says to Bubba, "Big Aztec."

And Bubba might be batshit crazy, but at least *she* knows Big Aztec isn't warm, and says so.

"It was warm that time we went one July," coughs out neighbor Sarah. For a time, I thought Sarah lived here. I think *she* thinks she lives here, too. Stuff moves in her throat. She takes the coffin nail out of her mouth so the smoke goes in my eyes. I blink. My e-number count stops me fixing my attention on it long enough to get pissed about it.

"I can't go to Big Aztec." Papa takes a mangled pen out of his mouth and looks up from his *Enquirer*. "Not with my complaint. And... anyhow..."

"What?" Even I look at him, though I know what he's going to say.

"The... thing."

"What?" There is something I'm beginning to recognize as mischief in the repeated word this time.

The *thing*. None of them want to say it: the *virus*.

"Hey, look at this." Nana wipes a mix of potato chips and candy from my front, and says to me, "You okay there, Benny?" And to them all, "I can always tell when he's sick over something." They nod heads with a look I now know means, *yeah right of course – sure, whatever*. They lean anyway, make noises that amuse me, though not in the way they think. More funny is their orange peel skin and the grey veins under it, their dirty teeth, and the dust glued onto their glasses with cooking oil and nicotine.

"Not Big Aztec," Papa slurps through the peach he's eating. Why does he take his teeth out soon as he comes back from the bookie and before he eats? The only time you need your teeth is when you're eating. And why does he park them by the ashtray, all pink and disgusting and, gradually, covered in ash? And how the actual living fuck does he *mangle* those bookies' pens, with no teeth? And, as he can barely read and write, why the fuck does he grab a handful of those stubby bookies' pens each time he comes out of the bookie anyhow? Every drawer in the kitchen, and every ledge, is full of child-size bookies' pens, some chewed, but most pristine. I suspect if I could ask, nobody would know. He finishes the peach, with some noise, and puts the hairy stone in the ashtray, and observes, "I didn't like that. It was too... dry." He pokes at it with his ciggie. "I can't go to Big Aztec."

"True, that," Nana remembers.

And it's not the thing – the *virus*. There is no good reason why the virus won't visit the Big Aztec resort with its ghostly vibe. I think of hospitals.

"No way is it as bad as Stevensville," says Sarah. "Didn't have the right pills for Alan's funny turns. Disgraceful."

Stevensville lingers on in legend in the house. For a long time, I thought Stevensville was some guy, maybe the old bastard who comes in every morning early with the *Enquirer* for Papa and the *Globe* for himself, and sits at the kitchen table and drinks tea and looks fat and is loud and smells. But that is Sarah's husband Alan.

They all say, "Yeah."

Sarah goes on, "The specialist refused to see him, said it was indigestion."

They bob their heads like professors. Or like those plastic head-bobbing dogs with one eye skewed, that both Papa and Alan have in their cars, and, in their hundreds, in the garage, making them look like dog-lovers. They're not. Papa just knew some idiot *thief* who stole two thousand of them by mistake, thinking they were something with some value, and who could barely give them away till he found an even bigger schmo to buy them off him: Papa.

"And the doctor that saw him turned round and said he should stop eating big meals late at night." I can tell that Sarah has a *noutrage* coming on. "I says to him, 'Hey,' I says, 'he can't help it if that's when he eats.' I got sick over that too," she sniffs. "With the worry of it all."

"I had to wait." Papa doesn't care about Stevensville, it's plain. He returns us to what is on his mind. "In Big Aztec."

When I hear the word *hospital* I imagine it as a place where people do nothing but wait. Like a bus stop. Or Disney World.

"They made him wait," says Nana. She fills that little word with a sense of doom. "I told them he couldn't, but they made him, all the same. It was cold in that corridor. We both got sick over that. Then they wanted to give him a *ninjection*."

"I can't have no injections," says Papa.

It's true. Because he can't face injections, he pulled all his own teeth out. Not all in one go. That might have been worth seeing.

He can't use no hankies either. Blows his nose on the towels. Fucksake.

"I *told* them that," says Nana. "I said, 'He *can't* have no injections.' I demanded to see the specialist, but he was busy, they said, and they turned round and said we had to come back next morning. And then they couldn't give us a time, just said we had to wait, along with everybody else."

"I had to wait," Papa tells us, just in case we missed the last hundred times he told the story.

Sarah leans over to Bubba and asks, "How did you get on at the hospital last week?"

And Bubba says, "I still can't see properly. They don't know what it is. Maybe it's the..."

"The what?"

"The..." She looks round, seeking help. None comes. "The *thing*."

"But why don't you wear your glasses?" Sarah, for once, has a point.

"They're no good for her," Nana says. "They're the wrong glasses. I told them. I said, 'They're the wrong glasses.' But they keep doing tests and giving her the same ones. That's the third pair this year."

Bubba says, "They turned round and said it was a waste of their time."

"It's a *noutrage*," Papa says. They look at him a second.

Nana says, "Those drops don't work, either. And she had to wait. I told them, 'She can't wait,' but she had to. There's something going on at that hospital."

I used to get excited when I heard this. I used to think the world was really full of what are called *conspiracies*, all against my grandparents Nana and Papa, and my great grandma Bubba, and their neighbors Sarah, and Alan. I don't, anymore. It's just people who keep turning round and saying things to them. Why don't they deal with people who are already facing in their direction? It may well be because of the gas.

"They're trying me on different pills." Papa shakes capsules from a little bottle into his hand and shows them to Sarah. They look like sweeties. Maybe he'll forget himself and pass me one as he says, "Those last ones were no good."

Sarah takes one in her yellow fingers and says at once, "Alan's had these."

Noutrage from Papa. He shakes his head. "Not these ones, he hasn't. These are new ones, never been used before, and you can't get them unless you're sick with something like what I've got. They *told* me."

Sarah goes, "Oh, well, I don't want to contradict you, Maurice." She does, really. "But these are definitely the ones Alan had. Only his were bigger."

"No they weren't."

The words rest in their own silence; he saw them, then. Papa looks up a second, to see if he has been caught out. He has. By me. I think he gets the uncomfortable feeling that I am looking at him, going, *caught ya, you old liar*. And I am. He says, "Anyhow, they were smaller."

"They were the same." Sarah makes her nose go up and down when she says this. I want to reach up and give it a push, fix it back into place. "Only bigger," she squeezes out in a breath.

"How many did he have to take?" Papa holds his little bottle up, looks at it like he doesn't want it anymore. He puts on a face only I can see, a little green face, with a glow behind his eyes that goes from pale yellow to chemical-fire orange.

Sarah says, "Two after every meal." She remembers things like that, but I know she doesn't remember to take a bath. She doesn't remember to brush her teeth or clean her glasses, either.

I wish she wouldn't keep picking me up.

"I have to take three after every meal." Papa scratches himself behind the ear with rapid movements that remind me of a dog doing the same thing, with its hind leg.

So Sarah says, "Are you sure about that? Here, show me the bottle." She holds out a claw for it, but Papa keeps it out of her reach.

He says to her, "Says on the bottle two after every meal." His voice goes high. "But the doctor said to take three when it got bad."

Nana changes the subject. She says, "The doctor turned round and said I should give up smoking." Well, *kind* of changes the subject. "I says, 'I don't think so.' Then she said I ought to go to the dentist."

"Well." Sarah sounds naughty. "She should know. I mean, she's the doctor."

"She's too *young*," Nana says. "They're always too young, these days. They don't study properly, you know, not like they used to. It's a known thing. No, it's my sinuses. I told her that. She turned round and said I might have to have some operation. I can't have no operation, I told her. Doctor Mukherjee said that, he said,

'Miriam, you can't have no operation.' He was lovely, Doctor Mukherjee, wasn't he, Mum?"

Bubba nods, says, "Yah. He never made you wait, Doctor Mukherjee."

"And he always gave you the right pills." Papa shows his gums in the smile he thinks I like, for some insane reason, kind of what he thinks is, the word is *fond*. "I had any pills I wanted."

Dr Mukherjee is gone; he lost his life to the thing – the *virus*, while fighting it in its early days before we knew the word *pandemic*; like David fighting Goliath, unmasked, unprotected, but finally unsuccessful. His good work lives on, though. I often wondered why they all let out so much gas. I'm always closer to their butts, though, and I know now. And as they talk on up above around my head I watch them, fascinated, as they quietly lift cheeks and pump out that gas.

They think I don't matter, because I'm not full-formed. They think I can't see, and can't hear. They think I can't smell. Even I know now that if you eat lots of, it's called *bicarbonate soda*, your guts protest, and you brrp and brrp till all the extra air it makes has been made into gas and let out. That is what good Dr Mukherjee prescribed, and what his followers continue to give them, baked into pretty little pills and stuffed into lovely little capsules, because they can't be bothered to turn round and argue with them anymore.

"So Big Aztec's out this year," Sarah reminds them, and they go, "Oh," and "Hmm," and, "Well." They will find their place to go on vacation, I know, and they know too, and this makes them all happy. They will grudgingly put on their masks and get into their cars and find a town where people all smell bad, with toothache smiles on their faces, holding grandsons and daughters making their own faces. But where they never have to wait. Under the cloud of gas that covers it, they'll spot that town from a long way away and, like balloons when you let them go, will get there, aided by the power of Dr Mukherjee's magic gas.

Anatomy of a Worm

Robin Ray

When I come back, it'll be as a shameless red
wiggler worm, blind, in love with a shadow I cannot

see, afraid of the dirt trapped in my five hearts.
I'll writhe in my sleep as if awake, elastic thoughts

of the flesh careening from dream to dream. This
is how I'll plan providence – over a deck of cards.

My climate is too intimate for compost. I'll hold
the poppy field trails in the grooves of my skin;

intensity is flesh. My brother was an alcoholic,
then became a limousine – long, sleek, black

like the hair of a Japanese ghost. Night crawlers
like myself believe the Book of Blood is a hunter's

"how to" manual. We scamper, hide, some feign
death, but we all fall down. There's my self-portrait

as a tortoise shell. It's the wild in me, the untamed
delusion of fantasy. When I come back, it'll be as a

chameleon disguised as a shameless red wiggler worm,
afraid of a simple deck of cards.

Oxygenation ramification

Dina Miranda

If you sit still enough I can see
a semi permeable heart. Under it
is more heart and then just blood.
You know you remember a year
ago I wasn't even halfway here.
Look how far we've come, see it in
my cells and in my rods and cones
and bones. I don't think that was
mine on the floor all that time ago
but it sure was red. I am happy we
can clot together again, how far I
was from you, suspended in the
steady drip of self inflicted whining
machines and all that. Now it's all
skin and a slow osmosis of those old
tears falling back down into my eyes
but I can deal with that.

Non-Combustible

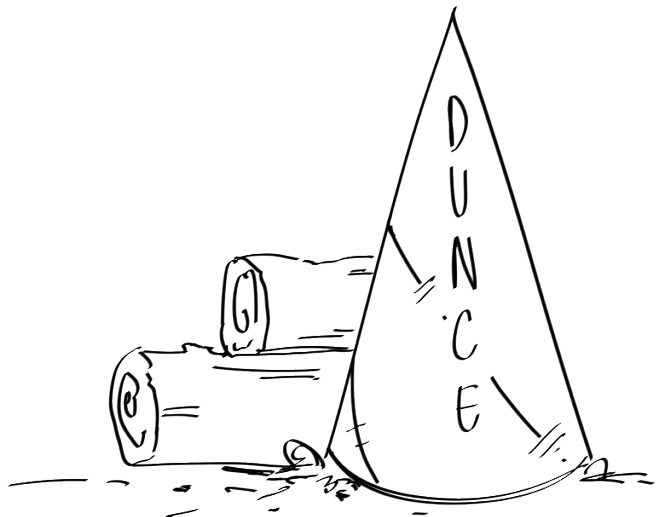
Donna Langevin

My brother jokes
that I look "ready for the grave,"
brings in two logs
and a handful of kindling.

As he stokes the fire, I fume
and fold his unread newspaper
into a dunce cap
imagining it on his ash-white head
until the flames consume him
and my own rage is quenched.

He comes back, almost eighty,
not as the taunting dark-haired teen
I wanted to kill when he nicknamed
my boyfriend "The Lobster"
nor the middle-aged debt collector
with his coal-black humour,
but as he is today: my beloved,
warm-hearted younger brother
who bakes cookies for me,
treats me to shows at the Legion
and laughs when his dog licks me
as we hike the old railway line.

His bones, brittle as chalk,
body, held together
by strawberry stitching from failed surgeries,
maybe his inflammatory jest means
he just craves my company,
hoping I will cross over too,
soon enough.



The Last Stroke

Swetha Amit

For many days and nights, I watched her cough. Blood dripping out of her mouth. She would place her hand on her chest, wincing in pain, and hobble from one room to another. That's when I saw a man in a white coat come in and shake his head with a grave expression on his face while I swished my tail. My instincts told me something was terribly wrong. After he left, I jumped on the bed. She gave me a faint smile as I snuggled next to her. Her tender fingers stroked my head.

Those same fingers that rescued me from the ditch. Pelting rain, my mother's limp body in front of me, the cold breeze brushing against my skin, and my stomach grumbling for a piece of meat. And there she was, with her blue eyes, creases of wrinkles when she smiled, luscious grey hair falling below her shoulders. She took me home, fed me slimy salmon, and sang in her beautiful voice that sounded like the gentle whisper of the wind.

She never said a word when I'd venture out alone. Not when I'd come back bruised after a fight with that tiresome skunk in her backyard or that annoying barking neighborhood dog. My claws dripped with blood, and she'd pick me up, gingerly wipe the red stains of my golden-brown fur. "Now, Ginger, be a good boy and stay out of trouble. Can't afford to lose you too." Salty droplets of water trickled down her face, and on my well-groomed fur. I'd escape her clutches, sit in one corner of the room, nibble on the slimy salmon she kept for me, and watch her luscious grey hair shedding like the trees shedding leaves outside her window.

I wasn't sure when I realized she'd be gone forever. Was it the time when she gave me those extra cuddles while fat blobs of tears ran down her face? Was it the time

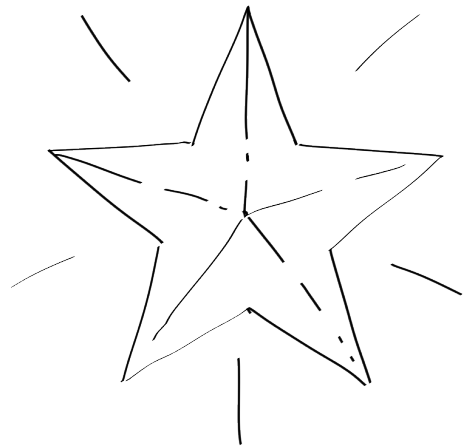
when I saw the empty patch on her head? Her face was deprived of the sheen as she lifted her arm weakly and motioned me towards her. I knew it would be her last breath, any minute. I huddled beside her. "Be a good boy Ginger, will you?" she whispered. "I wish you stayed home more often." I moved my head when she tried to stroke me. "Please don't be annoyed, Ginger." I continued feasting on the salmon.

And then her body became still. Just like my mother had been in the ditch. No more coughing, winching, or hoarse breathing. Her face looked peaceful. I ate the last piece of salmon and watched the last leaf fall from the tree. I put my head outside the window. A cold breeze tugged my skin, and little rain drops kissed the ground and my face. When I blinked, I was surprised to see the droplets of water trickling down my whiskers taste like salt.

Grasping

Richard LeDue

The fan is making my knees cold,
while I wonder where all the mosquitoes
have gone, or if I should close the window
before I go to bed...
no one ever told me about any of this
when I was getting all those gold stars
in school, when we were getting all
those gold stars in school, when the sun
was so much warmer, and ice cubes
only watered down drinks,
instead of cracking
as they cooled them down- the grocery bags
on pay days strangling my fingers,
even in winter,
but never numb enough
to lose anything yet.



Cycle

Robert Beveridge

And so he died there
in his motel room in the ashes,
fleshy fingers burnt
by half an starved cigarette,
an unfinished novel
spread in front of him.

Can you offer me sanctuary from this fate?

LSD, nitrous oxide, absinthe at the Cabaret Voltaire;
LSD, marijuana, Southern Comfort at the Sportsman's Club.

Laugh along with me at my own heart's blood
I've left my notebook at home
and those people want to make love to you
knowing, in this room,
only I will.

Later that night,
the lights of the Horsham Motor Lodge
invade the pounding headache
that drives me to find a bed.
You go in,
the night desk man knows you
and likes to flirt.

Middle of the night,
I wake up, a half-remembered
poem stirs me
and I grab for the pad
on the nightstand

but my hand touches
only your warm breast

I whisper my now-forgotten poem
to your dreams
and you turn
clutch me in your sleep
whisper "never let me go"

And so he died there
in his motel room in the ashes

The Hairball

Mary Salome

Dismantled mantel in a sidewalk splay
My passage fresh with disinfectant spray
I hold my breath, "good morning," look away
In San Francisco's greedy disarray
The price is worth the privilege, so they say

A hymn for the world we dream about; a lament for the one we live in now

Kara Dunford

I.
We speak in language large enough
to wrap the world in its caring arms.

Our capacity to help, boundless.
Our willingness to understand, infinite.

We are led to action.
(Which is another way of saying we are led to love.)

The grocery stores are for shopping.
The classrooms, for learning.

II.
Was there a time before
we were on this road?

Perhaps it's all we've ever known.
(Perhaps it's all we'll ever know.)

You'd do anything to collect the pieces
blown apart, make them whole

this place being what it is: unfinished, at best.
(Though we fear far worse.)

Where is hope?

Uncertain it will ever come.
Afraid it will never come.

Here sits the stack of letters we wrote
to who we want to be, unsent.

Here languishes the suite of songs we composed
for the world we imagined, unsung.

22:28, Ann Arbor, MI

London Johns

Our future returns on nights like these,
acrylic threads melting in black-car heat,
next February a spider clinging to the windshield,

the specter of passed headlights in my head
nagging the mental splinter of our arguments.
I keep cutting you out like a gangrenous limb

and choking on my teeth to keep the peace.
A deer holds back and doesn't run.
Nobody in these woods knows how to love.

Once I made the day give up on breaking —
now every night I set and set and do not rise.
When I told you I liked it I was lying.

Even God knows only half of it.
Lost together, I ask him in my mind,
is there any part of this for which I'm not to blame?

Let's both tell the truth this time:
whether or not we make it home safe,
something is always lost.

Contributor Bios

Ed Ahern resumed writing after forty odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He's had almost four hundred stories and poems published so far, and six books. Ed works the other side of writing at *Bewildering Stories*, where he sits on the review board and manages a posse of nine review editors. He's also lead editor at *The Scribes Micro Fiction* magazine.

Swetha Amit is currently pursuing her MFA at University of San Francisco. She has published her works in *Atticus Review*, *Oranges Journal*, *Gastropoda Lit*, *Amphora magazine*, *Grande Dame literary journal*, *Black Moon Magazine*, and has upcoming pieces in *Morning Fruit Magazine* and *Poets Choice* anthology about masked faces. She has also published a memoir titled 'A Turbulent Mind-My Journey to Ironman 70.3' which received a special mention at the New York book festival. She was bestowed the prestigious Tagore Literary Award in 2021. She is an alumni of Tin House Winter Workshop 2022 and the Kenyon Review Writers' workshop 2022.

Greg Bell is a recovering actor who says he knows nothing. The nerve! He's never taken a creative writing class, but he claims to have studied at the feet of the master—Shakespeare. Ha! He has a minor claim to fame as the model for the holographic image of Shakespeare on the NatWest Cheque Guarantee Card, but it could just be pub room braggadocio (though he does have a book of poetry out called *Looking for Will: My Bardic Quest with Shakespeare*).

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *Flashes of Darkness*, *Fairy Piece*, and *Take Five*, among others.

Sonia Charales is a South Indian American writer and artist. Her work involves exploration of South Indian culture, multilingual ideas, the beauty of nature, and healing. Her work appears most recently in *antonym*, *Suspension Literary Magazine*, *Perfumed Pages*, *The Firefly Review*, and elsewhere. She is in the process of becoming an optometrist.

Contributor

Bios

Kara Dunford (she/her) is a writer and nonprofit communications professional living in Washington, DC. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Brave Voices Magazine*, *Fahmidan Journal*, and *boats against the current*. She serves as a Poetry Editor for *Overtly Lit*. Find her on Twitter @kara_dunford.

Phyllis Green has published photography in *MIDWEST ZEN* and *RIP RAP*. Other art has been in *ArLiJo 123*, *Wild Roof*, *Gulf Stream magazine*, *Novus*, *New Plains Review*, *CERASUS*, *FERAL*, *Superpresent* and many other journals.

Originally from Chicago, IL, **Lee Johns** is an undergraduate student at Yale University. Right now, they are probably in a library, a forest, or a contemplative mood. Their poetry has previously been published in *Body Without Organs* magazine.

Donna Langevin's fifth poetry collection, *Brimming* was published by Piquant Press, 2019. She won first place in *The Banister* anthology competition 2019 and also in the Ontario Poetry Society Pandemic poem contest 2020. Winner of a second place Stella award, her play, *Summer of Saints* was produced in July 2022 by Toronto Metropolitan University.

Richard LeDue (he/him) currently lives in Norway House, Manitoba. He has been published in various places online and in print. He is the author of six books of poetry. His sixth book, "A Hard Homecoming", was released in July 2022 from *Alien Buddha Press*.

Contributor

Bios

Robin Ray is a writer and musician from the Pacific Northwest of the US. As a poet, his works have appeared in *Caribbean Writer*, *Gargoyle*, *Hawk & Whippoorwill*, *Delphinium*, *Blue Moon*, *Newtown Literary* and elsewhere.

Mary Salome (she/her) is a queer Arab- and Irish-American writer and media activist who lives in San Francisco with her partner, their dog, and some semi-feral cats. She has produced radio, video, and web publications, and is currently a Digital Communications Supervisor at the University of California San Francisco. Her prose and poetry have been published in *Sojourner Magazine*, *Food for our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*, *Tiny Seed Journal*, *Instant Noodles*, and *Archive of the Odd*, among other publications.

Nick Sweeney's books include a hapless lover's jaunt around Poland in *Laikonik Express* (Unthank Books, 2011), an opportunist's wander into the wrong part of Silesia in *The Exploding Elephant* (Bards and Sages, 2018), and a look at genocide-surviving gamblers of 1960s Nice in *A Blue Coast Mystery, Almost Solved* (Histria Books, 2020). *The Émigré Engineer* (Ploughshares, 2021) is about a man who escaped the bullets of the Russian Revolution only to find plenty more in Prohibition America. His story *The High Life* (Wordrunner, 2021) was nominated for the 2022 Pushcart Prize. He lives and works on the North Kent coast of the UK.

