

Circle
Show

22



Summer/Fall 2020

22



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Volume 22
Summer/Fall 2020

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Cover Art

“Rose Bush”

by Ellerslie77

Dmitry Blizniuk

A Woman in the Window

A woman has taken off the curtains and cleans the window –
the house wipes its glass eye,
taking it out of the plastic eye socket,
and the unprotected window
looks like a fragile laboratory beaker
holding the pure alcohol of electricity.

The First Moment

The first moment after death:
the electric snow of oblivion
is tingling the soft apricot pores of the cooling brain,
slowly burying in some yellow stuff
the enormous black statue
of your ego.

-translated from the Russian by Sergey Gerasimov

Quinn Carver Johnson
& Todd Fuller

Another Year

By the time another year
offs itself, maybe a new lover /
car / job / home will walk
through the door, be laid up

across the counter; maybe a war,
(another war) cooked up to
sweep all our poor / ambitious
(boys & girls) away and ship

them overseas on a mission to
take what was never ours;
maybe new enemies for us to
hate, or perhaps another look

into the lavish lives of the rich
and powerful; maybe a son, or
a daughter; maybe a crib and
a nursery painted bright,

dizzying colors; maybe a train
beside the coast; maybe a window
seat; maybe an empty one and
a body looking to fill it; maybe

laughter over a couple drinks.
Maybe, if we hope long enough
and nothing else, it will *all* fall
into place.

In Preparation for the Child

I could cut remnants out of the sky
and hang a story above the newborn
like flowers upon a grave.

I could rattle off tales about
the heroes of the constellations,
all the ways they used their wit
and cunning to outsmart malicious
monsters or the ways they trumped
the delicate gods,

but I'd rather my daughter not grow up
on poems about Zeus, the brutal swan.

I will not teach her that she belongs
locked away, waiting
to be saved.

My son should not be prepared
to take arms against an ocean of men,

ready to die so that his name may live on
forever in crowded taverns and noisy beer halls.

Should either of them decide to play football,
I will teach them to think of themselves,
not as gladiators or titans, but as dancers and
actors and artists on the field.

I will teach them that these are
strong things to be and that
it takes nothing to leave it all

on the field, but requires everything
to remain constant and true. I am not

raising martyrs and queens; instead
I will raise them to be kind and generous.

I will warn them against the hands
of King Midas and teach them
the proper way to toss starfish,
 like Frisbees,
 back into the frothy surf.

I will sand down the rough edges of
their hands until they are soft and smooth

callused only by guitar strings
and honest work: a hammer or

a pen—and teach their fingers to open
themselves like oysters to the world.

Lazarus

Gyrating fans in the sanctuary and
sweaty prayers stuck to the spine
every Sunday of my youth in that
dusty old memory of a home. Back
then I thought there was nothing I
could not do, that so long as Jesus
was involved there could be NO
failure, NO damnation, but now—
now that I've left home on my own
righteous endeavor to help *the*
poor, to follow in the footsteps *of*
the Lord—I see the trouble in one-
time miracles. I'll bet it all went to
Lazarus's head. I bet his folks went
straight to Jesus the next time he died
and that poor guy had to look them
in the eyes & find the gumption to
proclaim *you only get one*.

I've heard about lottery winners—
and I've had a few walk through the door—
that they're never happy with winning,
that they end up spending it all,
or their friends find a way to take it,
and they're worse off than they were
before. That's the problem with this whole
miracle thing: it's always temporary.

T. Clear

The First Cold Morning of the New Season

Wasn't it only yesterday
I walked out into buttercup sunlight
and a bowl of ripe tomatoes
still warm from the vine?
I cursed the heat I knew
would follow my footsteps
over crackled summer earth
as the day grew yet older—

All I can think of
is how we've spun in circles to get here.
The speeding-up of time
each of us has witnessed
dizzies me with disbelief.

Try as I might
to reconfigure planetary rotation
so as to let linger
the dahlia, the romano bean,
once again I find myself
giving in to autumn.
Every year I learn to love again
the abscission of each leaf,
that delicate measure between now
and when I become young again.

Teddy G. Goetz

Fermentation

Sappho was the one to coin
Bittersweet,
Except they translated it wrong.
In her voice it's
Sweetbitter.

Just like the crumbling relationship it described,
Something got lost along the way and
We learn a winner's history.

~~

Four months from both when we began to break up and when we
finished,
We split open a cacao fruit in the Belizean jungle.
The soft pulp cradling each seed was saccharine, yet tangy,
Forgettable, but for an acidic tingle
Whispering of catalytic possibility.

The guide instructed to spit our seeds sucked clean,
But I've never been great with following commands,
And bit instead,
Releasing a taste reminiscent of
That which is being preemptively mourned.

The journey to a chocolate bar begins with being left to rot,
When the shroud of sweet erodes away the bitter beneath, polishing to
Unearth? Create?
An unexpectedly full flavor,
Rounded-out by resolution.

The last gift she gave me was a bag of unprocessed cacao beans:
Proof that stagnancy can stave off deterioration,
At a confectionary cost.
Their aftertaste hung heavy on my tongue,
Echoes begging for the balance needed to become.

Forsaken

For 6 months I resisted invoking “deadname”—
Worsening my melancholy from misrecognition
By feeling additionally culpable for proving my mother right:

By becoming a man, I was killing women.
Never mind that I am not a man.
Never mind that I was thrown into a universe pact

Without Consent:
A life would be taken,
The specific sacrifice was up to me.

Scared Eyes on the street label the choice:
Girl or boy?
Girl or boy?

My own mirror reflects exhaustion:
Truth or lie?
Truth or lie?

How do I invite you to
Celebrate losing the girl you loved,
Without revealing that:

She would have disappeared regardless.
But having a Dead Name,
Is a luxury of the Living.

This is my invitation to
Celebrate my survival.

Revelation (6)

The Greek meaning of apocalypse is not
Impending termination,
But rather
Uncovering.

This becomes my mantra as, cornered cliff-side,
My legs tire from fleeing stampeding hoof beats—
I flirt with the edge of
Identity Implosion.

I used to dream of scalpels.
Age 10, wishing I could peel away the barrier to my ability to hug
myself,
Is this what womanhood is—
No longer able to feel self-love, isolated from my own heartbeat?
The diet industry suddenly makes sense,
Attempting to reclaim lost lightness.

I used to dream of scalpels.
Age 22, entranced by the surety with which hands move under OR
lights,
Is this what womanhood can be—
Putting that Girl Scout sewing kit to use, stitching broken bodies,
not buttons?
As sealed and secure as their suture, I decide to join them,
Seeking training to mend my unnamable mourning.

I gave up dreams of scalpels. Yet,
Age 25, my unquenchable verve has been best conveyed by my use
of a
Yoga Ball Chair;
I don't know what it means that I can no longer breathe while
bouncing.
I reflect better in my camera lens than mirror, and
Suddenly see what has never entered my chosen frame.

I don't know whether this is
The End,
Or a Divine Gift of glasses.

My only answer comes in the calm quiet when she
Caressingly calls me,
Teddy.

Ajay Kumar

Bliss Station

Where is your bliss station?

You have to try to find it.

-Joseph Campbell

is a white fish with a green tail
floating over a yellow leaf
lives in water climbs the waterfall
becomes a dragon.

is any arriving train we get
in the vendors' wagon of
& find no vendors.
there are seats only around
the sides as if the government knows.

but they don't really.
the tallest building in town
never knew shit.

is the big things kept in small places
compressed but not to scale
like gods in a green box
of second-hand books
like body pickled in soul.

is tucked up comfortable
in an auto-ride wanting it
to *don't stop* for the feeling
of always going somewhere
blue-black bag on my knees
long sleeves waterfalling
over my wristwatch caves of time
concealed in myriad grey.

is arriving shortly on
platform no. as-far-as-fucking-possible.
maybe it is the maybe
the ifness of it all.

All at Once

shells on mountain-tops.
the battery of a shawarma truck.
we're almost there in a rickshaw.

the triangles our shoes
make with the wall
scalene hollow
how almost-there we are.

the stars have no connection.
no part of the body a story.
crustaceans walking to a sea
that somewhen was.

the problem with our triangle
is that anyone can walk away
& I still cannot imagine tomorrow
or the metaphor the blue light is
in the back of the rickshaw.

what taut shape can two dots make.

no star calls the other second cousin yet.
the story of the thumb cannot explain
the scar far from it.

but there should be a tomorrow.
there must be one.

Over the Square Nest

I.

with the fear of icarusing as a hidden lid
the birds all fly off I stay with feathers
heavy & small legs rooted beak reaching
the closet of twigs I would have made
would be opened inside- chinese model ships
with japanese on their sails french perfume
from dubai airport belgian chocolate
seahorses 6 mixed flavors about 32 chocolates
much there-aboutness of my beak
to the fruit flying fish reaching tantalizing.

II.

it is raining.
only the elders of the desert chant
when it rains.

they're birds falling in drawn dark drops
the crows were cawing at noon
as if they had a feather
in the snow of the sun's peak.
water in the heat floods.
I am rising the nest floating
& little boats trying towards it.

III.

like a science project the universe is falling
drop by drop moon-dead-weight planets flagellated
grabbing whatever it can like a baby bird with gravity arms.
there were actual drops of water pity on the elders' faces
as they hooded up against the desert wind.
the nest is rising still & distant familiar voices dock
one by one by one.

Luna Dragon Mac-Williams

3 Scoops

Syd rolled up in their Ma's purple Jeep. Bucket hat, bracelets lining the arms, blasting Lauryn Hill & saying "It's so good to SEE you." I slid in, smiled at them & their hand-painted jeans, their Ecuadorian dangling decor on the rear-view, their good ass vibes that hang in the air like home-cooked dinner smell. Car & us grumbled to the rally, to get the fucking cops out of public schools. Two weeks later, the board struck a no.

*

I high-heel-on-the-sidewalked (noisy & also crusty masc attention) up to Rust's front door. Checked twice it was the right one. Sat in the lawn chair chained to the fence. They ambled out, Angry Birds backpack, big white tee w "COWBOY SLUT" sharpied on, offered me a fry & I snagged it like a bird. Talked ab how they can't stop making alebrijes & I can't stop using ampersands. Set off down Cermak to the "Honoring our Trancestors" march & performance in Plaza Tenochtitlan. Had to get back before too dark. But that goes w out saying.

*

Esther & Sam scored me in the square. Blue/pink/yellow skates tossed over her shoulder, his blades slung on his. We popped

out a name/sign/city of origin (she was just a girl I met on Tinder) but she laughed into me (the gay way) the first time that walk to the train stop. She said she got her braids done in colors like Shego, I said is that an anime, she said I could stick around. We hit up the FroSkate protest downtown, busting our shit & busting out w sweat-slick laughs & wisecracks. Devil Dawgs after. A promise to see each other again.

*

May the scoops never run out. May we always show up for our people. May they be waiting, but never too long.

Self-Care

I am holding space for all my
uglies & my insides. It is quite
the balancing act. My birthmark,
bone, my bristle. With the whistle
& kiss of my lightest. They told me
they try to treat themselves like
they're their little sister. Maybe I
should start to sneak-tickle myself,
wear my clothes like I stole them
from my closet. Make myself tea.
Maybe I alone should sing duets till
I run out of songs in this world.

Natalie Eleanor Patterson

Cackle

is the disturbed song of my heart. A drum that reminds me it beats only when I walk past, a flimsy flirt of birchwood so thin the light almost shines through. How the string pulled taut must always and eventually break—when I was a child they called me *ghost*, then *witch*. The thing is, when you do not want to touch someone, you make up reasons for why they are untouchable. Like it or not, we're all the inventions of other people, but only in the vaguest of terms. Remember how Demeter blessed the infant by setting him to sleep in a cradle of fire? Myths are only effective when referenced incompletely. To mourn one child you set another aflame. The thing is, it's better to be on fire. You will be otherved all the same.

BenzOde

I love you. I swear to God I love you. & you get
so little credit. You know, he used to knock
on my bedroom door on nights when even the cars on the main road
went quiet behind the pines, when I was busy reading or acquainting myself
with the blankness of my wall, & ask to watch a movie or have a round of chess.
How tedious, the game of fatherhood. How difficult
to play. He used to be the one reading to me,
a children's Bible or *The Chronicles of Narnia*. My favorite parts were always
the thwarting of Death, the lion or Son rising triumphant with the morning.
Now, I am unbothered. & I know what it is
to be obsessed, know how everything else just falls away, the sloughage
of weeks & months napping themselves to oblivion
on the year-stained couch. I'm not mad
anymore. I love you. I love you even though someday he will rest for a moment
in front of the TV, some Republican manifesto open on his lap, & turn to stone,
the wear & tear of forever sitting in loose-limbed silence. & somehow
I will love you still, because I must. Until the thwarting of Death
again. Until the lion or the morning brings him back.

elegy for hours lost to rehab

dad, your plastic eyes are beady when you cry,
your face a pulpy mass of rain. dad, you crushed your lover's bone
right under your foot. she cried, too. dad, you left
your bed unmade, sweater hanging from the banister
like so many dead things. sobriety misses you like your mother does, too.
dad, it's not the season. do you remember when I fucked up
the recipe for key lime pie on your birthday & it tasted like battery acid
but you ate it anyway, right out of the tin at the dinner table,
while she & I looked on in stunned silence?
dad, you taught me how to read. now all I am is a repository
of secrets, keeping only the company of strangers & learning what it is
to not be kept. I will tell them everything,
dad, so watch out. with untitled voice through the fine-haired rain, I will tell
them everything.

Alise Versella

The Curve of the Hip Loved Candidly

How many naked photos of me
Taken lovingly
Exist in the ether between
The space where
Deleted photos go?

What if you kept them
The one where my ass looked good
In the shaded afternoon light

What if it helps you sleep at night
Then I will let you have that
That piece of me not violation but beacon
Lullaby in the night

I take a nightcap from the bottle of gin
And recall the eyes of ex-lovers and how
The light swam inside of them

Sometimes I catch my own eye in the side-view
Mirror
How the sun catches brown
And the black rim
The kaleidoscope layers of iris
Fragile like paper

How it all detonates in a blink
The dislodged eyelash a wish

I collect paper—
Ticket stubs and receipts
Proof of us in ink
Stamped dates

Everything I love, kindling
Can evaporate like ash in water's care

Does the image of me hover there
In memory
In cornea
The deepest recess in the cave of the brain.

Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb

Memories of a Night on The Farm

The place was my punishment
for cutting school twice one week
and the advice of a psychologist
who authorized the arrangement
for me to be transferred out
of my family to what they called
The Farm. A pastoral setting
would do me well, give me time
to settle down, the man who
never raised a teenage daughter
reassured my mother. She believed

him when he said the open space
would allow me to reflect
on my behavior but never told her
he knew the woman who ran
the home for wayward girls
and got paid for each child discarded
on the flower-potted porch. I was one
in a room that slept four, the only teen
there who had attended public school,
the only one who came from untested
privilege. Because the raw streets

never owned my world, my life
became the others' game. Tamed
by sleep, I never heard them creep
up to my bed until my head
was partly shaved, my pocket
radio stolen, wisps of fading music
awash with whispers, girlish giggling
as my shadowy roommates fled
the house. It was long past midnight
when my parents got me, just in time
to see the horse on fire in a nearby field.

Em Walling

I wait for the phoenix

Everything is roaring and raging. The plane's engine as we cut through the Pacific wind and sky. My heart as I begin a new journey of deconstructing and reconstructing myself. The bushfires as they raze the land and steal homes and hope. The ocean as it sings every day for those who listen to the songs. The lightning as it strikes the earth and sky with energy. The heat sucking up the calm and replacing it with dread.

But all I see are untamed fires. I can't complain; I hate to feel like ice. Like arriving at a stop, I get off the train.
I wait for the phoenix.

Outer Places

During a period of isolation—
the best way to look at the universe
is to lie down on the sidewalk outside of your house,
on your back, legs slightly bent to avoid
spine pain, when the sun is only a stroke of violet
or mulberry
or azure
or scarlet
or whatever color it chooses to be that night.

But other people are outside doing
the same thing. So you have to
make sure you're laying right in front
of your house, or on the corner of your street;
run back inside if you must, or use the corner
to stake your claim of that view of the sky.

Ignore the other people outside, breathing in the air
around you. They will walk past, thinking
you're intoxicated,
or you fell off your bike
or got hit by a car
or confused
or dead.

But you're not.
You're just a person on the
sidewalk, laying,
trying—
searching for a world where the
air won't suffocate you.

Quiet Places

Let them all come out when we are gone.
The dragonflies to land on empty benches
with barely worn paint. Butterflies eating from flowers
that will never get pulled out of the ground
by any human.

Birds landing on temporary fences placed
around playgrounds.
Litter blowing across the roads and into
the trees, with no one here to
pick up the pieces.

Beetles singing in the woods, with no one
to hear. More birds in the sky,
with no one looking up at them.

Unfinished homes, with no one
here to construct them. Only skeletons
with no skin. Cars blocking the streets, metal
bodies corroding and newly dented from hail.

Rain seeps into mailboxes, moistening bills
and letters never to be read. The water bleeding
colors across the pages.

Picnic tables to never see spilled alcohol or melted
food stains on them. To never be the cradle for
conversations about the oddities.

But the sun will always shine down, a scorching fire
with no one left to burn.

Unlucky

After some time, the daily routine breaks.

Waking early to shower. Cleansing hair with apple-scented shampoo. Smoothing cream to calm the frizz. Boiling water to make multiple cups of hot black tea. Teaspoon of honey. Video chats with family and friends. Walks around the neighborhood, empty sidewalks. Then the easy part: write, nap, eat, sleep.

The routine stops working. Waking up early changes to waking up late; the prior evening spent lying in bed with worries pouring out. Clumps of hair come out while showering. Frizz turns to knots. Teaspoon of honey turns into a tablespoon. Teeth ache from the sweetness. Exercising in the neighborhood turns into awkward passes with people afraid you'll breathe on them and their children. Then the hard part: sleep, survive, awake, don't break.

Laurie Welch

Sonnet for an Unloved Tulip

And yes my heart is sear and hard
to hear. I don't know, am I meant to
make a picture of my heart before
the black was added?

Was there ever a time before the black
was added or was it always what was
made up from there: forever finding never
enough inside of nowhere?

I gave up all the clutch I once had again.
My husband was the Knight of Cups
and I drank him up. I pushed his hand
away and folded

my brute heart bleeding a bit and needing
to be hugged like a life in the forest.

Contributor Notes

Dmitry Blizniuk's most recent poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *The Pinch*, *Salamander*, *Willow Springs*, *Grub Street*, *The Nassau Review*, *Havik*, *Naugatuck River* and many others. A Pushcart Prize nominee, he is also the author of *The Red Forest* (Fowlpox Press, 2018). He lives in Kharkov, Ukraine, and is a member of PEN America.

T. Clear is a co-founder of Floating Bridge Press and Easy Speak Seattle, a bi-monthly open mic venue. Her work has appeared in many magazines and anthologies, including *Cascadia Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Scoundrel Time*, *The Moth*, *The Rise Up Review*, *Terrain.org* and *Take a Stand: Art Against Hate*. She is a lifelong resident of Seattle and is on the editorial team of *Bracken Magazine*.

Todd Fuller has two books published, *60 Feet Six Inches and Other Distances from Home: the (Baseball) Life of Mose YellowHorse* (Holy Cow! Press, 2002) and *To the Disappearance* (Mongrel Empire Press, 2015). He serves as co-director of OU's Mark Allen Everett Poetry Series and as an adjunct faculty mentor for the Red Earth MFA Program at Oklahoma City University. Recent work has appeared in the *Journal of Working Class Studies*, *Flint Hills Review* and *Red Earth Review*.

Teddy G. Goetz (he/they) is an overly enthusiastic medical student, writer, photographer, biker, and research dork, with an MS in transgender hormone therapy and BS in biochemistry and gender studies, focusing on interdisciplinary scientific research informed by individual embodied experiences. His (artistic and medical) goal is to help people feel seen. More of his recent work is available at teddygoetz.com.

Quinn Carver Johnson was born and raised on the Kansas-Oklahoma border and currently attends Hendrix College, pursuing degrees in Creative Writing and Performance Studies. Johnson was an editorial intern at Sundress Publications and currently serves as the Editor-in-Chief for the *Aonian*. Johnson's work has appeared in *Rappahannock Review*, *Right Hand Pointing* and *Flint Hills Review*.

Ajay Kumar lives in Chennai, India, where he's pursuing his BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Madras. His poetry has appeared in *Rattle*, *The Bangalore Review*, *Praxis*, *Vita Brevis*, *Runcible Spoon* and *Dream Noir* among others.

Luna Dragon Mac-Williams is a poet, playwright, actor, dancer, jeweler, and arts educator. She teaches theater, writing, and their intersection with activism through After School Matters in her hometown of Chicago. She is an undergraduate student at Wesleyan University and a narrator and writer for *The Ice Colony* podcast. She has recently been published in *Ariel's Dream* and *SWWIM Every Day* and is soon to be published in *Inverted Syntax*.

Natalie Eleanor Patterson is a half-Cuban femme lesbian poet from Georgia working on her BA in English and Creative Writing at Salem College. Most recently, she has work featured in *Sinister Wisdom* and *Hunger Mountain*. She has also received a Katherine B. Rondthaler Award in Poetry and a Best of the Net nomination. She is assistant editor of Jacar Press.

Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb's poetry has appeared in *About Place Journal*, *High Desert Journal*, *Clockhouse*, *Weber: The Contemporary West*, *AJN: The American Journal of Nursing*, *Terrain.org* and other journals, with work forthcoming in *Sonora Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, and elsewhere. She has been an educator, a researcher, and an editor, and is co-founder of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit natural history press.

Alise Versella is a Pushcart-nominated contributing writer for *Rebelle Society* whose work has also been published in *COG Magazine*, *Entropy*, *Enclave*, *The Opiate*, *Penumbra Literary and Art Journal*, *Ultraviolet Tribe*, *What Rough Beast*, *Steam Ticket* and *Elephant Journal*, among others. Versella has worked with author Francesca Lia Block and Women's Spiritual Poetry, whose latest anthology, *Goddess: When She Rules*, raised money for the Malala Fund.

Em Walling's visual and written work can be found in *Apeiron Review*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *The MacGuffin*, a poetry anthology from Shabda Press, and other journals. She has recent work in the *Erase the Patriarchy* anthology from University of Hell Press. Em currently resides in Australia but has lived most of her life in northern Ohio.

Laurie Welch earned an MFA in Poetry from the University of Nebraska. Her poems have appeared in *Sugar House Review*, *The LA Review* and others. She is working on her first manuscript entitled *Birdshit*, exploring the premise: If birds are a symbol of the soul, then what is the meaning of their shit?

In This Issue

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