

New Poetry by Shawn McCann: “All I Can Do Is Watch” and “No Way To Fight Back”

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New Poetry by Kathleen Hellen: “People Boats” and “Pretending There Is A Garden In The Spring, Paradise In Time”

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New Poetry by Lawrence Bridges: “Time of War and

Exile” and “Taking an Island”

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New Poetry by Matthew Hummer: “Amortization”

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New Poetry by Almyr Bump: “Plowing Water”

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New Poetry by J.S. Alexander: “Sabat”

New Poem by J.S. Alexander: “Sabat (Loyalty)”

New Poetry by Ben White: “Cleaning the M60 – 39 Years and January 26, 1984”

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January 26, 1984”

New Poetry by Kat Raido: “Blood Goggles”

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New Poetry by Luis Rosa Valentin: “Desperate Need of Help”

Desperate Need of Help

[Luis-Rosa-image](#)

New Poetry by Jim Kraus: “Amphibious”



ABOUT TO DISAPPEAR / *photo by Amalie Flynn*

AMPHIBIOUS

In Hokusai's "Kanagawa Wave," the boatmen
look like a school of masquerading fish
about to disappear into the vast trough between waves,

the scene a masque for the knowing seascape.

Underwater, Ahab,
pinned to the great white
creature, like a wave that has
disappeared into silence.

In memory's slow dancing,
flesh now dissolved,
seafloor muck covers bones
and shark-tooth nodules.

Out of the bubbling methane,
Ahab is reborn with tripod limbs
and tiny feet, the wooden leg
now a trail of seafloor slime,
amphibious.

New Poetry by Carol Everett Adams: "Rabbit Trails"



THE TEXAS DUST / *image by Amalie Flynn*

RABBIT TRAILS

in the Texas dust. We're flat in the dirt

so we can poke around down there with a long stick,
while above us bullets fly and children

hold up their honor roll certificate shields.

You say blankets are the answer,
and backpacks and better officers and armed teachers

and doors that shut like Vegas vaults to keep your money safe,
keep your money safer than my child.

I forgot what we were talking about.

New Poetry by Lisa Stice: “Our Folklore”



FIND MYSELF LOST / *image by
Amalie Flynn*

Our Folklore

Long ago, you were molten rock, and I—
well, I spoke the language of bears.

But now that I have been out of the forest
for so long, all the words and grammar escape

me, and I often find myself lost. And you—
well, you are often mistaken for a statue

in this solid state. No more rumblings and
agitations. We are both quiet these days.

**New Poetry from D.A. Gray:
“Cactus Tuna”; “We Return
from the Holy Land. God
Stays”; and “Reverse Run”**

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**New Poetry from Tanya Tuzeo:
“My Brother, the Marine;” “My
Brother’s Shoebox;” and “My
Brother’s Grenade”**



WAR HAS DONE / *image by Amalie Flynn*

my brother, the Marine

the recruiters come weeks earlier than agreed—
arrive in alloy, aluminum with authority,
military vehicle blocks our driveway
announcing to the neighborhood
they've come for a boy here
who will have to go—
though he sits at the top step
and cries

i follow them,
strange convoy to Staten Island's hotel
where all the boys are corralled—
farmed for war, becoming weapons
of mass destruction

when before they picked apples
at family trips upstate

a hotel lobby—last stop before using lasers
to blow off golden domes,
silence muezzins in the crush
of ancient wage and plaster—
Hussein's old siberian tiger left thirsty,
watches other zoo animals
being eaten by the faithful—
just like a video game

i clamp onto my brother
beg him not to go, we could run away
he didn't have to do this—
recruiters quickly camouflage me,
am dragged outside—my brother lost
did not say goodbye
or even look at me.

my brother's shoebox

the room across the hall is inhabited again,
home now from another tour
like sightseeing from a grand canal
where buildings are art
and storied sculptures animate street corners—
my brother returns a veteran.

i want to remember who this person is,
or at least, find out what war has done.

he leaves with friends to drink—
that is still the same,
later tonight
he might howl at our parent's window
or jump on my bed until the sheets froth,

uncaring and rabid.

but i don't wait for him to come home
and begin searching the room
that is his again.

it is simple to find
where people hide things—
a shoebox under his bed
that wasn't there all these years
furrowed by sand
and almost glowing.

i open to find drugstore prints,
rolls of film casually dropped
for a high school student to develop—
silver halide crystals take the shape
of shattered skulls
goats strung and slit
a school made of clay
blasted in the kiln of munitions
"KILL ZONE" painted across its foundation—
each 4×6 emulsion a souvenir
of these mad travels,
kept to reminisce and admire.

my brother's grenade

my brother's room in our family vacation home
has embossed wallpaper, indigo or violet
depending on the light that filters through the mountains—
and his grenade in the closet.

i saw it looking for extra blankets,
thought it was an animal resting in eiderdown
kept by my mother in one of her tempers
but it didn't move

and so
i picked it up.

inhumanity held beneath iron's screaming core—
a pleasant weight,
like the egg i threw across the street
detonating onto the head of boy
who said i kissed him but i didn't,
is it like that for my brother?—
fisted mementos of thrill?

seasoned by cedar sachets,
neatly quilted metal shimmered as i turned it
forbidden gem, his holy relic—
i placed it back in the closet and began making dinner,
said nothing.

the slender pin preserves this household
where our family gathers
unknowing a bomb is kept here—
my brother roasts a marshmallow
until it catches fire, turns black,
plunges into mouth.

New Poetry from Nidhi Agarwal: “The Goddess Incarnates;” “Cow Dust Hour;” and “Emancipation”

New Poetry by Nidhi Agrawal: “The Goddess Incarnates;” “Cow
Dust;” and “Emancipation”

New Poetry from Laura King: “Orange”



MY ACIDIC PAST / *image by
Amalie Flynn*

ORANGE

It's June, and a few stubborn ones
still hang on the trees.

We stand on the back of the pickup to pluck one—
so easy to peel, this old girl the sun has sugared
since December's sharp tang.

Now it's sweet as honey, sweet as candy,
sweet as that boy child

who wrapped himself up in his binkie,
his raw thumb firm against his upper palette,
who sat on the stairs facing the wall
because I'd snapped at him again.

Why was I upset all the time?

Though everyone forgives me, no one forgets
my acidic past; bright orange, raw rage.

New Poetry from Virginia Schnurr: "Touchstone" and "Valentine for Lewis Carroll"



VALENTINES IN ME / *image by Amalie Flynn*

TOUCHSTONE

My child's fairy-tale quilt is frail:
the wizard ripped, the prince bald,
the fairy's wing clipped.
Only the wishing well and frog prince survived
camp, college, the conception of my grandchild.

My eldest daughter wants the irreparable
repaired for her daughter, Maeve Arden,
named after a Shakespearean forest.

No longer willing to stitch painted pomp

I sketch a new quilt: a forest where the snake waits,
the dark trips, death lives behind every mushroom:
reality feelingly persuades me what I am.

My cataracts removed, I have a grander vision for Maeve's
covering.

I add the fool with his
books in running brooks, tongues in trees.

Absolute in my giving
savvy to the darker side of things
my needle pokes the sweet uses of adversity.

VALENTINE FOR LEWIS CARROLL

Purchased by an old woman
for her grandniece
I'm a blue plastic Valentine bag.

I have on me
a rabbit from Wonderland
whose creator liked
little girls without pubic hair.

I sit all year
on a doorknob
awaiting the day of hearts.

I'm singular,
not a carelessly covered box
but reusable.

My child places
her carefully labeled
valentines in me.

Unfortunately, this year
will be my finale.

My rabbit will hop off
offended by the onset
of hair.

**New Poetry from Marc Tretin:
“Justin Alter, Slightly
Drunk, Addresses Maya, Who Is
In Egypt” and “Maya Ricci
Alter After Excavating A
Pyramid South Of Zairo”**



HOT WIRES SCALD / image by Amalie Flynn

JUSTIN ALTER, SLIGHTLY DRUNK, ADDRESSES MAYA, WHO IS IN EGYPT

Now as I am hungover and queasy
stumping about the tilting house
and sappy as my face is green,
Maya, your sculpture of Qetesh,
that goddess of sex and ecstasy,
whose torso of clear pink plastic
has a heart made of puzzle pieces
dangling from wires that run to an
automated external defibrillator
normally used to shock
a rapid cardiac rhythm

back to normal, stares at me with eyes
filled with both desire and despair.
Though feeling embarrassed
I touch the pink nub you meant
to be her clit and a soft whirr starts, then
puzzle pieces spin so fast they tear, and scatter
and the bare hot wires scald
the insides of her perfect breasts.
I pull the plug, but the smell of burnt plastic
fills our bedroom despite the open windows.
Why do you have to be gone so long?

MAYA RICCI ALTER EXCAVATING A PYRAMID SOUTH OF CAIRO

As I stooped beneath the
standing sun within the
meter-by-meter carefully
measured order of this
archeological dig and
brushed pottery shards
and papyrus crumbs through
a sieve to sift out the sand,
the heat's strong hands
touched me like a half-
wanted lover, whose warmth
is too familiar with my
body to refuse and that's
why when Jamaal, the site
boss said, "You look
overheated.
Cool off in my trailer."
"Yes," I said, knowing I
wanted to betray Justin
but not knowing why, so
after we had sex and while
I was thinking how can I

use this experience,
I saw Jamaal shave with
a straight edge then I saw
the dead-on right image for the God Set,
a cave-sized skull made of razor blades,
entered by stepping
over teeth made of sharp knives
into total darkness
except for a weak light
piercing this skull
through one of its eyes
and in that eye is a web
and tangled in its threads
are Zipporah and Justin.
Their faces, formless rags.
Their bodies sucked out hulks.

New Poetry by Michal Rubin: “I Speak Not Your Language” and “Omar Abdalmajeed As’ad of Jijlya”

I, born from the womb of
my mother’s remembrances
wrapped in the cocoon
of her story[...]

New Poetry by Scott Hughes: “Still”



THE FAULT LINES / *image by Amalie Flynn*

STILL

I never thought of you
as a hopeless romantic; this was news to me.
Are you still meditating? Meditate
on this:
You can take the Mulholland Highway across
the ridges of two counties
and stay high a long time.

We parked there once in your subcompact
in love and unconfined.

From the afternoon shade of a scrub oak
I remember the ridge route home,
the silhouettes of Point Dume and your profile
in the afterglow.

Since then I have been a jack of all trades
and a master of nothing:
unremarkable, unsubstantial, undignified;
unresolved, unremembered, unconceivable;
unqualified, unpublished, unreadable.

I looked for you in the county beach campgrounds
where you went with surfers from your high school.
I looked for you in all the places I heard you were in love.
I looked for you where rumors sent me.
I looked for you in the hills of Northridge
where we walked around the fault lines.
I looked for you among the barstools
from Venice to Ventura.
I looked for you in old Beach Boys songs.
I looked for you in stacks of photographs.
I looked for you in the bottom of a glass.
I looked for you stranded after a concert.
I looked for you at the Spahn Ranch.
I looked for you in the bittersweet words in books.
I looked for you in unsold manuscripts.
I looked for you in the margins of old college notes.
I looked for you in every woman who looked at me.
I looked for you in dharma talks.
I looked for you in shrines.
I looked for you in my next life.

I don't think my karma is right.

Forty years on the hard roads of two counties
and I am

still.

New Poetry by Rochelle Jewell Shapiro: “Each Night My Mother Dies Again”



FALLS ON NIGHT / *image by Amalie Flynn*

EACH NIGHT MY MOTHER DIES AGAIN

Each night the phone rings—

Your mother has passed.

Each night I expect to be relieved, but night falls on night.

Each night she is the mother who makes waffles,

batter bubbling from the sides of the iron, the mother

who squeezes fresh orange juice, and serves soft-boiled eggs

in enchanted egg cups. Each night I squint into her face

as she carries me over the ocean waves, her arms my raft.

Each night she refills Dr. Zucker's prescriptions

for diet pills and valium. Each night she waters her
rosebushes

with Dewar's. Each night I see her hands shake,

her brows twitch. Each night she adds ground glass

to the chopped liver, rubbing alcohol to the chopped herring.

Each night she puts a chicken straight on the lit burner

without a pot. Each 2:00 a.m., Mrs. Finch from 6G phones—

Sorry to say your mother is naked

in the hallway again.

Each night my mother is strapped into her railed bed

at Pilgrim State, curled into a fetal position,

her hands fisted like claws.

Each night she calls to me

from her plain pine coffin, calls me

by the name she gave me, the name

she hasn't forgotten.

**New Poetry by Stephen
Massimilla: "Wounded"**



CAPILLARIES OF ROOTS / image by Amalie Flynn

WOUNDED

-to Laura

Bleating thing without wool

Thunder without sound

Ghost of wooded peaks, of constricted arterial waters

There is a dog inside the heart, voice bursting

Interminable silence, blown-open iris

Over organs buried deeper in the earth

where capillaries of roots still bleed orange dust

Leave me be, hot tongue of fireflies,

cracked pharynx of ice

Do not ask me to slip

down among green nerves of water-weed

where the flesh of the sky

is unmoving and fruitless

The moon still hovers in its surgeon's coat

But do not try to satisfy the dead

who hold on with claws like desperate fevers
Leave my sutured skull of empty ivory forever
But pity me; put an end to this much hurt

I am love, I tell you
and all the quick wings accumulating
as restlessly as the breaths

that were once inside
these wheel-crushed, wind-scattered leaves

New Poetry by Kevin Honold: “A Brief History of the Spanish Conquest”



RADIANT AS NOON / *image by Amalie Flynn*

A Brief History of the Spanish Conquest

Tell me again of that fabulous
kingdom where a single
ear of corn is more
than two strong young men can carry, where cotton
grows untended, in colors never dreamed of,
to be spun by gorgeous slaves
into garments that lie
cool as cornsilk against the skin and shine
radiant as noon.

*

How sordid and predictable history can be.
Within sight of the prize
but out of ammunition, they
lowered three men down the volcano's throat
to fetch sulfur for gunpowder.

This

was the vision
prefigured in the prophet's eye:
three men curled in a basket peering
back across the centuries,
their dewy starving faces so
desperate with hope
as they dissolve in a yellow mist,
felons set adrift.

*

North by west toward the cities of gold,
the soldiers in rags walked half-bent
with hunger and dysentery, nursing
grievous wounds sustained in hit-and-run attacks
by moss-troopers talking Choctaw.

Beside the mother of rivers, the horses sickened and died
but the soldiers, being less reasonable,
proved less destructible.

At disobedient towns they dragged out
chopping blocks to punish malefactors
and departed in a shower of ash, their legacy
a heap of severed hands slowly
clutching at flies.

*

But the much-sought golden cities sank below the horizon
like the tall ships of fable. For the Spaniards,
the age of miracles ended
somewhere in southwest Arkansas. The palaces of silver

turned Outlaw Liquor Barns, Triple-X Superstores,
the stuff of vision a mustard-colored mix

of smoke, dust, emissions
from riverside refineries and coal
plants along the Mississippi where squadrons
of John Deere combines like barn-size locusts
roll in drill order over the dry land,
half-effaced by squalls of chaff.

At night the fields burn.
Stray flames browse the blackened
shoulders of the interstate,
crop the stubble beneath the billboards.

*

In the state park south of Hot Springs
I fell asleep in a chair in the heat and woke
to a titmouse perched on the toe of my boot
with that peculiar weightlessness
shared by birds and planets

and I searched without hope for my place in the book.
Buzzards killed time there, their shadows
slipping across the iron ground
like fish in a shallow pool
while Time gaped
 at the spiders that battened
 on the flies that
swarmed the rotten
windfall apples.

*

Tenochtitlan.
At the imperial aviary, we found
a pair of every kind of bird in the world:
parrots and finches in profusion, brooding vultures,

egrets, ibis is sacramental scarlet.

Seahawks stooped and banked

through that hostile truce and we marveled

at God's prodigality, His exuberant

inventiveness, then piled tinder

to burn the thing to the ground.

Flames sheeted over the soaring

lattice dome like the fleet

shadows of clouds. For a time,

the structure smoldered,

a hissing wickerwork steaming as it cooled.

Here and there, a bird crashed the skein of ash

like a rogue comet bursting

the flaming ramparts of the universe.

Charmed in place, we held our breath,

beside ourselves, like couriers

trapped in a snowglobe, blinded

in a tempest of embers,

astonished at the work of these hands,

the everyday miracle of destruction.

New Poetry from Gail Nielsen: "Something Like Nightfall"



BLACK LACE TREES / *image by Amalie
Flynn*

SOMETHING LIKE NIGHTFALL

something, like night falls
slow, as if
nothing in the world has ever moved
but distant hope descending, still ablaze
days soften to wonder

what else leaves
silhouettes these black lace trees
fades from me

it is you from my life
steadily, quietly
as celestial movement

**New Poetry by Doris Ferleger:
“Praying at the Temple of
Forgiveness,” “Internal
Wind,” Driving Down Old Eros
Highway,” and “Summer Says”**



TURNING EVERYTHING AROUND / *image*
by Amalie Flynn

Praying at the Temple of Forgiveness

for Zea Joy, in memoriam

Last Monday you threw yourself,
your body, dressed in red chemise,
in front of a train.

It was your insatiable hunger
for a more tenderhearted world,
your husband said at Shiva.

Now no one will get to see
what you saw from inside
your snow globe where you lived,
shaking and shaking,
breaking into shards
of ungrieved grief, unanswered need.

I will remember
how tirelessly, with your son,
you worked to help him turn
sounds—coming through the implant
behind his ear—into speech,
speech into understanding.

Everyone will remember
how you skipped across the dance floor,
waving pastel and magenta scarves,
and prayed to angels.
O, dear Zea, your human bones
thin as the bones of a sparrow—

the way you could fold
your body to fit anywhere.
Rest now. You have succeeded.

INTERNAL WIND

When you died, our son
became *my son*; I watch
through your eyes

and mine how he lifts
his whole body into
a long accent à droite,

arms taut, wrists impossibly
rotated back, fingers and toes
also pointed back

to all the hours, years
of practice in turning
everything around.

~

Over the hollow
you left, our son stretches
his fingers across

frets and strings
in C minor,
Bach's Etudes

the way you taught,
the way you closed
your eyes, nodded, satisfied—

our son will remember.

~

Remember how
he watched you deep-
breathe into yoga postures?

Now his own focused flow

heals what Western doctors call
tics, quiets what Eastern doctors call

internal wind. Listen
how our son calls
to his yoga students

what he learned
at your knee: *Effort*
brings the rain-

of grace.

~

When our son and I argue,
I feel homeless, divided,
until I remember how you

and I took turns massaging
his neck that ached from its day's
staccato singing-

~

Sometimes I can see his *tics*
as flawless, meticulous,
a body expressing itself

with perfect diction.

DRIVING DOWN OLD EROS HIGHWAY

Me, in my Q50 with its hot flashes and warning beeps,
heading toward Sweet Desire, New Jersey, where my love,

soon 70, will woo me with mango, melt the mushy pulp
in my mouth—or perhaps he naps.

You, CeeCee, painting the walls pink in the tiny house in Pullman,
recently moved in with your old college flame, coming so easily

against his new ceramic hip, just the friction of it. You say your pelvis never quite fit with anyone else, including your soon-to-be-

ex-husband of 30 years. Me, with a G-spot suddenly. A rainbow of chaos tunneling through me when his fingers find it and flutter.

And long live the reckless tongue. The old-fashioned clit-kind of climax. Like a young planet rising. Oh, how old and greedy I am

for that whole-body wave and chill and quiver and release. You, purposely avoiding that whole-body wave of shiver,

as it reminds you of your ex's dogged insistences.

For your 60th, your daughter gifted you with a mini vibrator

on a rubber ring for your index finger. A *sex-thimble*, you joke.

Sex over 60 seems unseemly to talk about, CeeCee,

but it seems more ungrateful to say nothing at all.

You and I speak of what our mothers couldn't give us.

Daily I pray at the temple of Venus.

SUMMER SAYS

Pay attention to
your heat, your survival—
the tree rooted in your garden

is a sequined vernacular, a cashmere sweater.

Because nothing matters in the end
but comfort and the bending light.

Summer says, I will be the room you die in.
You will dream, neither of regret,
nor in the language you were born into.

A stranger will comb your existential threads.
You had thought, for instance, humans
were gerunds or harps bent

on playing in a diner that serves
black coffee and hard donuts.
You ask, *What is the past?*

What is it all for?

Summer says, The wound of being
untaught. Says, hungry.

Says, the cypress is a hospice,
says, falter, falter, falter,
bloom bloom bloom—too soon

a pall will keep you company.

New Poetry by Ricardo Moran: “ABBA-1975” and “On the Street”



TAG EVERY WALL / *image by Amalie Flynn*

ABBA-1975

Abba's lyrics, like water
shot from La Bufadora,
mingle with volcanic steam
from metallic pots of corn.

And the scrape on my knee
from chasing the seagulls
bleeds, but does not hurt.

On this Sunday, the ocean breeze slips
in gossip between vendor stalls
as young men in speedos walk past.
Tables of silver bracelets tap my eyes
and ABBA's Spanish melody
carries on my tongue

before any English syllable
ever arrived. Before the summer ended
when it tore me
from the sands of Ensenada
to a desert north of the border,
to a land with tongues
unfamiliar and stiff.

And now when I fall
chasing my shadow, my ABBA
lyrics cannot permeate
foreign soil. Cannot stop the pain.

On the Street

Run naked through the streets
and shout, "Make love to me!"

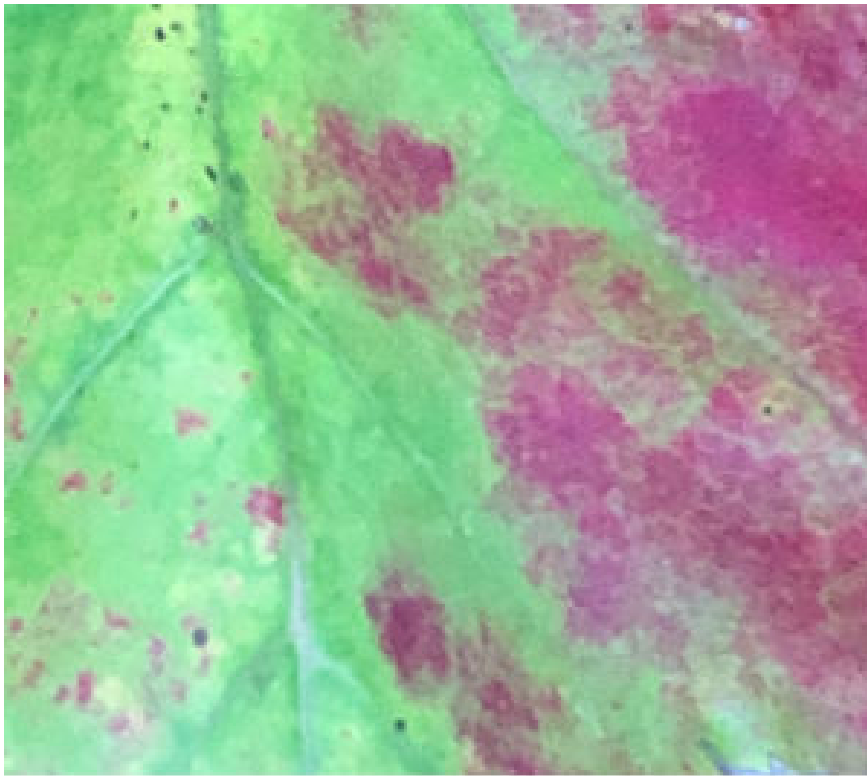
Tag every wall in a turf war
with quotes from the palatero,
from the child who yearns for love,
from the gay son who hopes his father
will welcome him,
this time.

With your sharp and fast tongue, mesmerize
passersby as they get caught in the gunfire
of stanzas and sonnets,
popping the air.

Bellow on the street corner
of how love abandoned you,
how your life is empty,
how you aborted your dreams.
And every day it rips into you
of every opportunity you threw away.

I want that on the wall.
I want all the pain and hurt
to get out of bed, to grab that bullhorn
and run naked through the streets.

New Poetry by Michael Carson: “Politics”



BLAME OUR BRUISES / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Politics

Every 20 years or so boys dress up
And kill each other for fun.
It's the way of the wrack of the world
The wind of our imagination and our love.
To blame our costumes for our beauty

Is like to blame our bruises for our blood.
The chime is what drives us, what ticks
Our tock forward to the next spree.
The foreshortened humiliation,
The immaculate imprecation,
Is neither what we fear or what we covet.
Man is. Rats are. Take what you can
While the day is rough
Move lengthwise into the past
And blame god for never enough.

New Poetry by Kevin Norwood: “Rabbits in Autumn”



THE LUSHEST GRASS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

RABBITS IN AUTUMN

Who will find our bones in a thousand years,
bleached and brittle under the unyielding sun,
scattered in dried grasses by feral dogs or vultures?

Who will hold such curiosities, not knowing
that we stopped here to kiss and murmur
that our love would outlast the moon and stars?

Who will hold our bones, never to imagine
that under the same sun, we once made love
on the lushest grass, under a sapphire sky?

In autumn, the fox lies in wait, hearing rustling
in the tall grass. Having eaten, the fox moves on.
There are no questions of why, or how, or when.

Smoke rises acrid in the air; the sun sets earlier
each day; the grapes shrivel on the vine. Time
is the fox; we are the rabbits. Please, hold me.

**New Poetry by Betsy Martin:
“About What You Have,”
“Female Figure in Photos,”
and “To Missoula”**



GRASSES QUIVER BEFORE / *image by Amalie Flynn*

ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE

In my dream
Dad, age one hundred twelve,
has his first cell phone—

big and square,
with a rotary dial.

With a proud index finger
he dials my mother,

gets her voice mail.
Together we lean in,
listen

to her low, drifty voice,
its mist so warm on my ear
as it rises from deep underground.

I ask Dad for *his* number,
but he can't recall it
before fading into the passage. He's left me

messages, though,
like: When eating fish be careful
not to get a bone stuck in your throat; when walking
tuck in the tummy; think
about what you have,
not about what you don't.

FEMALE FIGURE IN PHOTOS

fourteen-year-old mop of hair
sullen air in mod raincoat
on London sidewalk with
beaming scowling father brother

seventeen leaning
on brick wall in black-and-white flannel shirt
no cigarette yet mien
as in movies seen through a puff of smoke

college-era long hair
akimbo arms
eyes narrowed
to spot foe in tall grass

sixty odd in a museum at a window
face a little wooden
and through the panes
an autumn-leafed tree flames

TO MISSOULA

The cold air her pillow of courage, she skirts
the northern rim of the nation.

As she crosses the Dakota Badlands,
where even the hardest grasses quiver

before earth's uprisings and revolutions,
her eastern forest home has tilted

and is sliding over the rim!

She pulls her wings in closer
to fly fast and low

over layers of pink and gray guts
squeezed from deep under.

A tail feather tears loose,

whirls away;

she almost bursts into a plume of magma.

Night cools into dawn.

She parks the car,
steps out into a new world,
a young woman with compass and camera
and a crown of mountains.

**New Poetry by Suzanne
O'Connell: "Airport Luggage
Carousel" and "Shipwreck"**



IMAGINE GOLD DOUBLOONS / *image by Amalie Flynn*
Airport Luggage Carousel

A battered cardboard box

holes punched in the side
tied with frayed rope
lid popping up
plastered with masking tape, wrinkled.
One lone orphan
going round and round the luggage carousel,
heading nowhere.
Packed in chaos.
Full of soiled clothes
bloody Kleenex
unpaid bills
splinters
and Dear John letters.

This is what the last year has been.

So I imagine the contents differently.
I imagine gold doubloons,
a child's drawing of a rainbow,
a coupon for a free fried chicken dinner.
Maybe a photograph of a family, at Christmas,
standing together on a hillside,
everyone wearing red and green,
the husband holding a puppy,
and Carol,
still alive.

Shipwreck

She sniffed my trenches,
turned away from the skin she made,
her own thick blood
flowing in my waterways.
Me, a vacant dwelling on the shore,
wearing swaddling,
drinking low-fat milk.

Oh, wire mother of the soul,
entertainer of strangers.
She of too many decibels,
too many bright colors,
passing macaroons to visitors
while I carved "I love Chris"
in the dining room table.

Find the fur coat,
find the hairdresser,
find the beach umbrella
find the wine coolers
find the plants in pots
resigned to death.

Little fish swim by her ankles.
Like me, they long for contact.
Mercy, the color of the sea,
never granted.
In that day, at that hour,
on that wretched beach,
she wanted an audience
but found only me.

New Poetry by Tony Marconi: "Song of the Roadway Door"



WE AND MACHINES / *image by Amalie Flynn*

...three hundred miles,
 ahead the road more visible
 as the land dissolves in the pink light
 of almost dawn

you sit beside me,
 eyes fixed and restful on my face,
 offering hot coffee from a thermos
 while the farm news
 breaks morning music
 on a local station

i could be here forever,
 moving toward an unfamiliar place,
 held by speed and the vibrating engine,

 touched by the warmth of your breath

i could be here forever,
even as day turns into twilight;
you borne lightly on sheets stiffly cleaned,
wrapping your strength within, around mine;
prepared for tomorrow's miles

we and machines;
only we moving, moving;
i could be here forever...

New Poetry by Sam Cherubin: “Don't About Not,” “Mermaid Tavern,” and “Emerald Inula”



SUN HOLDING ME / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Don't About Not

If I can't or think
do it like I'm doing now
a beach
sun holding me
I am holding space
not space itself
not looking
being
gathering toward me
sun's filaments
fluidity
is all I need

Mermaid Tavern

A night-wind touching bare backs lying down
and bare arms spooned across my bed, in blue
light dreaming over skin, light-fingered sparks
of seaweed, dendrites rippling through the room.

Scales rubbed against smooth sheets, in silver
puddled water, a smell of open
ocean, roseate tips of waves, our hips'
undulations, in my body's rhythmic memory.

Emerald Inula

i.

Apples in Schiller's desk, Balsam of Peru, rockrose,

rose alba, Helichrysum Everlasting, *Immortale*.
Why can't this be enough?

ii.

Dried petals staining the pages.
Attar of cells breathing sun.
Flesh never accepting, but aching.

New Poetry from Alison Hicks: “I Took A Walk With A Friend” and “Untitled”



AWAY INTO SEA / *image by Amalie Flynn*

I TOOK A WALK WITH A FRIEND

Instead of starting a poem

I told her about my son's first semester
As long as he's home & happy & in one piece, she told me

Worry squeaked out my sneakers onto wet pavement
The rest dissolved with the pitcher of margaritas

Though it was wet & rainy
I did not get a headache

Married for thirty-four years
We selected the movie about divorce

By the time we finally got to watch it
He fell asleep

The book was about a friendship that started in
graduate school
I skipped ahead to the parts where she snorted OxyContin

Didn't want to think about graduate school
But stayed up reading the juicy parts anyway

Personally, I blame the recliner

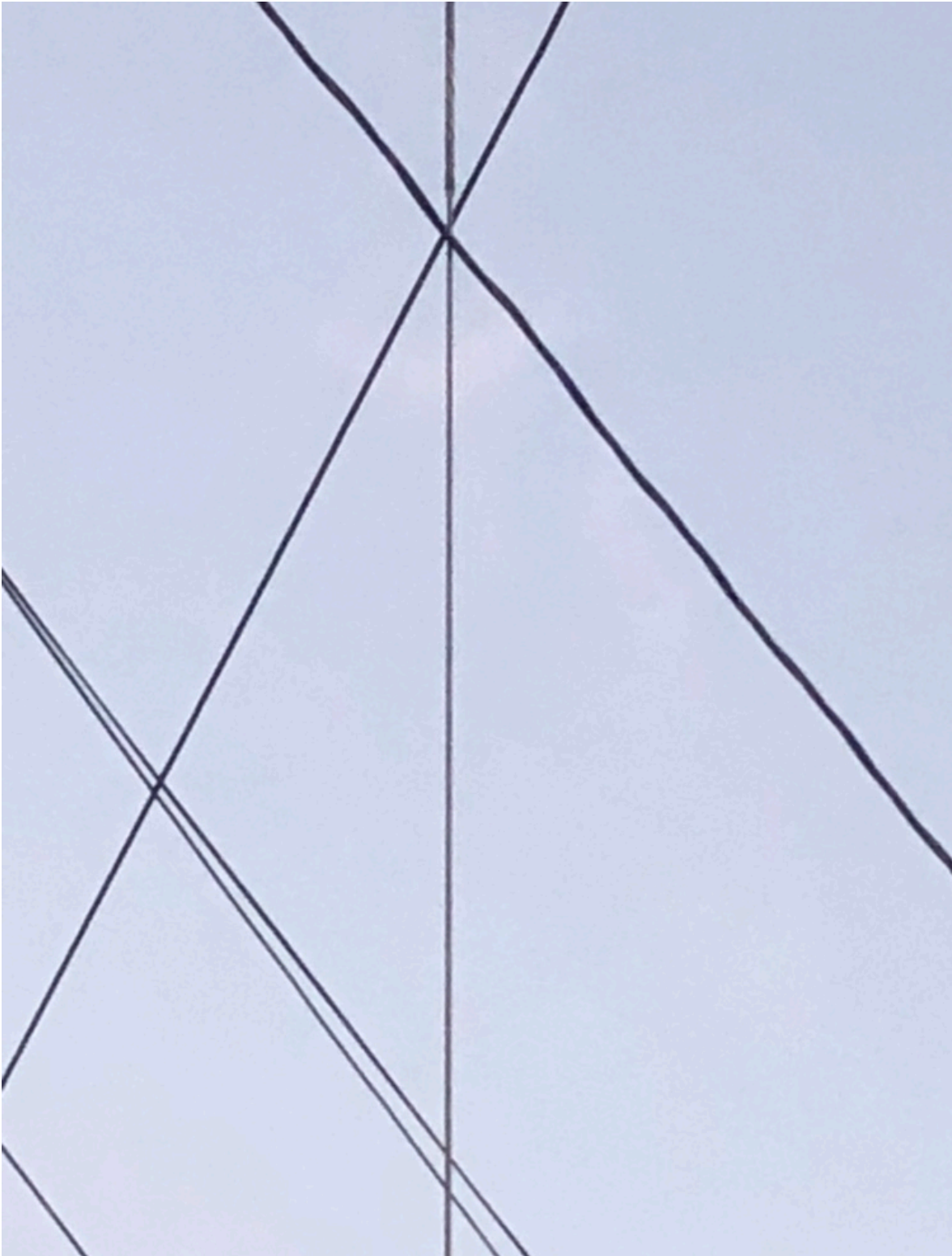
UNTITLED

The sea is a room without walls. It spills, falling over land.
Land shears away into sea,
rooms echo with spills and falling walls. Walls are powerless
in the war of land and
water, swells uproot trees, sweep cars, shopping carts,
diamond necklaces out to sea,
rooms of plastic ingots drifting down. The sea has room,
gathering spoils from falling lands.

(UNTITLED is included in Hicks' new book *Knowing Is A Branching Trail*, winner of the 2021 Birdy Prize and forthcoming in mid-September from Meadowlark Books.)

New Poetry from G.H. Mosson: "Warrior With Shield"

after Henry Moore



AN X STILL / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Blasted, broken to frag-
ments, left arm won't-
both legs blown &
absent, the spaces abuzz
w/ anger-but I edge
forward, shield up

as leg-stumps toe
for foothold. My mouth
is an X. Still-
ness. Yet I see.
I've been left.

Moonlight empties
onto my chest,
rivulets down
in a branching sheen
& I swell w/ a hunch
I'll make it
as if an old tune
warms the heart,
as if I too
might sing
again to Shelly.

I've been
 some-
 one
else
 once
 some-
body
 other:
 a child.
Dandelion
 pods
 tumble
past my
 open
 palms.

New Poetry from Barbara Tramonte: “Tailored To Fit In”



I WAS GATHERED / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Somebody sewed me with a string

On the bias

I was gathered

And about to pop

This has been a pattern all my life

They hemmed me in with notions

Each stitch bringing me

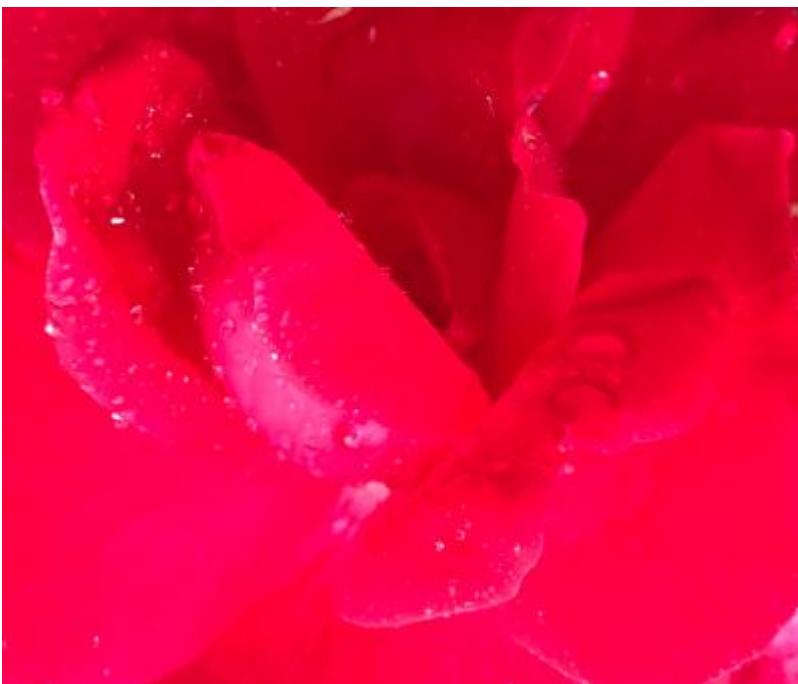
To a false whole

(I longed to slit my wrist)

I jolted with a shock of recognition

To see that I had drifted to the wrong side

New Poetry from Alita Pirkopf: “Roadkill,” “Sounds of the Past,” “Spring,” and “Unhealthy”



BLOOD IN BUCKETS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

ROADKILL

I bring you blood in buckets,
a heart that I hear, a palsied hand.
It has been eight, ten
years, my issue.
The same as twenty years ago
when your father felt
about me as you do now.
I felt the world shrink
but I thought something,
not necessarily the world,
would end. I had not thought
the world lay flat, as Renaissance
cartographers mapped it.
But now, like an automobile tire
not only flapping, flattening,
parts of it, or me, lie on the shoulder
of my road with dead things and dirt.

SOUNDS OF THE PAST

She thought she had found
soft music and warm dialect,
a sunny sort of near-Italian soul,

But surfaces surprise.
She found out. She found
that underneath pounded
a martial drumbeat
vibrating still

from Vienna's center,
his childhood years
under the Third Reich,
a father fighting
occupying Yugoslavia

with others
missing
the village polkas,
his son.

A burst of marches,
explosions, still resounding.
All of us hearing
pounding steps and hearts.

SPRING

Shreds remain—
unraveled weavings
of brown grasses and mud—
in branches a bird eyed
for her family tree.

The rest, the nest,
that we had watched
through last week's window,
fell.

The dog found
blue broken eggs
in the grass.

Families, all of us
consider seriously.
Upsetting winds
come to nests.
It is spring
and windows
open views
and dooryards fill
with the ambiguity
of lilacs.

UNHEALTHY

I loved my doctors
until one
played sick games,
touching and taunting,
and knowing of rules
I didn't know.
Telling jokes
I didn't understand.
Dismissing me
for my naivete-
stupidity.

The years passed,
and he operated
on me appropriately,
savingsly. Later he
mentioned dining
together or going out
for coffee, but didn't ask,
and got angry for reasons
I didn't know, saying
I hadn't said I'd go.

**New Poetry from Jesse
Frewerd: "Symphony"**



OUR TARGETED HEADS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Ballistic medleys project ambition, while dancing tones find their pitch. There is unexpected buoyancy in our youth. March, advance, train, drill, prepare, disseminate. It's the 4am ensemble, time to crescendo awake for guard duty. Report to post, front gate, alert and ready. Hours, minutes, seconds, tempo depends on the action. The symphony begins with an RPG flying over our targeted heads. Return fire. Bullets staccato the enemy location. A cappella commands over the comms. Write the counterpoint, execute. Threat neutralized, they retreated. Though my heart is playing allegro, via adrenaline. Dynamics decrescendo the scene, bringing it to normalcy. I return to my life as it is, my new normal cadence amid syncopated pop-shots, RPG's, mortar rounds, and IED's.

**New Poetry from Hannah Jane
Weber: “My Childhood Smelled
Like,” “Surprise Dawn”**



FROSTED WITH MOONLIGHT / *image by Amalie Flynn*

MY CHILDHOOD SMELLED LIKE

cabbage, salted tomatoes, and cracklings.

the flume of dust I awakened when my fingers
untangled the shag carpet's red mane.

crayons I melted against the wood stove,
our terrier's feet, with that same scent of fire.

night crawlers, shad, algae, and lake,
blanketing our boat after a morning of fishing.

Dad's scrapyard, fragrant with hot tar
and smoke from his brown cigarettes,
acres of rust and grease, a twisting maze
leading to one abandoned refrigerator after another,
each filled with jars and jars of ancient rot.

fireworks and muddy gravel roads,
leadplant, elderberries, horsemint.

Grandma's lilac bushes,
reeking of booze from the bar next door,
their purple bunches lighting up the dark
with neon liquor perfume.

SURPRISE DAWN

rows of cedars push through slats of slain brothers
dense boughs gushing berries
frosted with moonlight

my bike light skims twilight from creamy sidewalks
a premature dawn blaring from the flashing bulb
illuminating the wind's fabric
in rustling leaves

I lean far from the sweep of branches
but my jacket catches the emerald froth
and propels me into the flustered chatter of birds awakened
and tossed about by my helmet's pillage of their feathered
hearth

New Poetry from Tyler Vaughn Hayes: “They even pipe it into the bookstore,” “His first time: flight by ropes,” “The edict,” “Rappel annuel”



WAX-LADEN DAY / *image by Amalie Flynn*

They even pipe it into the bookstore

It's never quite silent, though
there's no lowing, not from God
nor his gluttoned blind bovine. Only

the thudding of shuffling ungues
on stereos hemmed, hidden

in the high grass–muzak

piercing through, prodding each
tagged ear. Far better this way–
now they needn't contemplate

the cacophony in BARN 8, the strain
of strings tucked tight to necks, jammed
trumpets jutting through guts, and

the flutes flushed fast with blood.
No, much better this way.
Bow, hark, try not to think.

His first time: flight by ropes
(for Corbin Vaughn)

it's fleeting
the rebuff
of a flutter
fleecing
the sway
in his wee
depleted eyes

exhausted
the college
girls of August
ferry a whole
life on the neck
heaving TVs
sleeping late
they flit
from mom
then return

we can't split
a pendulum

a heavy head
tightened white
like a fading grip
on the tethers
just out of reach

give it up already.

The edict

There is, without question,
a tendency to beg for
those things we have
already.

For instance, I once
commanded God: turn me
into a poet, else I'll pretend to
be a walrus.

Bruggghllff!

Rappel Annuel

I
(for one and once)
intend to celebrate
a soothing din
the cleansing mess
fresh from the wet
wax-laden day.
Hip hip

**New Poetry from Andy Conner:
“Apples,” “Untouchable,”
“Remanded In Custody”**



YOU MEAN NOTHING / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Apples

'The landmines are just like apples'
Khmer Rouge survivor

Apples can peel your skin
Like it isn't there

But more often than not
The cruellest fruit
Sucks the rusty blade

And leaves threads

Dripping

Threads of skin
Threads of your life
Dripping
Seeds onto barren ground

You mean nothing to the apples
You mean nothing to the apples
You mean nothing

Their anaesthetic minds
Hold no sense of time
No sense of pain
No sense
No sense of what remains

And if you
Are one of the hand-picked
Who escape in a step-right-on-it flash
Give thanks for this windfall

Which leaves survivors
Green
To the core

As they crawl
With the worms
With the worms
And the decay

Praying
To scrump a handout
With no hands
For the crumb
Which may or may not come

As they sit
In their own shit
Begging
On their stumps
For a friendly worm
To turn
Up
And eat it

Untouchable

On my recent trip
to Gujarat

I took
numerous
pretty photographs

of Modhera
Palitana
Dwarka
The White Desert

and other pretty places

but

the image
I can't delete
from my heart

my hard drive

is of a ragged street child

at Vastrapur Lake
who stepped out
from the promenading crowd

raised
his left
index finger
into the stifling
late afternoon

air

and drew
a rectangle
to take
an imaginary selfie

with me

Remanded In Custody

How can you talk
Of an even split
When you're parents
Of three kids

How can you ask
For understanding
When you won't say
What you did

How can you demand
We keep calm
When all you do
Is shout

And scream
It's your own business
When we're what
The fight's about

How can you plead
You need your freedom
When you've built
Our jail

Whose four sad walls
Have heard it all
Every selfish
Last detail

How can you think
We're stupid
'Cos we don't know
What it means

To move on and
Make a new start
When we're not yet
In our teens

If you two
Are so clever
And know what
Life's about

Why must it
Take forever
To sort
Your problems out

You've no thought
For our feelings
Or respect for
What we think

While you resent
That we need feeding
When you don't have
Cash for drink

You complain
We're far too young
To understand
Your trials

Well in this case
It's not the children
Who're acting
Like a child

You both believe
That you're the victim
Of the other's
Poisoned mind

But if your eyes
Can still open
You might see
The only crime's

Neglect of
Your own kids
All three
Ripped apart

By being used
As silent weapons
Against your
Other half

How dare you
Claim us as conscripts
To fight
Your filthy war

When the offence
That we committed
Was only
Being born

You'd never think
You're guilty
But if you'd any
Common sense

You'd see the last thing
Left in common
Is we've all got
No defence

New Poetry from Lauren Davis: "The Flowers You Brought Back From Italy"



FACES TUMBLING DOWNWARD / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Each time I open my notebook the pages stick.
Because I've forgotten.

And onto the ground
they fall:
royal purple flowers fall
out,
emerald stemmed, blue veined,
life
from the coast of Italy.

You pulled them from the earth,
pinched their feet
with your fingertips,

you breathed into the sea

and thought of the way my hair

swayed between my shoulders,
while you once walked behind me
near an American riverside,
flowers sway in the field
the same way.

You placed the poppies then
into the spine of your bible
you pressed it,
punched the face
and rubbed the back
onto the ground
to release water
into sacred words
you pressed,
wanting me there
and you breathed into the sea.

Yesterday, you stood in the kitchen
of your new house
while the songbirds in the yard
called *good morning*,
you opened your bible
and pulled the flowers up
by the end of their stems
like tails,
their faces
tumbling downward

and I opened myself / my notebook
and tossed the flowers into
my spine / my book's spine

and there
I closed it
and pressed it into the granite
underneath
to press

wanting to stay there with you
out.

You asked me:
when again do you leave?
Two weeks.

Now,
one-thousand miles away
the pages stick
each time I open my notebook

and onto the ground they
fall,

and I remember how
you must have looked
collecting purple poppies
by the sea of Italy.

Our modern lives,
so set apart,
both
by miles
and unsteadiness.

**New Poetry from Scott
Janssen: “Bottle Tree”**



VIETNAM DID I / *image by Amalie Flynn*

On my first visit I asked
A stock question about
Whether you'd been in the military.

Marines, nineteen sixty-six, you said,
A hint of menace in your eyes.
I never talk about it.

On my way out the door
I asked your wife about a
Tree in the front yard,

Its branches capped with
Blue and green and pink

Bottles made of glass.

It's a bottle tree, she said.
Pointing at a cobalt blue bottle
Glinting with sunlight,

She told me it had
Special power to lure in
Ghosts and lurking spirits.

They get trapped in there, she said.
Then sunlight burns them up
So they can't haunt us anymore.

Eight months later
You could no longer walk.
I rolled your wheelchair

Onto the warbled porch
Where we sat and talked
About how rough life is.

I never told you about
Vietnam, did I? You whispered.
I shook my head.

As you spoke,
Your eyes averted,
I looked at that cobalt blue bottle

And imagined it slowly filling
With blood and shrieks
And grief and the sound of

Rotor blades and the smell
Of burning flesh and the
Taste of splattered gore

And the sensation of
Adrenaline pulsing and

Memories of home and

Buddies who were killed
And of fear and rage and
betrayal and weeping

That lodge in your throat
Before you swallow
It all down

Into your belly.
Don't ever tell anyone
About this, you said,

Your hands trembling,
Jaw shivering.
I asked if there was

Anything else.
You started to say something
But stopped yourself.

No, you said.

**New Poetry from Ben Weakley:
“Checkpoint,” “There are 4
Ways to Die in an Explosion,”
“Good Friday,”**



PRAY FOR THE BLAST / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Checkpoint

The car came from nowhere, it came
from everywhere –

white blur and tire squall,
a four-door payload
of heat and pressure and steel.

When it is over, there is just
the tinkle of falling brass and a man
slumped
in a pool of broken glass
and coolant on hot asphalt,
calm as a corpse.

Doc cuts his shirt.
His face is weathered by years
of this. Layers
of skin and yellow fat pucker
from his open side.

He breathes.

In the trunk of the rusted-out sedan,
where the bomb
should be,

there are only two tanks,
an oxygen mask, and a box
filled with apricots and dates.

There are Four Ways to Die in an Explosion

First the blast rips limbs
from the torso. Throws tender bodies
against concrete walls. Pulverizes
bones against pavement. Those closest
to the bomb are never found
whole.

Then the fragmentation.
Little pieces of metal debris,
like the one that punched
an acorn-sized hole through the back
of Sergeant Gardner's skull.

Heat from the explosion starts fires.
Vehicles Burn. Ammunition
burns. People burn,

alive. When a driver is trapped inside
white-hot steel, prayers
must be said silently for the smoke
to take him first.

Pressure collapses
lungs and bowels. The bleeding
happens on the inside.
It can be hours
before the skin turns pale
and the bulk of a person
drops.

None of the anatomy is safe,

so when the time comes, pray for the blast
or fragmentation. Pray for the heat that vaporizes.
Pray for the kind of pressure
that makes the world dark and silent
before the bitter taste of iron
and cold panic.

**Good Friday, Udairi Range Complex,
Kuwait**

The first time I saw the sun
rise over the desert
it was 4 a.m.

Across miles of sand
and rusted hulks, the throbbing
of heavy guns echoed.

Over the horizon,
where the beginning and the end

meet and disappear, Friday arrived.

We saw the jeering crowds, the scourge
and spear-tip, the crown of thorns
and the crucifix, waiting.

What could we have known about atonement?
What did we know, then, of judging
the quick against the dead?

**New Poem from Nazli
Karabiyikoglu: "Hymn: A
Coffin at the Gates of
Topkapi"**



COLD SONGS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

The head, decapitated,
it sits on a shore, at some corner of the world.
Desperation is what they feel as blood gushes out from the
half-neck.
Death, however, has always been there,
nothing new, an enslaving event.
The name of the deal was predefined –
“flight”. It has been around since the Order of Assassins.
Part of us see the beauty in all this, even when the tortures
last
till the moon starts to shine over us.
Sir!

There you lie, your frail length almost pours out from the bed.

And here I am, by your side, barren inside,
yet my mind replays a moment with you,
where you feed me freshly-picked strawberries.
My worst nightmare is finding a way into my life,
into you, through your flesh and bones
yet my heart replays a moment with you,
where you dress me with freshly-picked strawberries.

Sir!

Many calls for prayer have been sung.

And here I am, can't look away.

My devotion may be in vein, but what I'm losing now is transcendental.

You missed most of it, as they held a mirror to your nose
and checked if you still breathed. So beautifully you lay there.

Before this fate, I was as effective as a human shield.

Here I am, bitter as rock, by the frilled duvets,
thinking how we must keep you alive
and not sickly-yellow and quiet like this.

See? I'm here by the frilled duvets, ice cold,
thinking how I crave to coil up next to you.

Sir!

We finally made peace with death. First our eyes watched the floors, then our fists beat our chests. Distances reached, horizons obtained, flasks of scarce water and worn sheaths. Almost everyone lost their sons to this war. Our sons. Our people. They believed in the protection of their shields and wanted to go as far as it got them, is that why we say our hymns for our sons, on and on for days? Is this our fate?

I decided I'll surpass fate and kismet and luck or

whatever. So here I am, standing before that reckless hope. I grabbed it by the chin, pushed it against a wall and I let anger take control. I asked it, and I was quite sincere about it too, "How is it that death gets in?"

The way you put your head on my head,
lifeless, breathless, heavy.
Your word is my law, and I stand by its chime.
With largest oceans behind my back,
you were my creation, and I gave you away.
Your first steps, your first words, have been my challenge.
And the way you put your shoulders on my legs.

Sir!

Greatest storms whirled inside me, and, oh, I prayed
to the Almighty; to His holiness, I presented all of my
organs,
but they pulled out my womb, or what's left of it,
and even then, all that mattered was you, sir.

Something penetrates, once, twice, my spleen
watches it happen, smells pleasant, like linden, my
favorite, something to go for a child is being
created, from the char of my liver, my flesh puffs,
my flesh grows fat,
count those things that penetrate me, arms maybe,
one, two and three,
stop there, stop at the second syllable of my name,
I did not do this to
me, I did not choose to carry this burden

Beings must produce, yet I'm barren inside.
Your look is my law, and I stand by its tingle.
With vastest moors behind me
you were my darling, and I gave you away.
Your first words, *my sultan, your highness*, have been my
challenge.

Beings must produce, yet I'm barren inside, and you're lovely inside.

That's what you said

All this glory and all these gifts, what use do they serve, I pondered for a long time and I could not find the answer. I knit for a long time, laces and wools too, wore them in the cold maroon rooms of this palace, in the cold of my own body, cold, songs were cold, my violin was warm, only to me. They took me right away, and no surprise there, I was pretty, I stayed quiet when they split my legs, but I'm known for kicking quite hard. How funny, the way things change so much so fast, we were a thousand and now I'm just one, do the winds always bring injustice with them or does it travel in the pockets of soldiers?

Crying my lungs out, biting my tongue, fires scorching my stomach, do these all go together for me now?

Or have I just comprehended death and broken apart while at it?

If we can't breathe where the dead go, tears can flood, for the duration of the earth's age even, quail with rice or grape compost.

He found his place in the history books as did I.

It takes courage to stand before a dagger; I did, I stood still as a brick and I shed tears.

If it wasn't for your shadow, I'd call you my child, my life, my signature, the one that makes me get lost in those oceans.

Don't be hurt, because I'm ordinary, I think you'll outlive

me.

You'll have no idea though how we managed to get that life out of you.

I bit my tongue, held back at every chance, and saved the pain along my spine.

My womb dried off and shrunk, they pulled it out, but I will not give up on your scent.

I yearn for your chest to rise up to the highest, for you to take one deep breath.

If it wasn't for your soul, I'd call you my child, my flesh, my bone, the one that makes a prisoner out of me.

Don't be hurt, because I'm ordinary, you'll outlive me.

I think I see the blue of your eyes again, yes.

You'll have no idea though, what getting that life out of you cost us.

I bit every part of me within my reach, saved the pain deep in me.

The nightingale dried off and shrunk, they pulled it out of me,

but I will not give up on you.

How hard it was to bring you to life!

If it wasn't for your soul, I'd call you my child.

Sign off my sentence, my tears are my sin.

Tightly tie the rope around my neck

and tightly tie a knot to the rope that goes nowhere.

Translator's Note: The story, although fiction, sits in actual history, and gives us some pointers towards having an understanding of era and geography. Topkapi Palace is in modern day Turkey, and was mostly used as the emperor's residency during the Ottoman Empire's rule between 13th and early 20th century. The Order of Assassins, Hashashiyān or Hashīshiyā, was a radical Nizari Isma'ili sect that assassinated Muslim and Christian leaders before that time period. The ordeal of flight, as in the work towards enabling humans to fly by any means, caused controversy in the Muslim world in

the past, since it is simply unnatural for humans to fly, but attempts are encountered in Ottoman history. The story, too, is likely placed in a time period where such attempts stir political balances.

New Poetry from Jacquelyn Cope: “Mission 376: Patient X,” “Prolonged Exposure Therapy,” “Doxies and Rum”



THERE'S EARTH INSIDE / *image by Amalie Flynn*

MISSION 376: PATIENT X

There's dirt in his mouth now

you

know that for sure.

There's Earth inside his bloated belly

you

know that for sure.

The worms might have eaten away his ragged skin by now
but the metal is still there.

Splayed on the satin or cotton lining
like sad coins of a wishing well.

His casket might be oak, or cherry wood

you hope it was something sleek

and aesthetically pleasing

you hope the flag was soft enough

for hands and cheeks that needed touching.

PROLONGED EXPOSURE THERAPY

Ten minutes staring at
a fountain pen stabbing,
scribbling paper.

A rocket hit a concrete wall
I told her.

Water spots on bifocal glasses
blurring iris's, flickering like
burnt out pixels on a screen.

A desk placard bolded
with professional credentials
hooraying the study of mental illness.

A rocket hit a concrete wall and

Tic-tacs shaking in my red purse
snapping the container at its neck
revealing the candied-mint nonsense
delaying my esophagus to stretch
in the direction of answer.

A rocket hit a C-130 fuel tank spraying
shrapnel

Her voice dives
down into the depths
of her vocal cords
pulling out
forced tonal sympathy
an octave of care.

*If
you'd like, I can prescribe you Zoloft today.*

The rocket hit a concrete wall
the metal
a rocket
hit
the fuel tank
a concrete
w
a
l
l

DOXIES AND RUM

My Dachshund

watches me pour

my

third

rum and

Coke.

His

bowed legs sit

firmly

under

his robust

chocolate colored

chest.

Eyes

beaming

not

in judgment

but acceptance.

Captain

Morgan's

leg
swung firmly

a barrel resting on

he winks, opens his mouth

and
howls a whistling screech

a
rocket's screech.

A
hand over his mouth

him. I quiet

Pouring
the rest in the empty glass

the
ice breaks up

dissolving
into

themselves.

Spice,
sugar, caramel,

washes away the
dryness in my throat

and
salt from the sinuses stuck there.

Salt that I refuse

to expel

any
natural way.

My Doxie jumps on
my lap

smelling
distinctly of corn chips

for
no reason at all.

He rests his head
in the crevice

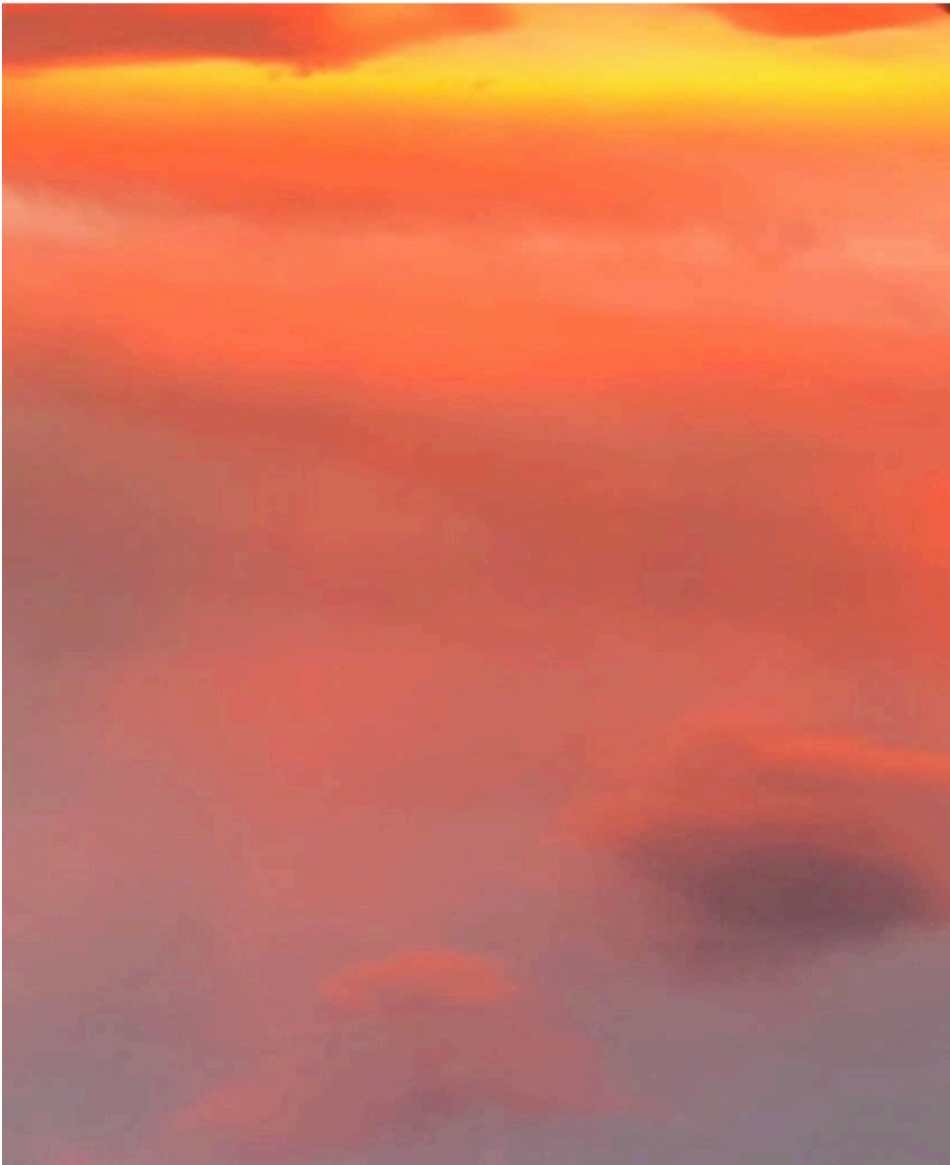
of my arm

sighing deeper

than

I thought he could.

**New Poetry from Mbizo
Chirasha: "Casava Republics,"
"Sad Revolutionary
Lullabies," "Rhetorics"**



SUNSETS OF POLITICAL MASTURBATION / *image by Amalie Flynn*

**CASAVA
REPUBLICS**

Juba

Child of lost sperm in sunsets of
political masturbation

Wagadugu

Deadline of our
revolutions

Darfur

Constipated stomach ,disease ravaged,

bloodless dozing monk.

Nairobi

Culture lost in the dust of Saxon lexicon
and gutter slang

Soweto

Xenophobia
Drunk and Afro-phobia sloshed.

Marikana

Cervical blister of the unfinished
revolution fungi.

Harare

Corruption polonium deforming elders into
political hoodlums

Congo

Lodge of secessionists and human
guillotines

SAD REVOLUTIONARY LULLABIES

.....Sing songs of afghan circumcised,

Damascus masturbating bullets

Sing *Belafonte* Sing!

Of
revolutions that never crawled, sing!

Lumumba, see whiz kids castrating
political gods

Nkurumah, see them mutilating
revolutionary goddesses

Sing *Kunta*, Sing *Kinte*

I am tired of revolutions importing
colonial mood,

Propaganda decayed pimps frying anthems
like *frikadels*

Tired savages roasting constitutions in
corruption oil pans

Sing songs of freedoms that never walked,
Sing!

RHETORICS

Mandela, the summer sun that rose through
rubbles of our winter

Gadafi and Sadamu making *shadufs* and
pyramids

..... . another spring

Obama and Osama pulling rich political
carrot in *Segorong*

Robin Island slept golden nightmares and
charcoal dreams,

Soweto virgins cracking their under feet
in the long walk to freedom

Faces carrying the burden of freedom and
anthems.

New Poetry from D.A. Gray: “Mosul Reflections,” “St. Martin in the City,” “The Rearview Has Two Faces”



STOMACH OF A COUNTRY / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Mosul Reflections

Ten years and the place is not the same.
Memory of green hills in a dry land,
cratered by what fell from the sky.
I don't know whether to trust the image
on the screen or the one in my mind.

One I only knew as Sayyd gave well water,
sweet tea and mince meat on laffa.
We were tired from the spring rains,
three days in the stomach of the country,
we sank into the hard wooden benches
and we ate.

I thought of Jonah, not wanting
to travel here, and when he did, enraged
at an apocalypse that never came –
how he rested under a bush then watched
it die.

The father of the family smiled
as I ate – both of us, with time, smiling.

Dost thou well to be angry?

His child in the corner never took her
eyes off me. Her mother would glance
over, expressionless, as if waiting
for something that never happened.

Rain fell like mortars, knocking the edges
from the dirt roads, craters in the middle.
In a few minutes it would take us with it,
descending. We'd see the fragments,
some carved reliefs; we'd wondered
what we'd destroyed, what we'd left
the world – an image of broken rock
in need of a makeshift savior.

St. Martin in the City

Hunger sometimes reaches up
grabs your cloak while you're riding.
You can't shield your eyes,
or go into hiding.

Every treasure you've carried home,
is never enough.

A beggar beside the road, lifts his head;
loose skin and sullen,
he shivers and so do you.

* * *

The day before we shipped
I was walking with Preacher
into the Walgreens for cold
medicine and we saw a man
asking for change. 'Pity it
couldn't be him,' Preacher said,
not waiting while I fished for coins.

Since returning the eyes
of every refugee leap
out of every face.

* * *

The stuff of nightmares.

Suffering
you thought you knew.

Sometimes it happens, a hand
reaches out and causes
you to draw back – until
you see your fear in their eyes

both surprised how easily
the veil between you parts.

The Rearview Has Two Faces

Your memory has two faces. The thought occurs
as you adjust your mirror in the chapel parking lot.

The eulogy's done its job, a few tears from even the most stoic, stone-faced ground pounders, the cracks in the First Sergeant's voice as he belts 'Smithson,' once, twice and again – as he waits for a response that never comes.

If you believe
the words-

he defended the abstraction of freedom with every fiber, never showed late, said his prayers, and flossed. You remember an emails he sent. 'When I get back, there's a lineman job in Oklahoma. And the houses are cheap.' Days before he did it.

You remember
the night

on your property, shooting empties off fence posts. 'I'm not going back,' he said. And you knew he would. Frustrating as hell but reliable. And you'd rather have sincere doubt than cocksure and careless.

The sun from the East burns the side of your face through the driver's side window. In the rearview you can see your left side turning red.

Yeah.

The night he told you, you didn't sleep, agonized over what to do about what he hadn't done yet.

And when he showed that morning, early, two full duffel bags and a goofy grin, you chided yourself for doubting.

You look one more time.

Sometimes he's there sitting in the back seat, an afterimage lingering after the flash has burned, you still trying to regain your vision.

Three Poems from Suzanne Rancourt



EXPLODE / *image by Amalie Flynn*

The Shoes That Bore Us

It is a dream of kind slippers that coddle bunions appeased
by hands mittened as the same kind slippers
holding warmth as forgiveness for all the combat boots
sogged by brackish muck of wars
when not hoisted in the occasional stilettos of never regrets

a conundrum of cognitive dissonance stabs the dreams
of where ever we had been, we escape to now over racked rails
rocked goat paths and deer runs you think it's a man's world
until
it is not

a sidearm presses to a right hip as cupped palms to iliac
crests
walking boundaries and borders skirting domains of
possibilities
that astrological forecasts stagger out on slow printed pages
like stammering promises spoken by the dead selling real
estate,
"Check Mate"
no choice is a lie when the inevitable is an illusion, no
freeze to suffice
that fighting, although futile,
is still taking a stand

Unhinged Again

a stone leaves the hand that flung it-air escapes
constricted vocal cords – a vomiting wild – enraged urgency
and angst

kinetic makes contact – leaves bruises the color of bludgeoned
fists pounding flesh is quiet. I can't remember if I was
screaming

my face and shielding hands turned overripe plum purple
sweet with sticky juice that dribbles down chins

attracts sugar bees you swat in autumn sun
that smells of maple leaves red with change

this hammer drives the firing pin into a child's memory, my
memory, of cap guns

explode a thousand times greater than a simple pop & puff

a chunk of lead propelled, is unhinged
from the mansplaining – the antagonistic prod of condescending
joust

I was stuck in a ring of double fisted doubts: leave don't
leave

I didn't know that I was a prisoner of white picket conditions

like my mother. Was she also a prisoner? A side bar of
recollection

a nursery rhyme my mother sang to me:

“Peter, Peter, pumpkin-eater, had a wife and couldn't keep
her

He put her in a pumpkin shell, and there he kept her very
well.”

I know my Mother knew when I was being beaten

there – my face laying with one ear pressed to cold linoleum

the other, an upward funnel catching my Mother's vengeful
whisper

“get up...get up...fight”

to be marginalized – a side note or comment, placed in the
periphery, only seen

when the reader desires or deems worthy of notice

only one of us walked from that house that day

to be silenced – a voice, a room, a home, a door closed upon
it

a mind made up, barred entrance, not worth the time to view,
hear, acknowledge

I'm writing this and telling you words are a privilege

voice is a human right thrown as stones – they fall from the
wind

Crying Over Continents

windfarms
white wake of ferries
channel crossing

a nonstop jack hammer knee
Morse code through time zones
pounding out instructions, the next destination

I'm not letting go like I used to. I feel heavier
in my gathering of nuances, intimacies –
You watch someone for hours, days
you learn what time they take their dog for a shit
turn on the garage light – the one just right of the workbench
and always with their left hand
You learn to recognize the screams of a woman
in an upstairs back bedroom being struck
or the subtle moans of make up sex easing across the back yard
from windows never locked and left half open

Or maybe,
it's the man in the downstairs apartment under yours
that you watch shaving his son's head before forcing
the kid to wear a chain and crucifix bigger than the kid's
malnourished chest with ribs that break at 0200 hrs
when Dad comes home drunk, no sex, and vile. The mother
died mysteriously, they say, in a different town, a different
country

Intimacy is being there as a ghost
being fed the compromise of "I'll never do it again"

Intimacy is being there at the end
and being held in the mantle of a dying eye

Poetry from Bryan Blanchard: “Pillar of Salt” and “The Mannequin”

Pillar of Salt

Raining fire, burning steel ...
And now I see haunted

Images of headless
Bodies bathed in bloodstained

Sand of a mannequin
Head with a swollen face

And lifeless eyes looking
Back at an explosion,

A disfigured Humvee
Staggering down the road,

A charred and gaping door,
A torso hanging out –



Sketch by Sarah Blanchard

The Mannequin

I am not a mannequin!
I am a pillar of salt!
I am the salt of the earth!
My heart is heavy with sand.

An earlier version of "Pillar of Salt" appeared in [O-Dark-Thirty](#), March 11, 2013.