

Bloodroot Literary Magazine

Volume 11
4th Digital Edition



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Bloodroot Literary Magazine

Bloodroot is a nonprofit literary magazine dedicated to publishing diverse voices through the adventure of poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction. Our aim is to provide a platform for the free-spirited emerging and established writer.

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The cover contains three of James Napoli’s photographs: “Starlings at the Intervale,” “Starlings at the Intervale 2,” and “Ontario Cormorants.” We thank him for his permission to use these images.

Note on Type

This book is set in 12 point ET Bembo, a modern face designed for the web and print by Edward Tufte and based on the Bembo family of typeface. ET Bembo is a freely available open-source font. The text was typeset using xelatex, an updated \LaTeX typesetting package, along with several other free packages, including poemscol.

Introductory Remarks

The world of publishing is vast. Agents, presses, publicists, libraries, bookstores, book clubs, lectures—the modern author must learn to navigate it all. Bloodroot is a small piece of this puzzle. We are an independent literary journal. We've never charged reading fees, sold anyone's information, or sold advertising space on our website. Therefore, we don't get paid, and we don't pay our contributors.

We do this work to get a glimpse at fresh, unprocessed new voices. We invite contributions from writers we've long admired. We discover and re-discover the reasons for writing, and indeed, for publishing. The pieces we selected demand to be read. It is our honor to present them to you, so that these voices may be heard. Thank you to the authors who trusted us with their work, and thank you readers, for being here, for being part of this with us. We hope you enjoy volume 11, *Bloodroot's* fourth digital edition.

The Editors,

RENA J. MOSTEIRIN & JAMES E. DOBSON

Tree-Crazy

like this maple, beckoning
with finger-twigs, laughter
cascading down its greeny arms.
about to shake loose into *enargeia*,
the god's arrival not as other

but as "bright unbearable reality"

and two herons shoulder up
from the pond, conferring, probably,
about minnows before one wing
flies out to draw a blade
to open the sky's throat, sun-struck

they are birds no longer

so, shuddering, I ask that I might
be let into this brightness, even
though it meant the end of me
as I might now cohere, while
tiers of maple leaves tumble forward,

eager to shred me into light

APRIL BERNARD

“Such hap as I am happed in”

from a poem by Sir Thomas Wyatt

Bunched heavy rugs and wraps
fail to disguise, instead delineate
seated “invisible” mothers beneath.
Capturing such hap as we all
are happed in, bizarre studio
daguerreotypes show children held
and propped by draped figures
molded to lumpy laps so that
history may prize these prizes,
though mostly it will not. Fretful
or slumped or wisely patient,
each copper-plate child augurs
familiar nineteenth-century agonies.
We ponder rickets, battlefields,
consumption, boredom, syphilis,
a horse’s kick upside the head.
See this one, perhaps a boy, up-
lift a fist with one finger crooked.
He’s like an infant Jesus altar-piece,

but for the twisted top lip that
sneers: "Look for the world behind
the world, if you like, but—" Allowing
no inroad to the spirit, nor hope
for the one who bore and bears him, he
only awaits such days as will hurtle him,
running, to his happenstance.

APRIL BERNARD

Post-Traumatic To-Do Lists

1.1

1. I inhabit two planes of existence.
2. One is populated by the richness of multiple identities,
3. possibilities, dreams, memories and hope.
4. One in which a single memory plays on repeat.
5. On which gravity does not act on physical entities,
6. but weighs souls down instead. This plane is invisible
7. to most, but I am concerned about hiding it
8. from those who can see it. I don't want them to know
9. that I inhabit it too. I don't want to acknowledge their visits.

1.2

1. I don't know how I became a visitor here.
2. There was a fracture in time; in reality,
3. that distorted the trajectory of my neatly linear life.
4. The tectonic plates that anchor my feet moved,
5. and a chasm was created. Maybe I was caught
6. at the wrong place at the wrong time, because I didn't
7. just drift with one randomly chosen plate.
8. I kept reliving the moment of the fragmentation.

9. I never inhabit the planes anchored by these plates simultaneously
10. and I never completely forget about either.
11. Oblivion would have been better.
12. Linearity, wholesomeness, logic – isn't that all life's about?
13. Two fissures; two fragments...is one too many.

1.3

1. The fibres of matter
2. that make up the two planes
3. intersect at specific locations.
4. I can be walking to work,
5. in the plane that everyone can see,
6. when a red car drives by. That's all it takes.
7. I'm in the second plane now.
8. Just for a second, just to shake me a little bit –
9. but not enough to let other inhabitants of the visible plane see
10. that my pace slowed down for a moment there.
11. It's fine, it's the least of my worries.
12. The worst is behind me.
13. And I have a To Do list to get to.
14. The only problem is that it doesn't stop at the red car.
15. When the ground beneath your feet tears asunder
16. you do start wondering

17. what made it happen. You move past your own little earthquake,
18. you see lines in the ground everywhere
19. and sometimes you worry that they don't exist.
20. You worry if they actually exist
21. in the invisible plane. But you know
22. that's not true, the invisible plane is marked
23. by radically different physical laws.
24. These lines are real,
25. or at least, equally real for everyone in the visible plane.
26. They are too fine, though, they haven't caused earthquakes yet.
27. They are easy to overlook.
28. But lines build fragments
29. even when fissures don't exist. You know this.
30. You can't look away.
31. You chase the lines like a lunatic.
32. But then you remember where you are.
33. In the visible world.
34. Everyone can see you running.
35. Stop. Breathe. Be normal.
36. You have a To Do list
37. to get to. But none of the items
38. on the list says

39. “Stop Playing the Victim Card and Get Over It Already.”

1.4

1. But it makes me wonder.
2. How many planes are there?
3. How many can I not see?
4. Are there people who live on more than two??
5. I am barely keeping the dissonance at bay,
6. how would someone like that go about life?
7. Not linearly, I presume.
9. I guess when you live through multiple planes it's almost like you are
dancing through life.
10. It's so sad that I can't see that.
11. I hope those people know that they are dancing.
12. Maybe their multiple lives expose more cracks in the visible world.
13. I want to hear them when they try to tell me, because I sure as hell will
never see what they are talking about.
14. But now I know.

15. I know that this world is full of lines that are easily stepped over.
16. I know this because I live in a plane where a line became a fragment.
17. I will keep living in both worlds,
18. because there is no way to repair the fracture.
19. But I can see, follow and contain
20. the fault lines from becoming fragments.

VASSIKI CHAUHAN

Successful Marriage

Mounting anniversaries carry little tread.
This is familiarity's shame.
Neither love nor loathing holds an edge
but smooth indifference cuts just the same.

JAMES WASHINGTON, JR.

Gentry

Money has clear-cut this town,
And so follow the proudly callused.
We've mostly lost touch
Since the buy-outs. But a few
Of us manage & drink coffee, black,
No cream, no sugar, into our phones,
Talking backwards, toward lightless nights
And the cricket song, or the pond frogs,
Waking into spring with their own
Hoarse serenade. But now, even now,
Our conversations are growing
Thin – mostly about who died
& Which of us is dying,
& How.

JAMES WASHINGTON, JR.

Grandmother in a Lightning Storm

Ma carried sway
 in my childhood home,
 Old Roxbury of failing
 brick row houses
 going all pot-bellied.
 We three generations
 lived skinny, our money
 pooled, so that we could stay
 at least edgewise with always bills.
 Summers, I couldn't run
 outside concrete with friends
 for her fear of heatstroke.
 And the way she pronounced it:
Do you want to give yourself heatstroke?
 Telling, not at all a question –
 convincing, even though I didn't
 know what such a thing could be.
 When a rain came to crack
 summer's stifling with lightning,
 God's pronouncement,
 it was time to draw the curtains,
 sit still, away from windows. Reverent.
 She told about an aunt, who had defied,
 sewing at a window for added light,
 while a storm stretched immense over the city
 as she continued to hem.
 Her needle glowed, awesome,
 hotter than the cast iron
 skillet after Sunday church chicken fry.
 She couldn't drop that needle
 fast enough, then fixed
 within the window frame, the lesson done,
 and passed along
 as family portrait.

JAMES WASHINGTON, JR.

The light of the star

can deceive: is it
even there anymore?
The shine of your eyes
as you ponder to leave,
Oh, love, are you
anywhere there
anymore?

JAMES WASHINGTON, JR.

Lament

When words sit
in your hand
and refuse to dance,
where to go?
The marriage can
be fine and the kids
growing straight,
or the wife
dancing bottomless
and our faith betrayed
while death is the shadow
at the tip of the tongue,
and euphoria? pancake-flat
in a coffin of cliché.
It really doesn't matter
when words
get that way
as they will –
herding mice or worse –
when they just sit
to our dismay
cheaply perfumed
and wallflower still.

JAMES WASHINGTON, JR.

The bullet

The chair is not
a chair is a cradle
a coffin and sits you sit
in on it not two feet
from a hospital bed.

The woman is not
a woman is a mother is
a skin your skin taut
with meteorites ignited
from within.

The room is not
a room is an ocean
a cove a washing
wave, we are blind
and clean from salt.

She said she couldn't see,
her fingernails growing
as if she were a baby,
and you, soft-kneed
and weary already.

She said she wasn't
scared until then and
then then then she called
you please come please
come and you came.

She said she laughed
almost laughed, I guess
I guess I dodged a bullet
and her hands soft and
her fingernails growing.

And her nails growing
and the stars spreading
inside. She almost laughed
she made me laugh
like a cry from far away.

Oh mother, can't you hear
the bullet? It's so slowly
arriving. It's already arrived
and already wounded and
all those stars are being born.

REBECCA SIEGEL

Feral

This morning's radio told me that
a bobcat had attacked two women
in the nearby village of Wilder.

While I waited for a friend at the cafe
two gazelles, slim necks, shared
a table and demurely lapped at

chai tea lattes with skim milk.
They leaned toward each other,
extended their delicate, thin

arms to touch each other in
reassurance, doe eyes blinking
calmly as I stirred my tea with

a rough paw and, mesmerized,
watched their tender browse.
My friend Ruth dreamed of

wolves, then, awake, understood
that the wolf was inside her,
the howl and the hunger.

I dream of bears, their searching
paws, snuffling snouts, their wet
and desperate appetite.

For weeks now, I've been holding
back tears by pressing my tongue
to the roof of my mouth.

I'm trying to hold back a growl,
calm my raised hackles, smooth
my serrated teeth, and still my

skin twitches when the wind brings
the scent of sweet softness. Something
ancient in me perks my ears, says,

*I am bobcat, bear, wolf. Lock your
tender kids inside. I am as old as the
Earth and all of this is mine.*

REBECCA SIEGEL

The finch

the downward upward swoop of her flight path as she approaches the feeder
her wings riffling the December air, then the silent scrape of claws on the perch
the seed shell split, the nimble tongue scooping to capture the germ
the perch's shiver and air flexing beneath her feathers as she lifts off
the seed in my throat, the thing that aches to split and sprout,
cracks—everywhere the ice is singing of spring

REBECCA SIEGEL

Sunrise Farm



JAMES NAPOLI

Oriole, White River Junction VT



JAMES NAPOLI

Trees in Snow, Peacham VT



JAMES NAPOLI

Cows, East Randolph VT



JAMES NAPOLI

There Are No Songs About Margarets
(A Poem for Women & Girls with Plain Names)

Margaret doesn't twist your tongue.
It's not flowery, sweet, and it can't ride a melody.
It denies whimsy and fails to mesmerize.
Margaret inspires practicality and hard truth.

Margaret is a wind-whipped ruddy cheek.
A nursemaid smoothing a cool sheet on your bed.
A freckle on an expanse of fair skin.
Margaret hangs laundry on the line, slacks snapping in a stiff breeze.

Margaret is the bindweed that wilts in the summer sun,
Freshening when the shadows enclose her.
A green eye seeking shelter in the shade,
Margaret wears a wide-brimmed hat, a long-sleeved shirt.

Margaret is simplicity and forecasts in the Farmers' Almanac.
Firm as a new mattress.
Two hands that knot a thick, oily rope securely.
Margaret is intention, accurate, calm.

But Margaret winces when she hears her name,
Rues her own arrogance.
A muscular heart of blood-pumping chambers,
Margaret is organs and bones and systems.

Margaret is the above-ground death, the underground root.
Soil and leaf litter and oxygenating earthworms.
A cloud-striped summer and a dangerous winter,
Margaret is every unforgiving season.

Margaret is sitting on the cool moss next to you,
A white hand beside yours resting on the tardigrades.
A feather falling from a bird preening above,
Margaret is an intangible breath you struggle to take.

MEGHAN OLIVER

Advanced Economics

(On the Eastern Border of the EU)

This is the challenge—
the science you need

to translate the fear
that on one bank of the river

the merchandise is in danger
of flooding the market

and on the other
that no one will buy it.

Sometimes the cows
resent the presence of storks.

If there are too many frogs,
wet times are at hand.

*Why not sell off
a few head of meat?*

It would involve just a small
adjustment in the market.

So intent
on its own clump of grass

a hard-working beast
would not even raise its eyes.

DANIEL BOURNE

When Kavanaugh Got Confirmed

I thought of my rapist
rising
the next morning,
wherever he may
be—drinking
coffee, his tattoo ink
turning into newspaper ink.
He's browsing the morning
headlines. He's got a wife,
she's making him up
a plate of breakfast.
They live
in the suburbs, their quiet
house a puzzle piece,
in-sync with the pieces next
door, across the street.
The lawns are all nuclear
green and the birds return
meaning to tweets and everything
fits perfectly inside
a little bubble, bursting
with this reality.

JAMIE DEUEL

Women Who've Gone

*I hold the women who've gone before us
in high regard*

intones the purveyor

of Silks and Satins for Sweet Milady
in Oxford, Mississippi. Paging through
a chamois-soft *Southern Living* magazine
in a chilly X-ray waiting room
in Middlebury, Vermont,
I pause to savor her corseted voice
within a piece on small-businesswomen.
Rather than a customer data-base,
I see her neatly penciled ledger
as the keeper of chimerical secrets:
bust-and-cup size, waistline measure,
hip-and-abdomen figures.
Through illusions of haberdashery
she turns social ridicule of female aging
into a comforting self-respect.
A rush of tenderness warms me.
Pillow-y-plush, fleshly bodies,
encapsulate like Russian dolls,
secrets within secrets, inwardness
going in and in. Body into Mind,
Mind within Body.
Until a final infertility of both,
a partaking of the Eleusinian rites
of vanishing softly.
Like the thread of email
tumbling down my tiny screen.
Who will write? Who will call?
In the next room, a technician
soon will stare straight through me.
Regard my bones.
The drab-lit waiting room
seems to hold the ghosts of all
other women who've gone before,
and waited for answers.

JANICE MILLER POTTER

Please Don't Hit Me

The echoing vocalizations bounce on the souls of waiting breaths in my mouth.

Home is no longer safe,
But I can't live without you.
I'm on repeat, and god has never seemed more distant.

Home is no longer safe,
Home is no longer safe,
And I can't live without you.
Can you make me beautiful again?
The skin of the fruit begs to be peeled.
Your hands leave bruises,
And you've already held me.

Home is no longer safe,
Home is no longer safe.
I can't live without you.
I'm on repeat, and god has never seemed more distant.

SEAN FELIX

Michael—the writer—at Night

He saw not her eyes flash,
 instead a silver flick of wrist
 as earrings go pinging into a dish.
 She was a chest of banging drawers.
 A man, her, a lover's fight. A pen.
 A little scene—more sketch—late night.

They're different, words at night.
 Past dark, accompanied by flash,
 they throttle from his pen.
 A vice-like grip on wrist
 that leaves him rifled through like drawers.
 Insides upturned, displayed in a dish.

Then a vacancy arrives: waiting cup, foodless dish.
 Concave, crescent, vacuumed night.
 Scattered things returned to drawers
 quietly, no gleam no flash.
 Small as an oval width of wrist,
 the world pinholes to the pen.

What comes from pen
 cannot be ladled into dish.
 Often it's the you: your wrist
 your foot, dreams, knees, your night.
 A light that will flash
 or not flash. Think drawers.

Thinking about those drawers,
 the man and woman too, with pen
 in hand, all in a flash,
 Michael thought about the dish
 blue, white and flowered, night- light lit dancing wrist.

On that wrist,
 the things atop those drawers,
 the idea of a fight at night,
 he thought hard with his pen:
 What else about the dish?
 What else about the flash?

What else about the night? Wrist
 flicking flash and sliding drawers,
 pen again tracing jewelry dish.

SABINE HOSKINSON

Two Januarys

It's happening again: wildfires burning Chico, Paradise torched.
San Francisco socked not with fog but smoke,
or so they say. I'm only on my way.

Narrow in my seat, I cannot pin the westward plane
on these middle states it shadows,
nor can I help thinking, again and again

The next time I fly it will be East. January 1st,
one year precise since I moved
San Francisco to New Hampshire.

Reading a library book about love I don't think
of the love thing that might be happening,
a new flickering thing I've left East for now.

A dying man has entered his estranged son's bungalow
looking and trying to know the boy man—
I turn the page and there it is:

A pressed palm leaf slid deep in the gutter
left as bookmark or memento,
waxy grooves catching against fingertip pads.

Last January this happened too, a first for me:
a pressed sprig of pine fell from another loaned book.
In blue ink across the bottom, *This book traveled to Labrador, June 2017.*

Here now in November
holding this second leaf, flying, thinking of both Januarys
I can't be the only one to say time moves sideways.

The plane is dark; the fade away is easy.
This book about love shines under overhead light.
All that fire is not yet contained.

Haiku on Leaving the City

I

To someone with hands:
pinhole, landscape; hand and strings,
while you have no land.

II

Clocks tick like always.
I gave the cat ice water.
Things are packed away.

III

Rather than writing,
the billboard needs changing, but
tonight I can't reach.

IV

This bar is so loud;
I'd like to stop talking now,
so you can go on.

ELIOT CARDINAUX

Separation

I'm a tree	hugger
I embrace	lumber
Press my ear	to it
Rings expand	fluid
Take a hike	baby
To Silver Lake	maybe
Back again	springtime
Breathe in deep	sweet pine—
Broke my fall	topple
Snapped a branch	awful
Please don't tell	others
Be my God	Mother
Whisper to me	my mistake
You forgive	I take
I divide	culprit
Into myself	guilty—
Without life	stillness
On this trail	illness
I'm a freak	I know
In the woods	it shows
May my death	rotting
Give to trees	nodding
Smaller still	Alice
Disappear	solace—
Lose it all	mirror
Down the hole	here
Metamorphic	rabbit
Death, trails, birth	habit
Lose desire	to know
Embrace life	shirk clothes
Meditate	human
Until I am	new again.

KATHERINE LEE LAZARUS

Guys Night Out

The brain was meant to kill.
It developed for that reason as well as
for us to climb the sky.
Hence, if we first
notice that the rush of blood exists
as if it will hardly cease,
we also cling to wish only to
watch it diminish in force.
It happens again and again, of course,
the sure loss of friend and foe.
Given this cross, to probe more is to persist
like pent-up saps against the odds.
Or is this a case
for the last wake of saints?

Take how the first Dylan and Louie MacNeice
one sang battle pretty much
all night long without a decent break
while they heard the clink
of dark pints and the pumps of thirst.
They themselves drank hard stuff
since for yet one more time, they knew
they would sink to defeat
and eventually weigh less than
the shadows each glimpsed in his glass.
Whatever it was
would shut them down entire
with no fête, no self left on some map,
no bluff, no regret.

But at last they tried to go for laughs.
So what if the two couldn't repeat
last-night's visions had they cared to,
hunched over, as they'd been,
in the rap of extempore while trying
to believe an inch of woe made final sense?
Yet they returned again and again, no less
good and ready to stop the thought
of slaughter in the air.
Their attempt to get beyond the grim
and to believe they could
never left them, as they sought to cut
their drinks not with water, but with what
we once called hymn.

L.A. RENZA

Sisters

I.

I have known you many years, long before I first searched your eyes
in a black and white photograph of you on a tattered hand fan
of an Alabama funeral parlor: two pig-tail-plaited black girls
sitting side by side, staring into a Kodak camera, pulling me inside
your likeness to my own daughters the morning they stood
holding hands at the bus stop on the first day of pre-school,
their futures stretching before them in a pathless, wooded sky
filled with tangled vines and boughs that I had failed to cut away
in those years when I stood surefooted and shalom but lived
as a faceless name, castaway on a sea with no way to cross over
to my own sisters, children of my father, a man I never called Daddy,
whose daughters met me, their oldest sibling, for the first time
the day their father was buried; and you make me think
of those mornings before the cab horn blew to take my grandmother
across town to cook, iron, and clean for white people, when
I'd watch her steel hands pull a brush through the tangled hairs
of two daughters, my mother's little sisters, greasing the strands
with Dixie Peach Hair Dressing and twisting the locks around
a hot curling iron; then, years later, I'd watch the girls fall
in and out of love with men whose only passions were fire and ice.

II.

Sisters, your wings didn't break
in the unholy water and swirling winds
of long, harrowing nights.

You didn't bend
when raging streams swelled your banks
and unmade your sweet bed.

You were the bow-tied ribbon and ragdoll
pulled from the rubbish
of a bombed Birmingham church.

You were the flowers budding
when they lowered
those four little black girls
into the ground.
Did you come awake?

Did you rise up
out of the deep dark pits
that only God could have filled
in some men?

JOHN WARNER SMITH

Murder on Red Hill, 1922

for Filmore Watt Daniel and Thomas Fletcher Richard

Imagine

half the town of 500 people
dream walking out of one bed,

and the other half lying wide awake
but not saying what they know
for fear of words
becoming the blood of two white men:
kidnapped, tortured and murdered
one horrific, black-moon August night,
in Mer Rouge, Louisiana in 1922.

Imagine

the midnight barn meetings
and hooded faces,

crosses jutting fire into an unmerciful sky,

every fist blow, shotgun blast,
and slash of the knife,

how loudly the silent, unrepentant
prayers and muted whispers spoke

in the quick, stoic stares
and masquerading smiles
of the town's white people
when they passed each other
in store aisles or gathered in barbershops,
salons and Sunday church services.

Imagine

no one convicted,
 no one in the courtroom daring to say
 the story colored folks told
 late at night
 when they turned the lights out,
 bolted the doors,
 and had little else to gossip about except

how the powerful men of Mer Rouge
 like Dr. McKoin, the Mayor, slept around
 and grew possessive of promiscuous
 mulatto women who passed for white,

no one daring to say why
 the dynamite that blew up Lake Lafourch
 had severed the groins
 of one of the men

with surgical precision.
 Such neat, straight cuts
 of bone and flesh.

Picture

the scalpel, body parts,
 lake water and dynamite sticks

stitched together, ounce by ounce,
 with twisted thorns of barbed wire

inside a quilted patchwork
 of daises and daffodils

blooming on a rolling red hill.

JOHN WARNER SMITH

Fight the Power

for Amiri Baraka

In these times of raging winds and waters
that we fight to hold back, we need the songs
of Phillis crossing the Middle Passage.

We need the weary blues songs
and songs of blistered feet and worn out shoes.

We need Tubman and Douglass songs,
and Civil Rights marching, spending time
in jail for freedom songs.

We need the songs of Billie, Ella, and Sarah,
Duke, Count, Satchmo, and Mahalia.

Bring back Ray, Sam, Aretha, and Jackie.

Play some Miles, Bird, and Coltrane.

Bring back doo-wop and bebop.

Play Sunday morning, old time religion,
praise Jesus songs, like the shout amen,
rock back and forth in your seat songs,
and the whoop, holler, run down the aisle
and do a holy dance songs.

Play some hand-clapping, foot-tapping
organ and tambourine songs,
and songs with drums, strings, and horns
played by bands with real musicians.

Bring back the 45s, albums, and 8-tracks
sold in neighborhood record shops.

Bring back Motown, Memphis,
and Philly Soul songs, and the only black DJ
on a white AM radio station,
Saturday afternoon soul-hour songs.

Bring back Soul Train, BET Video Soul,
and late night, mellow, not made
for dancing and bobbing the head songs.

Bring back BYOB rent party songs,
some blue-light, Smokey and the Miracles,
slow-drag, sodas in the ice box,
house party songs,
and some half-pint of whiskey
on the juke joint table,
ten for a dollar jukebox songs.

Play some swing out, two-step, hold me tight
tonight and never let me go songs.

Play Stevie, Donnie, Curtis, and Marvin songs.
Play *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*
and *Lift Every Voice and Sing* songs.

We need the Malcolm X Black Nationalist songs,
and the songs of Hughes, Baldwin,
Baraka, Sanchez, and Giovanni.

We need the *government standing up*
for poor people songs,
and *stop building walls and tax-shelters*
for the super-rich folks songs.

We need the *every white school teacher*
believing every black boy can succeed songs,

the *stop profiling, killing,*
and putting innocent black men in prison songs,

stop pandering to the NRA
and do something to stop gun violence songs,

and *stop sexually harassing*
and start giving more respect
to women songs.

Bring back all the songs that say
Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around,
Ain't No Stopping Us Now,
Wake Up Everybody, and
Fight the Power.

JOHN WARNER SMITH

Doctrine of Signatures

I

Repeatedly I have seen the clouds
fold to mimic perfectly
the shapes of the mountains below.

II

Scientists only recently discovered
that spruce trees will release spores as
clouds roll in to seed them for rain.

The Hopi have known this for centuries,
and will travel well over a hundred miles
to Mesa Verde every winter to gather
boughs for the ceremonies back home.

III

You seemed suddenly so appealing
in the warm mountain sun at our campsite
in the morning, by the river, breakfast
over, as you turned to get dressed
for our hike, just as the cottonwoods
began flooding the air with their catkins
and covering the ground with their snow,
that I led you by the hand to our tent,
where we allowed ourselves, once again,
to remember why we're together, naked
on top our sleeping bags, beneath the
screened-in ceiling open to the sky above,
so, when you nudged me onto my back
and stretched your full length on top of me,
I was looking up the trees into that blue
dome of sky, the way we used to do as
children, watching the white sprays
of cotton fly through the air up above me.

TRACY LIGHTSEY

Drought

There was a time when she wouldn't have even noticed him, standing there like a shadow on the rocks, thin as the cards in her hands, dry as a preacher's wife's laugh against the clang and clamor of her earrings...

She shook her head and raised her eyes to the sky once again. The birds of her language drew people in like clear water; she was a well in the center of her village... she was its tree, her arms spread wide for anyone needing comfort or shade.

And her laughter was like water as well; she pumped men up, shined children's cheeks, and made women blush past their worries and grudges, at least until they managed to get home.

But she knew about the laughter that dried men up too, that cut them into shadows and wrapped them like labels on tin cans; she knew the terror they carried in their skins, watched their souls eaten away over years, by that raging invisible hunger from within.

And this is what she felt from him now, as he hovered on the edge of the crowd gathered around her, the villagers come to drink at her well...

She motioned for him to sit, noticed his pale hands trembling, noticed the way the light shone down on the thin part in his hair. She could tap it with a card, she thought, and his head would split to his shoulders. "What is it you came to ask, my young man?" She smiled, though he was obviously older than she.

He looked like a man unused to such questions, as if he'd always had the answers in his pocket, but now, the alcoholic daughter, perhaps, or the upcoming divorce, had loosed him like a seed and brought him floating on the wind to her shores.

He had a brief whisper of real memory around him, a faint lingering scent of his purpose or mission, but it was hard to pick up on her heartbeat, as if the wind of his life had uprooted him from the ground, and left him with only what nourishment he could breathe.

But she needed that ground to get a reading, needed the current flowing through the moisture in the earth, like the milk she offered the spirits, so she spit on the ground at his feet, laid her warm hand on his arm, and asked, a canoe, flowing on the tenderness of her voice,

what grief he had wrapped himself so tightly around he could no longer remember how to open. He turned his face away, but she saw one tiny sliver of a tear as he sighed and spread his hands wide as the question...

And in that brief moment, rippling across the surface of his face, she felt the connection she needed. She shuffled the cards in her hands; the thunder echoed off in the distance, the electricity in the breeze lifted the hair on her arms... a raindrop landing on her dusty bronze skin...

TRACY LIGHTSEY

Your Hands in fur-lined Gloves

Your hands in the fur-lined
gloves she gave you as a gift
when she left.

Such enormous soft warmth,
swallowing your hands as if
the whole of your body could slip in.

They wrap around your fingers
the way you remember her mouth,
or the way her voice would hold you
enrapt in its gaze for whole hours
at a time when she sang.

It's a kind of singing too, this
opening you endlessly outward yet
focusing on your intake of breath
like a knife, like that beam of light
from the front of your brain that
can cut anything, except for the fact
that she left you, and the dark smoky,
velvet smooth opening inside that
won't close, like the view out your
window this late autumn morning,
frost on what's left of the leaves,
one more page of your life fallen.

But she did leave you those gloves,
and somewhere, deep inside them,
you can still smell her hands in the fur

TRACY LIGHTSEY

My Poem Today is Hiding

in the morning twilight by the river, huddled
beneath the dogwood and red willow, tucked
among the tawny long grasses, just watching
the world around her grow gradually warmer and more light...

She has nothing to say really, is busy feeling
her way along the landscape with her breathing,
as if her soul could walk lightly across the ice-
encrusted waters, or leave no tracks in the frost
covered grass, or climb the thin branches of willow
unnoticed; as if the whole of this landscape was
inside her somehow: the ducks drifting lazily
across the warm open water, the slight wreathes
of steam that caress and hover around them; the
quiet rustle of mice in the grasses just behind her...
the slow flower of the whole world breathing open;
the way her arms spread wide as her breathing as she
turns to face the sun, that jewel that rises in the middle
of her forehead and glitters on the grasses all around.

TRACY LIGHTSEY

Homesick on the North Esk

Swollen by a morning cloudburst,
the burn hurtles down
its narrow rocky bed.

We have come to see salmon leap
in water dark as stout,
churned to deafening froth.

First, they fly up the middle
silver bodies quivering,
but beaten back, search for slower
eddies where currents sculpt curved niches in rock.

Finally finding the steps
hewn from the stony gorge,
they struggle upstream,

miles from open sea and natal grounds
where they spawn in shallow gravelly beds
and die.

They are diadromous,
able to live in freshwater and seawater,
body chemistry morphing with habitats,

while we crouch
on sodden moss,
needing to feed and fatten

in unfamiliar places,
till struck with an ache that
hauls us home.

IVY SCHWEITZER

The First Lady as Victim

After Russell Edson

The first lady stands behind the unpresidential president as he says deplorable things in front of people with pens. People with cameras. The first lady's body language is cagey. Her face is a clenched fist. The only expression she can muster is a tepid smile. Her makeup is thick and severe. Thick enough to ensure that whatever needs to be covered up is adequately covered up. Her hair is pulled back into a stranglehold.

The unpresidential president stands in front of the first lady. Builds himself up for the captive audience until he is as tall as a luxury hotel. The ample shadow is hers to bear...

COREY D. COOK

The First Lady as Accomplice

After Russell Edson

The first lady floats into the pressroom in a cloud of tulle and says, I am here for my photoshoot. I am afraid you must be confused, a reporter stammers, we were told you had a message for the American people.

The first lady reluctantly agrees to read her anti-cyber bullying speech. Punctuating each plagiarized line with an exaggerated pose.

You do know that your husband has a Twitter account, right? the same reporter asks.

The first lady purses her lips and extends her neck.

You have read his tweets, haven't you?

The first lady places her right hand on her hip and leans forward.

You do know what a cyber bully is, don't you?

The first lady slips on her I-really-don't-care-do-u? jacket and storms out...

COREY D. COOK

Inevitable

I am crouched in the ribcage
 of the canoe, child of the clan,
 when the rain eats the farthest mountain—

The disappearing sky descends slow,
 my parents cross-stroke till their arms sing,
 the lake gulps their paddles

and we are racing, the bow splitting
 the water on either side,
 the storm an ink blot spreading behind us—

Thirty feet from shore I turn: the wind's wet breath
 laps my face, the world has shortened
 to the length of the lake and the far side boils—

We hit ground and mom yells run!
 I flash up the path in my life jacket,
 fumble at the tent flap

as the leaves quake and the first drops
 smack the canopy. I dive in, crouch to look out—
 my parents are heaving the boat onto shore

but as I watch the wall of rain runs across
 the shallows and strikes down. It roars
 on the tent roof, my parents pause—

The race is lost, sky fallen—
 they turn their faces out to the rain,
 laughing.

ELLEN PARENT

My Family Identifies Birds from the Kitchen Window

Twenty below zero. Ecstatic,
birds pluck seeds from our snow.

We try to remember
names: chickadee, junco,
that one with the crest—

We're together in this house
for the first time all year. The birds

roll sunflower seeds in their beaks.
We keep count, ghosts of their
names winging back from the past:
purple finch, titmouse, nuthatch.

Remember this: mom making
an egg sandwich, dad crumbling walnuts
over yogurt, my siblings at the table.

Remember this bird,
and this one, and this one.

ELLEN PARENT

Preschool, Apple Orchard

We climb the pillars
in this old low church, this orchard
of flying buttress branches
and stained glass sky,
we hug tree trunks to our cheeks
and shake the rafters for alms.
We are soaked up to our shins,
red-fingered from the dewy grass.
We pile apples: so small, mottled
like old nun's fists, blotched
by liver spots and crusted scabs.
I bite into one— it sucks the wetness
from my tongue, sour and dry
as a river stone. I spit the pellet down.
I won't eat another bite, I run
from the church unrepentant,
I believe in myself in this morning:
I have gathered my own food
and I have chosen not to eat.

ELLEN PARENT

El Padre Olvidado (The Forgotten Father)

North of Juarez
 Miguel Hidalgo,
 The unflinching priestly father
 Who died for *libertad*
 Has been forgotten by the Anglo,
 Acid-washed away, his visage replaced
 By a pale-skinned, grey-coiffed Washington.
 But here, in Jalisco,
 Staring at a ceiling
 The question circles round me,

What must you have seen
 That fateful day,
 Facing a firing squad
 That aimed steadfastly,
 Unsmiling exterminators of the native way
 Grown in *campos*
 Worshipped in *Iglesias*
 Like those where first you rang
 Revolution's defiant bell?

Tradition flows
 Like your monastic robe
 Spreading out
 Across Rio Grande's surface
 Following its serpentine path
 Travelling southward
 Carried by spirits
 Of the muddy river
 Once choked by sorrows
 And colored scarlet
 By bayonets
 And musket balls

Its cautionary tales
Stand at mute attention
Shamed into silence
By heat
And wind
And tears of elders
Wrapped in serapes
Dyed in Maya blue.

MUKUND GNANADESIKAN

Things I Should Say to Sarah

You know how you walk
by things as if blinded
while they shape themselves
to the shape they are—that
accounts for the white curtains
with the frigging ruffles you
wouldn't let me tell you were
picked by the previous owner,
the ones you think I bought on
purpose like someone who
would buy those frigging curtains.

You know how you hurry past
people but never hear them— that
accounts for why when we talk,
I get so void of voice, while some
kind of divider drops down between
us and you move it like a mirror to see
what you want to see as I try
to figure out how much light to let
in under the circumstances or
whether I should let any in at all.

LAURINDA LIND

Fourth Lake: August 2016 (for Mark)

The children take a selfie on the dock,
oblivious of the rapid sunset behind
the hills. But we see clearly, don't we, Mark,
the fact that they're just silhouettes of mind
and matter, dancing barefoot now above
the waves that subtly push and pull. At home
there is a photograph of relatives
from 50 years ago. You know their names.
You spoke to them on this same lakeside beach,
a simple yes or no to some great-aunt
whose cane sat here beside the fence while she
looked up amazed, her heart still full of want.
Is yours? Mine, too, even as our granddaughter
runs laughing toward us, trailing chilly water.

PAUL LAMAR

For George (2)

Our advertised scenes: my beard dye
and running shoes, your leather coat
and earrings. Tough boy, you, and I—
fresh old man. There is no great harm

in posing. Walt was a nurse, and Emily
wore white. Johannes was autumnal
by opus 5. They stripped unceremoniously
each night and boarded the monastic boat

with roaming hands. Skin! Bone.
Their heads were free of sound
except the thudding blood. Alone.
Their dreams became the art.

I have no art, just artifice,
publicity by day. By night
I have the grasp and kiss
and your uncovered heart.

PAUL LAMAR

Hope

I was in New York City with a three-month-old baby
and a husband so discouraged he spent
most of his time on the corner
vying for sips from brown paper bags
passed hand to hand in sympathy
for the harsh in that city.

The sun was down and I had just decided he wouldn't be back
any time soon and that walking the block again
in search of dropped change for a single cigarette (5 cents at the corner store)
or a place to pawn the iron
which was the only thing of value I had left
was no longer a reasonable option.

Desperate for positive I pulled out the last
of the powdered soap from the plain white box I bought
two weeks before when we had a dollar to spend.

I scrubbed the sink, washed the dishes from our meal the day before
(chicken backs and white bread), wiped the floor on my hands and knees
and took the trash out to toss down the shoot on the landing.

There, on the steps leading to the fifth floor,
was an almost full pack of cigarettes.

I cried, smoked, and called that day done.

Later we were living in a seedy hotel in LA
with a bathroom so funky no amount of scrubbing
could dispel the dis-ease.

A place where most rooms were rented by the hour: \$20.

The broker for the services that went with those rooms
parked his camper in the parking lot every night.

We were desperate.

No money and the baby almost a year old and the day to day and hand to
mouth

wearing everything thin.

We woke up one morning with no food or possibilities,
went to sit in the car we had bought for \$200,
borrowed from a friend,
knowing we had no gas,
just the need to leave that room
and sit somewhere else for a minute.

There, by the passenger door was the envelope:
nothing on or in it but a hundred and twenty dollars.

Cash.

We made it to the gas station, then to McDonalds
and feasted on hotcakes and maple syrup that morning.

God don't work that way for everyone.

DEBORAH MASHIBINI-PRIOR

Migration

A thousand years ago the whale moves in the water
the bones move in the whale
the whale wracked with bone and bonesong
long slow notes
blue tones of bone and long slow notes that shudder
along the floor of the sea like *something*
some dark animal we've never seen
if music can be an animal
made of bones and I think it can

DARREN HIGGINS

Lavender Dinosaur

Nobody ever knows
how to tell you about time,
and now that fires are raging
in California's forests, and silver mines
are relegated to a mythic past,
what about the dinosaur
in my living room,
the lavender one trapped
behind music box glass?
Shall I get a hammer and smash the window
to get the faded beast out,
let him roam free,
let him storm the neighborhood,
herding a flock of pterodactyls
singing *Close to You*
while I worry about water
and the lateness of the hour?

LINDA NEAL

Audition

1.

I am trying out for a musical in which I might be, all things being equal, the lead. But I do not anticipate it. I walk into a practice room where I intend to warm up and find a famous author at the piano, ready for my audition. Immediately she leads me outside the room, where lone students at long tables are hunched over books. Sing for them, she says. I balk. I'm not warmed up. This audition was supposed to be with her alone. I follow her into another room, where three male directors wait. The author says my audition is over. Wait, I say. I haven't even sung. But I already know I won't get the part: I wasn't willing to sing anywhere, in any state, for anyone. A true lead must be willing to do that.

I hang my head and take my place as Peasant Dancer/Chorus.

2.

I change my audition song to "Green Finch and Linnet Bird." A tough song at best, I know I'll sound awful if I'm not warmed up. I find myself back in the same practice room, running the song in my head before I must sing for the male director for whom I sang this song at summer opera camp at sixteen, when he had to pause multiple times to redirect me along the correct melody.

In my head, my voice is brittle and weak.

3.

Everyone from high school has gathered for a talent show. I decide to perform a song I wrote while heartbroken four years ago. I want to sing it because, finally, I can sing it without feeling the pain of the heartbreak the song is about, because it's fully in the past. Finally I can sing it without self-pity, and showcase the merits of the song itself. But by the time I return to the stage, no one is left in the audience but the class stoner. He claps before I've begun.

4.

My ex-boyfriend has bought costumes for me and two other women to wear. I put mine on to figure out what it's supposed to be. I look in the mirror: it's a shark, I understand.

Which is odd, since the snout looks much more like a bird's beak than anything else. I look at the labels my ex-boyfriend has marked on the other costumes: they're for J and H, two models he works with.

At the time, it's also the end of the world.

5.

There is a family riding in the car of a rollercoaster that is trundling along a track. The youngest of the family, a little girl, is inventing the track in her mind as the car rolls along. The family has conducted a nefarious plan, and they're getting away thanks to the track the girl is creating for their escape. But ahead, the track has run out. Panicked, they yell at the girl. I'm working on it, she responds, annoyed.

For some reason, though I am a person who stands to suffer from what this family has done (they're destroying the planet), I feel for the little girl. She's doing something bad, but she's doing her best to do it well.

As I observe it it strikes me that it's very well scripted. I make a note to write this movie. But later, it sounds very stupid.

6.

The only chance at survival is to hop into one of a limited number of sleek black pods on a sleek black train that is about to depart into a tunnel. (The famous author left on a prior train.) There's a dinner beforehand, in a room on the top floor of a nice restaurant, at which we all must decide whether or not we're to get into the pods. I become suspicious that this is a trap, that to get into a pod is actually to eliminate any chance of survival. I excuse myself and go downstairs.

In the restaurant, I pretend to be a server and slip into the bathroom. It occurs to me in the bathroom that I didn't need to pretend to be a server, but now everyone is expecting me to come out and work. The bathroom is very nice. I wonder what might happen if I never come out. The wallpaper is black with gold appliqué. The toilets are sleek and black. I decide to stay.

7.

I get hungry. I come out of the bathroom. Upstairs, the train has departed without me.

MOLLY GUINN BRADLEY