

The background of the image features a repeating pattern of abstract, organic, blob-like shapes in four colors: blue, yellow, green, and pink. These shapes are arranged in horizontal rows, creating a textured, organic feel.

'FIRSTS'

SIXPENCE SOCIETY

SIXPENCE SOCIETY



LITERARY JOURNAL

Thank you to the writers, the illustrators, the photographers, and of course, the readers. Issue One has been a journey, but it has been an absolute joy!

Contents

3. James Alexander, *My West End Debut*
4. Attik, *Peonies*
5. Jerome Berglund, *Haiku Firsts*
6. Peter Burrows, *First Spring & The First Arriving*
8. L.M. Cole, *Reunion*
9. Peter Devonald, *Misunderstanding, First Kiss & The First Egg*
12. Melissa Dorval, *Gambling*
14. Fefe, *musings about soy sauce*
15. Madeleine French, *At the Willow*
16. Indranil Ghosh, *Gold Mine*
17. Millie Godwin, *Home-Home & Home*
19. Chloe Henney, *Longest Fall*
20. Tina Lamoreux, *More Than Friends*
21. Susan T. Landry, *Firsts*
23. Suzanne Lavallee, *Firsts*
24. Mercedes Lawry, *Your Turn & Ripe for Spring*
26. Richard LeDue, *I Can't Remember My First Poem*
27. Sophie Leslie, *Slag Heap*
29. Jeannie Marschall, *Cast About*
31. Jedediah Matthews, *Moments Elsewhere*
33. Meg Merrilie, *For the First Time*
35. Zach Murphy, *Faults*
36. Sarah Oakes, *The First Time*
37. Anthony O'Donovan, *Smooch*
38. George O'Neill, *First Day in Venice*
40. Mabel Osejindu, *My Scar*
42. Angel Rosen, *Little Things*
43. Natalie Schriefer, *How to Make Banana Pudding*
45. Bud Sturguess, *The First Time You See Her*
46. Pierre Turcotte, *Hope*
47. Lynn Valentine, *Hometown Matters*
48. Kelsey Webb, *Teeth*
50. Imelda Wei Ding Lo, *Comfort & My First Real Thanksgiving*
53. Adora Williams, *Astral Paradise*
54. Thomas Zimmerman, *First Coffee Break & Persephone's First Spring*

My West End Debut

There was horoscope happenstance
on that moonlit Saturday
as Jupiter aligned with Mars.
I was the West End debutant,
more Young Vic than Old Vic,
the suburban teenage hick
surrounded by peace, love and entente
but still too young to go into bars.
So, we headed directly Waterloo way
and took our chance.

We collected ten pound tickets
and stood in the cheapest seats.
Down below, jewellery rattled
we just clapped along.
Communing with the Lord,
shouting, “I believe in Claude”
until the very last song:
when we ran, jumped and scuttled
storming the stage to dance to the beats.
It was wonderful, damn the critics!

Written by James Alexander, @JamesAl675o87o on Twitter

James describes himself as a ‘Sometime writer and performer of poetry and comedy. Sometimes both together’. His poetry, like his comedy, reflects his fascination with stories, situations, and moments.

He was the first poet published by the Soor Ploom Press and is included in their collection ‘Short and Sweet’. His poems will also be included in up-and-coming anthologies from the Hedgehog Poetry Press and Orchard Lea Books.

‘The poem records my first, and only appearance, on the West End stage. I happened to have tickets for the last night of the 25th Anniversary London revival of Hair (The Musical). It closed after only 96 performances, and I recall that the critics were not kind to the production. I loved it and, mirroring the 1960s, we stormed the stage, much to the delight of the cast which included John Barrowman, Paul Hipp and Sinitta.’

Peonies

Illustrated by Attik in ink



Haiku Firsts

1

mild weather
backslides and redundancies;
alcohol poisoning

2

freshwater plants
trade flight feathers
for brooding

3

waiting on overdue squall
when it shows
expect a corker

4

top of climbing wall
mastered trellis
reaches toward infinite

5

Bird That Cries With Grief
out there somewhere mewling
no solicitors

Written by Jerome Berglund, @BerglundJerome on Twitter,
@lespectrepoliteraryjournal on Instagram

Jerome Berglund graduated from the University of Southern California's Cinema-Television Production program and spent a picaresque decade in the entertainment industry before returning to the midwest where he was born and raised. He has exhibited many haiku, senryu and haiga online and in print, most recently in the Asahi Shimbun, Failed Haiku, Scarlet Dragonfly, Cold Moon Journal, Bear Creek Haiku, and Daily Haiga. Jerome is furthermore an established, award-winning fine art photographer, whose black and white pictures have been shown in New York, Minneapolis, and Santa Monica galleries.

First Spring

You equipped us with pens and paper, not just
to keep us busy on long journeys, but to share
your own delight spotting nature. Birds. Rabbits. Deer.
The other hidden lives that surround us.

Yet years later, crossing the high border plains
battling the last rage of a week's winter's gales,
our swaying car passing overturned trucks,
we trailed blinking-wet brake lights, seeing nothing.

But on reaching you the wind dropped. Be calmed.
Numbness befitting those first days, sleepwalking
the long, dulled-glass corridors overlooking
the distant estuary, to your blinds-shut room.
No horizon. And within days you were gone.

We quietly retreated South. Routines resumed.
Passers-by in their own lives didn't know
or care. Held hostage to our senses.
Curtains drawn. Missed calls. Cocooned reactions.
Divisions. Darkness. Darkness. All was loss.

It seemed an age. But out there, light's gradual reach
thawed the ground to a misty breath. First, snowdrops
nudging through. Birds, skittish, hungry, unseen.
It must have happened because now, here we are:
the sky, a bright and brittle smarting blue.
The air a claw grip achingly unfolding.

But still too sweet, too soon; embattled, winter-braced.
What's it all for, if not seen by you?

Days must be lived in. What else can we do?
First spring, then remaining seasons must come.
Remembering you anew with each altered one.
The first lambs born. Let us count them for you.

Written by Peter Burrows (bio & social media to follow)

The First Arriving

Weave in and out, chattering,
swerving, criss-crossing
under the cover of trees
returning to this home from home
from where they weave, they feed
on the wing turning with ease,
spinning off to turn and glide
swooping up and over the heads below.

Happy holidayers, the first
arriving, surveying the almost
empty site, setting up camp,
unloading supplies, crossing paths,
eye to eye, the returning faces
now once more here, they stop and say
How the young have grown.
Same time, every year.

Written by Peter Burrows, @Peter_Burrows74 on Twitter

Peter Burrows is a Librarian in the North West of England. His work has recently appeared in the *Places of Poetry* anthology and *The Cotton Grass Appreciation Society* and The Hedgehog Press *Tree Poets Nature* anthologies. His poem Tracey Lithgow was shortlisted for the Hedgehog Press 2019 Cupid's Arrow Poetry Prize.

Reunion

The ocean on our first meeting
greeted me as a friend once lost
to current of time and drift migration:
mouthful of salt, shifting sand underfoot
and a handful of spray, green-white
like clover field, queen anne's lace, hellebore.

A strange first reunion with a scraping
kind of strength, no soft-sworn parsing
of how-have- you-been or I've-missed- you-so,
the ocean is a body, warm like mine, yours,
just as part of me, as likely to carry me on.

On our first meeting, the ocean greeted me
as if to say:
why have you been gone so long?

Written by L.M. Cole, @_scoops__ on Twitter

L.M. Cole is a poet residing in the US East Coast. Her work has been published or is upcoming with Olney Magazine, Roi Fainéant, Corporeal and others.

Misunderstanding

I was saying how pleased I am
about being first in a poetry competition
and being published
and my mum said straight away
Yes I like to do Codewords too
when I have a spare minute or two.
Not well done or congrats or
look forward to reading it
instead
to compare filling out a Codeword
to wrenching deep into the soul
and pulling out the (hopefully) perfect words of poetry
arranging and deranging (stet)
converging and confirming
then sending out ones heart
in twinkly stars
into the night sky
and touching someone else's soul
making a connection
publication and awards...
so not the same
as every letter of the alphabet
replaced by a number
and each number representing a letter
and words appear
other people's words
not even her own.
I was angry and sad and tired
until
I read her Codeword book
and instead of filling out the puzzles
the words swirled into poems
of magical lands
and hidden hands
that make the universe
my mums universe
the dazzling vital array
of all human life
the beauty
majesty
spectacular jaw dropping
inspiration
sorry mum xxx

Written by Peter Devonald (bio & social media to follow)

The First Egg

How is there life?
Chicken before the egg?
The magical miracle of breath
dreams makes no sense
with unknown origins.

This limitless world
s t r e t c h e s
almost forever.
Who know what comes next?
How can miracles turn to silence?

How can everything become nothing?
How can dreams succumb to darkness?
Sparkle and souls
laughter and love
fade to black?

When we die we lose 21 grams of weight.
Do souls fly forth?
Do our spirits find a way
astonishing sunsets lead to after life
vistas tell of marvels
hope and infinity

visions are confusions
with unknown horizons
believe in miracles
they happen every day
welcome to the first egg.

Written by Peter Devonald (bio & social media to follow)

First Kiss

a memory
of a moment
fixed in time
you and I
stuck
in ice
forever

Written by Peter Devonald, @petedevonald on Twitter, @peterdevonald on Instagram

Peter Devonald is a Manchester UK based poet and screenwriter. Children's Bafta nominated, Gold Remi WorldFest Houston winner and Heart of the Heatons best poetry winner 2021. 2022 published in 30 anthologies/ zines including Artists Responding To..., Forget-Me-Not Press, Wishbone Words, 3 issues of haus-a-rest, Dirigible Balloon, Substantially Unlimited, Tales of the Underbanks (3rd in award), Bolton Breakdown, Dwell Time Press and Heaton Post. Chronically Online x Culturable x Layered Onion group show and Poetic Map of Reading. Formerly senior judge/ mentor Peter Ustinov Awards (iemmys).

Gambling

I was born an old soul. While other 90s kids wanted to listen to Nirvana and rollerblade, I wanted to sit quietly by myself and read books or sew. While fellow middle schoolers were discussing *Dawson's Creek*, I was into *The Twilight Zone* and *The Brady Bunch Returns*. While high school classmates snuck out to party, I dreamed of fine coffees and finding the perfect pea coat. I never wanted to drink, party, or do any of the things 'normal' kids did, so I surprised even myself when I wanted to try something typical.

When most of the kids in my school turned eighteen, they'd eagerly show off piercings and tattoos in the hallways. When I turned eighteen, I watched some movies at a friend's house. Months later, either out of boredom or a repressed desire to live a little, I decided to try gambling. Or, the idea of gambling according to a terrified, anxious, stuck-in-a-small-town, elderly 18-year-old.

On a late winter's afternoon, I left our gloomy apartment and trudged through the slush, walking as quickly as I could to the convenience store around the corner. During the two-minute walk, I kept nervously grabbing at my purse; I must have checked four times to ensure I had my cash and ID.

The nerves felt normal because, after all, I was going to buy a scratch ticket, and I was going to get carded! Very exciting stuff.

Arriving at the store, my hand shook as I reached out and pushed open the glass door. I had to take a deep breath to calm myself before heading up to the register and whispering,

"Can I please have a scratch ticket, please? Um, number five, please, I guess. Uh, please. If that's okay."

The bored clerk said nothing as they grabbed the ticket, tore it from the long roll, and tossed it into my hand. They took my two dollar bills and unceremoniously stuffed them into the register, and turned away.

(continued on next page...)

That was it? No greeting? No carding? Nothing at all? This was my first right of passage? Perhaps I'd been right to avoid such milestones.

Dejectedly, I stepped outside, leaned against the handrail at the top of the icy ramp, and scratched my metallic square.

I lost.

Seriously? I wasn't carded, and I didn't win? All I got for two dollars were wet boots and a piece of paper with a grimy pile of scratched-off ink? Deeply unimpressed, I knew when to walk away.

Written by Melissa Dorval, @dorval_ms on Twitter

'I hold a B.A. in Creative Writing from UMass Lowell, where best-selling author, Andre Dubus III, was my mentor. My poems, short stories, and articles have been published in *The Offering*, *The Lowell Connector*, and *The Shirley Volunteer*. My debut novel is currently in the developmental editing stages with an independent publisher in New Hampshire. When I'm not writing, I am a nanny to two children and a pet mom to eight rescue animals.'

musings about soy sauce

My mom told me 2 lies about uni:

1. Boys would line up to date me
2. I'd learn how to cook

After I got to uni, I realized I didn't like boys and my dorm didn't have a kitchen. Years later, I finally moved into my own apartment.

I no longer had an excuse to not cook.

I could struggle and experiment and set the kitchen on fire to my heart's delight. But when I stepped foot into the kitchen, I realized I couldn't start. There were so many things missing: rice, soy sauce, salt, sugar, ground pepper, MSG, cooking wine...

All of these things I remember my mother using and are ingrained in my taste buds, it just seemed that they'd always existed – a fixture in my life.

When I opened a new bag of rice – the first time I've ever bought rice by myself my hand paused. I realized that even the dingy old bucket in the corner of my family's kitchen, filled with rice for my entire life, had not always been there. Decades ago, my parents had once gone out specifically to buy it and add it to their new, growing home.

And the furniture in our home is mismatched in the same way. There's no color scheme or overall theme, but every piece has a story. The bamboo floorboards were a discounted buy from a carpenter friend; the sofa set, from another friend; the vase, from a garage sale; the painting yellowed at the edges, brought over from China.

When I stood before the spices and condiments aisle of the grocery store, I called my mom and cried for help. She laughed and said, *When I first came to America, I didn't even know how to make fried rice. You're already better than me.*

My dad had stowed away on a freight ship and sailed across the ocean for 3 months; my mom had arrived in this foreign land with just 1 suitcase and \$100 in her pockets. But over the years, they built their home from scratch, bit by bit, until it became so sturdy that it felt like it had existed forever – and would exist forever.

So when I look back at the towering shelves, I think that if others are standing on the shoulders of giants, then I'm climbing up a mountain of spices and sauces mismatched, interlocked, placed just so with love.

Written by Fefe, @fesedove on Twitter and Instagram

Fefe is an aro-ace Chinese-American currently living in China. She writes, occasionally, when not busy with other shenanigans.

At The Willow

He likes you, my brother said
 Why do you think
 he keeps coming over?
 I didn't believe it, not really

Then the chain came off my Raleigh
down at the willow
 I set my kick stand in the cool shade
 behind its scented curtain
 spent half an hour trying to fix it

Just as I'd turned the front wheel
to push toward home, he was there:
 Here, I'll do it
 then wiped the grease from his
 hands on his cutoffs

Our handlebars were touching, I had one foot on the pedal
(my old Keds, with the hole at the pinkie toe)
 a frond caressed my cheek
 just as his lips met mine
 and we rode off

Written by Madeleine French, @maddiethinks on Twitter & @madeleinesews on Instagram

Madeleine French has been telling stories since she was a girl. You may find her in front of a sewing machine, or behind a copy of Persuasion. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in West Trade Review, Hidden Peak Press, Words and Whispers, Poetica Review, and others. Madeleine and her husband divide their time between Florida and Virginia.

Gold Mine

The shelves stacked with his favourite Metallica records,
and some unknown pills scattered on the reading table,
I look back on how I sneaked a peek from the ajarred window
to my dad's lair in our backyard that spring.
I could recognise the intense scent that had been left behind,
one which invariably boosted my spirit.
It was my first successful curiosity driven mission,
after several failed attempts over the years.
Never have I ever met a more private person than my dad.
Not surprisingly his room was a gold mine to an eight-year old!
I also recall noticing his mantis-shaded coat by the door,
a fact that made me feel utterly fulfilled at that moment.
What delighted me the most was seeing my substandard paintings
that I had gifted him on father's day, pinned to his bulletin board.
He indisputably deserved those long tight hugs later on his return home.
I still remember how my antics put a big smile on everyone's face,
at the dining table that evening.

Written by Indranil Ghosh, @indraghosh314 on Twitter

Indranil Ghosh is a Ph.D. student in applied mathematics from India, currently residing in New Zealand. Highly inspired by Nirvana, Led Zeppelin, and Robert Frost, whenever he is not working, one may find him either reading classic poems or listening to bands from the 80s.

Home-Home & Home

Since I've been
right
here

Everything seems to be
wrong
there

My settling caused a different volcanic eruption
out of pure necessity for
disruption

I think myself selfish to still enjoy this peace

I still feel it
tied by an invisible umbilical noose

a straining rope of family ties

The lava bubbles in my belly
Popping and crackling
jumping to scold me
and consume, chew, digest
any contentment I have

This shivering guilt cannot be warmed
Yet I keep on getting
hotter, hotter, hotter

help her, help her, help her

hotter, hotter, hotter

help her, help her, help her

I'm unable to actually be where I'm actually
needed

Scorched fingers, blistered palms
reach to tie the singed safety net

back together

Because other commitments keep me

chained to this city I quickly
labelled 'new home'

while my 'home-home'

the one I pined for in the first few solitary weeks

is a
crum
blin
g
haz
ar
d

Written by Millie Godwin, @godwin_millie on Twitter (bio to follow)

Millie Godwin (she/her) is a freelance writer and editor from Nottingham, UK. In her spare time, she enjoys cuddling up with her dogs and reading poetry, fantasy or literary fiction, and the occasional non-fiction. She also practises tarot and earth-based witchcraft.

Longest Fall

When she told me you kissed
I thought the world was ending
even if our relationship still classed as pending
my heart was yours all the while
You had no idea did you?
A year later you must have thought me a fool
to crawl back to you at any opportunity
you knew you had me
beck and call, safe bet, a guarantee
her understudy
I still wonder if you ever did love me
not like how I loved you but just at all
the first heartbreak is the longest fall

Written by Chloe Henney, @chloeehg on Twitter & @chloehenneypoetry on Instagram

Chloe Henney (she/her) is a Politics graduate and aspiring writer from Birmingham, UK. She is a tea obsessed empath who writes about life, love, and self reflection.

More Than Friends

my eyes linger hoping you won't notice
i'm studying every part of you
in this room shadows and light
drape around your shoulders
cloaked in desire
my body
inked stretched marked
what will yours unclothe
scars for my hands to trace
we sit in this quiet
yearning for the warmth
connection
how soft is your skin
the sounds of our breath in the dark
wondering which one is brave enough to unbutton
the last layer
and dive into communion

Written by Tina Lamoreux, @LamoreuxTina on Twitter & @UnkemptPoet on Instagram

Tina Lamoreux always has stories floating in her head. She loved reading books with no happy endings as a child. Now she is writing one. She lives in Central PA with her partner and two cats. She has a BA in English and works in media.

'I wrote this poem in college after asking a friend to watch a movie with me in the dorms. I was drawn to them, and I was new to these feelings, however, they seemed oblivious. During the movie, as we sat barely touching arms, I waited for them to kiss me. To do something. We sat in silence and it was agonizing. To release my pent-up unrequited crush I wrote this poem along with dozens of others.'

Firsts

This, then, is the latest burden, as if the memories were not enough, not heavy and unwieldy enough to render our shoulders low and our legs as solid as stone.

They have flattered us, dripped honeyed whispers in our ears during darktime, the few hours we claim as our own, the hours we harbor for the chance to rest. They said, as though it were a reward, *you'll be the firsts.*

Even Rhonda, who never cries, never protests, cast her eyes in my direction, her feardrops glittering in the moonlight.

I soothed her, tossing my head in a show of impunity to distract her, flashing a quick smile of conspiracy. She's scared but she trusts me; she brushes a damp sparkle from her cheek and straightens up, pulls her shoulders back, and thrusts her strong young torso into a posture of willingness.

With this gesture of compliance and thus reassured, the men return to their hearty heave-hos and work songs, hoisting sacks of corn and barrel goods. As the weight increases, the waterline on the rough-hewn barge rises. A journey will be underway by morning light.

I had garnered clues to their plans, but only because I am clever and I know with whom to tarry as the moon rises. I needed to know more. I would have little opportunity, but my experience in gentling forms of persuasion were singularly fruitful. My mission for the darktime soon to descend was to be generous with my pleasuring magic. I hoped to glean information about our destination.

Not all the women were to be transported; the elderly would stay in the barrens where they'd been born, where they'd always lived, where they'd soon return to sand and rock. The young women were bundled in with bedding and the foodstuffs; the dim ones were excited, hopeful for a softer, greener land. A cooler sun. The luminous girls, my flock, were sensitive to the tension in the air, the raucous hoots of the young men, the silent stoicism of the older sailors.

Wouldn't you think if you were told that you would be the *firsts*, that others would come after?

That there would be *seconds*, followed by *thirds*? A steady parade of shipborne women and children, building tools, sheep, and goats?

I admit that I was not informed that this would be the case. That final evening on the barrens, when I plied my charms in a manner that in other situations had resulted in remarkable candor, was less than rewarding. The man I had counted on to whisper in my ear was exhausted from loading cargo and lay comatose straight through to dawn.

We have learned to read the star language of these foreign nights. The moon is our familiar; we have attended to its faithful markings of time passing, as well as its gift of more subtle messages than those we once knew. It speaks to us of crops and the comings and goings of sea creatures. We have harvested greens, and learned what is needed to ward off illness. Cultivated herbs to relieve the waves of pain that we, as women, have known and kept silent about all our lives.

Truth be told, we are happy; we are not waiting out of desperation. The quiet power of the *firsts* is mighty. The deep pleasures of naming and discovery far outweigh the chest-beating and night-long wolf howls.

If the *seconds* arrive at our shores, we will welcome them, but we will not cede our quiet dominion. We have knowledge: gifts of patient observation, skills that can never be unlearned.



Written and photographed by Susan T. Landry, @susantlandry on Twitter & @susanwalks on Instagram

'I am a writer and an editor, and lived most of my adult life in NYC; I now live in Maine. I write in several genres: memoir, creative nonfiction, the occasional poem, and short fiction. I especially enjoy combining art (my own and others' work) with writing. I was the managing editor of a print journal, *Lifeboat*, that solicited and published short memoir; and I founded and edited an online literary journal for memoir writers, called *Run to the Roundhouse, Nellie*. Both journals met the unfortunate fate of being too popular, and were impossible to maintain while making a living as a medical manuscript editor.'

FIRSTS

On the precipice of a cavern, yawning wide, I angle my foot down the slanted stone, mercilessly begging for a hand from down below with a friendly shout, “*It’s okay! You’ll be okay!*”

Tummy knots, bad dreams, four days of orientation,
and I’m still cutting my palms gripping on the limestone cliffs.
Countdowns with anticipation, became
a countdown with trepidation.

I’ve flipped all my calendars shut, praying the days won’t pass with liquid speed like the river I’m caught under.

Sweaty palms, beating headaches-

Thirty five days-

First days used to be rainbow backpacks and colored pencils,
how did I grow so far, my roots entirely uplifted.

I long for my garden, back home- my daffodil memories, rose bush classrooms, and pansy normality. I miss my familiar rain cycles, and bird feeder friends-
The pattern of everyday life, sunrising into moonrising and garden grass like always.
I bite my nails off, one by one, contemplating my long awaited first day of college.

Written by Suzanne Lavallee, @suzannelvwrites on Twitter & @suzanneofthebooks on Instagram

Suzanne Lavallee (She/Her) is an eighteen year old writer based in a small town in New England. She is the co-founder of The Limelight Review, an online literary magazine for disabled & neurodivergent voices as well as a volunteer for *The Authors of Tomorrow*. She can be found writing, listening to Lana Del Rey, or on social media.

Your Turn

I am the seasoned widow.
You are the rookie.
How did you do it?
I juggled mercy and truth,
broke the scalding pain
into small moments. Don't look beyond,
I advise, if you can help it, which you can't
for that empty horizon will shatter you
over and over. There is no relief
for a long time. Your tears
will astonish you, an unceasing river
that you wish would take you, too,
out of this world.

You call again, heartbreak
cracking your voice. *They don't understand,*
the others, not yet gutted.
Inevitably, I return to those first weeks,
raw, stumbling, untethered, and the best
I can find is the counsel to sit alone
with the sorrow, probe its sinews and joints,
taste it in the back of your throat,
because you'll come to know it as part
of yourself, folded between bones, lingering
in your shuttered breaths and fretting,
like stubborn thorns, just beneath your skin.

Written by Mercedes Lawry (bio & social media to follow)

Ripe for Spring

Clouds shuttle by and finally
blue appears, a cool winter light
suffusing the January sky.
Even still the shrivelled apples cling
to the bare tree that twists upon itself
like the three weird sisters with their
ghoulish chants. We are ripe for signs
of spring, just a slip of sweet green
emerging from the matted leaves
will startle us, will remedy the clutter
of our winter minds.

Written by Mercedes Lawry, @mercwrites on Twitter

Mercedes Lawry is the author of three chapbooks, the latest, *In the Early Garden with Reason*, was selected by Molly Peacock for the 2018 WaterSedge Chapbook Contest. Her poetry has appeared in such journals as *Poetry*, *Nimrod*, and *Prairie Schooner* and she's been nominated seven times for a Pushcart Prize. Her book, *Vestiges*, will be published in 2023.

I Can't Remember My First Poem

Maybe it was about flowers,
how love was a rose?
When we're young,
love is like a rose, until
one finds thorns
among a grocery store bouquet
with the price marked down
50% because yesterday was Valentines.

Or did I look death in the eye,
only to realize I was in the wrong
room, while trying to imagine
a clever rhyme for “breath?”
Now, my shadow feels heavier,
so does the sunlight actually,
and every sore back whispers
of disease instead of sleep.

I wish there could be a happy ending:
a shoebox housing my first poem,
along with photos of ghosts,
who aren't dead yet,
but it's lost, between names
and faces that were poor adjectives
for friendships, proving the strongest
goodbyes are silent years.

Written by Richard LeDue, @LedueRichard on Twitter

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

Slag Heap

I was standing on top of a slag heap barking instructions at the small community that had gathered at my feet when it happened the first time. My mouth was wide open as the orders bolted out of it when the bluebottle bounced against my teeth and skid off my tongue before finally hitting the back of my throat. Surprised, I swallowed it and felt instantly revolted.

You ok boss? asked Sam as he looked up at me from the bottom of the grey hill.

I just swallowed one of those damn flies, I said.

There'll soon be loads more if we don't get a move on, he said.

I knew Sam was right, of course. These flies love a dead body and I had thought I had managed to escape the first flush of them by standing on top of the heap but even they seemed to want to escape the putrid smell of the rotting corpse. I scrambled down the manmade hill and gave my next round of commands to my team, directing them here there and everywhere before the group broke up.

As the day dragged on, I saw the small cloud of flies quickly multiple. I kept my lips closed and drank my water through a straw out the side of my mouth. I kept thinking about the fly's hairy legs careering through my mouth, its wide dome eyes looking for the back of my throat. All through the day I could hear them buzzing around my face, as if they were saying eat me eat me.

At subsequent crime scenes I tried my best to be as far away from the body as possible, looking around for the tell tale flying dots of blue before I inhaled oxygen to screech my next round of commands. It mostly worked but there was still a handful of times when I felt the faint flap of the papery wings against the roof of my mouth and then I thought, well, it's happened again. Once or twice, I was able to spit them out on the sly, disguising one as a cough and the other as a sneeze. I felt bad for these flies as they obviously wanted me, craved my mouth, and I denied them their dying pleasure.

I started to dream of catching flies and made a point of talking to everyone and anyone at the locations. I took big gulps of water from open glasses and yawned widely throughout the shift. I pretended to nap on a chair with my mouth open, the corners slack and ready for action. I enunciated my speeches and joked I was preparing for an am-dram production and needed the practice. I said I had problems with my septum and had to breathe through my mouth. My mouth was always open, waiting, primed and ready.

I anticipated the flies' arrival and started to creep closer to the bodies while providing the briefing. They were hesitant at first, shy of my bold behaviour, but then they started appearing. They whizzed around my face and buzzed in front of my nose. I lifted my chin up and caught 2, maybe 3, swallowing them whole as I breathed in air for my speeches.

(continued on next page...)

Boss, what are you doing? said Sam, as he looked at me, repulsed.

I had managed to keep my growing appetite quiet, but now ran closer to the bodies, catching handfuls of flies and shoving them in my mouth. I flapped my arms back and forth, buzzing and buzzing, my salacious hunger for flies becoming increasingly insatiable.

Written by Sophie Leslie, @SophLeslie on Twitter

Sophie Leslie lives in Glasgow, Scotland and has always been a fan of creative writing. She writes short stories in her spare time while working up the courage to start a novel.

Cast About

I have
to say something.
I have
this thing writhing around, moving
from my throat to my belly to my chest and
making the skin on my arms break out in gooseflesh.
It's not a comfortable feeling, and new, and
my mind does not understand it yet, does not compute
comes back at me in an almost-panic because
that constant tug
it feels like I am missing something, running
out of time, running
away through the gaps in myself just like sand in a sieve just like
dream-memory, as if I will
lose something vital if I don't understand it in time.

It is
both easier and harder whenever I have you on my mind because
the exhilarating terror is stronger then.
I want that sensation, but I want to flinch away from it too, like
spilling a glass of ice-cold lemonade all over the front of my shirt,
shocking and freezing my blood, but
Oh my stars, it feels so very good in this heat, all relief and all sweet or
Tripping right there at the edge of a precipice,
heart kicking, muscles spasming for fear of the fall but
Oh my soul, just maybe I'll learn I can fly if I tumble and
if I do not slip then I will never know, not at all

I am
going to be brave now, braver than I have ever had reason to be.
I fear
this might kill us, but maybe not. Maybe I am lucky and
You have
already seen the shift, and smiled.

Written by Jeannie Marschall, @JunkerMarschall on Twitter (bio to follow)

Jeannie Marschall is a teacher from the green centre of Germany who also writes stories, time permitting. She enjoys long walks with her dog and cat, foraging, and tending her semi-sentient vegetable garden while inventing tall tales with her partner, or huddling around the fire in their witches' hut for the same purpose.

Jeannie mostly writes SciFi and all kinds of colourful Fantasy stories as well as the odd poem. She has a few short pieces lined up for publication this year, for example with Black Spot Books, The Banshee Journal, and QueerWelten magazine. Longer works are in the pipeline.

Moments Elsewhere

There are but few precious moments, it seems
Where the universe kisses your palms
And unlocks those mundane chains.
As if time could wait for you,
Bated breath, observing for your next move.

These touchstones
Often leave with their arrival,
A seismic shift
In the span of a wingbeat.

The princess Margaret
Ferried in my first of these,
With her arching beams
And worn pavement.
Otherwise truly mundane,
But for a moment,
Extraordinary.

I call it a gift for somehow
Surviving university.
My friend's old red Ford Fiesta
With its sunroof,
I stuck out my head,
I stuck out my torso.

Mr Brightside played on
And it felt like every single
Perks-esque novel
Sequenced into one flash
And it was perfect
Because thought left me,
And I was just energy.

I could blame it on the
Cipralex, Ativan,
Circumstances, time and place,
But that feels otherwise
Inconsequential.

Because just for a moment,
An earmark in a book,
When I beamed at the sky
And moonlight graced my face,
For the first time,
If just for the time between seconds
I was free.

Written by Jedediah Matthews, bio to follow

Jedediah Matthews is an emerging queer poet who resides in the unceded Treaty Six Territory. Relatively new to publishing pieces, they write to reflect on the experiences of growing up closeted and struggling with adolescent mental health concerns, acceptance, and life as it keeps marching on.

For the First Time

I

I've felt a lot of things today,
But I have been unable to move
Or act accordingly,
My dramatic sense of articulation
Has fallen short of lyric,
For the first time.

II

There is this ~~1x2~~ spot
Right side of this thing called head,
Which, like a couplet of a bad sonnet
Keeps reminding me to resolve,
By causing an indomitable ache,
Reminding me of a closure
When there isn't one.
My body is numb with negations,
For the first time.

III

I'm slipping away in my head,
Falling over moistened church floors.
God isn't a friend, looks at me cruelly,
Or is inviting a gossip
About the love-laws I've broken,
I'm exposed to an orchestra
Of different (only) vocals,
There is no tune or rhythm, mere voices
Aren't singing either,
Trying to tell me something,
(should I call it an orchestra then?)
For the first time.

(continued on next page...)

IV

‘there will be time
To time it out, to record condolences,
To wear slimy bangles and make
Liquid love.
There will be time
To walk out in the streets
And watch eyes getting shut.
There will be time
To call it a night but
Stay up and dream
About an old lover
While a new one is vocally engaged
At the basement.
And there will be time
To write to your mother,
An apology, undeserved,
Courier her a finger
From when you
Lost it to suicidal suppers,
From your first time’

Written by Meg Merrilies, @Megha5383o44o on Twitter & @oof_ophelia on Instagram

Meg Merrilies is a post-graduate in English from St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata. Her research interest feeds upon anything Medieval and Early Modern! Besides, she is a proud owner of The Silver Medal award and The All-Rounder award from AMITY University, Kolkata, for her academic and cultural achievements. She’s an active creative and academic contributor to myriad conferences and journals all across the world and has spoken on Medieval European philosophy in prominent gatherings, organised by universities like Cambridge and York. She has also published numerous papers on performance studies, film studies, the Medieval philosophy of death and more.

Faults

You were born into chaos before it became your shadow. You learned that your first heartbreak didn't unequivocally break you, it just prepared you for the future. You wondered why the stars preferred not to be seen, then you understood them for retreating behind the shroud. You longed as your dreams danced in the distance, only to taunt you in your sleep. You witnessed things burn because there was no other way. You witnessed things burn because there should have been another way. You felt your soul splash, sink, and swirl, like a tear that gets lost in a storm. And still, the mountains patiently breathed.

Written by Zach Murphy

Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories appear in *Reed Magazine*, *The Coachella Review*, *Maudlin House*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, *B O D Y*, *Ruminate*, *MoonPark Review*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, and *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*. His chapbook *Tiny Universes* (Selcouth Station Press) is available in paperback and ebook. He lives with his wonderful wife, Kelly, in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The First Time

The first time they told me
I was losing my sight
I couldn't quite comprehend
This new monstrous might.

In that moment I couldn't breathe
Or move or think or speak
I didn't know what to do
And my future seemed so bleak.

I didn't want it to be the end
I didn't want to lose my sight
For I still had a life to live
Despite this fathomless blight.

I made a few adjustments
Took each day at a time
And although the road was hard
I'm glad it was mine.

And now when they tell me
I am losing my sight
It doesn't seem quite so bad
For my future shines bright.

Written by Sarah Oakes, @SarahOa64492096

Sarah Oakes is a visually impaired science fiction and fantasy writer who loves music, mythology and plays the clarinet. She has had one short story and six flashes published both online and in print, and is currently working on a novella. She loves poetry and playing with words and rhythms, from a long background in music, and is always scribbling something.

Smooch

We sat on cold sandy rocks in a sheltered spot the wind and tide had formed a little further up the beach from where the others were. Sitting so close together that wayward strands of her hair were blown by the breeze into my face. These she retrieved periodically with an almost careless pass of her hand, not pausing in her chatter. I didn't want her to stop talking but too nervous to follow the flow, I made encouraging noises whenever I thought appropriate: "really", "no!", "and then what?" Fear and doubt held me back from slinging an arm around her slender waist.

When the moment of silence came, it seemed sudden even though I knew it was coming, like the arrival of a long expected visitor with no appointed time. A look of something like disappointment flashed on her face half-turned away from me.

"Will we go back?" she asked.

Slowly I moved in, aiming for her lips. My heart was drumming and I hoped she couldn't hear it. Her half-smiling face twisted towards mine, smelling of Dove Simple soap. Her lips were warm, soft and welcoming. Mine; nervous, tentative. When our tongue tips touched, the world dissolved into a white-hot spark-seared brightness.

"Now that wasn't so bad was it?" she asked my stunned amazed face, playfully closing my still-open mouth with her finger under my chin.

When we walked back along the beach to the others she held my hand and braided our fingers together, jabbering on again.

"Did you two smooch then?" called Mickey as we approached, it was a question that my face blazed in answer. This started a chorus of catcalls from everyone, except Paul who looked at his shoes.

Written by Anthony O'Donovan, @ajodonovan on Twitter

'I am a software engineer and aspiring writer and I am working on a collection of short stories. I have completed a Masters in Creative Writing and I live in Dublin.'

First Day In Venice





Photographed by George O'Neill

As part of my undergraduate studies, I lived in Venice, Italy, for three months. On my first day there, I took these photos — they remind me of a special time in my life, and a place that means a lot to me.

My Scar

Written by Mabel Osejindu, bio & social media to follow

I remember when I first saw you,
I felt downtrodden and blue.
I couldn't believe what I was seeing,
Nor accept my new way of being.
Here you are shaped like a leaf,
standing as the 'healthy skin thief'.
It's like an artist used the darkest shade,
to cover my back in an angry art raid.
How long will you stain my natural pigment,
Yet punish me with a new, pointless figment.
I feel your bumpy, raggedy texture,
Don't you give the 'beauty is within' lecture!
Because of you, bikinis are no longer for me,
or sunbathing backless by the crystal sea.
I hate you for the fear you always bring,
of being intimate or having my own offspring.
I bet you couldn't care for I never bared my skin,
but you are putting my mind in an awful tailspin.
Gone are the days for spas or crop tops,
For here and now, my body's freedom stops.

...

You remember that time when
I burst on the scene,
when you were only nine...teen.
I was carved and shaped,
I could not have escaped.
Remember I was only here to join your skin,
unless you want it open or infected herein.
You blame me for the life I wrecked,
when really I was not the cause, but the effect.
You can't gash wood, without a hit,
you can't get a scar, without a slit.
I tried not to appear with every try;
pressure dressings, grafting, skin cream dye.
I'm sorry I'm inflamed and simply not attractive,
these things take time, I'm being protective.
Just wait and see, and before you know it,
I will no longer be your only outfit.
For soon, you'll see past my look and look within,
to see that there your true beauty lies wherein.
I know you don't want to hear that beauty is its beholder,
but truthfully, you are much more than the pain you smoulder.
Why do you think fate put me here on your back?
so you could press forward and follow a new track!
I don't want friendship, just understanding,
a new custom-made official re-branding.
I wish to be more than just your hurtful scar,
but that which gave you strength to be who you are.

Mabel Osejindu can be found at @MOsejindu on Twitter and @mabelosejindu on Instagram.

Writer, Poet, Teacher. Bookworm. Mabel writes about identity, love, spirituality, relationships, and nature. Please feel free to follow her work on Medium @mabelosejindu.

Little Things

The summer days end,
August comes in sleepy,
but you're still playing
in the sand. You are too busy
learning to see that we are, too.
All small boys will grow,
but not all at once,
not overnight, so I hope
for more precious summers,
witnessing your curiosity and
amazement. You don't say much yet,
you only point and yell *rainbow!*
then laugh and know we understand
what you can't yet tell us.
You learn colors for the first time
while I learn to appreciate the colors
I've known all my life. Someday,
when you talk more and splash less,
I will give you a hug and say,
*Do you remember the first time
you went swimming?*

You won't remember.
I won't forget.

Written by Angel Rosen, @Axiopoeticus on Twitter & Instagram

Angel Rosen (she/her) is a poet living in Pennsylvania. She is the author of two poetry collections, *Aurelia* and *Blake*. She enjoys reading, baking, and spending time with her nephews.

How to Make Banana Pudding

Ingredients:

- 2 boxes vanilla pudding, premade
- 2 cups milk
- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 1.5 tbsp vanilla extract
- 2 cans whipped cream
- 1 box vanilla wafers
- 12 bananas, sliced

1. In a large bowl, beat the premade pudding and milk. Use the green bowl, the one you always used as a kid.
2. Add the sweetened condensed milk. Blend until smooth. Do this by hand, if you can, just like your grandmother, gone ten years. She made banana pudding every picnic. It's tradition. One of the few you'd like to keep, even if you don't like bananas.
3. Stir in the vanilla extract and whipped cream. Spoon a little for yourself, if you want; that's tradition, too. You can keep that, at least, even if you can't control anything else. For the first time your cousins aren't coming. They're away, all three of them, one on a summer fellowship, another studying abroad, and the third interning at a lab. You're older than them by a few years, but they've grown up without you in a way you can't quite comprehend. After all, you're still here. You never left.
4. Layer the wafers, bananas, and pudding mix in a serving bowl. This one you inherited from your mother, who got it from her mother before her, clear crystal sparkling in the sun on the counter, reminiscent of picnics at Grandma's, at the house off High Ridge. Your cousins were kids, then; you had to watch them. They don't even remember Grandma now.
5. Chill until serving. Your cousins have already sworn to come next year. You aren't sure that's enough, but how do you say that? What right do you have to ask them to stay forever? Maybe you'll bring some old photo albums to the picnic today. Your aunts would love to see them, your mom and grandparents standing in Grandma's gardens, your cousins no taller than your waist, each photo as tangible as banana pudding, as Grandma spooning you a second serving, the bees crooning in her prized rhododendrons, the wafers soft like cake against your tongue.

Written by Natalie Schriefer, @schriefern1 on Twitter & @nschriefer on Instagram (bio to follow)

Natalie Schriefer, MFA (she/her) is a bi/demi writer grappling with identity and coming of age. Her creative work has appeared in *jmww*, the *Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, and Canada's *Room Magazine*, among others.

The First Time You See Her

I burst into the control room, out of breath. I asked if anybody had seen anything unusual on the cameras.

My boss stared at me a moment before a grin spread over his fat face “you saw her, didn’t you?”

He walked me down the corridor, the dark tunnel littered with old gurneys and empty bags of snacks. His hand was on my shoulder as he said, still grinning, “the first time you see her it’s scary as all hell. It was for me too. And everybody else. Ask Morris and Smith But you get used to her. I know...those empty eyes, that dead stare dead people have...the way that old white gown flutters around when you know full well she’s not a living thing...it’s scary enough to make you sick. I nearly threw up the first time I saw her. But you get used to her after a while. She gets to be like a decoration, almost. You get so used to seeing her she’s like a stray dog. Think of her like that.”

My boss patted me on the back. I was still damp with sweat. He wiped his hand on his trousers and sent me to check on the old ECT building – it’s still got live wires, dangerous now as it was then.

“Radio if you have trouble,” he said, still grinning. “She doesn’t usually come around after 3 anyway.”

He turned to leave, then stopped

“Did she say anything? When you saw her, I mean.”

I told him no.

My boss stepped closer and looked around, as if to make sure nobody else heard him.

“That’s the only thing that gives me the creeps – the idea she might say something...give me some ghostly mission from beyond the grave, you know? I’m not running errands for the dead. What am I, a butler?”

He shook his head and walked away, leaving me alone in the dark.

I gave my two weeks’ notice. I’m not sweating bullets every night, terrified the dead will ask me for help, worrying myself sick about it later – how cruel I must have sounded saying no.

Written by Bud Sturguess, @SturguesVerses on Twitter

Bud Sturguess was born in 1986 in the small cotton-and-oil town of Seminole, Texas. He now lives in his "adopted hometown," Amarillo. Sturguess has self-published several books, his latest being the novel *Sick Things*. His work appears online at *New Pop Lit*, *Erato*, and *The Agape Review*, as well as the print anthologies *Mid/South* from Belle Point Press, and The Daily Drunk's *From Parts Unknown*. He lives on disability benefits and collects neckties.

Hope

octave sinecure
parallel disconnect
from the trunk of being
when you swing
sweet baked memory

you put your thoughts
daring poultice
on my more
small pains
the firsts
almost imperceptible
I'm receptive

the great sufferings more
furious arm themselves
to moan eight times
but you think of me

in the bone
like in the river
there is always with you
still
a hope

Written by Pierre Turcotte, @TurcottePierre4 on Twitter & @pierreturcotte1 on Instagram

Pierre Turcotte, was born in Canada, lives in Málaga since 2016. Has completed a Master's degree in Literature from the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQÀM, 1999). Founded the digital and multilingual publishing house Pierre Turcotte Editor.

Hometown Matters

Everybody knows that here
is red abbey, red cliff, independence signing.

Everybody knows that here
you buy Smokies, inhale the taste of raw salt from sea.
And some people know that here
lies violence, fights between locals and muscled Marines.
But how could everybody know
of the tree where Grandad told us the witch lived?

And how could everybody know
of the spot on the long brown slope of Seaton Road?
That's where I first said *I love you* to my first love
these things no-one will ever know.

Written by Lynn Valentine, @dizzylynn on Twitter

'I live on the Black Isle in the Scottish Highlands although this poem is about my hometown of Arbroath in Scotland. I have my debut collection, *Life's Stink and Honey*, out with Cinnamon Press and I also have a Scots language pamphlet, *A Glimmer o Stars*, out with Hedgehog Poetry Press.'

Teeth

The parent
not speaking to
me was always
the one

with dental
insurance.

The shame
snowballed

this guttural
depression
rotting me
from the inside
out

for ten years.

Today I taste
tin under cold
white lights
like stars

as I am
measured for
buckling
retraction
inflammation
blood

tartar so thick
it is visible on
my films.

After ten years
afraid to open
my mouth

it isn't too
late to realize

(continued on next page)

and reinforce
this decay

it isn't too
late to bleed
into each
stained gap
like a

reservoir.

Written by Kelsey Webb, @kelseybogacz_ & @BivouacMagazine on Twitter

Kelsey Webb is a poet and gastroenterology nurse. She is the editor of Bivouac Magazine, a forthcoming literary journal. She lives in Dover, NH, USA.

Comfort



Illustrated by Imelda Wei Ding Lo (bio & social media to follow)

My First Real Thanksgiving

They say certain smells are linked with certain memories.

My best friend, Frankie (who's now the owner of *Amato's*, that famous Sicilian restaurant on the Lower East Side) has told me, for instance, that the aroma of his *noni's pasta alla norma* can make him feel as if he were a baseball-obsessed ten-year-old again.

I've never really paid attention to my (admittedly underdeveloped) sense of smell, honestly, as I've always been more of a visual and verbal person. I've always lived for the theatre, after all.

But there is one smell in particular that has stuck with me through the years, and that is the scent of Thanksgiving turkey. The aroma of turkey roasting in the oven always brings back memories of a certain dinner party to which my girlfriend Lina had invited me, during my second year of law school.

In November 1919, Lina had invited me to a Thanksgiving dinner party at her parents'. And what a wonderful place the Williamses' apartment on the Upper East Side turned out to be — it was splendidly decorated, like a scene from some ritzy play or opera.

Garlands of colourful dried corn (rainbow corn, as I believed they were called) decorated the walls of the kitchen and living room; numerous gourds and squashes decorated almost every shelf and table of the lobby and kitchen; and the savory aroma of Thanksgiving turkey roasting in the oven — mingled with the scent of butter, milk, and hot coffee permeated through the air.

Clearly, the turkey was almost done. My stomach churned; it had been nearly 8 hours since I last ate. I wondered what else would be served — I never had really celebrated Thanksgiving quite like this before.

My parents — who hailed from Odessa in the Russian Empire — had never paid that much attention to Thanksgiving or to any holiday, for that matter. Accordingly, we celebrated Thanksgiving by eating our usual fare — pumpernickel bagels, some pickles, some lox, and a little kugel for dessert — in our cramped tenement apartment that smelled of mothballs and old, soggy clothes.

“Mom, Daddy, Grammy, and Grandpa!” exclaimed Lina as she led me by the hand into the kitchen. “This is Sam, whom I’ve been telling you about for the last couple of months — you know, the law student from Ambrose!”

She squeezed my hand as she spoke — we both understood what she wanted to get across: *be on your best behaviour, Sam! Save your raucous jokes and sly wit for later.*

(continued on next page...)

After we exchanged introductions, we all sat down and waited for the turkey to be done. Many side dishes were laid on the table already: mashed potatoes with gravy, bread rolls, sweet potatoes, and celery sticks.

An alarm rang and Mr. Williams stood up and brought the turkey out from the oven. How large it was (nearly two feet long, I'd wager)!

How shiny its skin was! Now, my tongue isn't as sensitive and *refined* as Frankie's, but I knew from that lovely aroma permeating through the kitchen that the turkey was tasty even before I took my first bite. Lightly roasted and stuffed with chopped-up bread, I could already taste the sage, chopped celery, and onions in the stuffing as well as on the bird itself. *Perfection.*

"Let's carve up the turkey now, shall we?" Mr. Williams said.

"Great idea!" I chimed.

And the dinner proved to be as delicious and memorable as it looked. Lina and I would remember this first Thanksgiving for years to come.

Written by Imelda Wei Ding Lo, @fortunusgames on Twitter & Instagram

Imelda Wei Ding Lo (a.k.a. [Fortunus Games](#)) is a multi-disciplinary writer, artist, podcaster, and game developer who is passionate about environmentalism, technology, alternative health, and above all, story-telling mediums that explore character psychology and development.

Astral Paradise

There's a pleasure in the nothingness
A peace in the absence of form
Several strings for each note played
Silence in the loudest thunderstorm

And there's August
Come from the last withstanding light beam
It arrived
While I cried
For a rose that had just
Died

Because it snowed here
For the first time fifty years
It matched my state of mind
It turned the view of my state of tropes

By the contrast's foam
And I was reborn
As I saw the rebirth of hope

It's in the middle where I strive to stand so
I can look to and from both sides It won't incarnadine
My blue
Snowflakes will remain in the memory of shapes
When the periwinkle dawn split all the brown
Roots from the perpetually unsure spring of my days

Written by Adora Williams, @adoralwilliams on Twitter & @adorawilliamspoetry on Instagram

Adora Williams has degrees in Journalism and Languages and has written poetry for 14 years. She lives in a historic region of Brazil. Her poetry anthology, *Mulher Poesia*, in Portuguese is being published in Brazil and Portugal in December 2022.

First Coffee Break

The lo-fi groove of air conditioning
cocoons me in this dream of work. The floor-
to-ceiling windows are partitioning
a forest full of pines and spruces more,

almost, than eyes can take, but green's a balm
mysterious and wild. My mind takes flight,
above the trees, in summer haze, breeze calm
as Buddhist emptiness, a second sight

that blinds me to illusion if I still
my monkey mind to clear pure space between
my thoughts and feelings, brute-force act of will
that scatters spirit-haunters, gulls that keen

insanity of anger, fear, desire,
inversion of the sun's life-giving fire.

Written by Thomas Zimmerman (bio & social media to follow)

Persephone's First Spring

The hooves, claws, talons, boots have trampled all
your moon-chilled limbs, but you'll come back. And when
the pomegranate seeds explode, we'll call
the hibernating angels down. And then

we'll kiss, bite, lick the fruits, the grains, the flesh.
The dark pink buds, those jewels bedazzling crowns
of trees, will burst in silken petals, mesh
with spirits birthing moist new greens from browns.

Behind your ear, on down your neck, across
twin azimuths, your breasts, the bestial and
celestial intertwine. It's Hades' loss.
Earth's winds and rivers stroke the mud and sand

where you lie after nights you thought you'd die
but now your stubbed wings sprout to let you fly.

Written by Thomas Zimmerman, @bwr_tom on Twitter & @tzman2012 on Instagram

Thomas Zimmerman (he/him) teaches English, directs the Writing Center, and edits *The Big Windows Review* at Washtenaw Community College, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. His poems have appeared recently in *Pink Plastic House*, *Roi Faineant Press*, and *Rough Diamond*. His latest book is *Travel/Travail* (Cyberwit, 2022).

About Us

Sixpence Society Literary Journal is a tiny one-man-band of a digital journal / magazine, run by Maisy O'Neill. Maisy is a student, about to start her final year of a Bachelor's degree in English Literature with Creative Writing. She has written stories her whole life, from a collaborative 'book series' with her childhood best friend at age thirteen, to the novel she drafted over the summer 2020 lockdown. As well as a writer, Maisy is an artist and can be found on Instagram @maisyaliceart handy, when it comes to designing artwork for a project like this, if a little out of her comfort zone, which is usually landscape paintings!

THANK YOU TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS

James Alexander
Attik
Jerome Berglund
Peter Burrows
L.M. Cole
Peter Devonald
Melissa Dorval
Fefe
Madeleine French
Indranil Ghosh
Millie Godwin
Chloe Henney
Tina Lamoreux
Susan T. Landry
Suzanne Lavallee
Mercedes Lawry
Richard LeDue
Sophie Leslie

Jeannie Marschall
Jedediah Matthews
Meg Merrilies
Zach Murphy
Sarah Oakes
Anthony O'Donovan
George O'Neill
Mabel Osejindu
Angel Rosen
Natalie Schriefer
Bud Sturguess
Pierre Turcotte
Lynn Valentine
Kelsey Webb
Imelda Wei Ding Lo
Adora Williams
Thomas Zimmerman

Editor in Chief & Cover
Design - Maisy O'Neill