

"The aphid underground"

will execute the supermoon far ahead of schedule. It's a show of strength. Aboveground, lady beetles launch a rainboot brigade set to dance music for old ghosts. Alley cats can be seen tangoing with lawn ornaments. The flamingos are peeling, but hum.
by Ruby Rorty

"Joy Ode" by William Erickson

Every day my joy puts on the tomato costume. Every day I stroll through the garden, wink at the bees, the stone steps bedding the river of my body. Once, I sewed magnolia leaves into a cape. All of us pretend to be ourselves and in pretending never notice that a self is just a seed inside a burlap sack. I slice my joy into uneven halves, and when I rinse the knife I wound the water.

Excerpt from "Reasons for a Disappearance" by Isabel Cañas

Grandpa is watching football in the back room and won't have seen us pull the god from the tomato patch. He'll be mad when he sees how the fat July fruits have been scorched by the god's skin. So we decide we won't tell him. Instead, we frog march the god to the creek between Grandpa's yard and Alejandra's, our sandals crunching over sharp, dried oak leaves, each of us clenching our jaws as we hold the god's burning forearms. If we cool him down in the creek, he'll be able to speak.

"The Devouring" by Mugdhaa Ranade

The noodles went straight for the throats, throttling like a noose. The breads bared razor-sharp teeth and sank them into flesh, drawing blood. The meats, missing parts of their bodies, claimed them from the humans: arms, legs, heads. The fruits and vegetables started peeling, slicing, dicing, chopping and crushing, grating and grinding, mincing and julienning. Then the soups and curries rose like The Great Wave off Kanagawa, and sizzled through skin and bone, leaving nothing behind. A lone sunflower erupted through the soil, tearing the skies apart; it opened its maw wide and swallowed the Sun, smiling, shining like gold.

Excerpt from "The leaves are busier than my mother on a Sunday morning" by Niesha Okere

As a reward, Daddy lets a few leaves inside. They face plant into a small golden bowl that's filled with house keys to snuff out the clinks of the early morning. I look outside my bedroom window. I see leaves dancing in our empty driveway. When they get into fights I pretend not to hear. It's none of my business. Sometimes the sound of my stomach breaks up the party. Before I can say sorry, the leaves make their way to my window. Stupid me opens the window. The leaves climb inside my mouth.

"LITTLE INFERNO" - Evan Nicholls

Like magic, the magician pulled a fire out of his hat. 'I'm your little inferno,' said the brightest thing on earth.

"Chew, Swallow, Chew" by Ai Jiang

They attached a zipper to my stomach, not to my womb. They said this would help the process run smoother, faster, if the babies could consume nourishment passed broken only by mouth and saliva. I watched as they inserted the baby, a worm, which would later metaphorize into one of them. Within me, I felt tiny legs and arms sprout from its malleable body, stole what I chewed. When it left me, I was a skeleton, and it a plump, pulsing, purple entity with a thousand arms. It unravelled its millions of folds before unzipping me, next child in hand. They told me I should be honoured, that my role was a glorious, glorious thing. Be thankful it was you, they'd said. And the choice, what choice? but the single one presented to me?

"Geese" by Brad Liening

Geese invade our homes. They hiss, beat their wings, and shit on everything until we're driven out into the night. We huddle at the edge of the lake, shivering. The lake is no longer filled with geese; now it is ringed by miserable people. I tell you that love will see us through this consequence of beauty while on the other side of the lake war is declared, or several wars are declared, or this is peace at last. A few bodies bob quietly across the water.

"When the round-abouts took over" by Cat Dixon

Round-abouts reduce collisions and pollution, at least that's what we were told by the new leaders eager to keep the flow quiet and steady. Palapas are open air, usually round shelters—a tiki hut with a woven palm-tree leaf roof to keep sun rays and bird droppings at bay, but unlike the umbrella, a heavy downpour will get through. I know—how are demonic roundabouts and lazy palapas related? Well, like anything manmade and true, aliens have combined them and created an omniscient cover for every rotunda in town. No sunburns. No more racing through yellow lights. No more excuses.

"Natalist fairytale" by Cat Dixon

Hooray! We survived the shipwreck, the sneaky chloroform attack, ice-skating on the ruptured lake, the point of no return. Is there a trophy to commemorate this? Who knows. The day after the happy ending, we're still happy. It's too late to hold the elevator door open, but it's never too late to reach the heights of human drama. People like to survive, couple up, kiss at sunset, and pump out babies like those babies will never outgrow family time, dinnertime—nine stories of toys plummet to the sea, and all that's left is bacon, omelets, sandwich shop reward cards, a torn pool table covered in apples, one watermelon, and seedless green grapes. Still recovering from last year's happy ending, we're not interested in rebirth—only telling the story we had to tell which has been underrated, undersold, and yet, we continue singing our canticle to the sun, the sea, the unborn.

"Dog Cage for a Mouth" by Caleb Bethea

Astrology boys vaping at the moon. A pack of laughing and the speculating of signs, a theory of miracles. Then, their limbs rattling around in my jaws. The sounds of a locked-up puppy, or a whole litter of restless bodies — cheap metal shaking as their owner opens, closes the door.

Excerpt from "Tomb Deposit" by Alejandra Cabezas

Nothing feels as empty as the trails of the earth. Where once, me and you, now runs a serpent. Bodied thing I am jealous of. With no arms to reach for you. No legs to keep me put. You see, I love standing on puddles during storms. Then comes the sun and I find myself in a hole. Never had to carve myself out of the present. I stay, always. One day I'll drown myself. I've heard all about this soil and its precariousness. No doubt the terracotta will outlive me. I am porous. Meant for permeability. My output is my weakness. Everything inside me is shriveled up. Old things. Uncared for. Left behind in floods. Found drying in the sand. Nothing has ever restored its composition. Chemistry, I know. Nothing ever dies. But the sun and the salt will eat away at me. You have to believe me. I am withered. Meant to serve in the afterlife.

Excerpt from "Friends Forever" by Katherine Plumhoff

It seems like I'm the only one who stays in one place anymore. I know my friends will get to their next cities — places in which they know no one, or know just their partner, or know many members of their extended family but are truly known by none of them — and, upon arriving at graduate student housing, or a strange apartment, or a guest bedroom, feel lonely.

Excerpt from "Gretel" by Jane O'Sullivan

Some days, my skin feels so dry, it's like I could go up at any moment. Poof. I don't notice most of the time, but some days, I feel very, very old.

I used to know this town. These people. All of us spread across the valley, all of us rising at the same time to get the milking done. And I was one of them so I didn't have to think too hard to understand any of them. But I still have no idea who her mother is, can't even think where she might live.

Excerpt from "Paraffin" by Will VanDenBerg

I sold the memory when I was young. The startup offered enough to bridge the gap in my funds for a month or two. For weeks after the extraction of the memory, it felt like an inch wide section above my right eye was missing. I swear I could feel the wind coming in.

When I went to buy back the memory years later, I couldn't afford it. It had been sold to a firm that resold it to another firm that—

Excerpt from "The Skin Keeper" by Jan Stinchcomb

The sleepover at your house feels like doom, but the tragedy has already happened. Even the smell is off, like the inside of a barn. Is it neglect? We are the only two motherless daughters at school. The problem, however, is your father, who wants something you cannot give him. He buys you pretty clothes, all the colorful dresses you want, and waits. There is no prince spying on you through the keyhole. Nobody is coming to save you. It's all on me. We sleep together under the heavy donkeyskin. Your eyes are those of a woman who is not allowed to have anything. You do not exist outside a certain unspeakable desire hidden in the remains of your broken family.

Excerpt from "Heatwave" by H.V. Patterson

Such heat. Even the vultures roosted listlessly in the shade, waiting for the release of death or rain. The pavement burned my dog's tender feet. He whined in betrayed pain and licked my sun-blistered knees.

Tempers run high in such heat, boil in sync with our dying oceans, sing sympathetic harmony with the melting of our plastic world.

Could I have said or done something different? Could I have been someone else, somewhere else? So many different questions to lay at the feet of the victim, so few answers to demand of the attacker. For me, there was little time for questions and less for answers.

When you killed me, I was staring into the merciless sky, begging for the dream of a cloud.

Excerpt from "Witch Sister" by Kira Compton

We decide to kill Aunt Miriam. We have already done everything else. We have played Monopoly. We have read hospital magazines. We have made tribal masks from old crosswords and glue. We have plucked the fuzzy man-hairs from our arms. We have played with our baby brother, even though he is not yet a real person. We have cut his hair, we have poked his cheeks. We have built a cage from hospital chairs and tucked him deep inside. We have searched forlornly for our brother under every chair but the right one. Oh, Jackson? Little Jackson? Where did our Jackson go? We have pretended not to hear his screams. We have turned away in disgust when he gurgled and sobbed and vomited on his sweater. We have remembered why we don't play with him. He is too young to understand anything, games or Aunt Miriam or anything. We have ignored our baby brother until his crying quieted into tiny, bite-sized noises: hiccup! Hiccup!

Excerpt from "Twelve Steps in the Hundred Acre Wood" by Jen Fawkes

The addict believes himself a skilled enchanter. Works at sleight of hand and misdirection. Thinks he's hoodwinking everyone, when in truth, he deceives no one but himself. He's so busy keeping his needs met, his fictions alive, that he's got no time to consider anyone else.

Excerpt from "Spin Cycle" by Judith Ohikuare

—Like the laundry: I really couldn't get a grip on that last load. I had decided to dump everything in all at once (there was so much and I had so little time), so in went EJ's basketball uniforms and my de-elasticized bras and Dana's period panties and Elijah's boxer briefs. The washer cycled while I checked things off my to-do list for an hour (emails, bills, defrosting meat), but when I returned to take everything out, I found myself pulling and pulling—I mean seriously going at it with the machine—for ages. I was nearly diving in at one point.

Excerpt from "My Dog is a Cat" by Xavier Garcia

My dog is a cat.

I can't explain it further than this. I can't make this make any more sense. When I look at my dog – who should be a miniature pinscher named Tails – I do not see a dog. I do not see a miniature pinscher named Tails. I see a cat. I don't know its breed. I don't know cat breeds. And I don't know its name. Maybe its name is Tails.

Out of a growing sense of nervousness, I go to take a drag of my cigarette and a sip from my glass of whiskey at the same time like I'm Kramer from Seinfeld. But I'm not Kramer from Seinfeld. I am me. There's at least that. I am not Kramer from Seinfeld, I am me. But that is not my dog. That thing looking up at me is not a miniature pinscher named Tails. It is a cat.

Excerpt from "A Girl with a Hole in Her Head" by Ruth Joffe

Part of her thinks people are just being polite—ignoring the black hole in her forehead under the false assumption that it's a religious mark or a tattoo designed to act like an optical illusion. That can't possibly be her brain, can it?

Excerpt from "A Year in Fog" by Nick Francis Potter

After dinner, I'm cleaning dishes. There's a witch in the backyard burying something in the garden—probably someone's heart—when my children start screaming and biting each other in the basement. It's not long before they're in the kitchen, my children, with red semicircles up and down their arms, arguing and soliciting punishments for each other, which I'm wont to officiate. The next morning, or maybe it's early afternoon, I take notice of the birds on the shed—crows and vultures—as my dog runs, spinning circles and barking in the yard. It's clear from her legs, muddy up to her chest, the dog's been digging in the garden, and she's unearthed something, a large bag of some kind. Upon closer inspection, it's probably a human torso, free of everything but an arm.

"The Final Girl Rehearses the Part of the Nurse for Her School's Production of Romeo and Juliet" by Meghan Phillips

The drama teacher would have cast her as Juliet, if not for what happened. She is the strongest actress of the bunch. Understands the rhythm of the language in a way the other kids don't. Understands that big emotions—love, fear, despair—don't always look big.

He worried, though, what the town would think seeing her play dead like that. So, she would be the Nurse. The caretaker. The nurturer. The only character in whole play who cares about the doomed girl's happiness.

He watches as the girls rehearse again the scene where the Nurse finds Juliet in her chamber, presumes that she is dead. He watches the final girl cradle the other actress's body. Hears the break in her voice as she laments, "Help, help! My lady's dead." He wonders if he has made a mistake.

Excerpt from "Memento Mori" by Sophie Panzer

Your mother is asking for your things back, my love. Your cashmere sweaters, your crockpot, your gold ring that once belonged to your father. As if she is the only one with a claim to them now that you're gone. As if I have no right to the objects that retain your scent, your fingerprints, your loose skin cells.

Excerpt from "The Woman We Called Vulture" by Jen Julian

So, I went out, and I sat on the porch steps and watched the sunflowers trace the end of the day with their faces, the hydrangeas' heads sinking under their own blue weight. Vulture was doing me a favor, but sometimes really good favors don't feel as good as they are, and sometimes it's hard to thank people once they've put their finger on your softest parts.

Excerpt from "Butter Dish" by Melissa Dittrich

I knocked over the butter dish while going to spread some on a slice of the bread Mom had just made. I went to grab the broom and sweep up all the broken ceramic and cream, when Tara took the broom handle and a look came over her face that haunted me for a long time.

I have to go, she said, and opened the door and flew away and that was that. I stood in the doorway with my mouth open like a frog and Mom came in the room and saw the mess.

She left, I said. Tara flew away. Mom sighed and said, Sometimes that happens. She looked me up and down in my dough-stained apron and T-shirt dress and said, You could do better than Tara. As if that helped. Then she went to the closet and said, Well, she didn't take our broom did she? When I nodded Mom rolled her eyes, took off her apron and went to the store to buy a new broom. I picked up the pieces of the butter dish with tears streaming down my face and got the kitchen floor all wet.

Excerpt from "Dream Scream" by Adelina Sarkisyan

The wife and the husband were inseparable except for the fact that the husband didn't believe in dreams and the wife was always dreaming. But she didn't call it dreaming, she called it predicting. Ever since she was a little girl, she had dreamed of dreams that came true. The night before she met her husband, she'd had a dream of him. He'd reached down and offered her a glass of cool water. She'd drowned in it. She predicted that was a good sign.

Excerpt from "Tourists" by J.D. Hosemann

The light outside was unlike any I'd ever seen. Everything appeared a yellowed sepia. The water in the canal was choppy and little balls of hail shattered on the asphalt. I found it all quite beautiful and wished I could remember where we were, which city this was. I thought I'd like to come back one day.

Excerpt from "Anglerfish" by Rebecca Ackermann

We ordered the main course and three men turned to admire her as they passed. One stopped and asked if he could take her picture. She ran a hand down the back of her neck and offered him her left side. That's when I realized our outdoor seating was good marketing: a beautiful woman makes a shiny lure. In my whole life, I had never thought of myself as bait.

Excerpt from "How You'll Go" by Wendy Oleson

Our universe is expanding.
You're nothing but fear and dust.

"Unseen Music" by Elena Zhang

My mother stole my fingers, right from the keyboard they were dancing on. She snipped them from my hands, one by one, dropping them into her oversized yellow purse as red fireworked against black and white. The tarantella kept playing as she rattled my fingers against pennies and coupons. I didn't see them again until her funeral. She clutched the fleshy bouquet in her fists, and I swore I saw them twitch as she entered the ground.

"The Goldfish" by Gessica Sakamoto Martini

The goldfish lived in a small apartment with a single window on the top floor of a brick building. Inside the apartment, nothing was alive except him and the walls. And every day, the walls grew smaller and grayer. From the window, the goldfish watched the sun come and go as it pleased and felt the threat of not owning a light. So, the goldfish visited the newly opened store at the end of the road. There, he saw a woman with hair and skin the color of corals and took her home with him. Inside the fish tank, the woman swam in perfect circles. A dim red light constantly awake, burning alive, between the goldfish and the gray walls. Even when the sun was gone.

"The View from Our Window" by Keith Hood

We live inside the tornado where our daughter was born. We were driving to the hospital when the tornado howled and my eyes tilted my head skyward. Surely some gigantic spaceship spawned that ear-piercing clatter but I saw nothing until the twirling menace grew in my rearview mirror. Clarissa clutched her throbbing tummy and moaned. The whirlwind whisked us into the sky as the baby's head crowned. My wife breathed and pushed, breathed and pushed. Roofs, tree limbs, close-mouthed dogs, wide-eyed cats with puffed tails, and other detritus swirled around us as I cut the umbilical cord with my pocketknife and cleaned the mess with paper towels. We travel from town to town now. Our daughter enjoys looking out the window. The scenery constantly changes as much as it remains the same.

"Colors" by José Felipe Ozuna

The Color Naming Committee was in session. Things were going well. They had decided on the big ones. Purple was the sound of a train leaving. Green was the wind you felt at the base of your neck. Orange was the feeling of a warm shower during a snowstorm. Specifically, the fog that gathered in the mirror. Yellow was rain, of course. And its drips from the gutters. Black was a leaf folding into itself. White was also the wind you felt at the base of your neck. What about that, someone asked, pointing a finger above them. Birds dotted the high plains which to them, until that point, had just looked like the ocean about to fall. They pondered for hours. Until someone spoke up and said I'm not sure. But what will we do, now that we noticed it's there?

"Embers" by Réka Nyitrai

When Dora is asleep, she sees hummingbirds hovering behind her eyelids. When she awakens, Dora spends her days sitting in an old chair placed in front of the window. She mostly watches the clouds and reads magazines. Sometimes, she tries to imagine how she would look with feathers, a long beak and fast-moving wings. Sometimes, she hums sad, old songs; songs that she learnt from her late grandmother. Sometimes, she thinks about starting a new life, somewhere in a faraway country, where she knows no one. Most often, when she looks into the mirror she sees a tiny bird perched on a bare branch. Even through the glass she can feel the beat of the bird's heart. Its heartbeat on the tip of her fingertips feels as if she is touching embers.

“The Scissors-Man” by Réka Nyitrai

I would like to ask you to let your hair grow — said my lover. You would look more feminine and this would excite me more. What he does not know is that my grandmother and mother promised me to the scissors-man. The scissors-man owns my hair and I. He dutifully visits me every night and cuts my locks. From my hair and his other slave girl’s honeyed strands his wife knits a special sweat cloth. With it he wipes her face clean.

“The Dark Staircase” by Shane Kowalski

The dark staircase leads to nothing. But we take it every once in a while, to another possible fate. Silently, a figure in white is digging a grave for you. It is “Purity.” It’s enough to make you want to splash your blood on white linen and scream. It’s enough to kiss passionately on a black horse in a thunderstorm before you die. This toppled chair indicates something intimate happened. Christine, where are you driving tonight, in this heartbroken fog?

Excerpt from “Sailor Moon is Tired of Fighting Evil” by Angela Liu

Sailor Moon doesn’t need a magical wand or an idiot with roses. The ghouls that chase her are already a dying species—outdated, second class to the real monsters shouting on the TV. She rides the train with oversized sunglasses and a wig that makes her scalp itch, dreaming of all-you-can-eat dim sum buffets and clubs where the lights strobe just enough for her to find another body in the dark that’ll help her forget her own. She’ll put on the sailor outfit if they ask nicely. If they’re good in the only way that still matters.

"On becoming your best self and finally getting the man and/or beach body of your dreams:" by Ruby Rorty

Inject antimatter to stop caring. Kill the mall zombies with antibodies. Best your therapist once and for all with one simple trick (reverse psychology). This is how you become light, tan, uncaring, beloved, and finally, finally indigestion-free.

"Joy Ode" by William Erickson

From the center of a small town a well sings of all the children that have fallen in. It is a sad song—there are many children—but a beautiful song, and in the constant din of stars it sounds like love would sound if love could be an echo. But love is not an echo. Love is a staircase in a meadow whose shadow tells the time. If you listen to its song the well will beg you not come and as you come the song grows low and soft and secret. We do not know what things are real. In winter we cut down the trees because they look too much like us.

Excerpt from "Pretend Friends" by Julián Martínez

I was a demon, cursing in a high nook of the Cloudbuster. I told the kids, in a raspy voice, that I'd eat their flesh if they didn't speak the password—any password would do. "Yes." "No." "Please." When kids got freaked, I'd tell them, in my normal voice, that they'd turned me good.

Excerpt from "La Carta" by Adrian Dallas Frandle

On the other side of the coin, the side we can't see: The Labyrinth. At the center of The Labyrinth is the Post Office, where everything arrives. The Postmaster is asleep on a heap of yarn. A minotaur knits beneath his pillow, which is a rhombus roughly the size of a postage stamp. If one shines the coin with some spit and squints, the face of the Postmaster appears embroidered on the pillow he sleeps on.

Excerpt from "As A Young Borges Myself" by Adrian Dallas Frandle

Progress as distance is immeasurable — the only yardstick being the arm attached to the hand taking measure. We'll measure in hands, then. Like horses. Or cubits. It should not matter so long as the units are biological. A hair's length. Within earshot. By the skin of my teeth. But these are all relative, and there exist no reference points for comparison to the end.

"Swamp Thing Sits on the Bank Examining His Life Through the Lens of Bernoulli's Principle" by Jack Bedell

Let's just say the Book was correct, and it all started with a single breath. Inspiration—>Expiration. All the seconds in between these two. A breath into the void. A breath before saying "I love you." A single breath to inflate the giant balloon of my ambition. The force of those breaths pulling so much else, so many people, with them into whatever gape I chose to fill. How many others' breaths pulled in tow? How many sucked into my own trajectory? Seeing it all this way, I can't help but think of Linda standing patiently, proudly next to me, totally balanced on her own two feet until that moment when I opened my mouth to set all of this into motion. And frozen in that one memory is the inevitable flow of air into space, the carnage I've lived since

Excerpt from "A Band, A Maelstrom, A Revolution of Axolotls" by Jennifer Lai and Nathan Xie

Axolotls like us find vegetables boring because they don't move, and maybe because they don't move, they're poisonous (to us?). Unfortunately, our company's cafeteria only serves dill pickles, and we suspect our clam boss deliberately makes us constipated so we don't visit the loo as much when we line-assemble submarines and fauna traps and electro-acoustic transducers.

Excerpt from "Wide Wet Grins" by Lyndsie Mannsos

They were already among us. Unheard-of numbers swimming into bays and inlets, and some found their way into freshwater lakes and rivers. Tagged ones disappeared from tracking. For a species that occupy every ocean on the planet, their disappearance was stark and swift. A squeal cut off mid-sound.

Excerpt from "Weather Report" by Rubén Casas

Tomorrow's high is going to be 93, says the weather report. Smoke quotient will be at 5 again. No progress has been made on the ORWACA mega-fire, and conditions are supposed to worsen by the weekend, when the smoke is expected to merge with a volcanic ash cloud coming up from the South Pacific. The weather report says they're talking about adding a lettering system to the smoke quotient scale to designate even worse air quality, accounting for factors outside of forest fires. In this case, volcanic ash.

"The Devouring" by Mugdhaa Ranade

The noodles went straight for the throats, throttling like a noose. The breads bared razor-sharp teeth and sank them into flesh, drawing blood. The meats, missing parts of their bodies, claimed them from the humans: arms, legs, heads. The fruits and vegetables started peeling, slicing, dicing, chopping and crushing, grating and grinding, mincing and julienning. Then the soups and curries rose like The Great Wave off Kanagawa, and sizzled through skin and bone, leaving nothing behind. A lone sunflower erupted through the soil, tearing the skies apart; it opened its maw wide and swallowed the Sun, smiling, shining like gold.

Excerpt from "Carcinisation" by Anneke Schwob

The scientists were holding a press conference.

They often did this and were often ignored. The public was sick of novel findings. They couldn't figure out why anything the scientists told them mattered and so had decided that, by and large, it didn't. The press corps didn't have the option. Their paychecks depended on it mattering, so they had decided that, by and large, it must.

"Gordon Lish" by Julián Martínez

I held Raymond Carver at gunpoint. I didn't know he'd be sitting in the kitchen when I busted into the apartment of my old creative writing professor, Gordon Lish. Carver gave me the face he makes on the back of What We Talk About When We Talk About Love: an eyebrow-raised smirk that said, "give me your best shot." The 9mm in my sweaty hands grew heavier as he stared me down, holding a chicken wing. He wore a greasy wifebeater. This seemed like the place where guys called them wifebeaters. "Where's Lish?" I said. I slammed the chamber of the gun back. Carver motioned with his wing. I swung around and there was Lish, also in a wifebeater, also holding a wing. He offered me a seat. "Seems like you're the real deal, after all," he chuckled.

Excerpt from "Actually, My Experiences Are Universal!" by Juniper White

They named her UMWELT, and she was the metric by which all internal experiences could be judged. They scanned her mind and sampled her stem cells daily to make those little cybernetic pills. Artists could pop one of those candy-coated globs of circuits and cells into their mouths and, when it hooked up to their brainstems, they could see their acrylics in the exact same shades she saw, correcting for defects in their sensory experiences. Chefs would taste their food with her tongue, knowing that their critics would too. She was a miracle for science, a perfect measuring point for any cognitive or metacognitive tests. UMWELT standardized sight, sound, scent, taste, touch. She was the control point, the objective experience.

Excerpt from "The Fastnet" by Adrian Dallas Frandle

More or less without a soul, the Fastnet speaks. More accurately, the Fastnet tweets. It tweets data on wind direction, wind speed, gust direction and gust speed. I confess, I do not know the difference between wind and gust. I confess, I pretend to know the difference between direction and speed. I profess, I have never asked the Fastnet, as such.

Excerpt from “The Cult of Kukulcan” by Alejandra Cabezas

Last night I lowered myself into a well. I spent the night in a serpent’s mouth, speaking to a god. Come sunrise, I forgot to ask for his name. I resisted the raindrops in between his teeth. Despite my thirst, I’m wary of drinking from the crevices of men. He was a feathered one, I think.

Excerpt from “Hibiscus Depths” by Alleliah Nuguid

My grandmother’s dress washes up on the shore. Which shore? Not sure. I never saw her near water while she and I were at the same time alive. Yet coast wanes cleanly into sea, and gulls barrel through clouds, bellowing from the gutters of their throats. And there, the floral garment sashays in on a wave. Water stains the flowers darker: hibiscuses on fuchsia deepen from white to grey. The dress docks on the shoreline, vessel holding only itself.

“Apocalyptic Date Idea #126” by Julián Martínez

What if we kissed in the McDonald’s drive-thru, when it snowed, all the bushes looking like the Flurry machine exploded but it was okay, it was costless, money didn’t exist, we were in a post-apocalypse with a quarter tank of gas and empty bellies and trembling lips and you and I called “hello?” so many times it seemed like language didn’t exist anymore— it used to, we could tell by the black box with red text flashing PLEASE ORDER HERE next to the LED menu someone had to be generating electricity for, if not then we’d die as the warmth waned in our arms with only an hour or so left, I don’t know I’ve never died before, I’ve tasted juicy perfection which I hear is known as a little death and that was what living was like right before the Internet and the power and the money disappeared— every day, a little death. And just as restless as in those days, we shouted at the walls of brutalist technicolor then turned and pressed the hunger held in each other’s lips together— just like before, as if nothing had ever happened, a voice that sounded like cigarette ash sighed, “good evening, can I take your order?”

“My Eyeball Says” by Remi Recchia

After Russell Edson

The ophthalmologist holds my eyeball in his hands, gloved and cradled in white latex. My eyeball twitches under the dim lights. It asks politely to be rejoined to the rest of my face. The ophthalmologist says, no, I don’t think so. You are broken nerve and fried pupil. My eyeball says, well, what about your Hippocratic Oath? The ophthalmologist laughs. He turns to me. Some joker, right? He takes my other eyeball, which is silent. He leaves my sockets stuffed with cotton.

Excerpt from “In a Meadow of Pop Stars” by Tina S. Zhu

The pop star moves to Los Angeles at sixteen to discover she is only one pop star in a meadow of pop stars. Pop stars grabbing drinks. Pop stars on the beach. Pop stars in sports cars crashing on the freeway. Ghosts of pop stars in the park, waiting for anyone who will listen to their plotless stories. Pop stars in grocery stores. Pop stars on the roofs of grocery stores, because nothing can weigh down a pop star as they float towards the sky.

Excerpt from “The Youngest Son” by Megan Barickman

But the father had a problem, and the problem was death. For he did not want to die, and he did not wish to see an end to his sons, but space was short and time was cramped with his lineage. Having heard the stories, the father knew his older sons would be no use to him. A youngest son was needed, empty-skulled and desert-handed. He called to him his eldest son, a man of great abundance himself, and said to him, “Go and fetch the youngest son, for it alone can solve this riddle.” So the son went and he returned.

Excerpt from “Greetings from Sands Point, New York!” by Avery Gregurich

The silver mouthpiece of a flute sends invisible smoke to the South. Out on the school grounds, the spiraling valves of a helicon constitute a playground under which many after-school yokels with lighters will come to feel big again. It is almost ready for habitation. WHAT ARE WE MISSING HERE? he asks me, filling a tiny ceramic birdbath with the played spit of a trumpet. B flat just does something to human spit that can be seen, and felt. YOU COULD PUT A ‘FOR SALE’ SIGN OUT FRONT, I say. I smell sweet, like a too-ripe pear.

Excerpt From “War Paint” by Sam Berman

Twilit. Almost all dark, outside, on our lawn is the stack of pallets your brother hasn’t come for. Not yet. And not for months. So. Now, when the squirrels successfully dash the street, they catch their breath between the slats. They rest themselves and their two-stroke hearts where the weeds are. But it’s fine. I like the stack. And the squirrels and the road they run. I like the other roads around our house, too. The catcall of the highway not so far from us. That airport. The idea of that airport. Of travel via flight. And bags. And cones. And siren lights that seem like they make noise but really just flash American light.

Excerpt from “It Smells Like Dead Girls in Here” by Skyler Melnick

The line takes forever, but finally it’s my turn. I stare at my best friend, tucked into a girl-sized mahogany coffin. Bridget is incredibly dead.

Face painted, hair curled and crunchy, she looks ever so ugly and I wish I could tell her. I lean into the coffin and whisper Ugly, but she doesn’t hear me, so I lean even further—further and further—until I’m inside.

Excerpt from “Mena, Until” by Patricia Russo

Mena’s digging hard, digging deep. The wet earth she’s turning up smells of damp ashes and rotting paper. But the trowel is still bright, and the bucket is steaming. I can feel the cold coming off it, coming out of it, a tingle against my skin.

We go a couple of steps nearer. Three or four, no more.

Mena stops digging. Leaning forward, she peers into the hole. “I don’t need a bodyguard.” She doesn’t look behind her.

“Ghost Pockets” by Jose Hernandez Dias

I had three ghosts in my jean pockets as I approached the rusty elevator at the doctor’s office. I was going to get my swollen leg looked at. One of the ghost’s names was Raphael, like the Renaissance painter. The second ghost was named Cimabue, like the Byzantine era painter. The last ghost was named Italo Calvino, like the futurist writer.

I reached the fourth floor. The restless ghosts flew and darted out of my pockets. They began to disturb the peace in the waiting room. People began to panic with so many peculiar ghosts in the room. Finally, Raphael, the artist ghost, began to draw stick figures on the nondescript office walls. Cimabue joined him, drawing lambs and goats. Italo Calvino, the social ghost of the group, tried to buy cigarettes from the people waiting in the lobby. When the nurse eventually called me into the office, I was relieved. The ghosts would have to learn to fend for themselves one way or the other. That’s how we all learn, really.

Excerpt from “Two Doctors” by Benjamin Niespodziany

Always they’re hiding behind their retractable curtains. Never to be lifted, never to be revealed. Their children are cyclones or cymbal screams teething and motioning as if they alone are in charge of the world continuing to spin. I hear them – their stomps and their weeps – but I never see them.

Excerpt from “A Wedding at Xibalba” by Xavier García

Why the fuck did I sit here, thought Iqui Acab as he shuffled in his seat, turning once again to meet the grinning face of Old Spider Monkey.

“Gorgeous wedding, huh?” asked Old Spider Monkey.

The wedding hall was suffocatingly dark. Lit only by the pale glow of the corpseworm infestation.

It also smelled like monkey shit.

Excerpt from “Body in a Barrel” by Lindsey Baker Bower

When they found that body in a barrel at the bottom of Lake Mead I bet you were just as surprised as I was that it wasn’t a woman. They can go on and on as much as they’d like about mob murders—mob murders, mob murders, mob murders.

That’s probably what this is.

Remember swimming in the July lake when the water was like soup that sat out for a while? We would imagine there were dead women under us. We’d jump at any little thing that rolled over our toes under the water.

Excerpt from “Lonely Waters” by Ben Larned

The Reservoir is over 100 years old. Tall, drooping trees surround its edges, leaning in opposition to the mansions across the street. Its wide basin is veined with cracks, black asphalt and little groves of weeds. A grand observation tower juts up from the southmost edge. At the waterline, the concrete turns bone-white. The water reflects the sky, blue and clear. It has the aura of a ritual site, a temple once sacred and revered. Perhaps that is why it is attended by the city’s most beautiful.

Excerpt from “A Girl in a Box” by Ruth Joffe

How long has she been in there? Even she forgets. One day, it was September 1927—one of those bright fall mornings in Chicago, no longer warm but not quite crisp, a great breath of fog drifting off the lake toward her neighborhood—and the next thing she knew it was autumn, 1954, new buildings on her old block and leaves already falling off the trees, a frisson of static coursing through the air, electric, magnetic, the sharp taste of it mingled with car exhaust and bird shit and the mildewing damp of that box she was trapped in, as if it had been left on a sidewalk overnight, cardboard already puckering where tape had ripped it and dogs peed all over it.

Excerpt from “at the (centre) of it all” by Isana Skeete

It’s not like nobody tried to get at it, them soft, chewy dreams. But it cuts so that this vulgar flower is now a red vulgar flower, enriched by those oxygenated erythrocytes. I call it the Flame because that other name chokes up in my throat. Blood Rose tastes dusty like I’ve been sweeping in a circle instead of out the door. This Flame, I’ve seen it. In a shell that was small with a cue that was curly and a cut down the back to see into the world where the chrysalis sits (inside) the (centre) of THAT flower.

Excerpt from “When We Became Trees” By Danaí Christopoulou

They’d told us it would be peaceful; natural.

Well, natural for us—peaceful for them. Peaceful to sit in the shadow of our green growth, lost in their memories of who we used to be. Feeling vindicated in the choice they carried out for us. “The burial pods are biodegradable,” they said. “Good for the environment.” Then they sat and waited, as we were lowered to the ground in an egg-shaped capsule, a sapling sprouting from where our belly buttons used to be.

“Nicknames for Dinosaurs” by Monique Quintana

She had a sancho in Michoacán. He gave me my faulty spine in the dusk. I had to get two injections in my spine. Nurse, what kept you? I hate the word hairdo over style. How can dead things do anything? There’s a place in the sun where I eat old birthday cake. You know the best way to get there. Our mothers were enemies—Polka dots at funerals. Macaws fall in love with other planets. I can’t keep their trees from dying. I forgot what tree my lover lives in. He forgot to paint a door.

E

I



Canas



Leaves are
busier



Tomb Deposit



Friends forever



Gretel



Parafin



Skinkeeper



Heatwave



Witch sister



Twelve steps



Spin Cycle



Dog is a cat



A Girl with a
Hole in Her Head



A Year in Fog



Memento Mori



The Woman We
Called Vulture



Butter Dish



Dream Scream



Tourists



Anglerfish



How You'll Go



website



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Sailor Moon



Pretend Friends



La Carta



Young Borges



A Band



Wide Wet Grins



Weather Report



Carcinisation



Experiences are
universal



Fastnet



Youngest son



Sands Point



War Paint



Dead Girls



Mena, until



Two Doctors



Lonely Waters



Body in a Barrel



Kukulakan



Hibiscus Depths



Pop Stars



Girl in Box



(center)



when we become trees



Xibalba



website



website



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