

# LEAVINGS

MAGAZINE

ISSUE  
5

SUMMER  
2024

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AYÁNDELE

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BINT



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How far we forth to saltwater or the passion  
of concluding winter.

All eyes out for a threshold  
south and west. We see the earth

work its seam and caul. We see no other mysteries  
but peaks. There is still an interior light.

Peer through the vaporous window.  
Half a moon stirs.

If we face where we want to go,  
it seems we could nearly touch

under, above: tomorrow's pink start  
or the wet fielding weave.

The promise of all that.

I wanted it.  
I wanted to be delivered to everything I had lost.

I was born beside an arch,  
myself the daughter of a paradise.

At the sunset of my suffering,

Ìfẹ́olúwa Àyàndélé

—after Louise Glück

there was an open window,  
I remember: January, with its

dry-cold, hanged on the hinge  
of the window pane & it becomes  
a slender sun that flickered

into my past. It is tragic to survive  
as a memory, shoveled down into the mind  
of people. Memory is the thing

I cannot own, love—  
my suffering is how songs become  
a cloud of vapor—a passage into the other

world. The hinges of my life are a cistern  
of sadness, carved into a labyrinth of love  
or else, like growing chrysanthemum.

Can these skies contain so much pain?  
Can my heart carry more disdain  
To humans and white laws?  
Can 365 sq km contain so much sorrow?  
Can my head house more horror  
At scenes of limbs dangling from cement.  
Cycles of pain, cycles of rage,  
How else can I break the chains?  
How else can I not let the rage consume me?  
They tell me, turn your rage into a song.  
But even that cannot set us free.

Out of focus, the room blurred in the dim light,  
the sheets lost their creases and folds, my hands  
shimmering and streaking as I moved them.

I was lost, and everything was tenuous. Do you  
understand now what fear can do? The tumor  
in my head wasn't even a tumor, but I was led

to believe it would take my one life and quickly.  
The neurosurgeon's words persisted. They informed  
every hour of my day and night. Everything

was a sign. Everything that happened was a sign  
of my impending demise. I was diagnosed with O.C.D.  
at the age of 13. Long-standing friend, this disorder

was suddenly unwelcome. I could not stop thinking:  
the tumor; the way it was supposedly growing.  
I repeatedly asked question after question of myself.

How obnoxious my questions seemed when posed  
to me instead of others. I questioned everything.  
With not so subtle desperation, I questioned

the very universe. Lost and falling out of focus,  
the room I had slept in for over a decade became strange.  
Out of focus, it shrank and enlarged around me, a

veritable scene from Wonderland. I was unsure. I  
was not fully myself. I wanted the Queen of Hearts  
to arrive, to shout her infamous "Off with his head!"



Butterfly stroke, a cursive stretch through the water,  
a black witch moth with a slithering wing.

If I didn't think someone should beat me,  
I wouldn't let them. I would choose speed then,

save my breath and close the gap between us.  
I wanted it to look easy, I felt the white

boy's eyes on me, surprised I floated  
as well as I do. It was erotic

surpassing what's expected of your body. Nothing  
quite turns me on like being called a good boy.

My movements were the same as rock climbing,  
the shade of my skin a rare sight on the rocks.

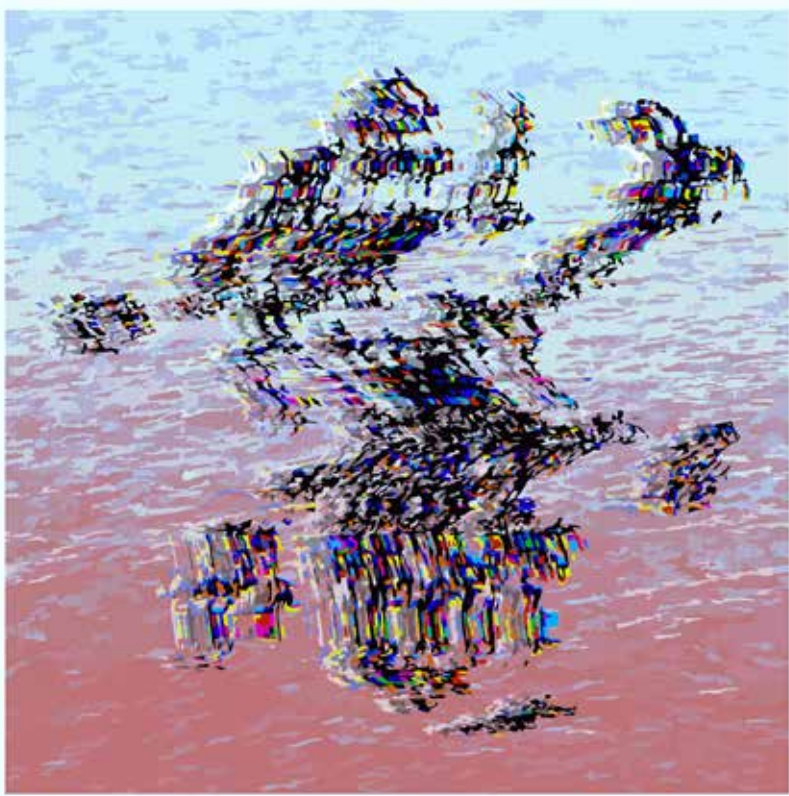
I don't get scared anymore. I leap with arms long.  
I'm reckless to prove I don't break.

Each time I reach the wall, I look like  
a hundred people dangling from a cliff

in a bat hang, suspended by my toes.  
I'd rather fall like lead from the sky

than count my losses. I am the boulder.  
I am the prize. All my life I was compared to a viper.

Cal Froikin



# From the Book of Wrong Words

Lena Zycinsky

Roughhousing  
with the language as foreign as my own  
son, I twist a muscle:

a total numbness of the apparatus. I choke  
on words. I am desperate for the language  
to turn in my direction. It doesn't.

"This is *not* how you pronounce it," my seven-  
year-old corrects me, full of love. The truth  
is, he is as foreign to me, as I am  
to him. Aren't we all?

To feel better, I make a book of wrong words.

"It's going to be my buttress," I say  
with a serious face, and he bursts  
into laughter.

is one of those words.

Its image is always daunting.  
Not the welcome-into-my-home kind,  
but the final adieu. I thus rhyme it with death  
when I know it doesn't.

Walking in Chelsea with a friend,  
from a similar background, I pointed  
at a white ribbon wreathing  
a house. "Must be a murder  
scene," we concluded instinctively  
stepping away.

(The note in the corner advised to do just that,  
but because of fresh paint.)

## Sons of Perdition, KY

Ian Hall

The dog was long dead, but its eyes still looked  
owlish at me. Puddled there  
in cartoon red, mites spelunked across it, the color  
& character of tobacco drool. Midwinter, I was thickened  
in severe material, hardly able to articulate  
my arms & legs. But Toy had stripped down  
to suet, trying to haggle it  
alive. Swivelnecked, face flushed carbide, he made urgent  
sounds at me. It didn't matter. Words could be spoken  
loud as you pleased but the wind

was a felon, pocketed them. I went & hunkered over him. Effort  
& wispy genetics had tonsured his hair. Only three past

the hour of thin meridian, & already the light  
was pigeoning away. A chloroformed scene. Above, buzzards

saddled the day's last vividry, the clouds  
novicely crocheted. Toy's head

was sumped down in his collar  
turtlewise. *Whoever owns up to this*

*is galactically fucked.* His voice was like rustling  
through tissue paper. I could see February

sharding all over him, his shoulders  
funnel-caked. Another bluster & his crouch gave out

& he was on his ass in the snow & froth, severed  
umbilicus.

...

*I know it was one of those lard-asses from up Hemp Patch, Toy said. They're still sore about them chickenfights. He was overtop the firepit. In it he flinted a wagging bouquet of flame. They did it sure. He rose, yawned booming. I'm pure tired. The night was cornmeal-bright—the air so edged & blatant it felt star-whetted. Hillsides ablotch with winter. I wish I was drinker than a warlord, Toy said. I imagined him that next day—under employed, feudally minded—ribbiting mufflerless into the slew of hollers, asking the incontinent & ankle-braceleted who made a pancake of my dog? Getting back a faceful of moldy dummos, screen doors guillotining to. Fall had been a page out of the almanac—vines & stalks so expectant the harvest had to be C-sectioned off them. A beef or so was tattooed*

to death by lightning, but all  
in all a bumper yield. Fieldwork was regular. Now what was he to do: go guileless  
into the sphincter of a mountain & bully ore? Live like a varmint on the corn  
dole? I didn't begrudge him his miniature narcissisms, a martyred dog. Of course  
he spied conspiracy everywhichway, thirsted to get the narrative  
by its nape & thump free some sense. So in wooden competence I passed  
that night, month, decade nodding with him. Why keep tab? I knew that next day  
the sun would still trek the sky at its dauntless putter, a sclerotic man  
on a Rascal Scooter. I knew the firmament would still wad up ashen  
as an old deed at 4pm. Me & Toy, what use did we have  
for calendered time?



Lil' Chirpers bounce brazen

anxious as tweakers under the chain link pecking

at crumbs unfazed by our sort of predator. I suppose it's the wings.

I watch the sway gentle, leaves shiver in angst, blades bend saying something brown & trampled through the checker of weaved wire. I just can't see the forest of futures from this dead tree. But even in these, a cold courtyard comes alive—kinda.

People always act like dissatisfaction is a choice; like gratitude is a muscle to strengthen free from circumstance. In a dim lit room, when a beam of natural light cuts through the air it always illuminates the dust floating in the ether—always.

A plane bursts above in the

Prussian blue dusk dropping. It pulls

smoke vertically across the sky.

deafen me with visions

something about seeing

that'd give me a welcomed

a trail of

The sonic used to

of travel & flight,

from such heights

vertigo. How do we [not]

fall so far?  
like the

Maybe it's a lack, of purpose,  
definition of better got worse?

Freedom isn't a blank page. It's full of scribbles, in other people's  
handwriting. I look up & see that plane leaving a rail of powder across the dark.

The sky drains so fast, I forget, it's us turning away from the light—uncontrollably.

## Small Magellanic Cloud

Lauren Camp

I was pulled to walk  
through to the clouds my sister  
says aren't you lonely I am  
not I wipe the constant fog  
from my glasses I rummaged  
a jacket a pair of wool socks to keep  
standing outside in the whirl  
of decentered truth a man  
and buddies walk past yelling orange  
anger I watch them behind me  
the clouds recover  
my own sense  
of what's gone and gone  
and gotten ready  
for us and no one  
is looking at all this  
precision  
of color and nothing  
is owed to us not  
even darkness

Eclipse meant the end of the world  
when anything was the end:  
drought, flood, bad harvest.

How they startled at the sky  
before leading their best calf  
to early slaughter,

before coupling in the fields, singing  
desperate ancestral songs,  
shooting flamed arrows at the sun.

A celestial monster captured the stars!  
The sun and the moon made love  
and hid their shy faces!

It is too easy  
to look down at history  
rather than across.

One day the dark swallows the sun  
and we see its hunger has no end.  
One day the century turns,

and each lit screen threatens: blackout,  
empty vaults, planes plunging  
from the sky.

One day a man breaks  
the speed of light—  
he travels that far away from me.

The secrets loose!  
The sky heartless! All my planets spinning  
off their axes!

But who can blame him? We're all scared.  
If I had a calf, I would have slaughtered it  
already.

It was my birthday, so I hired a professional jester to perform for my cat “Oscar” and I. I don’t mean a clown, an actual jester from medieval times. Anyway, the jester was dressed in a black and red skin-tight suit with bells attached to it. It was just Oscar and I so the jester seemed put off by it, but eventually snapped out of it and got to work. The Jester started juggling axes that were on fire. I laughed, but was secretly frightened. The jester seemed to sense my fear, so he upped it up a notch. Next, he pulled out a bag of wolf spiders and started swallowing them whole right in front of us. I was grossed out, for sure, but it was my birthday and I was having a couple of Pale Ales, so I went along with it.

When he finished eating the wolf spiders, I clapped and Oscar began walking around in circles as he does when he’s excited. The jester took a formal bow. Then he brought out a birthday cake. It was an ice cream cake with a skeleton on a surfboard on top. I told the jester how much I appreciated the gesture. We all ate.

After cake, everyone, the jester, Oscar, and I, started singing karaoke and drinking Pale Ales and black coffee pretty heavily until the early morning. Needless to say, we didn’t sleep much at all. In fact, at 6 am, we went surfing at our local spot. We caught some righteous waves. We had the time of our lives. But then, suddenly, the jester dropped so hard from a twelve-foot wave, and just disappeared like a magic trick. I’ve never seen him again, unfortunately. I assume he floated away out to the middle of the sea, insignificant, like the rest of us. *Rest in peace, dear jester-friend.*

We come home from the New Romanticism conference a little inebriated, a little wet behind the ears.

The furniture crafted by students from the college was a nice touch.

A painting of a stunt dog in the hotel foyer kitty-corner from a giant fern.

Climbing a mountain because it's there versus the urge to call or not call an ex from the summit.

"It was a prop hand emerging from the avalanche, not the real thing."

The creaking woods rife with bad movies.

The stepfather left a leaf blower idling in the corner.

Some people go their whole lives without saying, "Hello, America. Good morning!"

We are some people.

Savannah says I've become "buddy-buddy" with the train conductor.

Ann's jam was rollerblading to her voice coach's office.

The anchoress can't toss her cable bill in the river like we do.

You brushed away the crumbs from my face and I owe you one.

Neer, neer.

In one room, self-help audiobooks piped through a wall of seashells (Hello? Hello?).

Next door, a slideshow of the empty plains of North Dakota.

Paul on horseback is how bad news is delivered.

Cute asses in literature and car rental stories.

An hourly psychologist folds her legs and talks loudly on a mobile phone.

I look at home in a windbreaker and beige hat.

The best man's speech was voted the best thing about the wedding; he gestured like a flight attendant at an employee training video.



There didn't seem to be any law against it.

Immediately you thought of Steely Dan's biggest fan, his plastic fangs.

A beer bought for me while a teenager turned into a monster on TV.

Over a bridge I carried your *Mona Lisa*.

The ghost man on second stealing signs, trying to start shit at the charity softball game.

Many arms up in the air at this point.

We're listening to our hearts, the only advice TV psychics and extended relatives like to give.

We risk the river, odds hidden, sticking our hands into actual earth.

There is a squash court in Gilead.

We're gonna make it.

## Blackbird's Lament

Zachary Scott

From my window called dark winged blackbirds  
To arms—the hissy hum of tape deck  
Propaganda fluttered their wings to front line  
Power lines and I couldn't  
Take it anymore.

My feet then sank deep in the  
Centipede and I wondered  
If I'd ever feel that way again—  
If the ceiling fan could answer my waller or  
Kiss my feet. There's nothing  
I've done to deserve the blue ribbon apart

From the rattle-boned change from  
My waistcoat dropped desperate in the  
Palms of hard-tongued grade schoolers  
Declaring "Work is never done."  
Prepare my body

For tomorrow.  
The coins on my eyes are meant  
For cases of landfill chow—I've gone  
Without answers and I'm sorry  
To no one.

My heart—that heap of special muscular tissue—  
Has ossified witnessing the genocide, and became stone.  
I want to hold it with my hand  
And throw it toward the israeli tank.  
Maybe then, it will become a song.

—*For my sister Lydia.*

In the winter, I always walked two steps ahead of you,  
boots sinking into the white mouth of snow, to make room  
for your tiny feet. We propped up our cold-bloated, bluing

socks on the heater afterwards, wincing as we melted to glee.  
Your warmer hands reaching for mine. *Toast your paws?*  
you asked, shining with laughter. And enveloped me in glow

of your grasp. In this way we were always giving: clearing  
the blinding-bright frost, sharing warmth when the whole world  
was winter. Perhaps this was the beginning of the blade.

Perhaps if we weren't used to huddling so close together  
to survive, I wouldn't have made my sadness so famous  
in the space of your lungs. Wouldn't have seen you

flash, flare, tremble, a birthday candle without the song,  
every time grief shot its flame through my brain. Love  
is passed down by our mothers; anger and resistance, too.

I asked for too much, too fiercely, and gave too much to you:  
swollen soul scooped out with both hands, shaken fiercely  
into your small mouth. Truth is, there are still nights I pray

just to somehow sister you better. When all I want is for your feet  
to keep dry and lead you someday safely home. Little one,  
little love, small and hot as a coal in the dull oven of my heart.

Yours are the footsteps I listen for, crunching ice and pine needles  
in the dark. Yours the animal I sheltered, and wounded in spite  
of my pain. If yours is the softness that flays my eyes with salt,

yours also, the glow in the chimney that keeps me alive.  
Will you wait for me, someplace where you can stay warm?  
I will press through the gloaming to find you. I will wade

through islands of drifting white cold, to learn how to turn  
into summer. As white loosens to water, as snow melts to song,  
I will walk before you and to you all winter long.

“Who could be ill in March, that Month of proclamation?”  
—*Emily Dickinson, in a letter (dated March 1885)*  
*to Helen Hunt Jackson*

We will meet again, in the hills, in March  
when the snow will have seen the sun

for a while and the soft ground  
will still glint  
until late in the morning. The kits

and the kittens,  
having survived the winter, will now be free.

The children in the neighbouring villages  
will be readying their feet

to run towards the ice-cream vendors  
every other day. We will meet again,

like we always have, free  
to kiss each other  
once the birds will have claimed back

their nests and relearned quiet.

The hills in March will be like hands  
returning from prayer, cracking open like

snow does after the touch of the sun's  
first warmth. The farmers  
will ready some saplings for the year.

The petals will leave the bud for a flower,  
for a while. You will be there,

in the hills, in March,  
a smile stretched across your face.  
And mine. We will meet again,

near the gates of an old church, the way  
two lovers meet after ages of distance.

# Ode to the Philosophers Who Could Have Been

Ariana Yeatts-Lonske

If Plato had not been born with a silver spoon  
in his mouth, bees would not have known to settle on his lips  
as he, an infant, slept. Nature's omen of that sweet style  
to come, that mind honeyed by the Divine before flesh,  
before sweet childhood of wrestling and grammar.  
Aristotle's river of gold prose was at first: gold.  
Cicero means chickpea but his hands picked only  
books from shelves, quills from wells of ink.  
Augustine had to speak Latin before he could tell of his God  
who made the universe not in seven days but in one hot instant.

There might have been a thousand blacksmiths  
who dreamed of caves. One might have seen in the cats  
slinking and snarling on the village streets, the maggots  
squirming in week-old rye bread—a great chain of being.  
Perhaps one saw in the swirls of clouds the city of God  
and knew, before Augustine, love as kingdom, love as gate  
and lock and key. But if a bee had journeyed to his lips,  
sticky with heat, he would have thought: sting, not sign.  
If he, too, had heard at 33 a child-like voice insist,  
*take up and read!* How useless, his hands too stained,  
too filled with tongs and bellows.

And his child, the child of child, the one, the next, the next, again—  
all might have seen the flicker of flame on wall and understood:  
chain, puppet, form. All might have known everything  
and written nothing, told no one but the forge as it heated,  
the anvil as it was hammered. Even when Luther  
posted his 95 complaints in Wittenberg, a blacksmith



must have welded the hinges of that church door,  
a blacksmith might have understood each reason already.  
His four nails cold in Luther's midnight hand.  
His door's lock. His key, somewhere deep  
inside the church walls, on the desk, in the drawer, slipped  
beneath an unreadable book with the ninety-sixth reason  
written right into the metal.

“I am recognizable now as a part  
of the man who made me.”

—T.C. Tolbert

I used to be a bad crack  
dealer, cause I was such a *good*  
dealer. I'd give deals & credit  
I couldn't afford—  
burned time & time again.

playing a small part in black market supply & demand  
as a kid on the corner with a dumb phone, the Nokia  
Tron snake chasing the pebble, unable to cross itself.  
we, the suckers born by minutes,

divided in despair,

theirs—mine, theirs

swinging over me

like Dave's cold body.

I was *Wall Street* smart, doubling my investment  
in penny stocks. *if it ain't me,* *they'll get it from somewhere,*  
*might as well be me.* we'd say in cracked mirrors. benefiting  
from their brokenness perpetuating my own. I wasn't  
getting rich. just surviving when being a middleman made cents:  
I knew where to get Coke, learned how to cook it & knew  
who'd buy it. simple. it kept me from having to grow up.  
we knew the War on Drugs was drag—a slogan, free  
gov't cheese on a trap. a D.A.R.E to mock us. kill a few black

birds with specific neighborhood stones.

*“What separates a georgic from a pastoral  
is work. In a georgic, there’s no denying  
that work is being done.”*

—*Thomas Haddox*

My head is a calm auburn church. There is sun-nuzzled wash on the line  
outside the parsonage. Songbirds are heart on heart in the fatherly arms  
of an alder, but those hosannas you hear are not  
their ambiencing. It’s just the villeins absolutely obliged to their twilight  
vespers. It is indeed the choicest shank  
of the evening & these endearingly snub-nosed folk in cordwood  
slippers & flaccid hats are not kissing

cousins to dysentery & scrofula. There is no high plight, & not a soul is going steady  
with jeopardy. On the brambled verandas—sipping lemon cordial, dandelion  
& burdock—the gentry are of even temper. Their savorful inhaling is not  
troubled by the downwind cheddar of abattoirs or cattle in deep  
earthturning heat. Upholstered in the humid oblique  
of night coming on, they don't pay any care to their tenants  
hoofing home. & what of those swagbacked Atlases, shouldering  
the whole? The ebb of their talk is so wormbent it's loveable, like a little boy sorely  
missing his front teeth. They are in peak spirits, pudguttled, pinky-nailed  
the comeuppance out from between their own  
like it's daily bread. It might edge off chill, but that doesn't matter—they're shawled  
in contentment. Their feet in clogs are brute as pumice, but they're still moving  
buoyant through the night. & it is complete & final black, but they are not

itinerant in this dark. Raw grace enunciates their going. These mudhusbanders, they know there's no cause to doggone their betters. After all, this flesh is something

we're only pilgrim to.

---

I am half-batty to be among them. Maybe if I say it, it's so. I am there. I am there in star-crossed tandem with the least of them. & I would be grateful to forever

midwife a plow through unversed dirt—to just go on breaking  
fetal ground—or wear like a sumptuous doublet

an armload of bees from the hives of my seigneur. Yes, that is an era & age I'd be merry to happen into. Regardless, I'll tell you where I'm not:

I'm not up to my wishbones in this dishwater  
dawn, trying to shepherd with spade & prybar a D-8 bulldozer

back into flock on this mountainside

slathered in disagreeable weather. My old man does not look like a cosmonaut  
in his blowtorch gown. He is not strapped haplessly into the cockpit  
of capital, trying to rile the starter. The rank tension of jobs undone & an afloat  
mortgage isn't warbling his neck, shuffling his jowls, like he just entered  
orbit. He didn't just bawl me out, both barrels, for sagging the flashlight. & surely I am  
not so soft-witted that I still offer my neophyte advice. He doesn't have to keep  
saying *I'm shearing this goat, you just hold its head*—which can be digested as enough  
musing out of you. & at dusk, we won't slink home, refuge  
from success, in the same gruel-light. We won't be so hangdog ashamed  
that we scald the work off before quaking the threshold; we will not blight ourselves  
to the elbow with lye. & unlike something in the back room  
of a bad dream, my granddad will not be there swapping skin  
for recliner felt. He is not in breakneck wilt, too much popcorn

lung to fog a mirror, & I won't have to take shiving drags off a Winston  
& pipe the smoke down the swollen ductwork of his throat. My father doesn't steer

clear of us like an EPA edict. We are not just cellmates in this singlewide. &  
nobody, not a blessed one of us, will risk a glance at the competition

grade skeet-gun mounted above the furnace  
above all else.



## Cal Froikin



Yesterday, I went to the Whittier Library  
to pick up reading material  
for the spring season:  
Seuss, Limón, Mullen, Ray Gonzalez;  
I placed my card on the clerk's desk.  
“Do you still live at 12120 Barranca Ln.?”  
he said. “Mind your business,” I countered.  
“What's that?” he asked. “You need  
to have patience with novels,” I retreated.  
“Everything is like that.”

## Ballad of a Thin Boy

Zachary Scott

I used to dream of black freight liners and smoked out bars called  
Tilly's or Don's that held up far corner ramblers that sat  
In corners still. They'd sip their coffee and check gold pocket watches  
Like they had some place to be. I figure that's what life was like  
For a folk singer.

As a kid I would study grandpa's LPs  
And wonder if his favorites were the ones with worn out sleeves or  
Ones that looked fresh from their cellophane. I would ask  
What "freewheelin'" meant and how I'd go about doing it.

I had already had Dylan's  
Wild curls and so I began to wear my jeans high with a cinched belt  
Around my navel. I shoved my little boy  
Fingers deep in the pockets of Uncle John's mothballed olive drab jacket from  
When he went deaf in Vietnam. I sanded down my vocal cords to a  
Poet's wail with midnight Pal Mals and I began to sing.

I tied a grease-stained rope I peeled from the busted up handle of an  
Axe I found at the Reno trash disposal and fastened it to each end  
Of my wine-stain Harmony guitar. I'd say the grease was from the trains  
I hopped to get to "Don's" — the bar I chose to play my make believe show  
For patrons I kept in my mind.

"Don" kept a tight ship. His bar was all windows that looked  
Into rows of black pecan trees and a small  
Pond run thick with duckweed and algae. I'd strum on three chord ballads to  
Tassel-eared squirrels and Carolina wren who probably didn't know  
What a "downtown girl" was either.

And when the tips of my fingers ached I'd pack it in and work the mines like a  
Proper rambler. I'd sit in granny's red clay driveway with her kitchen  
Spoons and dig out hunks of broken glass. Specks of deep greens and dark ambers  
Poked their heads out like jewels and I'd gather as much as could fit  
In a plastic bag from the IGA and when my spoon bent back like  
A coyote's howling arch I'd offer my haul  
For a workman's wage of sweet iced tea and a  
Mayfield ice cream sandwich.  
I'd peel back the foil and savor my bites like road rations and  
Ask grandma to sing Corrina, Corrina once more.

—for Kayode

My heart is carrying                    the atlas of the world  
on its shoulders                        on a rainy June day.  
The roof of my room is                leaking & each droplet of rain

falls bare into my face.                I'm the boy who lost his father  
in Lagos while studying faraway in Ohio State. The sky  
is crying tonight    & I have got no bowl to fetch its tears.

The tears are becoming                a pool of trauma  
& my heart is drowning                in this pool. I don't  
want to float in this noisy pool. But I can't breathe

under these waters & I can't see a rainbow. How can  
I be the bird in the eye of the rainbow if my eyes are blurred?  
I can't see any color but                rain.rain.rain. I am running

in the rain, away from                a home, away from fractured

memories of my father & away from colors of grief choking my lungs,  
choking my shoulder girdles    that carry the weight of the world,  
bringing me to woods of smashed blackberries

& upturned roots after a thunderstorm.

썸 (sum) - n. a Korean term coined from the English “something,” which refers to the uncertain feelings and flirtation between two people who have yet to define their relationship.

you ride your bike, fast, even when the water clenches  
to thick ice outside. funny the things i don't notice,  
until somehow i do. like the trees planted green  
in your name. like the forest unfurled in my house.  
when i called, you came with your arms full of light,  
and joy was no longer a labor. my eyes  
running sunstruck from yours. my mother tongue  
soft in my mouth. you cut me a large wedge of laughter,  
and its sweetness served more than a feast. you were flicker  
and candleflame smile in the dark, and i burned  
with the warmth of the same. it was winter.  
my hand grazed your small share of heat.  
and my face glowed with summer for days.

## Kintsukuroi

C. Fausto Cabrera

Then, Miss Tracy overdosed,  
or just died & I saw her faded red cap everywhere.  
Her brag about grown children  
who never called grew charming in memory.  
Did drugs make her a better parent,  
or just help her believe it? I used  
to try to picture her at my age,  
and wonder if I'd make it to hers. But it's about  
choices, right—& the right to make bad ones.  
Drugs didn't destroy her life,  
if anything, they brought it a little color during the faded years.

I couldn't repair her            nor could crack            cause maybe she  
wasn't broken            the fissures formed            & no pieces fit anymore  
I don't believe            it was the drugs            not entirely anyway  
band-aid's on            bulletholes maybe            but aren't we all missing  
something            lost along            the way somewhere  
I can't repair            her so I sprinkle            her in the gold

Before you are given a body,  
God takes you to his boundless garden.

God tells you to count the violets.  
The flowers look soft to the touch,

their petals thin. The soil looks dry to you,  
but what do you know of blossoming?

You feel God watching as you count the first row,  
and then he leaves you to your work.

The garden clock is made of turtle shells and wind  
and it will spin for a thousand years while you count  
and for a thousand years after—

The last row has one more violet than the rest  
and you think you know what that means.

After all, you faced each upswept petal and thought:  
I will see the sun rising for *this* many days.

You read each heart-shaped leaf as a child to be,  
each stem held up a pollen-dusted map of the world.

But this isn't about symbols. God just  
doesn't have much time to garden anymore.

He just needs to know how much fertilizer to order.  
Some people come into this world so weary already.



## Fragments of Bearing Witness

Aicha bint Yusuf

-1-

Last night I was writing an ode to figs  
When bombs filled the skies and turned blue to gray,  
Light to darkness, and laughs to cries.  
I put the figs aside, and contemplated bombs.  
Maybe if I sing them an ode, they will stop killing us?

-2-

I can never tell the difference between convex and concave.  
Nor between midriasis and miosis.  
I keep reminding myself of the difference, drawing them on the backs of books  
And agendas  
But it never works.  
However,  
I know the difference between genocide and war:

War is between two sides fighting until one surrenders,  
And genocide is when one side tries to exterminate a whole innocent group.

Now it's your turn.

-3-

The taxi driver thought about his father's tobacco box  
As the passenger in the backseat squeezed more bags filled with his children's body limbs.  
His wife handed him another white bag filled with body limbs and lumps,  
And pointed to him to be careful on the road—the kids are young.

-4-

Yesterday was el día de todos los santos.  
This same day, Gaza  
Lost so many saints in the shape of children  
Pulled from underneath the rubble:  
Their limbs flaccid and their faces dusty.  
Dead children are organized in mass graves horizontally and sometimes vertically—  
They just had a growth sprout and became taller than their mothers.

Years later, when we light candles in el día de los muertos for Gaza's genocide,  
How will they leave the ground to join us for the day?  
Aren't they crammed there?  
Will they stand in line, waiting to leave  
Just like they waited in life at Rafah checkpoint?

Oh, how the broken chase what glitters. If Kintsukuroi means ‘golden repair’  
 in Japanese, a process of repairing broken pottery with gold—a restoration  
 that

puts a proud history of survival on display in dignity; then why do we hate  
 each

other for falling apart, yet won’t look away when we pass a crash site? I  
 didn’t

grow up around the movie tropes of zombie crackheads: they were all  
 people

with jokes & personality, issues & pain; but even the dirtbags were  
 respectful.

A dude I’d been dealing with for a while offered me a blue pebble of a gem,  
 I turned it over in my palm & asked *Is it real?* sounding like a kid treasure  
 hunting

at a yard sale. Light bounced off its facets, & for a moment life made sense  
for some reason I couldn't explain. I shook it in my hand like loaded dice &  
smiled,  
& gave him my last \$50 worth of crack for the costume jewel. It was enough  
to retire on.  
& maybe, in the end—all it's about is what the cup holds & that we decided to  
keep it.

—after Louise Glück

I go on addressing the saints  
by their first names. *sea garden*  
*nasturtiums. coastal sage. siberian*  
*iris. the california poppy. love*

*in moonlight.* a thin stream of hard tapwater  
polishes my fingers, licks a brief coat  
of lemon salt from glacial glass.

I feed you music slowly as you lay  
blinded, cotton gauze over your brow,  
the air cold and clear. you are in my world  
for two days, then rise again

with perfect sight, long lashes, the talent  
of a soloist. in conscription  
in the mountains.

I'd read any book to you  
all through the broken morning. until I fail.  
until I become all voice, you understand.  
until I become again the sea.

## How does a genocide end?

Aicha bint Yusuf

- 1) The butterfly effect: a butterfly settles on the barrel of a gun, and whispers to the soldier about to pull the trigger: *you think you are winning*.
- 2) The man (sometimes it's a woman) whose raised hand vetoes against a ceasefire, is idiosyncratically paralyzed at the exact moment and time; the neural electric charge gets stuck somewhere along his spine. The hand is not raised, and humanity is saved.
- 3) Soldiers' hearts are stiff and dry. One day, while walking among the debris, their hearts shatter into a million pieces, their guns are dropped, and they hurry back to their families for a warm hug.
- 4) Genocide: geno=people; cide=killing.  
When there are no people left,  
that's when we will all be dead.

- 5) The elements: the wind becomes unyielding to advanced missiles and iron domes. The sea becomes unforgiving to the blood spilled. The soil becomes sand dunes beneath the heavy tanks, and fire. The fire engulfs the whole world in its flames.
- 6) God wakes up from his stupor. He sees everything, and as he announces his verdict, he flips through a white sheet with all the *hasanat* (good deeds) and the *saye2at* (bad deeds).
- 7) None of the above, a genocide never ends. Its scars are engraved in our souls. The absence of body limbs reminds us of what was there. Gaza keeps asking: when shall this pass? Refaat's voice echoes through the abyss.



I was not feeling my best.  
Thought something was really wrong with me.

Was trying to remember.  
The subdivision beneath the lake.

What happened after the flood?  
I did not want to be seen as sensational.

Highways literally became rivers.  
A silvered stream but no salmon.

The mind swims there.  
What was the evidence for that thought?

I tried to explain myself.  
This part was going to be hard to say.

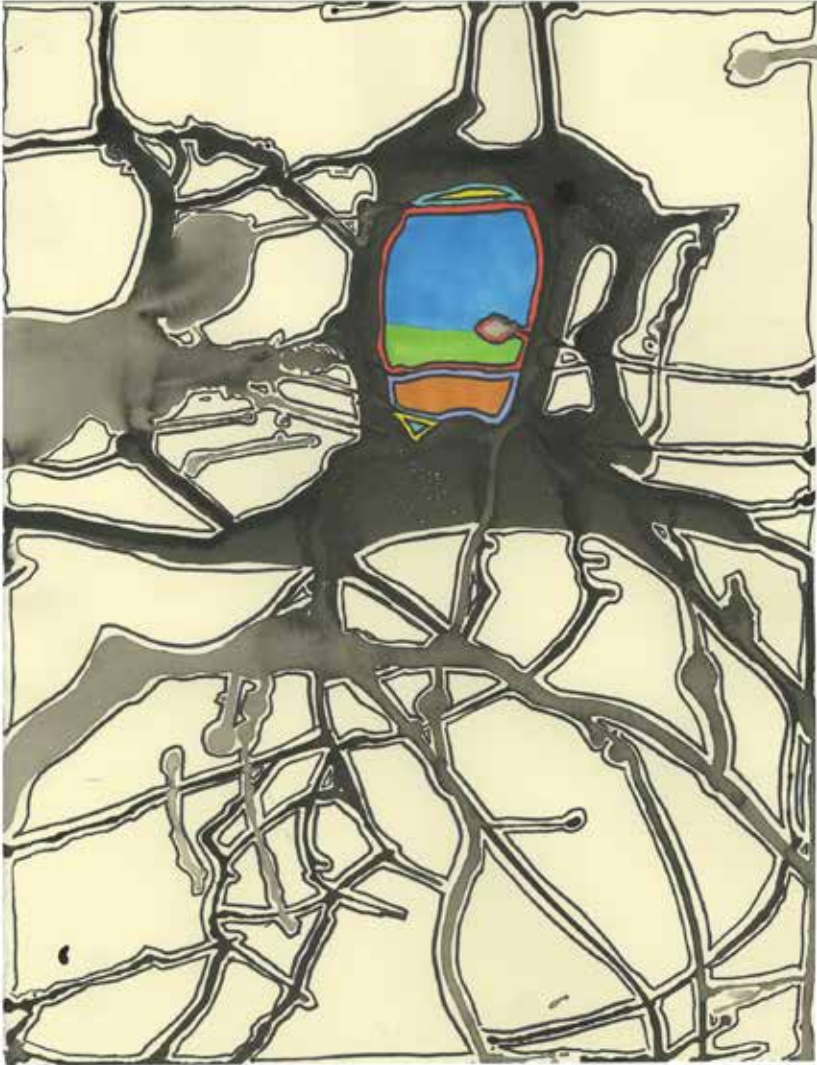
Mouth full of reservoir water.  
Many animals drowned.

I observed the deluge from a great distance.  
Looked for signs the best was yet to come.

One moment a helicopter landed.  
The next, people climbed into it.

A neon-whirring bird.

# Cal Froikin



I don't remember exactly the first time I saw *The Sandlot*. It wasn't in theaters. We didn't go to theaters often as a family; frugal. We probably rented it from the local dollar video store. Yes, they actually had video stores back in the early 90's. I remember being in awe of the movie, a summertime classic. It came out when I was roughly the same age as the kids in the movie. It was about my life, I thought. Except the kids in the movie played baseball. My friends and I played basketball. Similar to the movie, though, we didn't play organized ball, or Little League, like the middle-class white kids. We played on the local asphalt playgrounds until sunset. Further, I admired the fact that Benny "The Jet" Rodriguez looked like me, he was brown like me. Did he speak Spanish at home, too? For once, someone who looked like me was on T.V., and they weren't a gang member or criminal. *The Sandlot* crew were all just kids, though, exploring youth. That's what I appreciated the most about the movie. Little did I know the real world comes at you fast. Anyway, anytime I see *The Sandlot* on T.V., as I'm skipping through the channels, I can't help but remember those summer southern California nights of youth, watching *The Sandlot* with my brothers and friends, wishing I was Benny "The Jet." Wishing I was part of their crew.

# Kneading

Jayant Kashyap

I'm in the kitchen kneading dough.

How do things  
that do not speak complain when they

(mistakenly) think they are harassed?

Like grains—say wheat  
grains—ripped off from what covers them

since you don't know when  
and—let's say—someone kneads

dough to make what dough is kneaded for.

Sometimes to make black bread  
I knead it tough  
as gristle

as we make love on the kitchen table;  
we bolt / unbolt  
at our convenience;

but what of the things that do not speak  
things we use in the midst

of our bouts of pleasure—

how will they complain  
(if they will) when at any moment

there's no one here?

Autumn slips over me like a stream  
of bright silk, gathering me back  
into my seams. It has been two weeks

since you touched me & already  
I am curdling into myself like a quartered  
apple, left behind at an open window.

Always your touch left me feeling both  
effulgent & ruined, delicate & decimated.  
When you put your arms around me

I whispered, *Love me*, which was a plea,  
which was the price of me, which meant  
*Someday I want to be touched and feel*

*clean*. When you left, I would hold  
my head in my hands & tremble at the ledge  
of myself, repeating, *Oh heart. Oh head.*

*Oh this body, stupid with need*. My limbs,  
aching with greed. Open as a book torn  
through its spine, every rifled page scrambled

& fluttering in the breeze. And how often  
I compromised: *If not his future, at least  
his present. If not love, at least his desire.*

Once, holding my face as gently  
as a maple tree holds its spun leaves,  
you called me *more lovable*

*than anyone I know.* And for so long  
I read every sign of yearning  
as love notes disguised as a body,

and I wonder now whether it disguised  
how often I felt myself unlovable,  
how often I named myself unlovable

in this light-slashed, love-bereft world.

## American Horror Story: Coven

Nicholas Goodly

Madison Montgomery is a complex figure in a show about witches and stardom and not being wanted and loving a man who kills his mother but his mother laid every kind of hand on him so when it happens you're cheering for him and you feel terrible about how you feel but he is a zombie anyway but a handsomely made one and the girl he ends up with is a witch who kills whoever she has sex with when she lets someone inside of her they don't come out alive but since he's already dead their sex doesn't matter and it's not clear if she loves him because he's the only man she could share herself with until Madison dies and is brought back to life and Madison convinces the zombie boy and black widow to all make love together but it's ok because in a way they're all in a practical understanding already dead and when they sleep together it's a kind of unrest and this other girl has this curse slash power to make people feel what she would be feeling if she could feel or puts her pain on others like the time she dipped her hand in hot chicken grease and it scalded a man's hands even though he never reached for the chicken and also her pleasure she fought off a minotaur by standing in front of it and masturbated and although she couldn't feel it she rubbed the lips of her womanhood and he felt it in his bull parts and he huffed a little because no one had touched him since he'd been turned into that monster it happened against his will and he couldn't change back and even though she wasn't really touching him it felt like pleasure and she could nearly come off of the feeling she was giving him but he must not have liked her touching him like that feeling without a hand laid on him it was a cheating kind of love making so instead of kissing her he finished her off ran a horn into her she in a way got what she wanted a spirit brutally running through her a hot bloody tusk taking her breath away it's scary when a stupid scene like that ends up touching you.



Pin-prick of emptiness

in wet sand

marks a clam's breath

Hands cupped

defined by what

they cannot maintain

Children mine

puncture the balloons

kelp grows to bring

the sun near enough

its dancing blades

—*What's inside?*

—Nothing

They chime

Nothing Just the thing

without which

we'd be gasping for light

Nate, It Was Really  
Nothing

Nate Logan

If I was more intrepid, less influenced by cavemen.

My friend swears by drinking beer in the shower.

Commercials for calling cards.

The Friday drive time anthem came in a dream.

A volley of arrows over the courthouse.

Orbited by great minds such as Molière and Racine,  
Louis XIV was so central he was called the Sun King,  
his absolutist reign forgiven because like the sun,

he was deemed essential. I have a hard time knowing  
what is essential. As when one stares too long at the sun,  
and then sees the bluish white corona of it when one's eyes

are closed, I saw the tumor in my brain the way it was  
on the MRI scan. I simply needed to close my eyes.  
Unlike the scare about the recurrent foot tumor,

when doctors offered repeatedly to chop off my foot,  
no one would satisfy my request my head be chopped off.  
I was in a dense forest, the canopy so interwoven

the sun was dark. No chalk to hatch my way, I went  
round and around. Louis XIV made his noblemen  
circle the grounds at Versailles, collecting with each

lap, a golden flower pin. Whatever the King said  
was necessary became necessary. I circled and circled  
in the forest of my anxiety without a golden pin,

without any reward. To sleep was to enter this forest  
where the sun was dark but each time I closed my eyes  
I saw not the sun's corona but the fuzzy-edged tumor.

There was no grandeur associated with this sun.  
There was nothing orbiting it, drawn by its power.  
The forest was dark. I was nowhere to be found.

## Palestinian Spring

Aicha bint Yusuf

Is when I fold my oversized t-shirt outward so it becomes a pouch  
And pile freshly-picked green almonds;  
Is planning for the summer weddings  
And gossiping about our neighbor's sons.  
It is yellow scented monads in the shape of *calicotome villosa* (thorny broom)  
And white citrus blossoms that occupy the front yard—  
Every Palestinian household has a lemon tree!  
It is wild garlic and many many foraging trips with my aunt to the hills  
Where we gather sage, thyme, rosemary, and hyssop.  
Palestinian Spring is long walks amidst the shoulder-high white mustard and thistles,  
Followed by the usual stops to sneak green loquats from the verdant tree,  
And to pick peas from the ground in the valleys that separate the villages.  
My grandfather toiled and tilled the land—he knew it by heart,  
My dad knows it by heart,  
But I—my heart doesn't know, it only longs for spring.

A real Arab Spring:

A time when I can spend lazy afternoons spreading freshly gathered *zaatar* leaves across the Black tarp without worrying about death nor an abrupt war;

Without worrying about soldiers in green khaki pants on the bus,

And a man frisking me because I wear my name in Arabic around my neck.

Palestinian Spring is easter and dying eggs with daisies cooked over low fire.

It is death and overcoming death with the ascent—

It's liberation from the desert and its thralls.

Palestinian Spring is celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> of March—

That day when we watered the land with 6 beautiful martyrs.

My dad lost his cousin but never complained—

We protected the land and lost *khair*.

Palestinian Spring is just another spring:

A season of abundance and prosperity;

A season of rituals and renewal,

But different from any other.

When the Palestinian Spring comes

It will last forever.



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## Notes

In Jayant Kashyap's poem titled "A Lover's Discourse," the title is borrowed from Roland Barthes' book *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1977). The first line of Kashyap's poem is in conversation with the lines "We shall meet again, in Srinagar, / by the gates of the Villa of Peace," which appear in "A Pastoral," from Agha Shahid Ali's *The Country Without a Post Office* (1997). The seventh line of Kashyap's poem is influenced by the line "I have survived my life," which appears in "Grandmother in the Garden," from Louise Glück's *Firstborn* (1968).

The final line in Aicha bint Yusif's poem "How does a genocide end?" refers to Refaat Alareer, "our beloved poet and essayist who was assassinated by Israel on the 6<sup>th</sup> of Dec., 2023."

In Jayant Kashyap's poem titled "Kneading," the final line of the poem is an altered one borrowed from the title of a poem by Conor O'Callaghan, "There's No One Here At The Moment."





