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## **JOURNAL OF NEW JERSEY POETS**

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**LIZA**

**KATZ**

**DUNCAN**

## Ekphrasis: Sandy

In the Weather Underground photos, it appears  
no more than an optical illusion: look at it this way,  
it's an eagle's crest; that way, a snail shell. A trick  
of the light, or of the mind.

The sky makes and remakes.

Trees reach sideways: Hear us. Under cloud cover,  
behind caution tape, a town the bay built and unbuilt.  
Hazy as those photos. A collective memory, tempered.



A Volvo, shipwrecked.  
Three hunched figures in black  
row a lifeboat down Central Ave.

In the blurred background, a Wawa.  
The sign still bears the old logo:  
Three-layered sun: lemon, saffron,  
bittersweet. A single goose in flight.

Half a carousel, a balancing act. The dragon  
three feet away, less fearsome out of context.  
An organ's phantom cipher. Bright centerpiece.

A daylight moon bloated over the bay  
pulled the tide high like a child, fingers  
struggling over the bulkhead. See where it left  
prints of yellow foam for days.

A haze of sky, as if filtered through a smoke screen,  
its diaphanous glaze. A street sign flails, flaglike.

One woman holds an umbrella inside-out, like a wounded bird.  
She's carrying coupons, grocery bags, a sweater.

The girl in the blurred part of the photo, unthinkably, is smiling.  
But then, *children see adventure in disruption*.

See the foam blow like snow through her hair,

sand on her tongue. Her sense of time

stretches only the length of this boardwalk,  
where the ocean leaps onto the planks.

Only foam now, but soon it will swallow  
everything in the photo's frame. See,

in the grain of the planks, where it's already happened:  
a green stain, cyclone-shaped, spreading.

A picture taken through a window, the frame  
crowded as the last ferry out of town.  
Oil rainbows, gray cumulus smoke,  
phone tower silhouettes, bayside factories.  
Debris superimposed in the foreground,  
as if to justify yet another skyline shot.  
The flashbulb blotting out a tiny sun.

A video from a rooftop above the city:  
The storm static in a haze of neon sky,  
filtered as if through broad brushstroke.

The city rough-hewn, fog-tattered,  
though the buildings still glisten.  
The sky makes and remakes.

Monday, the camera blurs entirely,  
storm unmirroring the city.  
Tuesday, the clouds separate.

By Wednesday, the city glitters  
again in sunlight, sequined as nostalgia.

Clouds point to a hole  
in the sky like a cigarette burn.

## Kristina

(1)

She dreams of factory clouds,  
a chemical haze, of poisoned oysters

in a milk-thick bay. The dream-sky  
pelts her with geometric snow,

its angular moon a code  
her iPhone could demystify.

Behind the dream-house, a floe of waste,  
its ice-black veins threaded through.

The dream-trees wake, shake away  
white shawls, and she rises with them.

Sky, she says, I'd get on my knees  
before you: for clean water, for birds'

neat chevrons, for constellations:  
if I thought I could move you to tears—

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(2)

Waking: the bay under an ice floe;  
below, waves suspended mid-curl.

Across it, Brooklyn fades: in the residue  
of last night's moonlight, only a gleam of snow

to discern land from water. In five days  
she hasn't left the house, but she wants

the snow-bright world outside her kitchen window.  
She wants it desperately. She wants it

not at all. If I don't make it out tonight, she says,  
it will not be a tragedy: or if it is, it will be

a small one, compared with those outside:  
the crocus, snow-drenched, rotted before bloom;

the nest of stray cats taken by the frost;  
the neighbors' houses, flooded and boarded up.

It's the fifth night, the twenty-second drink,  
and she wants it all: the Full Wolf Moon's

ascent across the bay, the misleading white  
walkway on ice, the light's interruption.

(3)

In the blurred dark, she fingers her ribs  
like piano keys, runs one fingernail  
down the crease at the corner of her mouth  
to measure out the years. How ugly  
one becomes from waiting; how sordid,  
through fog's diaphanous skeins.  
She dresses in the dark. Again, the daughter's  
put herself to bed, closed the door to keep  
the monsters out. Seeing this, her heart cracks open.  
She's shared houses with monsters.  
Doors don't stop their ebbs and fluxes  
from a darkened hallway to a restless mind.  
They enter quietly, as floodwaters seep  
through fault lines in the plaster,

pores in the ceiling. Even at daybreak,  
they peer through the curtains' scrim.

Leave vestiges of themselves in an illness,  
a bad habit, the breakage of skin.

She is eight years old, and already they have touched  
down, have laid their terrible eggs.



(4)

There is nothing for her here, in the dark house.  
Nothing outside but grocery lines, gas lines,  
in the pixilated moonlight. How easily  
one could fall apart if given permission.

How easily she forfeited that chance. Outside,  
wind picks the bones of the frailest trees.

Sandflies nest in driftwood's open caverns  
as it floats through rotted houses,

growing oceans. Early ice forms on the bay,  
trapping sand and soil. She's become

wood-solid, a child's head against her shoulder.  
The more it leaned, the more she had to hold.

(5)

Her daughter still asleep, she stands on the pier.  
Once, a goat dove into a river, sprung a fish's tail.

In September's sky, you can see him:  
faintly, but she understands: Even stars

bear horns. Even the sky holds monsters.  
Effortless, to dive facefirst into a bottle,

or into the bay, and become one too.  
Tonight, boats cut through the inlet.

The underside of a comma separating  
ocean, bay. The floodwaters finally receding.

Gulls cluster on temporary islands while her veins  
turn an icy gray. Tomorrow, there'll be

sodden furniture to carry to the curb, sand to be swept  
from the porch, a perfect vantage point

from which to watch a planet self-subsume,  
its frozen skin thin and thawing.

## Sentence

When I say water,  
I mean the ocean  
you tried to swallow

when you couldn't speak;  
I mean your face when  
you drank alone, half-

masked by blue light and  
the porch screen, mouth  
canyon-deep and narrow;  
I mean the way you

sweltered, a shell left  
open, beads of salt  
burgeoning on your

skin; I mean the way  
repetition is  
only insane when

you expect a change:  
the false visions I  
harbored long after  
you'd given in for

good; I mean what did  
I expect, did I  
think you'd emerge one

day from the bottle  
like a genie, clean  
and eager to please?

**D  
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C  
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**HOLLY DAY**

## The Tree

I wake to the choking sound of electric chainsaws ripping  
through wet bark and I know  
it's the white birch down the street. I lie in bed  
stomach clenched and sick  
as the crash of limbs falling against each other  
interrupt the morning calls of sparrows and cardinals  
in my yard.

I worry about my own birch, how this  
will affect the old soul standing guard  
surrounded by painted ferns and flowering hostas  
once part of a thriving community  
of river and paper birch trees, roots reaching to touch  
one another beneath tract houses and  
old apartment buildings  
now the only one of his kind, friends plowed to make room  
for parking lots and the new grocery store.

## Things I've Been Told

in prison, they give you one coffee cup  
that has to last you the whole time you're there.  
the coffee they serve is so thin  
it makes only the tiniest of stains against  
the white insides of the cup.  
you can tell how many years you've been behind bars  
by how dark the inside of your cup is.

this is how prisoners identify newcomers, by how darkly stained  
their coffee cup is. each prisoner wears his coffee cup  
tied to his wrist by a thick rope, also issued by the prison  
tied there to protect the cup  
from being stolen by other prisoners  
who accidentally break their own cup

and have to drink their coffee  
as a dribble twisted from a dirty sop-towel  
or a discarded paper strainer.

**D  
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## The Corner

the beetle in the  
web clicks soft  
in time to the spinning of its  
body in the long arms of the spider  
that has made its home in  
the dark corner of  
my office. it clicks  
so regular I turn off my computer, my  
desk clock to make sure it's  
really him

the clicks speed up  
when the spider  
reaches out  
with one long, pale  
leg to spin  
the trapped insect  
another turn, they slow down  
fade to near  
silence whenever  
the spider  
pulls away

**D  
A  
Y**

**MICHAEL T. YOUNG**



## The Music We Live By

What would the world's soundtrack be?—  
Mahler's endlessly descending chords  
diminishing and disappearing  
into the cry of a Palestinian father  
shielding his son from soldiers?  
Or the beat of a B-52s' song  
shuttling two friends off to Europe—  
Venice by train, through Prague on bike?  
Or would it be a slice of Coltrane's  
saxophone sliding its note slowly  
through a crumbling glacier in Greenland?  
Or is there some mountain peak  
unscaled, and whose pitch includes  
the silences buried under its snow,  
a series of notes orchestrated  
not for the ear but for the need to know  
that the rhythm of our stories  
is in sync with something  
no human language can articulate?—  
like the great wave in Hokusai, arcing  
over the doomed men in their boat,  
and that wave's arc echoing  
in the shape of their hunched shoulders,  
in the sweep of the boat's hull, in the color

and peak of the distant mountain,  
and beyond the painting's frame  
this whole scene rippling out perpetually  
repeating in the shapes of trees  
and meadows, the flights of birds,  
the city grids lighting the night streets,  
the pattern of clouds and raindrops  
swelling in their bellies, everywhere  
this scene confirmed as a bar of music  
in a score for which every instrument is tuned.

**ESTELLE JANIEC**

## His Father Dying of Cancer

In NJ

An old man with cancer

Cries

While the cool light

Of radiation therapy

Burns and dances at the

Edge of what has been

Cut.

In Mission Hills, California,

His son

Sits by the phone

Trying to feel by

Sensation

Where the pancreas

And the liver lie

But

Instead feels only his heart

And then the blade.

**LOIS  
MARIE  
HARROD**

## That First Marriage

was the second and the third  
and the present, my ex

somehow my ex again.  
We managed

a serial nesting, monogamy  
slipping from one state

to the next  
like a line of dominoes

wending from Wyoming,  
Michigan, Maine—

to that menagerie  
in Nebraska,

a masquerade thrall  
one more guise

to slip, one more snake  
beginning.

I don't know how to define  
our hide and tweak,

but now I find him  
in the kitchen, making soup

without a recipe, skimming  
the foam from the broth.

**ELINOR MATTERN**

## Color Field Paintings in a Gallery by the Sea

A blue door opening onto air. Learning  
to be still. Blue corners. Yellow shoulders.  
A flag furling and unfurling. The sky spilling.  
An almost beach chair on a blue-white beach.  
Pink spider, pink spark. The way turquoise  
runs into white. A square here of anything but  
blue. A pocket without its purple dress.  
You love blue the way I do. Overwhelmed  
by blue. Drunk with it. Blue gravity. The sky  
minus stars. Minus clouds. Not needing to rain.  
The way only blue can. A door in mist  
to the other side of what? Pale snow  
and cerulean cloud. A flame blotted out  
by its own blue smoke. A language: words  
for everything blue. Blue needing. A navy blue  
prayer. The color of my inside. Sistine ceiling  
of my heart. My leaking heart. A blue territory.  
Geography of green and gold. Bird-fish in a blue  
sky-pond. Shadows I don't know well.  
Blue questions. Color of tears distilled. Doors  
and windows and gates giving way to more blue  
and more light than you can ever hold.

## Holding

My friend, the cardiac nurse,  
holds people's hearts in her hands.  
In the operating room.  
Not every day. Just as needed  
The doctors say  
she's very good at it, she tells me  
in her South African lilt. A special skill.  
Is called on when surgery requires someone  
who can put her hands inside your chest  
and hold your heart for hours  
without moving.

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## Potato Soup

You say, *Everything has at least three causes.*

I went on Match.com because of

Chris & Beth, Tracey & Bill.

I went back on after Ian because, why not?

We're reading books on relationships,  
it's a year and a half in, and you say,

*Apparently we're in the power struggle  
phase.* Together we gather bricks & boards,

take turns with the hammer, the level,  
the mortar, the saw. You always say,

*Appreciate what you've got when you've got it.*  
And, *Love is a verb.* You build me a bookcase.

You go to the grocery store.  
And you say,

*Why don't you write a poem  
while I make dinner?*

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**BLAKE LAPIN**

## Mourning in the Evening

It's your birthday so I smoke three cigarettes for you, a habit I've subdued  
and revive for this day as if it's a favor: one for the walk away from home,  
another for the field I arrive at, a final for retracing footsteps.

Your death is when someone peels an orange and the whole room is fragrant.  
I still haven't learned how to mourn; I have all these vignettes in my head  
that play and replay. I'm uncertain how they string together,  
when each is appropriate. None are of your overdose.

Artificial light

has trouble letting go: purgatory seconds between flipping a switch and solemn darkness.  
No new light flutters but the old lingers as if

needing to consider what it was

before discovering what it will be. Whenever I return home and commune with our  
friends, we nearly laugh through the whole dinner

before remembering why we are there.

I count my age in grief-begotten epiphanies. Which part of a past makes a person

a friend? Only your girlfriend witnessed your body tremble at five in the morning.  
She, sensibly, thought it was an early morning shiver, a body batting away  
the oncoming day. I suppose it was that.

I was almost killed by an ocean wave  
and am so glad I did not join you. I listen to music and compel the tears onward.  
You and I brought on the rebelling age: telling and retelling our young compatriots  
how to smoke, what to drink in well-furnished basements, when to run from suspicious  
flashing lights. You are and shall remain a tempest,

hiding in the tall grass.

It's your birthday, February eleventh; the last cigarette thrown away barely finished.

**ROBERT  
BEVERIDGE**

## The Bishop's Seven-Minute Eggs

And then there was  
your little house in the forest.  
You kept trying to take  
me there. I remained interested  
in its contents, but not enough  
to accompany you, test your tales  
of cherry-slate shingles, licorice-  
whip balusters. You demurred every  
time I asked you about the ovens.

I could not but touch  
your neck, the crosshatch scar  
where, you claim, you cut yourself.  
Shaving. With a box grater. You say  
you left a trail of breadcrumbs,  
planned exotic dinners where every  
course is red, considered the efficiency  
of horehound siding, maple post and beam.

The birds ate pumpernickel  
in the same way they ate ninety-  
nine-cent Nickels white, spongy  
and lacking imagination. Your sole  
obstacle is the inability of ginger

nine-cent Nickels white, spongy  
and lacking imagination. Your sole  
obstacle is the inability of ginger  
to construct a workable mirror.  
Two thousand wrappers from candy  
cigarettes and you still  
haven't got it. No, I will come  
as far as the barrier the Department  
of Transportation erected between  
the road and the woods,  
but will never set foot  
on the path, whatever the grain.

## Job Search

Marty's dog loves to piss  
on the right-hand pillar of the porch  
of Marty's landlady. Her name  
is Doris. The dog is named  
Rudolph (pronounced  
as in Valentino) but Marty  
does not know this, calls him Pops.  
Pops is a mixed bull terrier  
of some sort. Doris is Romanian.

Sometimes Doris catches Pops pissing  
on her porch. When she throws  
the paper at the dog, he looks at her.  
Every time, he looks at her, and she  
knows Pops' name is Rudolph.  
Marty knows nothing of this,  
just likes to walk his dog at sunrise.

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**FLORENZ CRUZ**



## "Sense Direction"

a private poetry  
she revealed only enough  
to keep one reading  
just a few letters, spaces, points  
  
along a single-stranded template  
  
to run one's eyes over  
  
over and over again  
the glimpse of a meaning largely withheld  
  
a glance through the doorway  
a smile in the elevator  
before looking down  
the length of her  
arms in a sleeveless silk blouse  
lipslength hair revealing the  
contours of her neck, light  
directness around inexperienced scientists  
and when she thought

no one was looking  
there at the Max Planck Institute  
within the massive curved concrete walls  
a thoughtful pause

reflection across a space  
lines of a faraway expression  
arrest in an unsought recollection  
touching a pith she has never  
seen herself

**"Kutt, Kött, Kun[s]t"**

We all have to dance for our food.  
everything in life  
is about who you can convince

**C  
R  
U  
Z**

**SIMON PERCHIK**

\*

All wood floats though this shack  
hems you in—it's hopeless  
drinking water at every meal

pointing to beaches, channels, boats  
till slowly they row end to end  
as shadows, half alongside, half

something to hold that is not sunlight  
thrown far off to build a crater  
from these empty chairs —you thrive

on rage: a well that gave all its thirst  
to the scent near the open window  
named after the walls and ceiling.

\*

Barely held in place  
pulled the way all funerals  
thin out as this whitening rock

half for the dead, half  
already drifting closer :the moon  
beginning again on a river

left open though you drink  
till the water reaches your eyes  
fill them –you look only for glare

are sure what you follow is a sea

**P  
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K**

**JULIAN KOSLOW**

## Rotten Apple

The two of them in the front seat, arguing,  
Abel and I roasting in the back, looking out  
the rolled-down windows of the brown Dodge Dart,  
the smell of summer sweat and carbon monoxide.  
We play with the steel ashtrays in the armrests,  
flicking the lids up and down, open  
and shut. Stop it, you're annoying me, I say.  
*You're* annoying *me*, he says. No, you.  
Stop it, *both* of you, says mom.

He's driving and she's looking for signs.  
A map lies on the seat between them,  
tearing at the folds.

I'm thirsty, says Abel. Shut up, I say. Is there  
anything to drink, I ask. Just swallow  
your spit, says mom. Are we almost there,  
asks Abel. We're almost there, says dad.  
Abel gapes at the view, a valley unrolling  
before us in blues and greys and greens.  
I punch him in the arm. Hey, he says, he  
punched me. Did you punch him, asks dad.  
No, I say. Liar, says Abel. Stop it,  
mom shouts. She glares at us.  
Her hair is like a thundercloud,  
her eyes are flaming swords.

We stop.

Hours pass, or ought to pass but somehow don't.  
The sun stays right where it is,  
hovering just above the car roof,  
tied to us by a string.

Tell us again why we have to move, I say.  
It's a long story, mom says. I don't want to move  
says Abel. Shut up, dummy. I say. No, you.  
The schools are better here, says dad.  
There's lots of fresh air, says mom.  
It'll keep you out of trouble, says dad

I look out the back window toward the river.  
Across the bridge I see the Archangel  
standing guard in his sunglasses, a frowning  
colossus, arms crossed over his chest,  
gun at his hip.

We're heading downhill when it happens:  
the apple flies like a bomb through the open  
window, smashes to bits all over the back seat,  
covers the two of us in pulp. A rotten apple,  
it smells like throw up. My brother is shrieking.  
I yell at him to stop. Stop being such a wuss,  
I yell, and then he starts to cry. Mom and dad  
have no idea what's happened. They think  
I've done something to him. But then mom checks,



and sees the apple everywhere, and Abel bawling.

The wind is whipping around inside the car,  
lashing the hair across our faces. Pull over,  
she shouts. What, he asks. Pull over, she yells,  
and reaches for the wheel.

We are nearly up against the guardrail.  
Other cars rush past us down the hill.  
When they blow by, the air hits like a wave,  
swamping our car like an open boat  
on a rough sea. I catch dad's eyes  
watching in the rearview mirror.

She wants him to go back and find  
the ones that did it. He says, they're probably  
gone by now. And anyway what could we do?  
What's done is done. That's just like you, she says,  
and stops, and doesn't say the rest. He stares  
at her then asks, What's that supposed to mean?  
I think you know just what, she says.

In the still air, the car is like a furnace.  
Their silence goes on for a very long time, decades  
perhaps. There is only the roar of passing cars,  
and of course the angels, ceaseless as tinnitus,  
omnipresent as mosquitoes, hymning  
their joyous disapproval, world without end.

After a while, dad puts the car back in gear.  
We drive around for hours and hours, while mom  
peers out the window into the yards of strangers,  
and the wooded lots between. But we never see  
anyone who looks suspicious. In fact,  
we don't see anyone at all.  
It's like we're all alone in the world, just us  
driving around in this car full of rotten apple.  
In the backseat, neither of us now dares  
to breathe another word, even to ask  
if we can stop to find a bathroom.

When people ask me these days, why I did it,  
I tell them the truth: I still don't really know.  
All I can say is that when the sun was finally  
setting, and the air cooled down, I looked over  
and saw my brother sleeping with his cheeks  
all blubbered, and apple pulp in his fine brown hair,  
and I smelled his pee and felt the intolerable  
stab of pity, an angel's spear in my guts,  
I could have done it right then. Instead, I just  
stared at him and thought, No, you. No, you.

*no you no you no you*

# **SHANNON CUTHBERT**

## Smoke Signal

When I was twelve and too old to know better  
I lost myself in the folds of a wood,  
A trail like a book sprawled open  
From back of the lodge where we stayed,  
Where men in white shirts smoked on their break  
Smelling of kitchen grease and wild words  
Thrown like darts to puncture the silence.  
Their eyes smooth as river stones on me departing,  
My body a few feet behind me  
Carried in a knapsack, picked over by crows  
Who wished to be ravens,  
Shining as all questions do when plucked by the root  
And tossed skyward, already the sun cast  
A scrim of salt on the back of my neck,  
Under jeans cuffed too big from a cousin.  
And the wood that swallowed me I would not remember  
For some time, sipping mint tea long after  
With a woman in a house that was not my mother's,  
Bird-eyed and sweet, rubbing my hair to gold  
And whispering it will be alright soon,  
Her hands that could put the sky to sleep,  
Could peel the wolves from all these trees.

**RICHARD KROHN**

## Verona Lake

The images float, drifting into each other,  
ducks on the water, benches on its edges,

the summer field where each birthday  
I shagged flies, my father taking an hour

from work, how the thwack of his bat sent  
the ball skyward to linger a moment

before dropping into my glove, his skill  
a mystery because he knew no other sport.

Winters, too, hazy light from the boathouse,  
as snow floated down to skaters on the lake,

steam huffed from mouths, off earmuffed heads,  
that Saturday night my laces and fingers

got so frozen my mother had to fetch me,  
he too busy hovering over other men's taxes.

Lines from the stack of blue love-letters sent  
everywhere from Anzio to just-freed Dachau,

but most vivid is from family lore,  
he in a rowboat his prankster brother has

just pushed off without oars, my mother  
on the dock, gazing over the water.

The story has him hand-paddling back,  
to the acoustic guitar I never heard him play,

to the proposal that they stay in Verona,  
a life of work until he was drifting in chemo.

But in my other image he floats over the dam  
and down the Peckman, through Cedar Grove,

Little Falls, into the Passaic, looping Paterson  
to Newark, and I'm shouting from the bank

as he drifts away, through Kills and bay,  
then back across the Atlantic.

**SARAH MATTHES**



## Birthday Poem

After smearing the fireflies all over my arms,  
I went inside to wash away the wings.  
Had it been worth it, my skin glowing green  
so briefly, everyone always looking the wrong way  
at the right moment, like with spoons on the nose  
or meteors. It was my birthday. End  
of a strangled summer day, middle of summer.  
Driven to a friend's home under  
some pretense, opening  
the door I found three girls  
winded on the couch. One noticed me and startled,  
said a weak *surprise*, approached me, touched  
my hair. The room was filled with blue balloons.  
And on each balloon, drawn in black marker, the face  
of someone who didn't come to the party.  
Dozens and dozens of them. Kicked up by invisible  
eddies of air. The faces of Jack  
and Samantha. Two of the Carolines kissing  
in the corner. My friends fit  
a bandana over my eyes  
and led me to the car. Blinded I tried  
to keep track of where I was,  
as the car turned left on Mountain,  
right on Hodge Road, but the next turn  
could have been Carter or the one after Carter,  
and then I was lost. The car stopped,

the blindfold removed, we were back  
where we had started.

This had been the gift: darkened, taken.

One day when telling this story on a date

I will accidentally say I was gagged.

The date will end short. Later alone

in the shower the mistake

will shock through me, and I'll consider

calling to clarify. It was evening.

Fireflies lived and died in the dark. The four of us

caught them, wading awkwardly in different directions,

cupped hands rising to scoop their light from below.

That's when I crushed them. Legs

falling from my fingers. Inside again

I flicked on the light, and nearly screamed —

a room of deflating people. A perfect surprise.

## Leaving New Jersey

How the leaves collect inside you and move  
like a corps of old dancers, still waving their roses,  
blood filling their heels; how thin the bridge  
to New Hope, Pennsylvania, and Main Street  
cold and blank in the verve of this morning's yawn,  
the sky's blue mouth splayed open so long  
you could stick in a finger and pull it out unnoticed,  
smell the fresh saliva on your nail; how you melt  
into the doorway of the collectibles store, yes, this is  
that kind of place, the railroad museum and the Children's museum,  
the salon is called "Gratitude," and the playhouse is brick,  
near the river. Inside you touch  
the rose quartz, you think what is the word like "bouquet"  
for when you want to give someone a fist full of pretty rocks  
and good spirits, you find necklaces  
of pentacles and a headband with a tiny hat,  
and how you choose to love it all,  
the plastic spiders, the white dummy heads  
tumbling out of a barrel, the dim slides you hold up  
to a red glowing light. How you wander out, hands  
full of remembered metal, teeth ringing against the wind,  
and head to the river, your face a tomato  
too long on the counter; how I meet you there,  
down on the brown bank, and you won't share  
even a little dribble of roast beef, nor the cream soda  
in the stinging can, nor the spears of leaking pickles

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tucked in the crinkled folds of white butcher paper; and you eat  
with a menace I've not felt in your wrinkled prayers,  
and then from nowhere you bolt to the river, tumbling  
as the ground gives way to mud and reeds;  
how you stay there, minutes icing your thick eyebrows, water  
spilling from your nose, and I become stone,

how you collapse on the side of the bank, calling to me  
that it wasn't your stomach that was hurting, they had lied to you all those years  
and you knew it, you would never forgive them  
for all the time they took, and the water, and I see  
a glint of metal in your palm,  
a bright fishing lure lodged in the mud-caked flesh  
between your ring and middle fingers, drawing the smallest smirk  
of blood, and how you call to me, you say Sarah  
I am suffering, take this hook out of my body, let me back into the sea —

I say *I can't take the hook from your body for fear  
it gets lodged into mine. I say I can't  
take the hook from your body  
for fear it gets lodged into mine. I say this isn't the sea*

## 2021 NJ Poets Prize Honorable Mention

### The Basics

I thought I understood the basics:  
my body would be put through a series of trials.

I understood the surface of the water,  
when broken  
by a chucked stone,

would reassemble itself  
around the sharp intruder—

I would not be so constant.

But even when the news of *blood* reached me,  
even when the white moon sat in the white cloud of day, I believed  
in a deep magnetic resolution,

the way I believe in the inevitability  
of separated twins colliding at the market.

Then one day, rewarding myself for a month of consistent and vigorous exercise,  
I took the scenic byway through a nearby mountain, and, spotting something  
in the road ahead,  
I slowed to discover

one chipmunk

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facedeep  
in second, dead chipmunk,  
its little mouth trembling in the soft still fur—

And I couldn't find a way around that.

I lived for years within that.

What kind of mind  
is unable to recognize the difference

between a chipmunk in mourning  
and a chipmunk at lunch.

## Gyroscope

You are learning everything about how to get around in this world  
if your phone is dead, and your sextant has been crushed

by your enemies. *One old sailors' trick*, you tell me,  
*was to stand nude on the ship's deck*

*and note which way the testicles swayed*  
*to determine the swell of the sea.*

This was difficult to corroborate on the internet.  
It was, however, an effective seduction.

You can tell north from the stars and south from the moon—  
you know the winds from the birds and the weather from the winds,

the hours from your palms stacked up on the horizon, measuring the sky  
like a horse's wide grey side. But for someone so devoted

to knowing where we're going,  
you never can remember where we've been—

*It was a concert, summer, there was a long hill and a big green crowd,*  
*were you there?* Yes, I got separated from the group

and you found me panicking by the porta-potties,  
like a child “staying put.”

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*There was a cardinal, so early in its season, lifting  
against the wind's northern shift, when was that?*

That was when I wrote you a letter.  
It was in the letter I wrote.

Of all the senses hiding in the helices of other senses,  
nearness is the one.

Sometimes, I close my eyes.  
Then I know where I am.



## Harder All the Time to Go Back to New Jersey

My old friend makes me sit in the car forever  
when we get to the bar  
to feel the way the engine “purrs” or something

and having never engaged in such a predictable show  
of homo-vehicular sensuality,

I sink into the seat and paw  
his jacket for a lighter.

Hold my cold hands up  
to my cold face.  
Try to discern what is colder.

Inside eventually,  
there is all-you-can-eat crab  
someone else is eating

in quantities  
so normal  
it breaks my heart.

Put on something sad, friends,  
let’s clear this place out.

I remember when:

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low brown ceiling.  
Mural of women in stiff bonnets.

Listen, I *know* how to pour a beer  
so that it doesn't foam over,  
I just didn't.

Across from me is a girl  
who greatly hurt a friend of mine who,  
in two weeks' time, will greatly hurt me,

so, you know, pick your battles.

The one I pick with her tonight  
is about potato skins.

I ask "But what do they do with the *potatoes*?"

"They skin them" she says.

I hate her so much  
I want to kiss her,

long and surprising,  
with the loudest "mwah."

Everyone is outside smoking.

I'll go when they come back.

Behold: an orphaned potato skin.

I set it down like a boat  
in the closed sea of my glass,

watch the salt blast the beer  
into a fizzing, electric kiss, and go back —

Pop rocks. Purple sky. Under the bradford pear trees.

There's a special darkness cast around  
a single light left on at home.

Sometimes I think if I had known  
they were just joking about eating the roach.

If I hadn't pretended my voice was lost  
a day after it had come back.

If only I had known that the ones I would love  
were the ones that would never leave

and that the staying would make them  
so unlovable.

## Self Portrait at the End of My Life

I do remember beauty:

A blue pool in the pine barrens,  
the fermata of a summer afternoon,  
tangles of hair on a soft stomach,  
my lips combing through them;

Working quick and hard on a fire  
in the black backyard, knowing soon  
I'd see those bright lit faces bursting  
through the screen door  
saying *there you are*;

And then being alone:  
howling on the mountain  
until my spirit expands, pans out  
and sees my body disappear  
below the tree-line;

Or the black expansive solitude  
of being a child in the backseat of the car  
at the end of a long trip home, the hum  
of adult voices, my head cradled in the sling of the seatbelt,  
the dark and permeable glass,  
the sky spilling in—

Still, I wanted the next thing.  
To collapse the paper dolls of my life  
back into the flank of an aspen.

To hear the insides,  
like floating with your ears below the water.

I suppose that's what I'm getting now,  
though I always pictured it differently.

I thought I'd be on my back.

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**JOHN  
BARGOWSKI**

## Dead Man's Cave

Sometimes we'd dare each other  
to crawl in alone and touch the back wall,

scramble over the broken bones  
and mummified carcasses of dogs

and cats that had strayed far from home,  
fallen in, and not found their way out,

slither across the mattress some losers  
dragged inside the mouth to sleep on

then dumped into ankle deep water,  
the slick walls dripping with rat skitter,

bats' rabid clicking from crevices  
in the trap-rock ceiling, nothing anyone

wanted anymore in there, not even  
a waterlogged girly mag someone stashed

on a rock shelf half-way past the first neck,

so sure when we reached the back wall

and snuffed the flame we were one of the first  
to go that deep into total darkness

with two stick matches and a storm candle,  
the sparked screech of jackknife on stone

when we flipped open the blade, relit  
the wick, and made our mark.

## The Tank

I tucked the rainy-day stash my uncle  
gave me to bail him out of the cooler

into the back pocket of my jeans  
the morning I got the call and drove

the Plank Road to Union City  
past that hot strip of go-go joints

he'd grown to love more than anything  
after his wife took their kid

and vanished down 1&9 into the pine  
barrens of south Jersey.

The girls-in-pink-cages and cops moonlighting  
as bouncers all gone home to bed

before daybreak snuck past the Empire State  
and cast oily shadows over

the Hudson's tidal slug of trash on its way  
to The Kills,

the graveyard shift sergeant dawn-groggy,  
but "Ready", he snarled from his perch,

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to close the book on last night's business  
after I handed over the cash,

his key ring jangling along like echoes  
from those Sunday morning steeple bells

clanging open the day's first services  
as he led me back to the steel cage

where my mom's baby brother had crash-  
landed the night before,

his Sinatra hair piece askew on his scalp, one eye  
blackened, knuckles skinned raw,

and that gap-toothed grin he flashed at the Sarge  
when he cracked open the cell door

the same one I'd seen for years peeking  
at me from a snapshot under

a magnet on our fridge, his kid on his lap,  
the love-of-his-life by his side,

and the big man decked out in red and white  
trying to hold the whole damn thing together.



# **JONATHAN GREENHOUSE**

## Hit at the Jersey Shore, 1985

The carpet's polyester fibers press against  
his pockmarked skin, the body  
a blue-suited landscape of rolling hills  
composed of hips & bloated belly, his face  
the calm surface of a pond. We wait  
outside this motel room,  
a caravan of the displaced, a mother  
with preadolescent children in tow, a key  
screeching in the lock  
busted or stuck, the deadweight of metal  
gnawing on metal. Tomorrow we'll wander  
to where hypodermic-needles  
crash into the Central Jersey shore,  
set back sand, breathe  
towards the chintzy boardwalk. We shift  
from foot to foot like flamingoes,  
each new minute poking a dozen more stars  
into the punctured sky. Inside,  
the man's body rests awkwardly  
between a warped desk & the slumping bed,  
will require 3 men to lug it out, the cops  
halfheartedly dusting for prints  
like kids obliged to polish off their veggies.

A thousand summer nights  
will erase this, will slick our skin  
with a black hole's magnetism, will order  
a hit down to every last one of our souls,  
our brothers & sisters whacked  
in their places of work  
& in their homes. The hall light flickers,  
then gives off sparks  
before its cinematic explosion. No one  
rushes to witness this epilogue,  
this snuffing out. No one expects  
a reprieve. No one will make it out alive.

**BARBARA DANIELS**

## Monopoly City

Miss Markasano: Hear a child gasping, trying to breathe.  
Look: trees all death.  
Think of your country burning.

Mr. Bilsland: And how prevalent is asthma? Has it been proven to be exacerbated by climate change?

*A player must own all of a color group to build houses or hotels. St. Charles Place is no longer in Atlantic City. It was replaced by a casino.*

**In the News:** If emissions are moderate, it's extremely likely that Atlantic City will experience sunny-day flooding 95 days a year by 2100. There's a fifty per cent chance of sunny-day flooding 355 days a year by 2100.

**Tattoos:** Stop climate chaos  
Fossil free now  
Pray outdoors  
Make earth cool again

**Caution:** Nonpotable water. Do not drink.

**In the News:** Atlantic City's sea-level has risen 0.2 to 0.5 inches a year since the beginning of the 20th century. This rate will increase.

Llame al 911 de inmediato, el golpe de calor es una emergencia médica.

Miss Markasano: Sedge islands disappear. People kayak in the streets. Cars make wakes on the main road, so waves roll in. Everyone splashes in their bare feet, wading knee deep to get to the grocery store.

*Under Baltic Avenue (rent \$4) a more than one-hundred-year-old canal has been returned to service, decreasing flooding by allowing rainwater drainage even at high tide.*

**Today's free daily horoscope:** Raising blueberries and cranberries will no longer be possible. Nearly thirty percent of New Jersey's bird species will be at risk, including the state bird, the goldfinch.

**In the News:** Air quality grade F

**Plan and Prepare:** Hurricanes, floods, thunderstorms, wildfires, tornados, droughts,

groundwater contamination, sea-level rise, heat waves, air pollution, tropical storms, difficulty breathing

The Recreational Bathing Code standard for the indicator Enterococci bacteria is not to exceed 104 colony forming units / 100 mL of sample.

Miss Markasano: A threatening low gropes the shore, dragging  
a whirlwind toward me. Birches mark time, twitchy  
in wind, quiet birds hidden in fidgety leaves.  
Should I fold myself up? Or open, legs splayed,  
not even try to brace myself? A phone  
keeps buzzing, the TV beeps warnings, rain  
starts its thrashing. I'm afraid of pale trees,  
of wind, afraid of the rising, drumming  
darkness. I wrap myself in a blue blanket  
and wait for the whip of the certain storm.

*Marvin Gardens (\$280), Park Place (\$350), Virginia Avenue (\$160), Arctic Avenue (\$200),  
and Boardwalk (\$400) will be under water. Move boats and cars to higher ground, valuables  
to attics and top shelves in closets. Place sandbags at front and back doors. Anchor fuel tanks.  
Raise wiring. Install toilet backflow valves. Prepare portable safeboxes for valuables.*

Mr. Bilsland: I mean, we are all doing the best we can. I am a member of the American Littoral Society, New Jersey Audubon Corporate Stewardship Council, Climate Change Initiative, Council on Climate Resilience, and the Water Body and Stream Network.

**Wanted:** Home handyperson to help with flood cleanup

*Water Works (mortgage value \$75) is the Atlantic City Municipal Utilities Authority. If both utilities are owned, rent is ten times amount shown on dice. The Electric Company (\$150), now Atlantic City Electric (an Exelon company), is installing microgrids, small electrical grids with their own backup power sources.*

**Today's free daily horoscope:** ocean acidification, deforestation, sewer overflow, a 55% increase in heat-related deaths.

Mr. Bilsland: According to the terms of Executive Order No. 89, the severity of future impacts depends on the willingness and ability of businesses, industries, government entities. What is the likelihood? Why are there data gaps?

**In the News:** Atlantic City had a flood every year or so back in the fifties. Now it's eight or more floods every year.

*Illinois Avenue (mortgage value \$120) was renamed Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in 1988.*

Miss Markasano:           What's the point of a city? Blue light  
                                     on a wet sidewalk. Slow-dancing together.  
                                     Open columns of air. Men singing. Cars  
                                     meet them and pass them. Yes, danger,  
                                     hinged faces. But lobster ramen. Funnel  
                                     cakes. Tongue. If you want to know,  
                                     it's memories, saltwater taffy, rolling chairs,  
                                     so much sun I was blistered.

*Community Chest: You are assessed for street repairs: Pay \$40 per house  
and \$115 per hotel you own.*

El golpe de calor sobreviene cuando el cuerpo no puede regular su temperatura.

**Wanted:**               Home health care professionals to work with patients  
                                 suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)



Mr. Bilsland:

We lack a framework for governance and funding and analysis of exposure and vulnerability in terms of size and geographic distribution. We lack a comparison matrix, an adaptation clearinghouse, and strong, informed community involvement. I move we draw this meeting to a close and postpone further discussion.

*Go directly to jail. Do not pass Go. Do not collect \$200.*

Miss Markasano:

I thank clouds moving slowly. Mason wasps. Red milkweed bugs. They haven't lost heart. Only the catbird is crying. The Japanese toad lily blooms slowly, its small white petals tipped with blue. I thank the wind. The next-door boy with his trampoline, squeak, squawk, the human rhythms of jumping and landing. We all have sorrows. But one boy is jumping alone in his yard.

**ILENE MILLMAN**

# Metamorphosis

September 3, 2020

*Every happiness is a child of separation  
It did not think it could survive. —Rilke*

We recognize them from their colorful wings  
their conspicuous flittering flight—  
as children we learn the magic  
nature's magic: the blobby squirmy thing disappears in  
and the flappy beautiful thing comes out—the lacuna  
the hole in the story—  
never learned in kindergarten

The caterpillar finds a quiet place, attaches a pupa. Inside there  
it doesn't just sprout delicate wings from furry body like a tadpole grows  
legs—more horror movie than fairy tale in self-imposed quarantine  
it deconstructs, liquefies—  
from protein and fiber mush—a different creature  
becoming real.

Except for the time I skirted-up  
for a distanced dinner in a friend's back yard  
I've marinated braless in old tee-shirts  
and jogging pants for months—  
the two of us sealed in the microclimate

of our 4-bedroom chrysalis, atlas of living deconstructed  
down to pulse punctuated by curves on televised graphs—

we disappeared in, just below eye level  
pupa woven with Lysol wipes, potato chips, toilet paper  
*I can't do this, it's killing me*, you say  
but sometimes, just sometimes I catch a glimpse—  
this moment bowing to the story  
spots of neon yellow and bachelor's button blue

## Out Beyond Blue

I suppose you might be one  
who channels God through blue—  
blue-fringed prayer shawl, blue mosque,  
blue cloak for the handmaid of God—  
but color it's cagey, camouflaged in words—  
Homer's sea wine-dark—  
no word for blue could he even see it?

Our baby first days we see only black  
and white luminosity labels later  
like bright buckets  
where successive objects drop.

White lily-white white knight white collar white hope white Savior  
pure as driven snow

Black blacklist black mood black mark black sheep black magic  
black-plumed raven *nevermore*

words wormhole like larvae  
into your ear, into my ear  
and those buckets fill  
white-souled and black-hearted  
binary subtractive

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I suppose   your red might be my blue  
but if you stand with me on the beach  
as in moments just before  
night   not yet night  
everything a charcoal drawing—  
waves   clouds   sky  
all grays   and scented with wild rose.

**VERONICA**

**BEATRICE**

**WALTON**

## Addressing Rosemary Kennedy

*Rosemary Kennedy, eldest sister of John F. Kennedy, was institutionalized in 1941 after a botched lobotomy, intended to cure her intellectual and emotional disabilities, left her unable to speak.*

I wish you could hear them now. I wish you could hear me now. They're laughing at us, Rosemary, cellophane kindness aflame, licking our legs whole and raw. They've shut us away, Rosemary, exiled us to faraway beds: the voids we've been trying to fill. They asked you if you're afraid of the dark, and not the darkness, as though it were merely a visitor. As though like it, you are unwelcome in the hallway at night, singing how hands hold each other, skin echoing skin. You can train a body to be enough, but can it ever be free?

Rosemary, a child told me once that a bed can't walk because it would scratch up the floor. What have you tracked into the house with your fury? As a child, I had to be taught to walk up and down stairs. I used to draw pictures of flowers that don't exist. If they cut down the tree in front of my house, how will I know my right from my left? How will my landmarks survive, these soft heuristics of the world? The clouds run together like a jigsaw puzzle as I stand atop my childhood's breathless hills. In this air, Rosemary, are several iterations of loneliness.



They will not speak to me when I am this way. I am full of words, Rosemary; I too am twenty-three. I wonder what sounds were left inside of you after the procedure, once they erected the reclining chair, post-nuclear fission, after they unsplit your brain like an accidental atom. Is there any science that explains self-authoring? Rosemary, you outlived all of your siblings. I am sure you are tired of being spoken to.

**SHANNON  
DONAGHY**

## Demolition

*All words from “Message in a Bottle” by Marilyn Joyce Lehren,  
Montclair Magazine, December 19, 2019.*

I often think about the tedium of breaking down  
load-bearing things,  
pulling out all of the guts  
like you would a Jack O’Lantern;  
Let us carve this place up,  
bake the innards into pies and  
seasoned pumpkin seeds,  
let us feast and see.

Isn’t it remarkable how we regenerate?  
With an act of faith – oh, I don’t know who finds this,  
but when they do, say my name,  
pull my words out of the debris,  
commit me to memory or history.  
Whatever you do, don’t forget me.

This secret note is  
the assumption of change, of an ending,  
the hunch that we knock down to rebuild to  
knock down again.  
The subtle secret of our lives  
lives and follows us past our graves, past our obituaries,

past our successors and loved ones,  
who wear our faces, our voices, our names.

We are survived by what we enact,  
what we leave behind  
with the intention of others to find,  
what we do with purpose.  
Let this be a small sign that I am living.  
I will have altered this reality with my breath,  
my words, and have moved throughout our world,  
until I had nothing left to give to it.

**CHRISTINE HAMM**

## Easter Lambs

The landlady flaps impatiently above our tinfoil  
hats as we scatter to find the candied egg,  
colored like a child's heart, with

the violent scent of a snap dragon sighing, open,  
open. We all want to be first to hand it to  
our little sister, the one with the

sideways leg but something is always fluttering  
above our heads; not a sparrow, but a wasp.  
Not a tiger kite, but its powdered

glass line. We all want to claim the largest scar or  
the newest bruise. Nothing sleeps outside  
the screened-in porch tonight, while

the moon bangs her forehead against the river's  
reflection. In between sliced shadows,  
we jump from the garage's roof

to see how that plunge feels. Nothing wants us as  
much as what waits in the dark, pin-pricks of  
yellow and the rustle of apples falling.

**DIMITRI REYES**

**2021 NJ Poets Prize Honorable Mention  
Summer Ave.**

*(one)*

Street corner,  
this is a letter.

*(two)*

Today I lie next to you  
where your weeds loiter  
between seasons.

*(three)*

Turn me over in this bed  
I have made of soda and spare  
time. Make me visible only to  
those who walk all over you.

*(four)*

I miss the corner store dates  
where ten swedish fish always  
costs a dollar; feasting on gummies  
until the sun went down.



Fish swimming down the drains  
of our throats for freedom.

*(five)*

I can run my hands  
down the small of your back  
in broken ridges: a storm drain.

*(six)*

Children chalk up pistols,  
water bullets waiting on  
pinchos. Their open mouths  
are the sun that melts  
quarter cherry icees.

*(seven)*

Empty chip bags and tiny plastic  
baggies are embraced by dirt,  
snuggled in your hug, a fertilizer  
made with the richness of our blood.

*(eight)*

Sneakers spin on your line

lynched like a weathervane  
and you wear them like a  
beautiful necklace.

*(nine)*

A cat's last breath is stolen  
on your doorsteps, cracks  
and potholes filled with  
flattened bodies.

*(ten)*

I can carbon date silhouettes  
of the dead layered in chalk  
reading as far back  
as anyone remembers.

*(eleven)*

People pick you piece by piece  
for every funeral you've curated.

*(twelve)*

In the morning someone cracks  
you open like a walnut; you

spill out and cover us with  
the color of living.

*(thirteen)*

Ways to meditate: eat  
and drink your asphalt: worship  
the fumes of gods from spray cans:  
learn to love the way we love  
in street corner stupor.

*(fourteen)*

Fill in the gaps of you  
with the memory of me.

## One-Eight-Seven

Devastating. But you know tragedy better than I do  
playing the hell out of a Shakespeare's Hamlet  
to the girls in sixth period. Cavalier and eloquent  
saying words we felt but didn't understand.

Me and the crew hanging back, taking notes  
on how to turn pickup lines into stanzas  
like you. And even though we're eye to eye  
now, I couldn't believe it even after

everyone else saw it. Now I see.  
The last time your face was on posterboard  
it read, "10 Year Plan Senior Project"  
where your face was photoshopped

into Young Money Records. Only 7 years later  
your face is wanted all over this city and it's a tragedy  
that I can't watch you blink so I'm mean muggin'  
just to keep my eyes open. To fight a tear duct.

Are these how the man's eyes looked when he saw yours  
in the dark? When a floorboard creaked and you heard,  
it will not be your hoodie today. That single bang and  
flash that cut through a dark apartment like celebration.

The blood. A cry for God during the final monologue.  
That split second decision between the front door  
or the window followed by the drop of a curtain.  
You know this one better than I do.

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**JOANNA FUHRMAN**

## The Least Witchy Witch on the Internet

rips pages out of spell books and mixes them with Diet Coke. She sprays her insides with stray rumors, so her heart cavities smell like red Jolly Ranchers. She replaces your pocket mirror with snapshots of the cool people you envy.

When she wears her silk pajamas inside out, the seams get stuck on the furniture. When she gives a lecture on loss, all the Barbie dolls tear off their own heads. Replace their missing skulls with bejeweled pocket knives. Did you know she started out as a canine copy of your soul? She would wear your face on her fur, and when you slept it would turn into the visage of the popular girl you wanted to be. Celestial eyelashes. A frying pan for a mouth.

As a teenage werewolf, she slept at the top of a flickering lighthouse and howled at your crayon drawing of the moon. As an elderly sasquatch, she mocked your earnest attempt at a tweet.

## The Internet is Not the City

so no one can see your red pimple or your purple wheelchair. My optimism about this is stuck in 1997, but what do you expect from a woman whose wrinkles are deep enough to reach her subconscious?

As a preteen, when I first rode the subway alone, I carried a heavy Walkman, listening to upbeat songs about the end of the world. Back then, the cars were wrapped in unreadable, brightly colored names.

I thought of poetry as a way to get lost like the internet, but I hadn't yet heard of the internet.

Back then. I didn't need to get lost to feel lost.

I spent so many hours on the phone talking to my friends that my neck ached.

I wrote in a poem "Talking is like going swimming in a small pool. You think it's the ocean until you bang into the rail."

**F  
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**SUSANNA RICH**



## The One

Woolf, Plath, Mary Trump—  
to each family the one is born  
who undenies what holds  
the family together.

The one must seem broken,  
so the family will leave her  
to stain her fingers in a locked room.  
She will hear voices.  
She will stare out windows.

She is the blossom the century plant  
shoots up, once in a hundred years  
on a woody stem tall as a thirty-foot tree;  
tipped, like a candelabrum bright with blossoms—  
red, white, or yellow.

The one who tells what mustn't be told  
might fill her pockets with stones  
to walk river bottoms;  
leave milk for the children,  
and lay her head in an oven;  
or go on tour.

The century flower, aloft its stem  
is beautiful and distinct from the glutted,  
prickly, low, ground-hugging basal leaves;  
the heavy spiked tips that draw blood  
when its heart is plumbed.

Once the one blossom fades,  
the century plant dies.  
A family is a family to bear  
the one blossom it cannot survive.

## Hide-and-Seek

Mine is a family of champion hide-and-seekers.  
My parents hid behind trees from Russian soldiers.  
They hid under bridges from airplanes  
that dropped bombs. They hid in a ship's  
hold behind others and didn't breathe.

In America, my father beat my mother  
so she would hide from him,  
and he could look for her in diners and bars;  
in the church basement where she looked for  
the whispering priest; in the parking lot  
behind my father's friend's bakery.

Afraid I would be the next beaten,  
I hid in the closet. They found me,  
locked me in the basement for a night,  
so they wouldn't have to look for me.

I looked for my father in an ocean lifeguard;  
I looked for my mother in the nun  
who drank wine behind the altar.  
I looked for them both in saffron-robed swamis.

I hide behind the gate of a toothy smile,  
emojis for a face—talk, talk, talk.  
I hide what I want from myself  
sleep, keys, books, friends—  
so, I always have someone who plays  
hide-and-seek with me.

**R  
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**TAMARA  
ZBRIZHER**

## 2021 NJ Poets Prize Winner

### Everyone Always Looks Mercury Retrograde in the Wrong\* Light

\*natural

I'm tired of being that friend at the dimly lit bar  
who reads you her poems\*  
and you say *Awwe*  
slip a compliment the way you slip  
an obligatory tip in the bartender's palm  
I want these babies\* to be neon  
from the *exit* sign  
but so far, all disco balls

\*aches. sins. ancestries. hysterias

\*poems

if someone told me the truth\*  
I'd gladly watch Netflix and chill  
until my eyes bleed glitter  
glow up\*  
three pairs of spanx and a too-tight mini  
swipe left, meet me  
under the disco ball, *baby*\*  
I know the lingo  
*Never let me go*  
under low lights, *baby*\*  
gin glass half empty  
and a young man to stare into  
my ass I mean eyes\*  
I'd spend way more time  
working out my thighs  
instead of metaphors

\*Old English- faithfulness, fidelity

\*clown face the contour

\*bae, bb, babe

\* Female lead in the 1987 film  
*Dirty Dancing*- birth name Francis  
Houseman

\* I mean ass

Young men don't like  
their women layered-  
mini skirts in December  
I'll be your never-cold-baby\*  
like all those girls on lines

to get inside where strobe lights

filter them glitter\*

In this truth\* even similes are filtered  
Forgive this so last season brain  
but I'll take my truth bare-faced  
acne-scarred, puffy-eyed  
Forgive, no, give  
me an unbleached truth  
I swear I'll stop  
begging strangers  
to explain the retrograde\*  
I'll take it all at star value  
at planetary shift, baby\*  
I'll get fit and snap-happy  
blame every mistake  
on the retrograde-  
this battered heart  
travel plans badly made  
which is to say  
all I want are your fingers

*\*Baby, It's Cold Outside* - 2018 Controversial\*\* song  
\*\*Rape culture turned joke as in Brett Kavanaugh's  
Supreme court appointment despite sexual assault  
accusations; the country agreed Julie, Deborah,  
and Christine were lying.

\* Microplastics that pollute marine environments.

\*Poem, America

\*poetry, prayer, America

\*Rosemary's? Gerber? Yoda?

in my mouth,  
so stop taking them  
far far away, baby\*  
if I were a better salesman\*  
I'd sell you on the retrograde, baby\*  
I'd praise it so prophetic  
you'd never get in a plane(s), train(s), automobile(s).  
we'd forget truth\*  
I'd make it retrograde all year, baby\*  
for years maybe,  
make it retrograde so long  
we could build a whole life  
waiting for the world  
to spin in the right direction  
cuz the truth, baby,\* is hard to see  
past all this electricity\*  
past this whole damn world\* that runs on  
the difference between good and bad lighting

\*so precious that you are of my body  
\*poet, lover, preacher  
\*so precious that you are of my body,  
once and ad infinitum  
\*1987 John Candy film - binge-worthy  
\*, water, sleep, food  
\* so precious that you are of my body,

\*you  
\*you, poetry  
\*you, poetry, truth

## Bridge Back

The first church I stepped inside of was with you  
A gothic masterpiece splashed in the middle of Manhattan  
as if someone spilled it there  
I begged to sneak in during the early evening service  
as if your Catholicism would give me a pass  
You kept joking that I would go up in flames  
and some part of me believed it and its opposite —  
our bodies in these pews, my hand grazing your thigh  
your hand weaving in between mine  
would be forgiven even as we cross  
the bridge back home to Jersey  
to the smell of hot garbage  
my atheism, your wife.

**Z  
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**KELLY CORINDA**



## Exhibit

The spiral of thought is  
divine

anxiety the buffalo  
rose

and fell  
like me

as I wake  
and sleep

in walking distance  
of a red

panda snow leopard  
eat steak

on a plate  
next to Alice

in wonderland  
call my brother

he says  
an award for

the fastest death  
of a patient

I say no for  
organizational

excellence death  
had already

crawled out of  
the nest

of her lap  
when I met her

I text a stranger  
about penguins  
receive  
apathy

I'm just a person  
registered with the state

who can't  
sleep

I pay twelve dollars  
to watch

the panda  
breathe

## Wild Hunt

Join the cavalcade  
of aloe,

slow creep of glass  
across a century and a half.

Before of an assembly  
of figurines

I would demand offerings  
of privacy,

demand to be left alone  
to weed

in my windbreaker at  
El Paso Christmas.

I put a wreath  
on the head

of a mare,  
leave the tale

it's mimicry  
and telling to others.

Lifestyle shift  
is medicine

I'm connected  
with. One slip

flips wrath  
to air.

C  
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## Who's Afraid of the Number Two

elegant shuffle  
the gems  
in my mouth

overhand palm  
lazy shuffle  
tree on the street

riffle tiered tray  
shuffle chargrill  
gulf butter

table riffle weave  
sequin hat  
steamboat queen

forgetful gold  
beard on the pavement  
poet overhand

strip shuffle weave  
magic tour guide  
crypt almondine

bride bluff lucky  
cut diamond count

deadwood

table riffle baize  
true up exposed  
cascade

cut no faro spiral  
and control cut  
no riffle stack no

butterfly cut  
in a red crown  
down, show.

**C  
O  
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A**

## Audio Tour

Turn a freckled corner to a  
stained glass horse on the wall.

Why would I.

In a Russian house  
eating mushrooms,

I am she and she is me,  
half deaf and running

on the treadmill.

I need his art explained to me,  
in my good ear.

Kool aid powder  
desert and  
consumable parks,

the repetition of  
this check is void.

Can't you see.  
It's void.

**C  
O  
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## Fictions

I fall in love easily.  
I'm familiar with  
an abundance of  
bread, air. Variety  
in miniscule spices,  
light through  
fingertips of  
eucalyptus.  
I've never had  
an alarm clock,  
my feet are soft  
and ordinary. I don't  
read about cures in  
blue light. I hit  
the piñata swift and  
sightless, enjoy the  
mineral unwrap of  
sweets. One quick  
breath blows the  
candles out, I drift  
through lemon air  
sea air grass air,  
with friends clung to  
me like brambles.  
I stand effortlessly  
in the motorboat,

captain's license,  
plan. The ducks  
come back every year,  
they never left. They  
sleep in the tulips  
while my sister plays  
the clarinet, she never  
stopped, we never  
complained. Open  
window, laugh, breeze.

C  
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## CONTRIBUTORS

**John Bargowski's** new book *American Chestnut* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press) is forthcoming in 2021. His first book, *Driving West on the Pulaski Skyway*, selected by Paul Mariani for the Bordighera Prize, was published in 2012. His poems have also appeared on *Poetry Daily* and in *The Gettysburg Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *New Letters*, *Poetry*, and *Ploughshares*, among others.

**Robert Beveridge** (he/him) makes noise at [xterminal.bandcamp.com](http://xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *Blood and Thunder*, *Feral*, and *Grand Little Things*, among others.

**Kelly Corinda** is a poet. She is currently completing an MFA in Poetry at Brooklyn College, and is a Contributing Poetry Editor at *The Brooklyn Review*. Her recent work focuses on the uses and limits of language through the lens of the experiences of nurses.

**Florenz Cruz** is a writer and scientist from Somerville living in Berlin most interested in writing about the female on female gaze.

**Shannon Cuthbert** is a writer living in Brooklyn. Her poems have been nominated for three Pushcarts, and have appeared in journals including *Chronogram*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, and *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*. Her work is forthcoming in *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *The Metaworker*, and *Lowestoft Chronicle*, among others.

**Barbara Daniels's** *Talk to the Lioness* was published by Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press in 2020. Her poetry has appeared in *Cleaver*, *Faultline*, *Small Orange*, *Meridian*, and elsewhere. Barbara Daniels received a 2020 fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

**Holly Day** has worked as a freelance writer for over 30 years, with over 7,000 published poems, short stories, and articles and 40 books and chapbooks.

**Shannon Donaghy** is a queer writer and poet from South Jersey. She is a recent graduate of Montclair State University and is currently a book publicist. When she is not reading, writing, or writing about reading, Shannon enjoys cooking, hiking, and traveling the world. To get in touch with Shannon Donaghy, you can email her at [Shannon.donaghy3@gmail.com](mailto:Shannon.donaghy3@gmail.com) or visit her portfolio website [www.shannondonaghy.com](http://www.shannondonaghy.com).



**Liza Katz Duncan** is an MFA candidate at Warren Wilson College, a 2021 Pushcart nominee and a 2017 recipient of an Amy Award from Poets and Writers. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Poetry Northwest*, *About Place*, *Sugar House Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Permafrost*, *Phoebe*, and elsewhere.

**Joanna Fuhrman** is the author of six books of poetry, most recently *To a New Era* (Hanging Loose Press 2021) and *The Year of Yellow Butterflies* (Hanging Loose Press 2015). She teaches creative writing at Rutgers and in private workshops.

**Jonathan Greenhouse** won the Telluride Institute's 2020 Fischer Poetry Prize, and his poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Fourteen Hills*, *The Ginkgo Prize for Ecopoetry*, *The New Guard*, *New York Quarterly*, and *Poetry Ireland Review*. He is currently – joyously – wearing a mask with his wife and 2 children. This is his 4th time appearing in *Journal of New Jersey Poets*.

**Christine E. Hamm**, queer & disabled English Professor, social worker and student of ecopoetics, has a PhD in English, and lives and teaches in New Jersey. She recently won the Tenth Gate prize from Word Works for her manuscript, *Gorilla*. She has had work featured in *North American Review*, *Nat Brut*, *Painted Bride Quarterly* and many others. She has published six chapbooks, and several books -- her fourth, *Girl into Fox*, came out in 2019.

**Lois Marie Harrod's** 17<sup>th</sup> collection *Woman* was published by Blue Lyra in February 2020. Her *Nightmares of the Minor Poet* appeared in June 2016 from Five Oaks; her chapbook *And She Took the Heart* appeared in January 2016; *Fragments from the Biography of Nemesis* (Cherry Grove Press) and the chapbook *How Marlene Mae Longs for Truth* (Dancing Girl Press) appeared in 2013. A Dodge poet, she is published in literary journals and online ezines from *American Poetry Review* to *Zone 3*. She teaches at the Evergreen Forum in Princeton. Links to her online work at [www.loismarieharrod.org](http://www.loismarieharrod.org)

**Estelle Janiec** holds a PhD in clinical psychology and had focused most of her time and energy in her practice as a professional counselor in New Jersey. However, poems continued to bubble up within her. Sometimes she wrote them down. Sometimes she sent them out for possible publication. She was last published in the *Journal of New Jersey Poets* in 1978. Now that she is semi-retired, she hopes to pursue both the writing and publishing of more poems in the future.

**Julian Koslow** grew up in Tenafly, NJ. He was formerly a professor of Renaissance English Literature at Virginia Tech, and is currently a full-time parent, having left academia to take care of a child with special needs. His poems have appeared in the *Cider Press Review*, *The Broadkill Review*, and *The Avalon Literary Review*. He was educated at Rutgers University.

**Richard Krohn** grew up in Verona, NJ, and has spent most of his life in nearby states, especially PA, but also in Central America. He currently teaches Economics and Spanish at Moravian College in Bethlehem, PA. In addition to *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, his work has appeared most frequently in recent years in *Tar River*, *Poet Lore*, and *Southern Poetry Review*.

**Blake Lapin** earned the award for best undergraduate thesis in literature for his poetry thesis, *Durability of Bone*, at Claremont McKenna College. Scholarships from the New York State Summer Writers Institute, Community of Writers, and Claremont McKenna's Center for Writing and Public Discourse have supported his work.

**Elinor Mattern** teaches creative writing and has had poems and prose published in literary magazines and newspapers. She is also a visual artist, has exhibited her photographs and paintings, and speaks to groups on many aspects of creativity, culture, and communication.

**Sarah Matthes** is a poet from central New Jersey. Her debut collection of poetry *Town Crier* (Persea, 2021) won the Lexi Rudnitsky First Book Prize. Selected poems have appeared or are forthcoming with *BOAAT*, *Pleiades*, *The Iowa Review*, *jubilat*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Yalobusha Review*, *Midst*, and elsewhere. She has received support for her work from the Yiddish Book Center and the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, and is the recipient of an Academy of American Poets Prize as well as the 2019 Tor House Prize from the Robinson Jeffers Foundation. A graduate of the Michener Center for Writers, she still lives in Austin, TX, where she serves as the managing editor of *Bat City Review*. Find her online at [sarahmatthes.com](http://sarahmatthes.com)

In addition to writing poetry, **Ilene Millman** is a speech/language therapist currently working part-time with school aged children and volunteering as tutor, tutor trainer and assessor for her county Literacy Volunteers organization. Her poems have been published in a number of print journals including *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *Nelle*, *Connecticut Review*, *Paterson Review*, *Passager* and anthologized in several volumes including the recently published *Show Me Your Papers*. She is an associate editor of *The Sow's Ear*. Her first book of poetry, *Adjust Speed to Weather*, was published in 2018.

**Simon Perchik** is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Family of Man Poems*, published by Cholla Needles Arts & Literary Library in 2021. For more information including free e-books and his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" please visit his website at [simonperchik.com](http://simonperchik.com)

**Dimitri Reyes** is a Puerto Rican multidisciplinary artist, content creator, organizer, and educator from Newark, NJ. His chapbook, *Every First and Fifteenth* will be published through Digging Press in the summer of 2021. Dimitri is the Marketing & Communications Director at CavanKerry Press and an Artist-In-Residence with NJPAC.

**Susanna Rich**, twice nominated for an Emmy-Award in poetry, is a Fulbright Fellow in Creative Writing and founding producer, writer, and principal performer at Wild Nights Productions. Among other shows, she tours her musical, *Shakespeare's \*itches: The Women v. Will*; *ashes, ashes: A Poet Responds to the Shoah*, and *Squeeze Play*. Susanna is author of five poetry collections, most recently *Beware the House*, and *SHOUT! Poetry for Suffrage*. She is recipient of the Presidential Excellence Award for Distinguished Teaching at Kean University. Visit her at [www.wildnightsproductions.com](http://www.wildnightsproductions.com).

**Veronica Beatrice Walton** is a Welsh- and Lebanese-American neurodivergent teacher and poet from Cranford, NJ and a 2019 alumna of Bryn Mawr College. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ethel*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, *Little Stone*, *Ponder Review*, and others. Follow her on Instagram or Twitter @bildungswalton.

**Michael Young**'s third full-length collection, *The Infinite Doctrine of Water*, was longlisted for the Julie Suk Award. His previous collections are *The Beautiful Moment of Being Lost* and *Transcriptions of Daylight*. He received a Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and his chapbook, *Living in the Counterpoint*, received the Jean Pedrick Chapbook Award. His poems have been featured on *Verse Daily* and *The Writer's Almanac*, as well as *Cimarron Review*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, *One*, *Rattle*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*.

**Tamara Zbrizher** is a Ukrainian American poet. She received her MFA at Drew University. Her work has been published in various journals and anthologies and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and Best of The Net. Her first full-length collection *Tell Me Something Good* was released from Get Fresh Books in April, 2019. She lives in New Jersey with her son and an overfed cat.