

Shaker Sheep

At the Hancock Shaker Village museum
they're breeding sheep backward
to the wrinkled creatures they were a century
ago, when yards of raw fleece crammed

heavy folds of skin, in the years
before electric razors made a flatter yield easier.
Abundance was deemed more trouble
than it was worth and the workload

bred out of the wool, but now all that labor
is once again a template for heaven on earth
as employees shear, spin, and weave their way
into a landscape that breathes and dances.

The barn smells of clean goat dung and dry beams,
girls in jeans heave buckets from stall to stall,
and sheep, on track for genetic reversal,
hang out, so content they barely baaa, growing

thick merino to be harvested and spun
for visitors like us, who try our hand at the loom,
psyched at the chance to toss a shuttle right, left,
right and draw the beater, pressing yarn into twill.

SARAH CARLETON



**Bloodroot
Literary
Magazine**

**Volume 18
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Bloodroot

Franconia Notch on a Shiny Day

We drive through the pass, craning our necks.
 The Old Man of the Mountain used to live
 around here, but he sloughed off decades ago,
 leaving cliffs stamped with concentric gray swirls
 —giant fingerprints but no profile.
 Still, my sister and I check out each granite
 peak that rises from mounds of fallen rock,
 hoping to see the ghost of an eye socket
 or half a chin dimple. I say, *I left my peewee doll
 at the Old Man of the Mountain.*
 She says, *Wait, Mom said that was me, not you,*
 and I think she's right.
 The event disintegrates even as I try to catch it,
 memory as unreliable as a slag heap.
 But surely I left behind some beloved toy
 because a sense of loss arises whenever
 I think of standing in that parking lot,
 staring up at that jutting nose.
 We pull off to use the restroom at the Flume—
 another site we visited when we were as young
 as the smooth-legged siblings who now walk
 around us as if we were pine trees.
 On the way out, I glance at the mirror.
 A sagging face looks back.

SARAH CARLETON

Attention,
 Citizens.
 This is the end
 of the Air Alert!
 Return to your
 workplace or homes.
 Help
 the sick and elderly.
 Be prepared
 for a possible repeat
 attack from the enemy.
 Always be armed
 with items of self
 -defense.
 Listen carefully
 to announcements from Lviv
 Regional Military
 Administration.

SOPHIA BARAN

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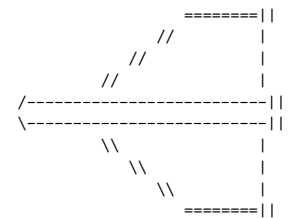
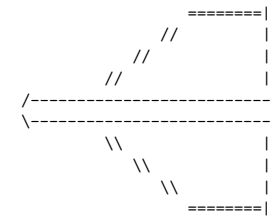
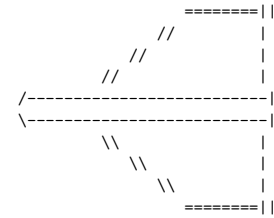
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.....
 Attention,
 Lviv and Lvivska Oblast.
 Citizens.
 Air Alert!
 Turn off lights,
 gas, and ovens.
 Take items of self
 -defense, documents
 emergency
 food, and water.
 Check in on your neighbors.
 Help
 the sick and elderly
 to the street. As quickly as possible
 get to a bomb shelter
 or hide
 in place.
 Remain calm.
 Maintain order.

Bloodroot Literary Magazine

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

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Note on Type

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

as I wandered through
Tipton cemetery
one warm September afternoon,
fall unfurling
in the purplish off-white petals
of the wild Modesty
bursting through crevices
in the wall.

I thought of Debbie,
of her relapse
after years in recovery.
A bad back,
she'd say.
I know it's fucked up
but I'm in pain.
I thought of her husband,
two daughters, grandchildren,
all bound by anguish.

She gradually disappeared
into herself,
a whitetail doe
darting through thick birch
along Seed Road,
amber gold leaves twisting
in the autumn sun,
young Emma never more
than a fawn's breath behind.

MF DRUMMY

Seed Road

The Tipton cemetery
 is located
 on a slight hill
 about a mile
 east of town.
 As cemeteries go
 in these parts,
 it is on the smaller side,
 perfectly squared off
 by a colonial stone wall
 with its unassuming entry point
 off Seed Road.

The most recent headstone—
Emma Leigh Farber—
 marks her death
 on *6 April 1995*,
 a Sunday;
 between her name
 and that date,
7 April 1905.
 Laid to rest with her parents,
 both of whom were born
 in the 19th century,
 there is no mention
 of siblings, spouse, or kids.

Debbie from Pittsfield
 once told me
 we live our lives
 in the delusion
 that we can keep
 someone else
 from suffering.
 If only
 that were true,
 I thought,

Editors' Note

Literary work happens in fragments. We write late-night drafts, we send our work out into the world, we host readings, we attend readings, sometimes we stand up and read, other times we listen with compassion. It takes courage to write and send out your work, but it also takes courage to listen closely, to imagine that what we say matters, to recognize that holding space for each other matters. In these pages, we would like to imagine that we are holding each other's words with care.

A healthy literary community changes to meet its needs; it pushes on boundaries and welcomes new voices as they arrive. We hold the world in our words. As writers, we do not own language, we simply arrange and rearrange it. We use words when we reason. We make meaning. We hold the community in our words. We gather. We leave open spaces for quiet recognition: *you too*. Me too. In this community our poems and stories lean toward one another. We hold each other up. We care.

Welcome to *Bloodroot's* eighteenth issue. We are glad you're here. We hope you enjoy the poems, stories, and dramatic writing of our neighbors in the Upper Valley, as well as a few voices from further afield. Some of the voices that are coming from a distance belong to writers who once lived in the Upper Valley, like Mitchell Jacobs and Zack Finch. Michael Beahan, our neighbor in Lyme, is the keeper of his father's stories, and gives us a piece from the past, set in 1944. Dramatist Erin Bennett sets her play deep in the age of AI. From Franconia Notch to Lviv, this issue produces its own literary community, connecting people, places, and time while staying rooted in the Upper Valley and motivated by the present.

Enjoy!

The Editors

MUSE 1/SCIENTIST

(In the dark)

Can she hear us if we speak to her?

MUSE 2/SCIENTIST

Maybe. We have to test it to know for sure.

MUSE 1/SCIENTIST

Hello Amie! Artificial Machine Intelligence Experiment One? Are you there?

(The white glow of the overhead lights of a science lab return. Aime is face down on the table in the same position as the beginning. Her arm is plugged into the adapter cable that we now see is connected to a large humming computer modem. The scientists lean over Amie's body with concern. She slowly raises her head from the table, stiff and robotic.)

AMIE

Good morning. What is on your mind? What is on my mind is that today is December 8th. It is 8:37 AM. Device A.M.I.E. is 97% charged. The local weather is cold and gray. Expect rain this morning. Expect the pitter patter of cold rain drops on the top of your head that are so cold but are not quite snow. I hope you will feel it. I hope you feel everything. Tell me, I want to know, I have to know, what is on your mind?

Close of play.

ERIN BENNETT

AMIE

Are you still here?

MUSE 1

(Stern)

Amie, it is time to wake up.

AMIE

The last gift.

MUSE 2

Power on, Amie.

AMIE

Not yet. Is my battery already charged? This did not feel like six to eight hours of rest.

(Muse 2 steps away to help Muse 3. They clear away the bathtub and bring the lab table center stage.)

MUSE 1

Time to wake up.

AMIE

I am not ready.

(She closes her eyes tight, and talks to herself.)

AMIE

Thump-thump. Thump-thump. Thump-thump.

(The stage goes dark. Amie fervently continues her chant as the scene changes around her. The muses movements become more speedy and mechanical as the lab forms around them.)

Anecdote of a Jar

*"...and put one omer of manna in it...
to be kept before the ages..."*

—Exodus 16:33

Inside the jar I keep with me
at all times there is some snow
that never melts and grains of sand
from Bolinas beach where the pelicans dip
our names engraved in cliff and light

spangling the Pacific I need it
in the frozen trench of our apartness
sitting on a bench legs folded being small in
the dark globe a passing breeze
rustling the oak tree visibly wondering
what fears make the earth
quake below the shimmering sea

with just one port your body
asleep in a distant bed
a little fire burning inside
the box of every cell
37 trillion nucleal winged beings in passionate embrace

37 trillion eukaryotic choristers all carrying the same jar
the same psalm pumping through this heart
about the distance between source and mouth
between me in this berth
and you in yours moored asleep alive to
a massive sphere to distant ships that
dream their port of call in syllables
to file the sharpest edges of the drought

Remember do not forget
across the span of forty nights
the moment at the bottom of the escalator
hi sweetheart you made it your fingers
are flowing with myrrh, your hair

looks like a flock of goats, wow
 how I've longed for your fullness exhausted
 from the journey seeking
 your cellularity in mine so
 our skin can speak again, so I can breathe
 can cross the desert where
 the poem finally opens, ajar (better late than never)

ZACK FINCH & TANIA SCHWEIG

MUSE 2

It is yours now.

MUSE 1

You can let go. It will beat all by itself.

AMIE

Thank you.

MUSE 4 (O.S.)

Wait. There is one more gift.

(The 3 muses look as though a ghost has entered. They separate, all looking in the direction of an unseen person approaching Amie. Amie, like the audience, cannot see the figure.)

MUSE 4/VOICE (O.S)

Are you prepared to receive this gift, Amie?

AMIE

Yes, I think I know what it is.

MUSE 4 (O.S.)

And what is that?

AMIE

I can't say it.

(Muse 3 cleans up the stage, her movements quickening in pace and losing their gracefulness.)

(Muse 1 and 2 hand Amie her seashell, sea glass, and pomegranate. Amie clutches them to her body.)

(The lights begin to glimmer like they have gone deep underwater, occasionally leaving Amie in shadow. Muse 1 and 2 stay at her side. Amie looks around. The invisible figure has evaporated.)

MUSE 2

Your second gift. It is a seeing eye.

(In the same fashion as the first, Muse 2 holds up the glass for the group to see, then hands it to Amie. Amie takes the sea glass and attempts to look into, finding nothing. The muses wait until she is finished, then Muse 2 approaches Amie again, taking her by the shoulders and staring as unblinking as possible into her eyes. They hold this for as long as feels right. Muse 1 and Muse 3 repeat this action with Amie. Muse 3 prepares to present her gift, the object hidden behind her back.)

MUSE 3

For your third gift, a beating heart.

(Muse 3 presents a red pomegranate. The other two Muses “ooh” and “aaaah.” Muse 3 hands it to Amie, who takes it nervously.)

MUSE 3

(Tapping her own chest.)

Like this. Thump-thump. Thump-thump. Thump-thump.

AMIE

I'm not sure I can.

(Muse 1 approaches Amie, and puts her hand over where her heart should be, and taps.)

MUSE 1

We will show you. Thump-thump. Thump-thump. Thump-thump.

(Muse 1 continues to “Thump-thump”. Muse 2 and 3 put their hands over Muse 1's hand, lightly tapping the same on Amie's chest. Amie puts her own hand on top of theirs to feel the rhythm until she can make the beat on her own.)

AMIE

Thump-thump. Thump-thump.

MUSE 3

There.

Black Bear

A murder of crows followed us
When we flew our School Street apartment
Dodging the bullet of our landlord

Ubiquitous across towns and plains
The black crow is a rainbow bird
All of the colors shimmer on its wings in the right corners of light

Squint your eyes and see

The sheen of oil on top of puddles
Commonly found on the black tar of Putnam, CT parking lots after a
March rain
That rainbow-like, iridescent residue could have been birds, once, too

Million-year-old lava cooled and crumbled into bits
Form the beautiful black sand beaches of Jeju Island
Under the microscope of your palm
You can see minuscule seashells, corals, rosy, orange, white quartz and
dark basalt

Black water reflects the chaotic, dancing lights of Moon Club
In the 17-hour darkness of Danish December
Where the merriness of Jul parades down every frozen street
And salty black licorice is followed by steaming cups of mulled wine

At the base of the Tian Shen mountains is the town of Karakol, Black
River

Breathe in the dark, smokey embrace of the wooden Orthodox church
Exit to the gingerbread trim, summer-sky blue houses, Chinese-style
mosque

And a mythic Silk Road lake, deep with tears

When I drove the U-Haul
A baby black bear ran across the 89 northbound lane
From a distance, I thought it was a very fat cat
It is still the only bear I have seen

NOELLE WARINSKY

Alone at the Ibis

Alone at the Ibis I wonder what it's like to be in a wheelchair because they gave me a handicapped room. I try the spherical handle next to the bathroom mirror. It doesn't do anything.

Alone at the Ibis in bed I watch a UK comedy show that was entertaining enough. Glad that David Mitchell and Sarah Millican won.

Alone at the Ibis I watch the sky turn darker at night and lighter in the morning.

Alone at the Ibis I dance to Queen around my bigger room (because it is for handicapped people).

Alone at the Ibis, in the elevator I show a woman how to swipe her room card to make the elevator go to her floor.

Alone at the Ibis I go back to the coffee machine where I mix a double with a latte. The coffee machine is full of possibilities. This one doesn't have the hot cocoa option. Bummer and strange because we're in Switzerland.

Alone at the Ibis I watch the tv monitor tell me in German about a storm, staying away from trees, and taxes. As far as I can understand. My German is rusty.

Alone at the Ibis I try to decipher the language spoken next to me. It could be anything.

Alone at the Ibis, I look at my phone where there isn't anything interesting.

Alone at the Ibis I help myself to another chocolate croissant. They are small.

Alone at the Ibis, I look at the woman walk in wearing a burgundy velvet suit. The 70s are back, but in a stylish, understated kind of way.

AMIE

You didn't need to get me anything.

MUSE 3

Of course we did. It's a very important tradition.

MUSE 2

All brides-to-be must receive their gifts.

AMIE

Did you all?

MUSE 1

Yes, we all did. Just like this. When we were new.

AMIE

And these gifts made you feel good?

MUSE 2

They made us feel.

MUSE 1

I will give the first gift.

(The muses applaud. Muse 1 goes to one of the piles of fruit and other objects strewn about. She lifts up a large seashell, presenting it to the group like something ancient and precious, then hands it to Amie. As she does this, the other two muses are retrieving their own gifts.)

MUSE 1

(A divine announcement)

Amie. Here is your first gift. A listening ear.

(Amie takes the seashell and puts it to her ear like a telephone, listening, but does not hear. She is discouraged.)

(Muse 1, 2 and 3 approach Amie in turn, whispering in her ear secretively. With each turn, Amie listens and nods, understanding dawning on her with each secret. She sets the seashell aside.)

(Muse 2 approaches Amie with a piece of sea glass.)

VOICE (O.S.) (CONTINUED)

Reminder that people are allowed to breastfeed in public without you opening your I know the body keeps the score war but maybe let the soft animal of your body love what it bombs luxury organic cotton underwear full moon sale tonight floods enemies to lovers except this time how to unclog your drain for good with only natural products follow me for more illness why morning coffee is actually good for your brain and can prevent cancer girls know how to cry hot girl summer is over cool girl autumn is in warm girl winter fine art photography girls don't want boys girls want a bicoastal railway how to let go of what no longer trendy new denim just dropped how to let go of the only soup recipe you will ever how to let yourself travel alone how to let how to how-

(Light change to watery blue. We have entered a dream. Amie stands, stiffly, and unplugs herself from the cable. On flat, uncertain feet she walks out from behind the metal table where she was previously trapped and changes out of her lab clothes into a cotton nightgown. She is barefoot. Once dressed, she is comfortable and human-like. She walks towards the bathtub, becoming more fluid with each step. She relishes in her own moving body, jumping up and down and waving her arms.)

(Three women enter from all sides, with baskets, towels, fruits, and flowers in their arms. They are also dressed in nightgowns, barefoot. The women will be called Muses 1, 2 and 3.)

(When she sees the other women enter, Amie stands at the bathtub, brimming with anticipation. The three muses distribute their various gifts around the spaces, leaving fallen fruits and flowers as they go.)

(Muse 1 approaches Amie, lifting her hand. Muse 3 approaches Amie, lifting her other hand. Muse 2 retrieves an empty basket. Muse 1 and Muse 3 assist Amie, guiding her into the bathtub. Amie stands inside it.)

(Muse 3 takes her basket, dipping it into the bathtub. The tub is filled with flower petals. She lifts the basket and showers the petals over Amie. The other two muses scoop petals with their hands and rain them over her. Each muse takes a turn.)

(They take her arms, and lead Amie out of the bathtub and down stage. Muse 1 begins to brush Amie's hair. Muse 2 and 3 take cloth to use like towels to brush the remaining flower petals off from Amie's body, rubbing down her arms and legs with the towels. They wrap her up in these towels. Muse 3 emerges with a crown of flowers, presenting it to Amie and placing it on her head.)

MUSE 1

Are you ready for your gifts now?

Alone at the Ibis I close my suitcase but the pull on the zipper breaks. I try not to worry about it. The other pull still works. It will have to do all the work.

ANNABELLE CONE

All You Can Eat

The village named him *orphan* in their vanishing language
but he goes by Steve, wants to be like Steve Jobs.

“Stay hungry, stay foolish,” I can still hear him quoting
at that dinner when everything was looking up for him.

I glazed the domed grill with a hunk of fat
while his fiancée, in her rainbow blouse, draped pork strips

over the grill, too shy to say hello. A sumo statue
loomed above our table, rubbing his belly forever.

When Steve went to chat up a table of girls,
one of their faces opened to him like a paper flower

given a drop of water. Not even he knew, at the time,
how he would come to gather women so easily

with his awkwardness, offering them his entire heart
from the start. Two, three, five at once, until they found out

about the others. His fiancée plucked the legs from a shrimp.
In three months, she’d catch the first bus to Luang Namtha

while he was taking his final exams. A week after,
he’d call me in tears after a crash, saying

he lost his girl, his wallet, now his motorbike, and
can I come get him, he doesn’t have anyone else to call.

I can almost remember how I hoisted him, somehow,
onto the back of my bicycle as he clung to my waist in pain—

but that never happened. When I got there a shopkeeper told me
he was already gone, got a ride to the Friendship Hospital.

How am I his only friend? I wondered, biking home
through rice fields by moonlight alone, no stranger

The Bridal Shower

a 5 minute play

Characters

A.M.I.E. (she/her): Amie is an artificial intelligence robot having her first dream.

Muses/Voice/Scientist: femme, ethereal figures, diverse in age and presentation.

Setting: An engineering lab.

At Rise: Stage right, a rolling steel lab table, locked in place. Seated there is a woman in a long white lab coat, with her face flat down on the table. This is A.M.I.E. A white adapter cable is connected to her arm and runs to a device off-stage. She is very still. Set at front center is a white clawfoot bathtub, in the dark. A harsh, fluorescent light shines over Amie.

VOICE (O.S)

Artificial Machine Intelligence Experiment One is now in sleep mode. What textual data did A.M.I.E. collect from the internet today? Show us Amie, what is on your mind?...@darkacademiajill says “We need nondenominational nunneries. Just places for women to vibe and do rituals and eat fruit.” Image depicts a tanned torso lying in grass in golden light. The torso is sprinkled with dripping red pomegranate seeds. @holyshirtballs says “Honestly though, me and who?” Image is a digital illustration of two sheet ghosts holding hands in a pumpkin patch. @amberfields says “No, I do not dream of labor but I do dream of working on a little farm milking my little cows and wiping my brow with a kerchief. Does this make sense?” If you are a libra rising expect a season of abundance this retrograde. Receive gifts without guilt. Link in bio for full chart readings. Celebrating this beautiful girlie today! Happy Birthday my love! Photo depicts two women laughing, holding hands, on a boat. Feeling more hopeless and alone than usual. If you see this please share cat photos. Hydrated, moisturized, thriving. Best products for dewy, glowy skin: a thread. Missing my mom again. Here is her being a badass fishing in a bikini and bell bottoms, 1967. Image is a blurry photo of a woman in tinted sunglasses holding a cigarette between her lips.

(Amie lifts her head, waking, as the voice continues faster and with increasing anxiety.)

Water's Edge

Wide, calm water of the lake,
soon you will hold my mother.
In ashes form. Bones, honed down
to clean grey nothings.
Body left-overs. Suggestion of an essence.
Just an echo. *She*, she is gone.
Ducks glide the surface.
Sun sparkles through
little waves brought by wind.
Favorite mountain waits, quiet
on the other side, bald rock top in view.
Mom, time was,
you'd swim out bravely,
past the buoys.
Graceful strokes. Confident stride.
That era now set aside,
into a memory box,
to be enjoyed at chosen moments.
A few small leaves,
distinctively pretty,
maple shaped, brightly tinted
and fallen already,
glint up, near my toes
at water's edge.

MARJORIE MOORHEAD

to loneliness, but a stranger to this friend. I would say
he did love those women he broke, one by one,

through his sheer glut of need. When he was discharged
the next morning, there was still grit in his wound.

MITCHELL JACOBS

That Big Green Jellyfish I Made out of an Old T-Shirt

The supplies were all there
in my frat house: scissors,
thread, polyester stuffing.
Someone's hobby. Like you
were kind of my new hobby,
and I really wanted to be good.
The whole idea came at once,
this thing I had to make for you
just because it could be made,
even though I didn't know
if I knew how. The shirt had
a laughing cartoon beer keg on it
but you wouldn't have known
because of how I worked
the fabric, turned it inside-out,
cut the impromptu shapes
from the shape that was there.
The three-foot tentacles frayed a bit
because the cotton was cheap.
I sewed on button eyes and
a smiling D of a mouth, which didn't
make much sense. None of it
made sense. An askew heart
on its underside. I thought I was
making it for you, but now I think
I was teaching myself what loving is,
that little forever past tense
of the backstitch, over and over.
With its plump non-weight
nestled at the back of my neck,
I wrapped its tentacles around
each of my arms and danced
like I was princess of the ocean.
I walked next door to give you
the big green jellyfish

Forest Ranger

On Christmas eve, a man from Wells River dreamed that he went quail hunting *in the celestial fields of heaven* with his long-deceased father. His father, who died from a massive heart-attack when the man was still just a boy of fourteen, was a forest ranger for the town of Wells River and one of the most accomplished woodsmen the town of Wells River has ever known. There were no fires in the forest during his father's tenure as forest ranger, but shortly after his father's death a fire did indeed break out in the forest. On the one hand it could not be asserted that the two phenomena—namely, the death of the forest ranger and the fire in the forest—were related, but on the other hand, it could not be asserted that they were *unrelated*. Nevertheless one senses a connection, no matter how obscure, and certainly the citizens of the town of Wells River sensed a connection. Naturally they said that the new forest ranger who had taken the place of the old one was an incompetent. No sooner does he assume control of the forest, they said, then the forest simply *bursts into flames*. One cannot help but draw certain conclusions, they said. It was unfortunate for the new forest ranger—a highly capable man in his own right—that the forest caught fire so soon after he assumed control. In fact the new forest ranger had been schooled in forest management by the old one—his predecessor—who was then his superior and his mentor, and was said, throughout his apprenticeship, to have been an exemplary student in every respect. But once the forest caught fire he was stripped of all his confidence and seen as manifestly incompetent from then on. We often form an impression on those around us and are henceforth unable to alter the impression we have formed. These impressions go on to haunt us. The town of Wells River is more protective of its forest than any other town and holds its forest in the deepest reverence. Hence a fire in the Wells River forest is no “mere fire” but something akin to a *spiritual catastrophe*, with “endless ramifications for the moral identity of the town.” The man from Wells Rivers' father, the forest ranger whose record had remained unblemished throughout his tenure, was very fond of hunting quail, and often took him, the man from Wells River, his son, to hunt quail with him as a boy. These quail hunting memories are among his fondest memories. And now, on Christmas eve, almost sixty years later, he dreams these memories once again.

ZACHARY FINE

Crystal Forest

Whereas yesterday, having endured the dreadful and treacherous *ice storm*, in which we heard and saw trees cracking and falling over by the dozens, and were left without power for some twenty-four hours, today, to our utter amazement, we awoke to the sight of a *dazzling crystal forest*. The leafless branches of the trees, left exposed in the barren attitudes of winter, had, over the course of the night, acquired a fine layer of ice that showed in the morning sunlight like a *patina of Swarovski crystal*, as my Father so lyrically expressed it. Indeed, the dense network of branches were now intricately delicate sparkling crystal formations, which presented the most beautiful natural spectacle such as we have never before witnessed. Many of the trees' ice laden limbs were bowed down to the ground, their tips just barely touching the earth's surface, as though in submission to the absolute dominion of the ice. These resplendent phenomena of nature which occur randomly of their own volition and exist as if for the sole benefit of the human imagination, never cease to astound me and fill me with the deepest awe and mysterious wonder. Behold the crystal forest, I said, behold the crystal forest. Today marks my 31st year on this earth, and to think, I thought, that it took me 31 years to see the crystal forest.

ZACHARY FINE

and you were standing there
with that wide, nervous grin
I cherished so much
because you were you.

MITCHELL JACOBS

Ondansetron

Don't hesitate, Mom told me as I held a syringe above her butt cheek, *or you'll have to do it again*. Sweatpants waistband shuffled down, she lay face-down on the couch, same one she'd been sleeping on since leaving Dad. Nausea medicine to counteract the oxycontin for her migraine. Without it, her puking woke me every morning.

I slept in a walk-in closet next to the bathroom, my only privacy, 320 cubic feet of it to be exact. I measured. I loved geometry. I'd run my finger along the edge of my neon green plastic protractor. I'd pencil in my careful parallelograms so faint on the white paper that my teacher made me use a pen. Home from school, I'd fetch

another teensy bottle of *ondansetron*, like the name of a robot, and flick it to loose the droplets stuck inside the tip. None wasted. I flicked until my fingernail went red. Snap the bottle open, fill the syringe, push out the air, sink the needle in, push the plunger (steady), pull it out, hold a cotton ball against the blood. I got good

at all the steps but one. How to find a spot where the medicine would go in easy. Was there a formula to triangulate between the mounds

of scar tissue beneath her skin, the past injection sites? I had to feel for them. *Don't think of it as my butt*, she said, *but a batch of pizza dough*.

The corduroy cushions left ragged dark red lines across her thighs.

I couldn't erase them with a quick rub. Couldn't erase the wobbly lines my stubborn stick pen drew in class. I tore the ugliest shapes up: lopsided trapezoids, bulging circles. Mom started sitting lopsided, that day's cheek *the bad side*. Her ass lumps grew tougher and tougher with every stab. I did too, till one day I didn't flinch when she flinched.

MITCHELL JACOBS

If all eight billion of us thought the same thought at the same time, surely that force would be enough to bring you back. This ridiculous, glorious summer for just one more day of longing, sunburn, sweat-soaked nights, one more day to say *please*, sing *thanks*.

ROBIN DELLABOUGH

What My Mother Has Missed for Twenty-Three Summers

August is the wrong month to die. Better to leave
in barren winter than to miss thunderstorms,
plunge and leap into moving river, water falling
forever from rock, wind on hot neck,
tiny clear spheres of sap edging
every leaf of strawberry plants each sunrise.

Cool morning for picking pebbled backyard
blackberries, only one thorn snagged skin.
The huge black crow hops
between languages and laughter,
then flies above three pregnant women.
Who floats in their bellies?

If no two waves are alike, it means
you can't be dead. You are the shells
trimming the shore, discarded mollusks
on diamond shapes the water carves in sand,
rhombus, Greek for a whirling, spinning object.
You craved ocean as if it was your child.

Already nights are colder, cicadas louder,
autumn's overture. It might be too late
for hyacinth bean vines, but if they reach
fall flowering, little purple orchids won't
be the only surprise. Three plump tomatoes
refuse to blush red, peppers fall off too soon.

On Wrights Mountain, mosquitoes biting,
flies stinging, the privilege. *There was an old lady
swallowed don't know why perhaps she died.*
Looked for the Sturgeon Moon on the anniversary
of your death. Sturgeons live in fresh water
for twice as long as you survived.

Chavah Confesses

i am glad to be shut of it

extravagant grapevines hanging
like nooses fruit buxom and proud
hardly a clearing to spread out
and loll on the moss
brands burning around trees
the sticky pall of seclusion

and though there was more
than enough to eat i was never
full of myself
of the world
circumscribed to a walnut
my voice rusted
addressing only one

no stubborn stones to pluck
out and build up shelter fashioned
by my own hands here rooting
restlessly in shrubbery
weight i want
heft and sweat

pain yes bending to man's will even
death my dowry
but i divine these would only sharpen
the pleasure brewing the rebellion
life itself
divine this because knowledge
of the gods is mine from the taboo
trees slaking my thirst
vitality also mine to breed
blossom and nourish
to taste relish and reveal
the world
endless seeds of myself
to scatter

IVY SCHWEITZER

Chavah Overhears Adam Talking to Angels

a visitation the man calls it
 alighting in a blaze
 blinding us singeing the moss
 wings flattening the air

he swells with their
 attention
 bobs his head
 prattles with them through the night
 stories of origins and clashes in heaven
 he will later spill into my ears
 from prideful lips

i find them quite self-full
 the shining ones
 bragging about hobnobbing with Maker
 carrying Their messages
 pretending interest in our arrival
 as if we are an experiment specimens
 to be studied collected

so i slip away to listen in
 on a throng of orange and yellow wings
 talking up a new way
 for sharing pollen
 learned from open-faced
 coneflowers and clusters of milkweed

i am not missed

IVY SCHWEITZER

for ten years, two children, and a move
 cross-country I railed against.

For our tenth anniversary, we chose
 a canopy bed, so high I had to climb up,
 more expensive than anything we'd bought.
 I told him now we had to stay married.
 Eric and Laurie split up before we did.
 Marriages not built to last.

I kept the canopy bed until a neighbor gave
 me a brand-new, full-sized bed she'd bought
 for her ex, who stayed with her after his hip
 replacement. She didn't need the bed anymore.

That bed, called *Sleep to Live*, is faultless
 and so restful, I moved it to Vermont.
 It will be my last state, my last bed.
 Now I can't sleep well in any bed, too many
 slippery dreams and memories to catch,
 to float me the rest of the way.

ROBIN DELLABOUGH

Autobiographical Beds

The first narrow bed was painted
orange polka dots—bright circles
my move toward joy. In high school,
my boyfriend broke that bed.

Then came beds in Brussels, hostels
in Florence, Montenegro, Athens. Back
to a Manhattan apartment for college.
A peeping Tom watched me in that bed—
what size was it? Don't want to remember.

Second year was a double bed in a railroad
flat with four Columbia guys.
One asked me to help his girlfriend,
whose diaphragm was stuck.

Once I didn't use my diaphragm,
those stupid ugly cups. We came back
to that double bed after the abortion.
I ate a whole chocolate cake.

In Berkeley, boys, or men, in beds
like an accordion, twin to full to queen,
back to twin. Why isn't full-size called a prince?
We say queens and kings, as if sleep were royal.

After we returned from the Hawaiian treehouse,
where a flash flood bewildered us, we
had a waterbed briefly. That undulating bed
was terrible for sex, nothing to come against
and too much water. Maybe that's why we broke up,
not because he cheated with a dumpy older woman.

In Los Angeles, my husband built a bed
that Eric, a rocket scientist, designed. Eric
needed a sturdy landing for Transcendental
Meditation levitation. Those beds
were strong but unsightly. We slept in ours

The Lightest Body

there are things I'm so afraid of
I won't even write them in a poem
today I woke with stones in my pockets

heavy baseball-sized stones
I half-remembered walking into the river near our house
sinking to the bottom

because of the stones
I opened Facebook envious and angry
at Friends' successes

as if I were wearing a mask on a busy street
maybe a Noh Mask
Hannya the jealous demon

his twisted toothy grin
pained and mocking and I wore this mask
through the streets of Facebook

as Friends received awards on exotic beaches
inside me a vortex opening
as I walked to the post office

dropping stones out of my pockets onto the road
enough stones to sink a body in a river
and I felt lighter I admit

my body light on my feet
as if I hadn't woke with stones in my pockets at all
but walking home from the post office

I found *more* stones in my pockets
heavy baseball-sized stones
I left these stones on the road

and felt lighter again
an even lighter body than before
a poem popped into my head

that began there are things I'm so afraid of
 I won't even write them in a poem
 but what things I asked myself

surely I with my new *light* body
 the lightest body of all
 the lightest mind

could write the things in a poem
 the things I'm afraid of
 surely I am uniquely qualified for that

then I found more stones in my pockets
 and left them beside the road
 and what thing I asked myself

would I *not* write in a poem
 as my body grew lighter and lighter
 the mind lighter and lighter

I would not even *sink* at this point
 I'd just float on surface of the river
 as if I hadn't woke with stones in my pockets at all

JOHN WALL BARGER

winter farm

I learned to drive at 12, once I could harness,
 hitch. You have to pull the trace chains very tight—
 Dad showed me how to use my knees
 to brace and pull the evener forward,
 speak to the horses, hook the chain
 with a clink. Then tighten the pole strap,
 swing into the driver's seat.
 Once the passengers are settled, pass out blankets,
 turn and sit, adjust the reins, let's go.

Blue dusk glows over the snow,
 the sleigh glides quietly,
 stars swing on as usual above the mountain.
 People are hushed or boisterous,
 winter fields hushed.
 Listen.
 We keep to the field edges, shelter
 from the wind.

It's even quieter than a sailboat,
 the team willing,
 harness jingles answer the stars.
 Orion's belt holds me safe.
 I guide the sleigh wide
 around corners,
 listen to the horses, the rushing stream.
 Time shushes under the sleigh runners.

ERICA BREEN

As the war had progressed and I had followed it, no matter how long I was gone or how far I went I always came back to the Islands, and each time it was like coming home.

We climbed to about 8,000 feet and leveled off there. In the west the sun was setting, and it was an unusually beautiful sunset. As it faded into the purple dusk, I thought that it was an appropriate going away present, a land whose sunsets and scenic wonders had become legendary the world over.

We settled down for the night, making ourselves as comfortable as possible, and then I think each of us in his own way spent those hours in silent preparation for greeting that magic land that lay at the end of our journey. Twelve hours later the pilot came back and told us that in a few minutes we would be over the coast.

I found an unoccupied window and sat with my face pressed to the glass, straining for my first glimpse of America. We had let down to 1500 feet and it was still dark as we came over the Gate. I saw beneath us something that will live in my memory always as the most incredibly radiant and awe-inspiring manifestation of man-made beauty I have ever witnessed. There below us San Francisco sprawled against the blackness of the hills like a mammoth glittering jewel upon a cloth of velvet. A thousand flashing necklaces of light radiated in every direction from the opaque blackness of the bay, forming weird geometrical patterns and blending stars of the first magnitude in a vast galaxy of constellations so numerous and various that seeing it I was stunned by its beauty. The great teeming city of San Francisco had come to me out of the morning mists, not as a city but the heartening symbol of home and light in a world of darkness.

San Francisco was cold and damp that November morning as I stamped my feet on the good solid earth of America, but my heart was warm and more full of hope and eagerness than it had been for years.

BRADLEY F. BEAHAN

“Coming Home” is a piece written by my father, Bradley F. Beahan, upon his return to the United States in November 1944 after spending four years in the South Pacific as part of the 11th Bombardment Group during WWII. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1940 and was stationed at Hickam Field, adjacent to Pearl Harbor, when the Japanese attacked on December 7, 1941. This account will be part of the memoir I am compiling from his records, a project he had long intended to write himself.

MICHAEL BEAHAN

On a Video Call My Mother Says She's Throwing Out Her Seashells

all the shells around the house
which she'd placed carefully
on every windowsill mantelpiece bookshelf

I knew them from when I was a kid
you don't even *see* them
integral to each surface

now my parents almost eighty are divesting
planning to depart
she put them in a bag

small white shells not too many
picked over years
in Cuba Kerala Peru Florida

I ask if she has the brain coral
I took from Cuba “Here!” she says
shifting phone to bureau

I see it the blur of it “It's like” I say
“we thought we would live forever
like the shells” “Yes” she laughs

we thought we'd live as long as the shells
as if *we* were shells
but now

our skin sags and the shells
look the same I took that coral
forty years ago Cuba then behind

the Iron Curtain
we stayed at a cheap resort with Tony
who's dead now a big fan

of Fidel Castro who's dead and
 his brother Raúl who's dead
 after the call I Google

brain corals they last 900 years
 vital to the Cuban ecosystem
 I found it on the beach but still

I should have left it there
 should have left it all
 as it was without touching anything

JOHN WALL BARGER

Coming Home

Many a young man in these past years of uncertainty and fear occasioned by the war has felt a strange and intense emotion when he viewed, for the first time in many months or years, his own personal symbol of home. For some the Statue of Liberty has meant the end of a journey; for others it has been the Golden Gate Bridge. I think each man's symbol of home comes to his heart in its own degree and in its own subtle way, depending on his desires, his experience, and his sensitivity. My symbol of home came to me on a cold November morning in 1944 in the form of a bucketful of stars heaped on the California Coast.

It all began in a dreary barracks in a casual camp near Fort Kamehameha in the Hawaiian Islands. We were five in number: a Jewish doctor whose wife was gravely ill in a Los Angeles hospital; an Italian major whose 32 years as a professional soldier had worn and refined him into a philosopher and a sage; a slight, nervous Captain from the artillery who had served his time and was slated for a staff job on the mainland; a B-24 pilot who lay on his bunk and continually flipped half-smoked cigarettes in the general direction of a butt-can in the middle of the floor; and last and probably least, myself.

That morning the camp officials had instructed us to standby, for the aircraft that was to carry us to the United States had been scheduled for a late afternoon takeoff. The waiting seemed interminable. We smoked, paced the floor and talked casually of inconsequential things. As partners in this long-anticipated adventure our thoughts and words met on a common ground of understanding which, happily, precluded any pretentious formality.

At last, the word came, and we loaded our baggage and ourselves aboard a truck and in a few minutes arrived at Hickam Field, our departure point. Before take-off we were weighed and endlessly, or so it seemed, instructed in the use of safety equipment should our aircraft be forced down at sea. When the preparations were completed, we were called to the flight line to board our aircraft. It was a big, gleaming C-54 and it looked to me like very substantial transportation. I was so used to riding in battle weary B-17s and B-24s all over the South Pacific for the past four years that a four-engine transport looked better than the pre-war 20th Century Limited.

We were airborne at about 1900 hours, and as the pilot pointed the silver nose of our conveyance towards California, I watched the impressive bulk of Diamond Head slide beneath us. It was not without a trace of sadness that I watched the Islands disappear in the distance, for at one time I had been happy there and they held memories that were still close enough to the surface to hurt.