

Summer 2026 | Issue 1

MUSHROOM RAIN



FOREWORD

"Mushroom rain" (or *gribnoy dozhd'* in Russian) is a term used in some cultures for a rare kind of weather: rain falling while the sun is shining. The name stems from the traditional belief that these conditions are ideal for mushroom growth. It is a fertile phenomenon, much like the birth of poetry.

I take it also as a symbol of convergence — the coming of all life-giving things together. Visually, this convergence is sunlight reflecting through rain: illumination within what might otherwise seem grey. It suggests that something hidden can be revealed, that there is a quiet, glistening reality beneath the surface of things. An animating grace, giving shape and light and life.

This is what reading the ineffable in poetry feels like to me, and I hope this becomes a place to hold that feeling, and to share it.

In this issue, unlike in Issue 0, you may notice author names beneath some pieces. Thanks to your submissions, I am able to start building something that relies less heavily on my own work and more on a growing community of writers. Thank you to all contributors for your little sunlit raindrops:

Bruce McRae
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If you would like to contribute to future issues, please write to submissions@mushroomrain.org or complete our online form.

CONTENTS

- 4 BLUEPRINTS
a sense of childhood nostalgia
- 17 FIELD NOTES
observations, perceptions and impressions
- 25 FAULT LINES
moments of tension and shift
- 36 ADDRESSES
to *you* in longing, mostly

b l u e p r i n t s





The Many Summers

Bruce McRae

"The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once."

—Albert Einstein

Boys swimming down a river in the summer rain.
The showers pass, the current pulling them downstream,
time slipping from one century into the next,
cicadas generating their sombre electricity.
They swim into the past and king's estate
(one of these lads will drown in August, though this is late July).
Time circles a drain, the boys on a mission of intrigue.
The golden princes of Mesopotamia bow down to Ishtar.
They're crossing the Euphrates on inflated bladders of hide.
It's good to be alive. The sun-king reigns like a waterfall.

One of the boys becomes a sturgeon and turns away.
He's a spirit among papyrus reeds and Nile's rich silt.
All we can hear is water splashing and children's laughter.
The boys, seven of them, of varied ages and size,
brown as berries, have never been, nor will they ever be, more alive.
Thunder grumbles in the west. It might be gunfire.
Barricades have given way. A battered curtainwall is undermined.

In this heat another boy has winter on his mind.
His psalm writes itself. A letter becomes a word. Words enlist
words. Sentences tangle, Diluvian pond water evaporating,
the boy-pack ensconced behind the lines. A faceless nameless
enemy. The English are coming. Romans are beaching their ships.
Tall ships with watchmen on their prows. Grog in their bellies.
Sucking limes and plucking mealworms from their biscuits.

The boys are swimming in the same dream twice. They shout
and cuss and swallow water. Women are beating linen along the banks.
One looks up as they pass, wiping her brow with a forearm.
She squints. She thinks she recognizes a figure coming towards her.
Work gangs are singing to the rhythm of their swinging scythes.
The shallows disturbed, a small fish leaps among bulrushes.
A guitalele string twangs. A bone flute plays a discordant melody.
The waters of the river rock back and forth in sympathy.
The millennia are various smokes rising. Come the locusts.
Comes the honey from an angry hive, one boy gone underwater.

He opens his eyes and through the murk he finds
a Mayan treasure, a blooded offering, the jawbone of a sacrifice,
the deepest water the colour of wine. Like strawberries and blood,
he thinks, before returning to the surface.

The current has slowed now, then, and tomorrow. Bronze chisels
ping stone in a nearby quarry. The minor gods are watching.
A peon serves laird and lord through taxes and tithes.
It's half past Dreamtime, a falcon diving among paper Chinese kites,
burnished, like the sun that's setting, and one boy hollers,
red-faced as the mother who's calling him home.
Floating on his back, the clouds resemble galleons and stallions.
His wife-to-be is about to be born. She'll make his favourite stew.
Their first child will sicken and die. Many are to go un-souled.

The boys are tiring of drifting and wade ashore, neolithic
hunters hunkered in a lamplit eden, made sullen with weather.
Time is dragging its bluestone megalith. This was once a night
when stars aligned, centuries before the late morning's cloudburst.
Men named insects, flowers, trees, and called it good.
Like Horus's eye, death sees both past and future.

By now, by then, the boys are walking along a gravel road,
returning to the river's source, to a nation's origins.
Mercenaries, they're in love with battles and mime explosions.
They joke about the Holy Grail of women's things,
the mysteries of limestone caverns, of tadpoles wriggling in ditchwater.
They're walking upright across a savanna, a spring breeze
mussing in the tall grass, upwind of giant panthers, past
a parkette named for a local alderman who had done good work,
then disappeared with a neighbour's wife and Christmas hamper.

Almost home, gilded towers become burning mansions in Atlanta.
Late afternoon, vultures soar on thermal updrafts.
The boys invent new airplanes and talk about dreams they've known.
"A revolution," says one, "When losing your head was of a fashion."
Soon they'll take their separate paths in the dimming light.
Great obelisks will split and tumble and silver blackens.
Another day begins, a green hand combing over bones and tombstones.
Finding a skull, it will brush away the glowing sands.
A brass horn will call. Their stories shall remain unwritten.



Coming Home

Editor

Alerted by the sound of a car door,
a gate latch,
the dog's exuberant greeting:
Instinct drives her outside, but she holds back
from the object of her innate anticipation.
The air he carries is foreign; it smells of the city —
of brake dust and printed paper.
The bag on his shoulder is an alien obstacle,
which she makes no attempt to overcome.
She marvels, instead, at the secrets inside;
a portal, no doubt, to some great infinity.
Eventually, the smell dissipates,
swallowed up and extinguished by home.
The bag is placed in a corner
along with all her reservations.
With time, the strange unknown things acquire familiarity,
building trust by the promise of safety to come.
Now, the smell of the city
is a comfort she seeks.



big wooden house

Editor

A big wooden house
with a small wooden room
and one big swishing tree
in the window
with a little square of lace
cut to stop the biting flies
little bed
in the corner
holding fast
to those back-to-school bad dreams
all these books, and these drawers,
even toys, lie untouched
preserved patiently in place
to be read and to play and to dress
those two kids
who have houses of their own
made of plaster and of brick

Family Lore

Howie Good

My dad's dad, Zayde Jake, broke his nose long before we ever met. To refer to his nose as "broken" is frankly an understatement. It looked as if it had been flattened, macerated, and then molded into a vaguely biomorphic shape and left to harden. According to family lore, he broke it – or, more exactly, had it splattered across his face – in a street brawl with communist stooges determined to take over the union he had helped organize. Whatever the facts of the case, the truth is he was one tough guy and about as far from a doting grandpa as you could get. He smoked unfiltered cigarettes (Camels) that stained his fingertips yellow. He gambled at cards. He gunned a shot of slivovitz every evening before dinner. Most days he went around unshaved. My mom, who had a ladylike abhorrence of rough behavior, disliked him intensely. I still remember the bristle-brush feel of his stubble when I kissed him on the cheek.

I wish I'd photographed this man I saw once

Editor

Young dad with a child
On his arm
In a strop,
And in his back pocket,
Fallen head first,
A small yellow bear
With a smaller red top.

I thought, at the time,
That it was simply sweet
To see such a sight
In the rain, on the street.
But now, looking back,
I think it's all due
To the fact that I miss
My own Winnie-the-Pooh.



childhood dreams

Editor

As it turns out, it was a dream
that I was flying
down stairs nightly.

Nonetheless,
I did believe
in daylight I'd jump,
hovering slightly



past lives

Editor

There's I and I
And you and you
There's childhood sweet
And scared of school
One language played
The other dreamt
Now that we are here
Here is where I am meant

For Poppy

Editor

"I love cats because I enjoy my home; and little by little, they become its visible soul." — Jean Cocteau

It was World Book Day and I was eight. Rows and columns and swathes of books were arranged in diagonals across my classroom, transforming it, to me, into an entirely new thing. They all looked the same, the books, except for one. Light pink, larger than the rest: *Me and My Kitten* in purple glitter it read, and I had to have it. In the days and weeks that followed, I poured over that book as though it were some sacred text.

"Please can we get a kitten?"

I begged and pleaded with my parents. For what felt like forever. And then, one day, we were driving down a lane on the back-way home from Taunton: a "kittens for sale" sign at Beehive Farm. There were ten of them. Black and white mostly, and one all-black one, the runt of the litter. All ten going for free. My parents let me pick. I was stuck between two—two girls of course—one with a little pink nose with a black dot on it, and another—an all-black nose with the black smudge spilling over slightly onto her tiny muzzle.

We went back a few weeks later, once the kittens were old enough to go home. The little black one had died. And I chose the kitten with the black smudge nose—perhaps as an unconscious ode to him; for whatever reason it felt like an easy decision. Straight after we picked her up, we went for a walk around Neroche forest. I protested, but it was no use. I was wearing a brown coat with a fur collar, and her tiny body nestled in my collar the whole way around. Coming to the end of the walk, I decided we should call her Poppy. It was November and the poppies were out on people's collars.

When we got home, my mum suddenly announced that the cat would be living in the shed. Again, I protested. Poppy was put in the shed and left there. I begged and pleaded for her to be brought back inside the house, and, with my dad's help, my demands were eventually met. The little tiny thing was shell-shocked. I took her into my arms and lay her down on the sofa, where she fell asleep. I sat not beside her, but in front of her, and scooted my bum forward, so that she lay hidden between the small of my back and the back of the sofa. My friend came round to visit, but I told her to be quiet and I didn't let her move or touch or play with or disturb Poppy in any way. I was eight years old and she made me a mummy.

Before long, she was a kitten playing. She played in particular with the bright fluffy ends of our glittery pencils. One time, she accidentally peed in a shoe and my dad stuck her face in it. After that, she only ever did her business outside. If ever she was locked inside with no way out she used the bath, or even the toilet. As she grew, fluffy pens turned to fluffy bunnies. She would eat her kills under the trampoline, leaving behind a selection of organs and fur—like she knew exactly what she was doing. She liked following us around. She would come to the school field on sunny days, interrupting our games of rounders to say hello. One time, she followed us almost to the neighbouring village, to our grandma's house. Everyone was shocked and found it so funny, but I knew it was because she loved us. My grandma gave her cow's milk even though you're not supposed to, and she scratched her chin.

"She likes it there," she said.

No she doesn't, I thought, she likes it on the top of her head.

By this time, I had finished *Me and My Kitten* and moved onto reading obsessively about what happens when your cat has kittens. I wanted more! I became so obsessed with this fantasy that I convinced myself Poppy was pregnant. I begged and pleaded with my parents to set up a bed for her, since this is the done thing—a nesting box. They reluctantly agreed. I gave her an old cardboard crate with blankets inside and waited patiently. One morning, I was the first downstairs. I was on the stairs that go down to the living room, but are arranged so that you cannot see the living room until you are on the bottom stair. As I descended, I could hear little tiny squeaks. Four groomed and healthy kittens with their 9-month-old mummy Poppy in the crate with the blankets. I was nine and she became a mummy.

I so badly wanted to spend time with the kittens, but we had to go to Russia for the Summer holidays—six weeks, a whole lifetime. Dad went back to England once and I begged and pleaded with him for photos, but the signal in the village where we were was too bad. Then we got back home. School started again. The kittens were sold or given away. Another morning, I was the first downstairs. As I descended, I could hear little tiny squeaks. Three groomed and healthy kittens on their own on the armchair. We hadn't known she was pregnant, and we hadn't prepared. Soon, we found more kittens scattered about the place, ungroomed, one behind the tv, another behind the sofa. Poppy wouldn't tend to them. We had to give them milk and keep them warm as best we could. We lost four and four survived. I never knew why Poppy did that. Maybe because we hadn't given her a crate and blankets, or maybe it was too soon after her previous litter. But now I think it was because she didn't want us to go away to Russia again. After the second litter, we had Poppy spayed.

In 2009, we moved house. Only down the road, but it was a whole new cat neighbourhood. Poppy was unsettled. She would get into fights. Someone cut her ear and she had a chunk missing for the rest of her life. One time, she got such a big cut on her tummy I think she maybe almost died, but I didn't know that at the time. We went to Russia. When we got back, Poppy was missing. We looked and asked after her everywhere. It turned out she was living in a barn on our old road. Sharing it with some alpacas. She didn't like the new house, and liked being left in it alone even less. After that she got used to it, though. She would greet us at home when we came back from Russia. I just had to call her in a high-pitched *popppeeeee*.

She was affectionate. She had a loud purr. She would climb on our pillows and on our laps and she would dribble contentedly. When I would cry and go to my room, she would come in and purr loudly until my sobs stopped. Like she knew me. I felt so understood and comforted by her, when I, in all my childish drama, felt misunderstood by the whole entire world. I was 10, 11, 12 and she was my mummy.

When she was 5, we got a dog. She hated us for that. As she got older, she stopped roaming the village as much, she stopped following us around. But she would tap on the window for a cuddle at 6am. Her face smelled like home and a little bit like onions. I was older, too. I started chasing and having by accident new experiences. I forgot to keep her the centre of my world. I left home and went to university. And each time I came home she would greet me like she'd never forgotten to keep me as hers. I would stare at her eyes; they were like old maps. It was so clear to me she had a soul. So clear she knew me and I knew her. One time, I got a bit high in my room with an ex-boyfriend and Poppy was there. I believed that nothing existed outside of the room. And I remember thinking that made so much sense. Of course Poppy was the only real one. I was 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and I hope she knew she was my best friend.

One time, when I visited, Poppy's fur was coming off and her skin was all raw in places. I fought with dad to take her to the vets. They said it could be allergies and we tried steroids a few times. They worked temporarily over the course of a few years. One time I visited and she was so thin, and acting strangely. I told her I loved her and fought with dad to take her to the vets and paid for her blood test myself. They said she could have one of two things but we should rule out one of them first. One time I visited and she was still thin and her hair was matted. I fought with dad to take her again, the vet said her heart was too fast, and she finally got the medicine she needed. She gained some weight back. I tried to check in. She got ill again without me knowing. The doses, the vet told my dad, had to be administered properly, twice a day. She got better again. I was 24, 25, 26, 27 and she was my poorly baby.

Every time I came home *poppeeeeeee* would be the first thing on my lips. I would need to find her to make sure she was alive. That she hadn't died without my parents telling me. I would find her and she would lick me, as if I was the baby.

One time when I visited I gasped. She looked so old. She was slow and her hair was coarse. I cried and she purred. She still purred loudly and immediately upon contact and she dribbled more than ever. She couldn't retract her claws. But she was okay. She lived like this, happily I hope. She had her medicine, she asked for food, she ate, she slept. Shitty canned food from Amazon but she still ate it. Her younger bunny-eating years helped her out, I like to think. She even made friends with the dog. She strayed no further than the house and garden.

One day, because the weather was too hot, she stopped eating and she just slept. The weather cooled, but she kept on sleeping. When she died, dad said her body stayed warm in the sun for a while. The dog lay beside her and didn't realise what had happened. He said she looked like she was a kitten again. Her fur all smooth and sleek again. She was 19 and a kitten. My *Me and My Kitten* except I wasn't there to save her, or to say goodbye.

I'm sorry Poppy that I wasn't there. I'm sorry that I left home at all. To go to uni, and to go to Germany, and to live in London. I'm sorry for leaving you to go to Russia, and I'm sorry I didn't know you were having kittens the second time. Thank you for comforting me with your purr. I've conjured it countless times over the years and I can hear it now. It's deep and full and loud with love.

But now you're back with me I suppose, in a way. Back to following me around the village. Now you're with me wherever I go.

All My Relations

Mike Nichols

In the schoolyard at dawn I counted a murder.
Thirteen crows. They launched from the roof
of the cafeteria in ones and twos to alight in the
soccer field, as if they wanted to be counted.

Several of them launched directly over my head.
Undeniably a grand omen. Crows are considered
omens of bad luck, or of death, but I feel an affinity
for them. They band together in family groups. Their
neurotransmitters and hormones are similar to my own.

Couple this event with the face of Skeletor I've seen
for three mornings in the moon and one might believe
that death is coming for someone. Maybe for everyone.
This warning is likely to change nothing I do.

Thirteen is the true number of lunar cycles in a year. Representing the Feminine.

Thirteen is the number of Christ's betrayal. A spark in the deep tinder,
setting off centuries of Christian conflagration.
Crows refuse to suffer judgement.

Feral beings who ask nothing. Who do not share the human
tendency to self-pity. Who seem impervious to the various
seasons' freeze and swelter. Who live on the knife-edge of
starvation, with everything and nothing to lose. Crows hold
vigil around their fallen. Funereal, keeping the scavengers at bay.

Maybe Mr. Meigio is still here too. Kinda seems like a thing he'd do.
Get in league with crows just to say hello. Perhaps understanding it takes a lot
to get my attention.

Back in Black

Daniel Miltz

South Detroit wasn't a neighborhood, it was a bruise that never healed. The Polish families on our block worked themselves raw, smoked cheap cigarettes on their porches, and talked about the old country like it was some lost heaven they'd traded for a paycheck. My grandparents on my mother's side came from that world; Polish to the bone, proud and unforgiving. My father's parents were German, stiff as iron fences and twice as cold. Between the booze, there wasn't much room for softness. I learned early that emotions were for people who could afford weakness. I couldn't.

By six, while most kids were learning to color inside the lines, I was shining the cracked boots of drunks in beer gardens. Their breath hit my face in sour waves, their hands heavy on my shoulder when they slurred their life stories. They'd tell me to stay out of trouble with the same mouth that encouraged me to fight if anyone pushed me around. They were contradictions in human form, and I absorbed all of it. Their language became my language. Their toughness became my armor.

I went to Catholic school, but I didn't stand a chance. The nuns tried, God bless 'em, but I already had an attitude. I smiled during prayers, carved different words into hymnals, and spent more hours at mass and in confession, than in class. By fourteen, I was out of catholic school and had fully stepped into the skin I thought the world demanded: black clothes, greasy pompadour, smirk, curled lip, that said, try me. I kept a toothpick or matchstick between my teeth not because it looked cool, but because it kept me from grinding them down from my attitude. That thing in my mouth was the only restraint I had.

The cheap red wine was worse. We drank it under flickering streetlights behind the pool hall, our shadows long and restless on the brick walls. It warmed me in a way nothing else did, burning a hole where fear should've been. At the railroad tracks, we yelled until our lungs rasped, flattening pennies, just to watch something break under pressure, maybe because we knew we were breaking too.

I fought because it felt like the only time the world made sense. A hundred fights? Easy. Maybe more. Some I walked away from laughing, others left me bleeding onto concrete while the taste of metal filled my mouth. I was a bully, plain and simple. I didn't pick fights, I collected them. When you grow up in a place where way of thinking is currency, you learn fast that you're either the one swinging or the one getting swung on. Stealing wasn't rebellion. It was instinct. Fruit from gardens, vegetables from yards, small stuff from corner stores. I knew each creaking fence, every loose board, every blind spot. Half the neighborhood fed me without ever meaning to.

Public high school was a zoo, and I was one of the animals that refused to stay in its cage. I took shop and industrial arts classes so I could stay away from the so called nerds. I felt more comfortable around people who liked working with their hands, building things, and getting messy. Back then, it seemed easier to blend in than stand out. Looking back, I realize I was really just trying to figure out where I belonged. The shop classes gave me a sense of purpose and confidence, even if my reasons for choosing them weren't perfect. Over time, I learned that everyone has their own strengths, and labels never tell the whole story.

After high school I got a job at Ford Auto Plant, stayed a few years. Then, I got my hands on a muscle car that growled like something alive. Freedom! The cops chased me so often I started recognizing the officers by voice. Sirens at my back, adrenaline burning through my skull that was the closest I ever came to freedom. I always outran them. Never got caught. Either way, it was better than feeling nothing. I wasn't just a kid in black. I was a storm walking on two legs, angry at everything and terrified of nothing except standing still long enough to face myself. South Detroit didn't just raise me; it twisted me into something sharp and reckless, something that didn't know how to step out of the dark. And the truth is, maybe I didn't want to. But five years after high school, I left everything behind, I packed up and headed to California, chasing something bigger, something real. I was ready to carve out a life that really mattered and had meaning, to step out of the shadows I'd carried for so long.

f i e l d n o t e s



High Clouds and Wild Winds

Wilson F. Engel, III

high clouds and wild winds
while spring sunshine streams through leaves
birds cry from green marsh.

pet's cat missed beetles
wide as crepes, six legs wiggling
on the bare wood floor.

blood in the rinse cup,
my teeth sing as I fix on
a picture of picnickers.

the dentist drills deep
probing for decay near nerves
somnolent soundings.

traffic sounds with sirens
distract as low jets fly by
do I clench my fists?

former horse lady
spent twice this time and yet then
I thought of Flicka.

Personal Raindrop

Fred Gerhard

It was on my walk
that I looked up
the sky-darkened haze
drawn across sun
as if in reply

And a single drop of rain
fell warm to the bridge of my nose
I let it roll, just roll
before lifting my hand
to touch, then taste

my personal raindrop
sweet
mixed with salt
it seemed

And no more did I
search the sky
but noticing my toes
had strayed from cement path
to patch of moss

there I stayed, peering down
saying "Yes" out loud
to what might be looking up
to me
for a sign

The Old Woman of the Woods

Helen Jones

Out in the woods.
Nothing except the birds
Singing,
Trees
Susurrating their leaves,
Waiting.

Until it seems the air parts
And she is there,
Watching,
Hair like clouds,
Floating on the breeze,
Her face,
Carved from the angled rock,
Staring.

I stay still,
Fearful,
I am seeing a legend,
The old woman of the woods,
The witch of children's rhymes.
She stands
Rough as the sea
Darkness around her
As if all the light
Absorbed into her body
Had clawed the lines
Across her moon-cratered face,
Lightning- fast had twisted her hands
To claws.

She shouted,
Words bounced against my head,
Unknown words formed of trees and rocks.
I run.
She disappears,
Folded back into the woods
Which made her.

Excerpts

Nasta Martyn

[...] I remember only one thing, and the eyes,
Were like taut flax strings, [...]

[...] Sometimes a mountain falls down,
Curling up like a snail,
Absorbing the world to give birth to a point [...]

[...] I know it's my last cigarette...
But what to do when the smoke looks like a
butterfly
From an ancient tribe [...]

[...] She had two dark dragonfly eyes,
She hid her thoughts
Adjusting to reality [...]

Breath: Part One

David Dephy

Silence is pregnant with words.
Mountain drifts on the mist.
The sky kisses its forehead
with the lips of rain.



don't dragonflies grieve?

Editor

I close my eyes and a strong breeze
blows past my left ear while
my right is somehow shielded
by shoulder or by hair

The breeze stops
but I can hear out of the same
left ear that it has claimed
a neighbouring tree
as its next victim

I open my eyes just in time
to witness a small huddle of bubbles
disappearing together
beneath the surface of the pond,
as if the letting out of a dying breath—

and yet the birds rejoice
and dragonflies dance over the grave
and the sun is warm

Movement

T.M. McLean

It moves.
Of course it does,
But I can't see it, can I?

An orb
Travels through the sky;
We see it there for sure.

New day,
Much like the last.
I'm the same, aren't I?

A line —
A brand new crease.
Something has changed.

Grey shock,
A tuft not there before.
How has this come to be?

Movement.
A journey through time;
Imperceptible decline.

f a u l t l i n e s



No Light Perception On Fire

Bobby Steve Baker

They come like a miracle birth
from which we flee in terror
the fires of the mind
from deep in the old brain
the reptilian brain
trauma is never in the past tense
the fires burn all night
cracking hot lungs full of smoke
God will not let them touch
the church
but He does, over and over
there is no escape. Run
to the road drag the priest
beg to be taken.
they come no matter where
fires of the mind are always
in the present tense
respite only wide awake
in total darkness but
even there slowly we are betrayed
our own eyes
evolved to see adapt
objects grow
from pitch black darkness
it feels like a miracle that feels
like a nightmare
a blind man in respite now
navigating the room
details of my sleeping wife's face
in the faint glow of starlight
how long will it be until
I can see the fires
feel the heat we all know
is with us now

Chains of Mundane

Bobby Steve Baker

How can I be so like a slug
stuck on a sidewalk
after a rain
I have studied the classics
read all the greats
worshiped at the feet
of St Vincent Millay and O'Hara
Oh Frank and Edna
please don't fight over me
just take turns
whispering
gentle themes of transcendent
beauty in my ear
I will write them down
and give you
a footnote
as if I just got off
the Staten Island Ferry

No Room

Editor

there is no room:
today's mist making gentle the horizon

nor breaking leaves, forgetting sun
or smiles or ice cream

no room for me
in so entire a hatred
in black cement spread on my soul,
my soul mistaken for it, made opaque

and I am blind
because of you

I cannot see the soft horizon

Ironclad Paperweight Monarch

Nattie O'Sheggzy

Were I inclined to knead
A monarch between my fingers.
All I needed
Was some dark nights, blinders
On the light and the courage to look monstrous
To stare at old scars in the twinkling stars.
Lest faces and timid mouths dissuade
The escapades of exerting little air
In the lungs of the groaning monarch.
I would bolster my soul with variegated wings
Of the poised butterfly on the sill.
Time whispers in lyrics, rhyming off
At the edge of the paper.

Monarch, I realized I was the short end
Of the joke, the butt of presumption.
My apologies for the phalanges I mistook
For the appetite to rent your royal robes
Forgive me for the antennae I tore
Away from the center of your head.
Your blood painted my hands purple.
I have little more to tell your resplendent self,
But don't begrudge me for discarding your carcass
Among the pack of wolves.



Ice Crack

Jon Summers

Ice crack. A cold wind,
ill in bed again. Broken.

Is it dark already?

There is truth here,
in this reduction to
the basics. Naked,
watching grey light through
a thin pane of glass,
holding to the flight of
a magpie carrying only
sorrow in its bare,
bleeding maw. See, this
is all that you are.

Possession

Ali Rowland

Only five minutes after we have parked the birds return,
filling the damp evening with their clatter. They're used to cars
becoming part of their landscape for a while, then passing on.
The sparrows chirp, a goldfinch trills and dances,
a gull lands on the car roof and lets its footfalls
echo like a drunken cymbalist. A spider has found the wing mirror,
perhaps by colliding with it, or maybe it has travelled with us.
In any case, it's built a home, and already there's a fly vibrating
there in protest against the sticky threads.

Nature adapts so quickly, whereas we have to grieve a loss,
and then readjust. I'd like to wind the window up
and give in to observe from inside while creatures crawl
along the bodywork, then creep into the engine,
as moss settles in the rubber seals of windows,
and the whole hard case around us
gradually becomes no longer ours.

In favour of Leaving

Editor

I know it will be good
For me to leave.
The brand new air, I know,
Will settle on me
Like feathers made of peace
And sparkle laughter—
Sweet and full and beckoning.
It will flood me
In my body,
Drown me in a kind of safety
Known only in the absence of your hands
Covering my eyes.
I know all this
Because it happened all before,
 Just so,
And I came back
To tell myself to leave again.

This time, though,
I cannot wait
To feast on how it all will feel—
To fill my lungs
With brand new air
Until they turn a healthy pink
And stay,
 Just so,
For good, this time.

An Ode to Moreton Avenue

Editor

no longer must I seek to find
in all things just a hiding place
nor must I fear these walls
simply because
they, too, have seen your face

so, I let know my cowering mind
that it is safe, low is the tide
she'll hear a soft melodic clang
the walls, she'll learn,
were on her side

and as she learns
she'll come to know
what actually it means *to be*
not hidden, nor with limbs held down,
but plainly, fully there, and free

Troubadour

Shayla Dodge

They say I know nothing about love.
I say they know nothing about me.
Maybe I am a cowboy and a troubadour,
an old-time song-singer
That beats the dust from the rugs
each day in the middle of the corridor.
Maybe I feed the pigeons.
And when they come into the house from the front porch
I shoo them away with a broom.
But they keep coming back,
because they know where love is.
I need to tell the story about dying
And how living while dying is an extremely
hard and exaggerated thing.
And that even with the whiskey it makes you old
faster than growing children.
I need to tell them I love them and not push them away.
But I do. I do anyway.
Because going is like taking a piece of your heart away.
And few friends can understand how time is a circle.
And we are always trying to reconnect the spinning cycles.

teeth of the sun

Linda M. Crate

i was born beneath
the moon,
and i find the teeth
of the sun
are sometimes entirely
too sharp.



a d d r e s s e s



Orange

Martina M

peeling an orange
is this what your skin would feel like
if we danced

I close my eyes.

the Atlantic turns into a still pond

which star do you want me to take down for you this evening
and place around your wrist

hold my hair
braid it into a new constellation

do not let another morning take you away from me

my only breathable space
is the seconds after waking
when my heartbeat is still synchronised with the Atlantic wind

soon even that is torn apart by sparrows

here there is nothing else left
but the peel of another orange



Getting By
Bernard Pearson

He had half a mind
To tell her that he knew,
But she was only half listening,
So they made their half lagers,
Last half a life longer.



Going, Going, Gone

Bernard Pearson

I see planes in the sky
Vapour trails like
The past slowly fade,
no longer referencing
The empty void
that infinite blue
dividing heaven and earth
and me from you.

Vanishing Point

Fred Gerhard

for Ukraine,
for Bill, who told me sometimes
“little” and “gentle” can be the same word

little rain
such little rain
I hold you
in the gentle of my hands
cupped

the shape of your shoulder
for what you shoulder

like blue sky calm
on yellow land
protecting all that’s little
gentle
curled as language

Ukraine blue
on yellow

and the fine line
of distance
we do not see
between us

grounding things

Editor

1. whether it's the chairs rolling on the floor above my head, or thunder
2. thunder
3. your face fitting into mine

tractors and earth and a slow spreading

Editor

yesterday I watched
as big metal arms
lifted brand new soil and spread it onto the old,
darkening it where sun and time
had stripped all colour.
I reached into the space around me
as if the present could be grasped
like strings of tangible time
to be held down,
to make it last.
and then they had covered the whole patch of old earth with new soil
and I hoped you still felt the same.

what if it's actually all fine

Editor

what if the fear that there is too much of my pain for you to hold
is null and void because
you make me light?
what if, when spoken
for your ears,
the past will shatter
and its shards will fall away
so quietly we do not even notice?

Fences

Vidya Hariharan

Moist lips pursed
to kiss, a quick pat,
ritual goodbye said
at the gate
hand half-raised
in a half-hearted goodbye.

“Leave, please”.

Inside,
quiet greets me,
thankfully.

My only fear—ennui.

Hallway

William Gibson

Stare down the hallway,
Your self stares back at yourself.
Inquisitive, he asks,
“So where does all my love go?”

“You just give it”
Yourself advises,
Innocent, he wonders,
“So where has yours gone?”

“It’s given”
You reveal,
“It went along with time.”

Breathe: Part Two

David Dephy

The water is calm.
Your reflection on it
makes it precious.

Breathe: Part Three

David Dephy

The shell rests in my palm.
The sea has vanished from the shore.
I still miss you, heart.

Trapped in Memory

Daniel Miltz

Inside an old forgotten book
I found a flower, pale and thin
Its color fled a long time ago
Yet somehow it remembered spring
I held it gently in my palm
And watched a decade reappear
The crowded café, nervous laughs
The promise hanging in the air
We were a chapter never read
A letter left without a stamp
Two paths that touched for just a while
Before the map erased the chance
The flower crumbled into dust
Returning softly to the years
Some memories are meant to fade
Yet leave their fragrance when they go

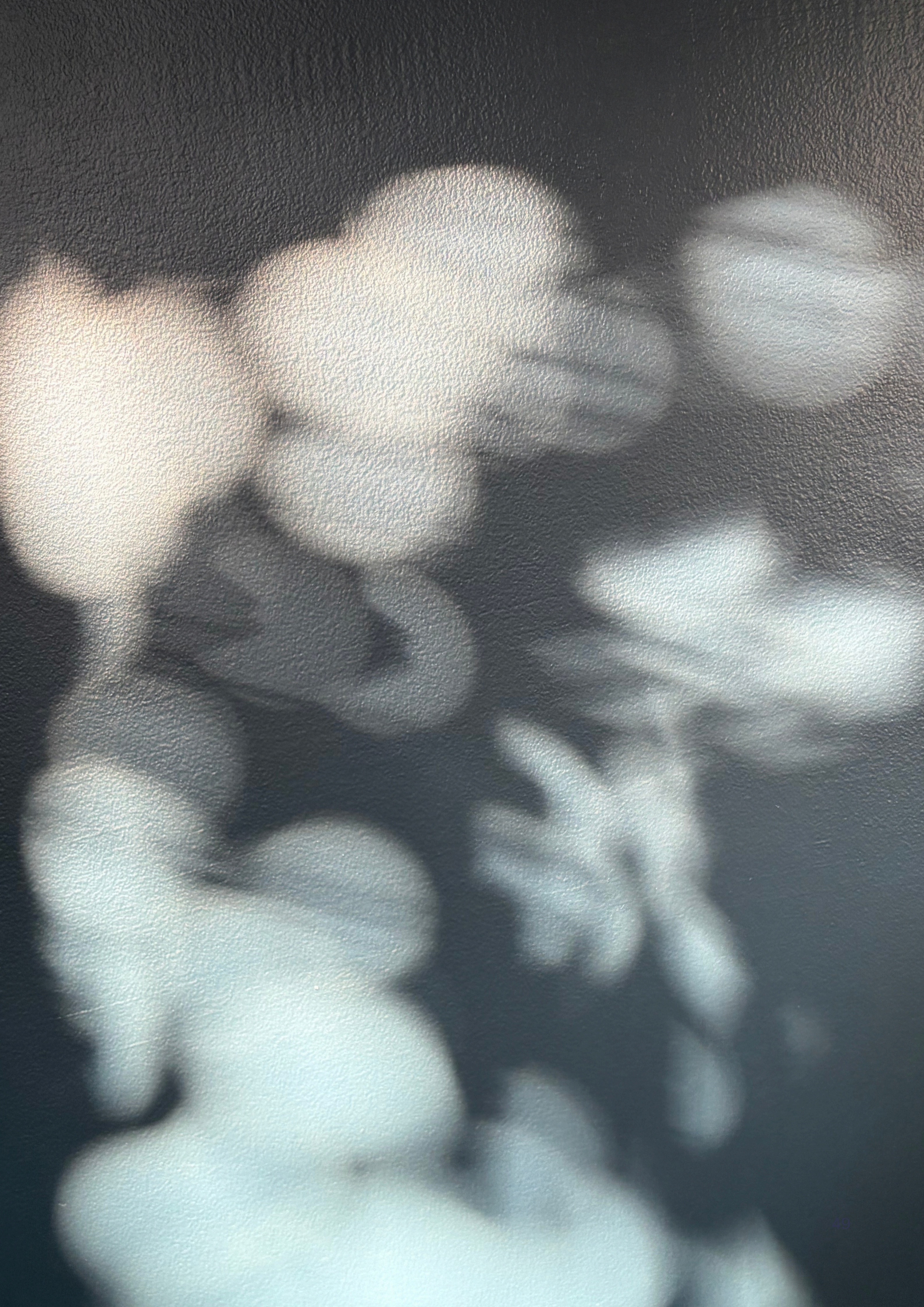
Two Misfits

Strider Marcus Jones

it was no time
for love outside—
old winds of worship
found hand and mouth
in ruined rain
slanting over cultured fields
into pagan barns
with patched up planks
finding us two misfits.

i felt the pulse
of your undressed fingers
transmit thoughts
to my senses—
aroused by autumn scents
of milky musk
and husky hay
in this barn's faith
we climbed the rungs of civilisation
so random in our exile—

and found a bell
housed inside a minaret—
with priest and muezzin
sharing its balcony—
summoning all to prayer
with one voice—
this holy music, was only the wind
blowing through the weathervane,
but we liked its tone to change its time.



Heaven is still light streaming in
Editor

Heaven is still light streaming in, and light dappled, and the gilded outline of a cloud. it is still lungs full of autumn and a clear, crisp step. it's the beauty of a blank wall in the straightness of its edges, and an escalator, warmly lit. it is life, hand in hand with life, like mushroom rain falling through full sun—

but my new heaven is the soft purr of a small black cat at dawn. it's the smell of her home-soaked fur, and her silhouette at the window. my new heaven is football boots and put-up shelves and home-cooked meals and something on the telly. it's a warmth on the back of my neck and the first eyes to rest on me without wavering. Heaven is your love for me and for our little black cat.



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Thank you 😊

