



Crowstep

Poetry Journal

COLLECTION 1

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## Darning

I saw two birds darning a tree,  
with winged eye and point  
in looping swoops, using invisible  
thread flown through branches  
left unwoven by winter.

It happens fast, this job:  
anchor points, intersections,  
reclaimed fabric tufts pierced  
and sutured at the leaves till  
the tree is fixed for nesting.

Our ellipses were longer that day,  
called out, as we were, by sunshine  
like the birds—my circuit out  
to the coast, yours inland,  
both of us flying the knot.

True, our orbits had diverged  
recently; we'd dragged curved  
messages about the house,  
towed them like aerial banners,  
but it was a joy to tie the bow again.

**John Kefala Kerr** is a British Greek sound artist and writer. His work has featured at festivals and venues in the UK, Europe, USA and Japan. His poetry is published by Live Canon and Arachne Press and his debut novel *Thimio's House* is published by Roundfire Books.

## Lenguaje Resonante | Echoing Language

Yo hablo, yo hablo así, you hablo así, en mi corozón...

When I began to speak, I parroted  
Mariposas instead of butterflies  
and they appeared to be tropical,  
but I realised I was landlocked and  
it was winter with dusty snowflakes  
taking over from an unknown place,  
but in me it was hot, patacone crumbs  
clung to my salted lips and a sunspot  
in a photo held me closer to her,  
but language and places have changed,  
days so far away from palm trees, and  
Caribbean waves recede with miles  
and miles of exile, my empty mouth  
open and trembling a ghost of words  
veiling a forgotten culture,  
everywhere colours I can no longer describe.  
It's all bled together now  
into a spring day— migrating  
I've returned, listening at night,  
feeling my turning tongue inside me.  
I awaken that vernacular through  
song and sound again and again before  
I sleep, and from abroad I stitch memories  
and echo words under my skin.  
Slowly, misplaced phrases return  
softly revealing their delicate wings.

**TAK Erzinger** is an American/Swiss poet and artist with a Colombian background. Her debut chapbook entitled *Found: Between the Trees* was published by Grey Border Books, 2019. Erzinger's most recent poetry collection *At the Foot of the Mountain* (Floricanto Press, 2021) was recently selected by Etchings Press, University of Indianapolis as the Whirling Prize winner for 2021 for best nature poetry book.

## A Freshly Baked Scone

You tug at the tattered edge  
of the sky, risking a collapse  
of fabric that would drape  
skyscrapers and church steeples  
and smother innocent passersby.  
I know the ragged clouds offend  
and the seam where sad old mountains  
meet the sunset needs restitching.

But you're not the world leader  
who can deploy a million trained  
tailors and dressmakers to fix  
what eight thousand years of faith  
have failed to uphold. Leave it,  
and sit and enjoy your tea.  
I brewed it the way you like it,  
added milk to color it

the tawny shade you associate  
with the lapping of the harbor  
after dark. Your obsession  
with cosmic imperfections can't  
end well, the scale too inhuman.  
The war in Ukraine continues,  
the sub-Saharan genocide  
hasn't yet exhausted its evil.

Dragging the sky down over us  
won't snuff the gray philosophies,  
won't solve the greed of majesties.  
How about a freshly baked scone?  
It's not quite Scottish quality,  
but it's complete in itself  
and will wash down easily  
with hardly a catch in your throat.

**William Doreski** lives in New Hampshire, USA. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Mist in Their Eyes*, 2021 and his essays, poetry, fiction and reviews have appeared in various journals.

## At Night my Body is a Furnace

No one told me this process is electric/ice fractals to desert mirage/I dream I am trapped in a car parked at Fish Hook Bay/where a man surfed the rotten carcass of a whale/out here I am blind to the flame's brilliance/harried by the ticking of matriarchal clocks/even the recent past becomes a faraway land/ferns damask my amygdala/old pathways seal shut/impurities slough away/we are dropped into the world like a wolf cub, we go out like a lamb/woman redundant/woman triumphant/woman on the verge of the change.

## Wildling

*After James Tate*

I found myself in an equestrian barn containing faded farm machinery and fitted out with roomy stalls. My right hand in front of me, unrecognisable, was brushing the coat of a dark-coloured warmblood. After a few moments a man entered the barn and asked me to throw down a hay bale from the loft. "Of course, right way sir" I said. "You are an odd fish today" he replied, laughing. As I ascended the ladder, my skull began to elongate east to west, brimming with bright white clouds and sea breezes. My limbs bristled with new energy to form oscillating levers, powered struts, springs and cushions. I knew that beyond the square entrance above me was moorland. I knew the land was piebald-splashed with granite tor and rough grasses. I knew a herd of one thousand wild ponies lived there, and because I had thirsted so long for this, I would be anointed one of them. I hesitated on the last step, aware that this time the path had split like an old tree struck by lightning. But I forged ahead, as I always do, consumed by a ridiculous curiosity.

**Fiona Perry** is an Irish woman living in England and has also lived in Australia and New Zealand. Her first collection of poetry *Alchemy* won the silver medal in the National Poetry Book Awards, 2021. Her flash fiction *Sea Change* won first prize in the Bath Flash Fiction Awards 2020.

## Valet Miniscula

Perched on the rim of your sunglasses, he sits, feet swinging, and reminds you that someone must've loved King Herod before or after he ordered The Innocents massacred, but that doesn't keep the traffic out of your ear, so you ask him to roll out some story about the stoplights giving each other the go ahead deep into black morning, but he laughs and points out that you've already told yourself, and your light has gone green so you better hurry or the horns will split you open, and you ask him, your Valet Miniscula, if anything should happen to him will there be another assigned to your service and he tells you it would be difficult, what with all the committees and subcommittees and other obscure occurrences clouding Miniscula conduct, and so you roll up your window knowing that in the end, it probably isn't worth it, and, who knows, he'd probably find you and you would inevitably find him, likely hiding among your other prescriptions.

**James Cole** is a poet, author, filmmaker, and scientist based in Virginia, USA. His work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Oddball Magazine*, *Poetica Review*, and *Angel Rust Magazine*. In 2019 he released his first collection *Crow, come home* through VerbalEyre Press.

## Miss-Thing

I Googled her. The name's different. Specific. Easy to find.  
A red top tale told of misadventure. Miss-Thing in leopard skin.  
Dark kohl smeared under eyes that look like mine.  
Hunted - paparazzi catch a glimpse of her.  
I see her for the first time.

I don't know if she wanted me. Was she forced to leave?  
It's what they did then. Bundled into mother & baby homes, unseen.  
Hidden, hiding, away from prying eyes. Alone.  
Frightened children carrying frightened children.

She's a photograph, words in a newspaper, 2D.  
A face on social media, smiling at me.  
Not a mother.  
She has two daughters, divorced from their father.  
Divorced from my father? Three daughters.  
All of us, daughters.

I am the first.  
Does neither of us want the other? A scandal then and after.  
Is she impulsive?  
Caught out, acting not thinking. Too young to be a mother,  
first time, second and third.  
A youth corrupted by birth.  
With her dark kohl smeared under eyes that look like mine.

**Jane Langan** has poems published in the anthology *Footprints and Echoes, Blood Kisses* and *Makarelle Anthology One*. She is co-editor of the online literary and creative arts magazine *Makarelle*. Jane is currently editing her second novel. She has an MA in Creative Writing.



## Other Yellow Fruit

The core of a lemon had sealed  
all wounds. I played the piano  
at the old folks home.

Infancy was rocked like  
nightfall splashing through

the open window. I was laughing at  
the separation of a larva and his fly–

cut out from underneath the  
same maple tree. The sky bled

in deep colors and I was strong.  
I, the grand daughter–

the wine dark ocean spilling over  
the mountaintop, am now a chrysalis

standing at the Memorial of the  
Murdered Jews of Europe.

The place whispers *say my name*  
*and think of me*. I think of little

army men simulating war. I think  
of them losing thought. I am

swiftly brought to kneeling  
in the trenches. 6 raw beanstalks

provoke the angry heat of the day.  
Blocks sit on pomegranates

skinning the broken language.  
My grandfather's name is

etched into the granite powder of the  
memorial. An unsettled dream then

comes knocking from the grave.  
The stalks gravitate to the witching hour.

The witch howls. A soldier is molting  
in the socket of sound, an intercourse

between the grainy severed arm—  
long limber in green, and the Earth

that did not want this. The weasel is  
unburying the air, holding

the blood and the soldier of which  
he is still very much a part of.

6 black birds dissolve into winter's icy traps.  
The place is not interesting for only death

and its ordinary boundaries. 6 winters  
kill the men of Bergen-Belsen.

6 posthumous drugged beetles.  
The cow moos and flies up the nostril.

French border police molest the crossing  
of thin wasting prisoners and the preacher

wanting change. Grandfather's name is  
resurrected. Church's heavy eyelids

fall down onto God. The clock has rotated  
into a new beginning.

**Nicole Flaherty Kimball** is an emerging poet from Utah, USA. Nicole's work is published or forthcoming in *Sky Island Journal*, *Sunspot Literary Journal*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Club Plum Literary Magazine*, *Book of Matches Lit* and several others. She was the recipient of the Pat Richards and Joe Beaumont Scholarship and is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree at Utah Valley University.



within the tunnels of your ears  
Think of Etel  
Who was born today

The day a war starts somewhere far away

So with a broken accent  
Hold there  
Think about Tamalpais  
And the moist roots forming below

You don't have the privilege to mourn  
So eat those words for lunch  
Juicy round-shaped half moons  
A broken orbit  
The icy moon  
And the heated sun

Put them into your mouth one by one  
Feel them slide down

A cosmological feast  
At the end of the world

Enjoy

**this**

the distance i build  
with my hands  
with the language i have  
not the language i have  
but the language i gained  
with my hands  
the distance  
i created  
between me and this  
this distance  
built  
here  
comforting my tongue

and touching my shoulders  
and saying  
calm down  
this  
is  
not  
real  
the distance  
i mean  
the illusion  
of the distance  
between  
you and me

### **try**

remember  
the house  
in our backyard  
remember the woman  
the old one  
remember the reality  
now distance it  
from the dreams  
now try to remember the house  
again  
now you are left with  
no house  
with your hands open  
now try to remember  
one last time  
the house  
now try to distance it  
from the woman  
too old  
to be young  
try  
one last time  
open your hands  
try

**Naz Cuguođlu** is a curator and poet based in San Francisco and Istanbul. She is the co-founder of *Collective ukurcuma*, experimenting with collaborative thinking through reading groups. Her writings have been featured in *SFMOMA Open Space*, *Art Asia Pacific*, *Hyperallergic*, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, *M-est.org* and elsewhere.

## A Window

It is with the night  
that the jaguar dream steals in,  
pulling along the full weight of  
the dark  
in its mouth.

It is into the window  
the dream climbs,  
lifting in one leap  
darkness from the earth,  
a darkness  
the better  
to see.

It is from here the jaguar  
dark catches  
the scurrings of things  
though they think they know  
the ways of shadow.  
Within, such pride  
in tiny leaps,  
without, a faith more timid  
yet confirmed  
in the kingdom  
the light left  
all for them.

But jaguar dark  
in darkness sees.

Now the moon  
disturbs  
a smudged white eye.

Across a sofa pillow  
her grey skin distorts  
its own indolence,  
stretching toward the sofa's arm  
a claw,  
will

hook  
with its cool curl  
the starting of a seam.

It is not the jaguar  
but it is also the dream,  
shadow  
to the darkness,  
watched intently,  
or overlooked,  
what  
the night's seen in.

**Glenn Ingersoll** is the author of 2 chapbooks *City Walks* (broken boulder) and *Fact* (Avantacular). His prose poem epic *Thousand* (Mel C Thompson Publishing) is available from [bookshop.org](http://bookshop.org) and as an ebook from Smashwords. He writes two blogs - *Love Settlement* and *Dare I Read* and his poems have recently appeared in *haiku kontinuum*, *Rejection Letters*, *flux*, and *InkSac*.



## Counting Crows

Let's say you are here,  
and we take this early morning  
in hand and walk the Tohoku trails.

We speak of crows flying overhead  
against a front coming in from the sea of Japan.  
The polished tips of our slender fingers trace  
the Neanderthal forehead of the jungle crow  
as we follow its flight.

Above the breathy rings of conversation,  
the collective caw of carrions and ravens  
echo off wires and tree limbs.

Because we have a common language,  
we can speak of this,

and of the wind in from Siberia,  
the scent of lilies in a glass jar,  
trees laden with persimmons  
and the sound of rattling panes  
as dusk begins to fall by four.

Our voices cut the distance,  
clear as prised light.  
The collective cry of crows  
from far feeding grounds  
summons a gathering to a common nest.

Let's say you are here  
and we take this morning,  
rely on a common language,  
term all that is true—

Ripe persimmons and rattling panes,  
ravens and carrion crows—  
counting them as they secure  
the patchwork sky,  
design their way home

## Finding Polaris

You can always pinpoint it  
looking for the triangular shine,  
I want to learn to find that light  
on the nights I'll be alone.  
For so much depends upon  
what we leave each other.  
Somewhere in the story  
is our true north,  
directions to travel alone,  
to remember to lift our faces,  
gaze upward.  
We need now to create  
new ways to look at old stars,  
even though I would rather dwell  
in our past heavens when desire  
was in a turn of phrase  
and the indigo sky was clearly plentiful.  
On those nights, you'd take my hand,  
trace beginnings and endings  
of constellations that lit our lives.

**Laurie Kuntz** has been nominated for a Pushcart and Best of the Net prize. Her book *The Moon Over My Mother's House* is published by Finishing Line Press. Her 5th poetry book *Talking Me off the Roof* is forthcoming from Kelsay Press in late 2022.

## Early Morning Discovery

I wrapped my vulnerabilities  
into my thickest coat, pulled  
padded gloves over already whitening fingers  
and lumbered into the yard.

In the bitter world at the end of night,  
the dog growled at a menacing shadow,  
too slow to be a rat. Whatever it was  
took umbrage, slipped  
itself into a drystone gap.

At the wall, a bucket – plastic,  
scratched – held an ice-rim half-moon.  
When I lifted it out I saw it held  
a fragile, latebrous wilderness.  
A world shrunk down.

Held up to the dawn,  
its innards burned pink.  
I took a breath, took a step,  
then let myself in.

**Penny Blackburn** lives in North East England but is originally from Yorkshire. Her poetry has been published by, among others, *Poetry Society News*, *Atrium*, *Phare and Riggwelter*. She was recently commended in the Waltham Forest and Positive Images Festival competitions. She is on Twitter and Facebook as @penbee8.

*When humans learned to farm in the Agricultural Revolution their collective power to shape the environment increased, but the lot of many individuals grew harsher.*  
Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens*

### **Acre \***

On the other side  
of the property line

the riverbank  
the river,  
chestnut, basswood, black walnut,  
American elm, black willow,  
bitternut hickory, blue beech, butternut,  
blue ash, sassafras in its leaf asymmetry,  
nothing  
in a  
row.

No one counting.

As if measure itself had dozed  
off in the shade  
lost  
its cadence

acre by  
acre  
by acre  
by  
ac re by acre b y ac  
re by ac re by acre b  
y a c re b y

rearranged itself  
strange

how the land spoke over the divide

how a single tree standing  
on the farm

could nonetheless hum  
a whole chorus

\* *Old English denoting the amount of land a yoke of oxen could plow in a day.*

**Tonya Lailey** has just completed her MFA through the University of British Columbia School of Writing and is shaping her poetry manuscript *FARM: Lot 23* into her first book. She has recently been published in *FreeFall Magazine* and *Mason Street* and has poems forthcoming with *IceFloe Press*, *the Anthropocene Project* and the *Summer Madness* edition of *Bindweed Magazine*. Tonya lives in Canada and works in the wine trade.