



Crowstep
Poetry Journal

COLLECTION 2

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The Frequent Flyer's Monster Manual

I meet the devil in an airport Chili's.
She extols the importance
of marriage, careers, tipping only six percent
for average service.
How did she get through security?
Is sulphur and brimstone status quo
for YYC after 10 pm, and what other creatures lurk
in late-night terminals, embrace the ethereal
between heres and theres,
like the shoeshine guy who says hello
every time I pass him by on my path
around gates C-16 and A-whatever--
a circle which always leads me back to Chili's
and the shoeshine stand,
wondering who needs their shoes shined at this hour
and if the devil really wears Prada.
Maybe the shoeshine guy is an angel
sent to spy.
Or maybe he's a fey folk,
tracing fairy rings from my footsteps between gates,
mistaking me for someone like himself:
a shapeshifter, centaur, mermaid, half-being who bounces
between two cities, borders, bodies.
Let me out of your circle, fairy man;
I have to find my way home.

On the migration patterns of rats

There are no rats in Alberta.
Habitat maps outline that border I crossed
to Ontario,
to a new house--
home is up for debate.
Still, I've yet to see a rat.
Sometimes, grass shimmies
on the wrong side of the Ambassador Bridge;
I say to nobody
'Maybe that was a rat!'
My mentor told me not to rent here.

'What could be wrong
with a neighbourhood named Sandwich'
I ask nobody, knowing my relationship with food:
all day without meals
consume emptiness
distance
dissonance
the thought 'holy shit I am still here'
but depression has zero calories
so I shotgun late-night pizzas into my emptiness
half succeed
go to bed hungry
for something else.
I dream that I don't eat the whole pizza,
that rats scurry around
my unfurnished apartment
with chunks of crust.
I dream the rats grow wings.
I know it's foolish, but we all cross borders somehow.

Skylar Kay is a poet from Windsor, Ontario. Much of her work to this point has been haiku/haibun but she is exploring longer poetry. Her debut book of poetry *Transcribing Moonlight* came out through Frontenac House in April 2022, and she is currently working on her MA thesis.

Elizabeth of the Raspberry Orchids

Elizabeth of the raspberry orchids
who is the old soul who lives in your shadow
as you paint your delicate flowers on squares of silk

holding them up to the window
the sun shines through pink petals and green leaves
tattooing your face and neck

surely it is you there
always new
with hair black and liquid as Chinese ink

fingers like the branches of a jade tree
and laughter that pours softly
as if from an earthen tea pot

who is the ancient ancestor, asleep in the bamboo grove
that wakes and looks out from your water-moon eyes
and tints your smile with wisdom?

Victoria Twomey is a poet and an artist. Her poems have been published in several anthologies, in newspapers and online including *Sanctuary Magazine*, *BigCityLit*, *PoetryBay*, *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, *The Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Agape Review*, and *the Trouvaille Review*. Her poem *Pieta* was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Feral Water

I wake with vixen stink all over my thoughts.
By the beck of neglected paths, someone has graffitied the God
of Minor Discretions' face on the trunk of a lightning-loved yew.

I have seen memories of otters make churchyards of these waters.
Heard ghosts of gone children beg the riverbed to release them.
But stones do not care for ethereal creatures.
They are best friends with sticklebacks and minnows.

AG once tickled trout so well here, she ended up marrying one.
Before Poland distracted its scales, transformed its mudheart rainbow.

A drowned child flows giant here. I offer fistfuls of moon daisies
as a useless apology for the life he never grew wild enough to live.
He never swims in close enough to touch them though.
His myth anchors tight to the abandoned dreams of a broken mother.

Three apple trees offer their fruit as talismans to anyone pious
enough to disown the history of them. Those years of blackberries
sacrificed to crumbs, how delicious a thorough pillage can be.

I want to throw my sadness as pooh sticks to the wide, crumbling
mouth of the bridge. Feel the pull of it lessen as the sea reels nearer.

There are whales that remember the intimacy of the 19th century.
Breathed the same air as a world where planes had not been invented.
My heart would turn whale if it could.
It has jonahed the need of you for years now.

The beck will trade the fluidity of its voice to winter soon enough.
Believe itself a younger sibling to the ways of arctic tundra.
On certain nights when the moon croons quiet, this whole sky
swells with winged creatures disguised as solar wind.

The following spring, tadpoles will croak fluent
Norse God from the stomach of fledgling kingfishers.
This is a landscape intimate with the fierce art of swallowing.
Come close to the vixen stink of my thoughts, their teeth.

Grapes For The Dead

How the quiet drifts in on its swan feet, deceptive.
They come to where three waters meet - rickety gods
that swirl river-tongues below a waning moon.

There's no such thing as ghosts, his small lips
work the way of winds through bed sheets on a line.
This is how a November existence has washed him.

Behind the dead oak that exposes its heart
to every unwary dog that sniffs past, the lifebuoy
sits mothering its red ropes, pure mythology.

Ms. Janus, our new history teacher, says some stories
imagine themselves as being real. Will try to gobble
their children up the way I swallow toast and beans.

There are peeled grapes in his pocket, swaddled
in a plastic packet for the ducks that do not return.
The adults get on with sieving tears to nothing, again.

By the wooden seat with the metal plaque screwed on,
a pile of pebbles contemplate what it might be like to be a pack
of geese imagining themselves as a gaggle of siblings

that glide between the estuaries of being alive, being dead.
How the skins of certain rivers will sometimes whirl together,
haemorrhage buried memories into scars that can mark water.

In the back seat, the afterwards drags itself inside the car
on its drowned limbs. Unanchors the child until next year.
One day when I'm older, I will swim away. Just like them.

Deadheading

My fingers begin their slow forgetting.
How long does it take for shared history
to become the bones of mythology?

The Mournes burn their hearts out all weekend long.
The gulls are full of the embers of them.
If love is a dialect, ours purrs wind.

Winter's return is distance turned feral.
My womb becomes a hot water bottle
that stains the mattress whenever there's frost.

I'm tundra these days. A woman scrubbed bare
of the vegetation that colours me.
My seedling pots sing the song of empty.

Weeds of unrequited love haunt cities.
Separation maps replotted as sprawls.

Marcia Hindson lives in a village at the top of a hill surrounded by woods in the north of England that has fields and sky in every direction. This wild landscape influences her work. She is obsessed with moss, clarts and touching trees. She is a proud, feral weirdling.

I/我 as a Human: a Bilinguacultural Poem

1/ Denotations

The first person singular pronoun, or this very Writing subject in English is I, an only-letter Word, standing straight like a pole, always Capitalized, but in Chinese, it is written with Lucky seven strokes as 我, with at least 108 Variations, all of which can be the object case At the same time.

Originally, it's formed from The character 找, meaning 'pursuing', with one Stroke added on the top, which may well stand for Anything you would like to have, such as money Power, fame, sex, food, or nothing if you prove Yourself to be a Buddhist practitioner inside out

2/ Connotations

Since I am a direct descendant of Homo Erectus, let me Stand straight as a human/人, rather than kneel down

When two humans walk side by side, why to coerce one Into obeying the other like a slave fated to follow/从?

Since three humans can live together, do we really need A leader or ruler on top of us all as a group/众?

Given all the freedom I was born with, why Just why cage me within walls like a prisoner/囚?

Yuan Changming hails with Allen Yuan from poetrypacific.blogspot.ca. Credits include 12 Pushcart nominations & chapbooks (most recently *All my Crows*) and appearances in Best of the Best Canadian Poetry (2008-17), BestNewPoemsOnline & Poetry Daily, among 1929 others. Yuan both served on the jury and was nominated for Canada's National Magazine (poetry category).

The Still Room

And that was that. The cook
wouldn't let her near the soft fruits,
not to be trusted with blackberries stains,
strawberries and the flesh of the plums.
The starched matriarch nuns her attention
over the jam pan, eyes her
 and she, left pimpled with the lemons,
 hard and unyielding, takes the blade
 to extract, to scratch and scrape
 rinds to make the drink. They mist
 her eyes red, sting her hands. Then
 so much sugar; the weighing aches teeth.
and when the cook, leaves to retrieve
her jars, with a last over the shoulder look,
 the maid adds the juice of a secret lime, hiding
 the pulped body under yellow trimmings.
 She wonders if they will notice
 the change upstairs, on ice, whilst
 here, her armpits darken moons.
 And then she dabs the sap behind
 her ears, the pulse on her wrist;
 a sour dissent.

Jennie E. Owen's writing has been widely published online, in literary journals and anthologies. She teaches Creative Writing for The Open University and lives in Lancashire, UK with her husband and three children. She is currently working on her PhD under the guidance of Manchester Metropolitan University.

My Wisteria

Stagnant in December, a bare stick clinging
to a trellis—like a woman
stranded in the wind without the proper overcoat.

Memories of Cicada filled nights,
and perfume,
its scent misting the veranda lamps with ribbons
of light pouring on purple petals,

she remembers:

A lilac shawl draped over her,
In her season,
she was cloaked in everything that flowered.

Now, another year etches itself on her gnarled branches,

She has no choice but to be content
until the murmurs
Of all that blooms purple

happen, yet once again.

The Freedom from Being Beautiful

after a line in the poem *Menopause* by [C. Prudence Arceneaux](#)

The manicured body,
replenished skin,
and the avoidance of the syrupy desires,
the lusting glow of everything bronze.

Hair managed, eyes shadowed,
the arched and high cheekbone turning
into the right angle, away from the sun,
and anything else that might burn through the work.

The nightly rituals, the glossy cover photo
touched up, but never touched, never knowing
the comfort of what can be discovered
in the uncovering of one's uncharted skin.

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. <https://lauriekuntz.myportfolio.com> › home-1
<https://www.finishinglinepress.com>

Bowl Barrow

I sit at the foot
of your tomb and watch
as fog descends

extends its cold fingertips across the crisp-moss hills
becomes a sudden sandstorm gathering speed and bite:
pursues a red kite, striking white under its wings.

Gorse shrubs
drop barbed spines
Carlina thistles
shake dead heads

walkers are forced to battle

through fine fistfuls of vapour

emerging

with chalk manes restrained

travelling land they don't

understand.

Their feet resist, create
rifts. Tug and trudge
disturb mud, stumble
over your grave; labelled
a bunker
a ditch
a crater.

I reach for my scarf, pull
it tight around my chest
feel the chill of damp grass
pull my l i m b s apart.

I am the bones beneath the barrow
left for none to see.

Pin and Thrum

Primrose leaves soft and green
creased like wrinkled skin, fine

hair coats your stems, lanugo
to each new born limb. Pin-eyed

blooms rub against thrum
as the pale brimstone gathers

crumbs of nectar and nearby
buckthorn shoots. Your sepals

begin to tremble as day bows
to dusk, afraid of the passing

light and what life will be like
when dusk becomes night. You

long for her wings to brush your
petals, but the brimstone flitters

and quivers in the hedge as she
lays her oval eggs out of sight.

Ninety-three Concentric Rings

Your crenate leaves are the colour of clay silt
left to harden in winter.

Fallen apples, once green and flushed, gather
in sunken splits at your base; rusted orbs

leaking sour juice: collection long overdue.

Withered branches droop like unhooked
curtains, catch my fine knit cardigan, tear
a ragged gap in the sleeve's seam

unearth roughened skin. My fingernails scratch
scrape past dead layers until I feel the living
dermis beneath.

I fill my bare basket to the brim
with discarded branches, forgotten apples
and lined leaves.

Lottie Angell is a Sussex based poet and creative writing/wellbeing workshop facilitator. She graduated with a first-class Master's in Creative Writing from The University of Brighton in 2018. Lottie is currently working on her chapbook *The Isolation Hospital* – an interaction with life through the lens of isolation.

WHAT ONE FRAMES THROUGH ONE'S VIEWFINDER

I Trysts with the Thar

To the unaccustomed, Thar, the great Indian desert, is a region of death
All the unacquainted folk agree that Maroostali is a perfect name for it

For all they see is a barren, depleted, lifeless, famine-prone desertscape
Fit only to feed its sterile lineages, past, present and future, to the vultures

Their eyes, to whom they listen, show them a dusty, dehydrated terrain
Where the wild and everyday spaces come together under a tyrannical sun

A territory where angry, gravelly sand hills chase one another
Where long, parallel lines of sand shape-shift into assailing fabrics of turbulence

Where craggy ridges reflect the region's extremities, its uncertainties
Where compacted salt lake bottoms show up waterlessness as a way of life

Mythology, ancestors and local legends, all say the Thar was a well-watered land
And its residents insist its biotic resources and locational advantage are unmatched

That magic happens as plants yield on arid sands, rocks and saltwater depressions
Through its bountiful, nutritive grasses, sand-binding trees and water-holding scrubs

Through the wizardly of their plants that wither into dust-like seeds
But burst into carpets of flowers in first shower, ephemeral yet luminescent

Sewan, khair, khejri, thor, guggal...is it any wonder they their chant flora names?
Thar, our Thar, they chorus, storehouse of our vegetation, nursery of folk medicine!

The people of the Thar move from a life on the edge to self-sufficiency
Through their orans, sacred groves, that forbid grazing and loping to teach frugality

Through their banis, deity domains, that stem the over-use of their greens
Yet teach them abundantly of belongingness, sharing and compassion

They have found a balance between their worlds: the ones inside and outside
They are able to put their eye, head, heart and soul on the same axis

II In a Flux of Floods and Fallacies

The complicated futility of ignorance

That's what taming the Bagmati River is, say the people of Sitamarhi district of Bihar

Don't be fooled by its mild flow during summer, one infused with yogic calm

Or its restfulness in winter, say dwellers of the birthplace of Sita

Sita knew, as we know, that our Mithila waterscape goes rouge during monsoons

Cutting paths, changing course, conniving with its tributaries to overflow

That the Bagmati's speeding torrents gather people, livestock and crops

Tossing, buffeting and drowning everyone's only known world

That death, destitution and dislocation is what it leaves behind

As it does fields bloated with silt and the certainty of uncertainty

That sand-and-earth embankments on both of its sides and canals

The way of engineers and that of the contractors is no way to contain the Bagmati

It is only a requiem for the river, a requiem for the people

That the only way is the people's way, one of ancient wisdom, almost mythic

In their saying 'let the flood come', in their belief 'we will build better as we bond'

In their allowing of the flood waters to disperse and drain over time

In their marking of floods as a distinct season called barh

In their acceptance of its destruction as much as its enrichment through silt deposits

In keeping of their faith in the river as they do in their temples

As in their sacred land and their goddess Sita, who sprang to life from an earthen pot

III Where Contrarities Fuse

A lenient, liquid sun

A pale yellow fan of light

A translucent cover of impish clouds

For the aloft, snow-capped Himalayan ranges

Bleached sunbeams, marshmallow clouds
A floating sky and the village Satoli

Tucked in the Kumaon hills of Uttarakhand
It keeps much of its story in the shadows

Yet its lichen-covered forests are the doorway to an unseen world
Its glistening pine, chestnut, rhododendron and oak trees oblique roadmaps

As one walks deeper into the Satoli forest
Into its green gradient, it leads one into its liminal corners

Into its inner-most forestscape
Removed from everyday realities

Where the vegetation takes on a measured hue
And the air a stillness

The birdsong gets fainter
The quiet and darkness deeper

The silence and gloom are not easy
They are sullen, predator-poised

Audible above
Are the clicks of cicadas, the chittering of woodworks, the scrapings of aphids

A pause in time
A peculiar force is now at work, an energy that is yielding as it is congenial

An unbearable expectancy
Then a vividness where I am present to myself, wholly, both my good and evil parts

In this balance of contrarities
A falling away of duality

Between me and the forest
Between the parts of myself

Chitra Gopalakrishnan is a New Delhi-based journalist and a social development communications consultant. She uses her ardour for writing, wing to wing, to break firewalls between nonfiction and fiction, narratology and psychoanalysis, marginalia and manuscript and tree-ism and capitalism. www.chitragopalakrishnan.com

Alligator Jade

Spilt into two identical halves,
the avocado's buttery flesh,
as ripe as Inanna's pregnant belly, rests
encased in verdant-green elephant skin,
ready to dip with fish & chips
while tipping pints & flinging arrows
at Dick Turpin's Front Street tavern
where spiritual Canterbury travellers
gather & exchange twisted tales
gleaned from tent Vancouver city sages,
paper bag pubs & iPhone apps,
revering the alligator-pear with equal
appreciation, eating it quickly before
the mature fruit begins to brown, leaving
only a large pit to pierce with toothpicks,
place in water, plant as a new tree.

Sterling Warner is an award-winning, author, poet, and English Professor. His works have appeared in literary magazines, and anthologies including *Trouvaille Review*, and *Danse Macabre*. His poetry/fiction collections include *Rags & Feathers*, *Edges*, *Serpent's Tooth*, *Flytraps* (2022), and *Masques: Flash Fiction & Short Stories*. Currently, Warner writes, hosts 'virtual' poetry readings, and enjoys retirement.

The four pyramids of love

1st pyramid: (North)

There was a time when they cut off
the tongue of the person who designed this place
they kept it in a wooden box
wrapped in muslin
as if they were afraid of it telling the truth
despite being unattached from its owner

2nd pyramid: (East)

Trying to reach the sky with buildings
they kept their faces under a shade of shame
so they did wear masks made of gold to cover it
where the dust settles almost tenderly

3rd pyramid: (West)

They did the maths in order to dream of eclipses
and stars colliding so far away
(That didn't avoid the old master and slave issue
but we are trying not to judge here)

4th Pyramid: (South)

A message was sent forward aiming to the future
perhaps too optimistic
hoping we would be ready to understand
Are we?
Are we ready to understand?
We face South like there was nothing
but this emptiness
this vast plain of sand ahead of us

Luis Elvira-Sierra is a painter and writer born in Spain, where he achieved a BA in Philosophy. He writes mainly poetry and short stories both in English and Spanish which have been published in several books, magazines and websites. He lives in South East London.

Greenhouse

canoodling with slush
we fill our boots

and dream in seed-catalogue colour
cherry blossom, lilac

scarves fly off like boomerangs

green elbows
poke from plastic trays

celestial smell of chives
lavender, tomato leaves

ghosts of our grandmothers
hiding in the mist

Sing for the storm drain

where the spring melt
glockenspiels, last year's
leaves chip-hipping
down the boulevard.
Sing to the bluster
of sparrows giggling
for the mates
they may never find.
Sing o zinc o zing
for the drop of ladybug
on the change
in the window.

Angeline Schellenberg is a recipient of the Manitoba Book Award for *Tell Them It Was Mozart* (Brick Books, 2016), the elegy collection *Fields of Light and Stone* (University of Alberta Press, 2020), and was a finalist for the 2022 KOBZAR Book Award. Angeline hosts *Speaking Crow*, Winnipeg's longest-running poetry open mic.

Beneath the drum of war

The mouth of a kongo drum spat out
my bones skittering along the tracks
of mud on the face of the tragedy
returned home. I embrace the silhouette
of his scars & pour water from my chest
on his shorn head. We sit under
a harmattan wrinkled tree, lick the lips
of small cups, waiting as the men help
our father settle with the sediments
of memory into the worn embrace of red
soil. He thinks it is wrong
that the concrete under his feet
has shown itself to be sharp sand
moulded with blood.
He thinks of the man that laughed
robust songs from his oiled belly.
I think of the walker by his room door
that dragged him about as he screamed
for his god to take him. We sit there
deep in the susurrations of our blood
until the night cloths us & a
sonorous flute bleats a final lullaby.

In the spirit of full disclosure

I'm the chief bride of lies, a snake
in the grass, a hyena giggling
in the dust coloured veldt, a vulture
launching from a cracked tree of bones.
I'm carnage whispered sly as oil
into the ears, questing deep into
the brain to lick all sense from it.
I'm deeply entrenched in the roots
of your soul, holding you down
& away from the illumination just
beyond touch or reason.
I'm a web of confusion cast about
by the spidery intuition to con. I'm
the beast king sitting on a shelf
of scalped skin. I'm a lonely figure
standing in a middle of the dance floor,

glass raised to a window,
back turned to a wall.
I'm an untitled etching on a woman's skin,
a crayon drawing on a lone boy's book,
a sad song on a bitter girl's tongue.
I'm the bruise on a fist. I did
what I did & I'll do it again.
It was done to me first
in a morning, before sunlight,
before dawn bright, before bird
twitch. I'm a broken dream
catcher caught in the hands
of a lightning. I'm a rain of voices
on the kitchen sink when
the plumbing don't do right.
I do wrong all the time.
I'm the lie in each story that
a mother tells herself in order
to love her life. I'm the story
that doesn't change in a crime
fiction. I'm a dog of the city,
the wolf of a country.
I eat anything even my own damned body.
I'm the flesh & blood,
a grisly god,
the gristle & bile
in this potpourri of tragedies.
I'm a genre of pain,
the sweetest sucrose this world
has ever made.
I'm the lie in a confession
that you must believe because
you always need a truth.
All I have said above is true.
You just need to close your eyes
& you will see, I am who I say I am.

Osahon Oka is a Nigerian poet of Bini/Kwale descent. His writing experiments with language. His works are up on Jalada, Ice floe press, Visual verse and elsewhere. His writing has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize as well as the Best of the Net Anthology.

Journal Entry: Foresight

Every spring,
my grandfather burned
a pasture,

scorched and blackened
thistle and fleabane right
to the tree line

where mice
and bees escaped
the slow advance

of low flames.
It was the end of the world
in increments,

the ragged
approach of a god's wrath.
But which god

I couldn't say.
The god of fescue, the god
of meadows,

the god of grazing?
All season long, resurrection
broke out

all over the field.
Later, cattle survived on this
manna, the small herd

my grandfather kept,
some for milk, some for meat.
I never saw

the slaughter,
the sacrifice, except when
squirrel hunting,

my father
made me help him
skin the creatures,

their gray pelts
limp on the ground. But that was
autumn, after

the garden's
last harvest, tomato vines
brittle as bones,

corn stalks cackling
with a touch of wind. Every day,
a little closer to firelight

and superstition,
I thought this was how
witches were born,

from the uncut
fields of corn, a spell
cast under

a lagging moon,
the shadows of papery leaves.
I thought

bad luck
was a matter of misreading signs,
first frost

six months
from first thunderstorm.
Wisdom and witchery

were the same,
honey for bee sting,
vinegar for wasp,

grab your earlobe
to stop the pain of a burn.

I watched

my grandfather
beat the fire out with a shovel,
throw buckets of water

to drown the embers.
I watched smoke rise
through branches

and leaves.
There was nothing on earth
could catch it.

David B. Prather is the author of *We Were Birds*. He served as a juror for Ohio State Poet Laureate Kari Gunter-Seymour's anthology, *I Thought I Heard a Cardinal Sing: Ohio's Appalachian Voices*. He serves as a reader for *Ember Chasm Review*. His work has appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and many other journals.

The Fog Lifts

An eagle flies to a heron's branch, and the heron flies away on stick legs, squawking. Soon the whole bay's raucous with the cries of crows and gulls and loons, and a haunting moan on the loose behind tall trees mossed with fog at the lean shore's edge.

Is it the eagle, who took the branch before landing on it, or the young man in the yellow kayak, plunging his oars into the dark-sleeved water, that pulls from every throat this echoing spill of voices? Undisturbed, my son glides on in his red rain slicker, twenty years strong.

Nothing will stop him from riding the jubilant current he's found, plumbing the ancient blood tides to conjure a life different from the one back home. Magic's in the air, the future on his mind. And a frog's, swimming too far out, that he chauffeurs to shore. What a prince!

Deeper then, he paddles, the hours all his. Disappears, he does, into them. And the fog lifts like a page turned—revelation and sudden remembrance in its place: the cupped fallen light, stirred leaves dangling just so, even higher branches like wands for the taking.

Seagull

In the rocky shallows
of a shell-littered beach
a marauding seagull
found a starfish.

Hauled it over
the grieving sands
and ate it.

It took an hour:

one by one, and slowly,
each plump starry arm
was swallowed,

that plunging
rivering body
dammed
in the iron gates
of his hooked yellow bill

until finally
the last arm
let go
of the twilight.

Neck bulging,
unable yet to fly,
he turned and watched,
eyes glittering
as the darkened sea withdrew.

Lynne Burnett's poems have appeared in many magazines and anthologies in the US and Canada. A Best of the Net and Pushcart nominee, she won the 2016 Lauren K. Alleyne Difficult Fruit Poetry Prize and 2019 Jack Grapes Poetry Prize. Finishing Line Press published her chapbook *Irresistible*.

Natural History

Rabbits and cochineal have changed the course of history. Drones die immediately after mating. If you can be trusted with very little, you can be trusted. We're clay and seawater. Credit cards describe the golden ratio. Any two-foot circle of earth holds enough organisms to make into ink. Many mothers leave their children. Nothing's inconceivable.

Aunt You

All those Ancestry.com emails serve up men, men, men, men, men, all claiming to be my second and third cousins, like a twisted dating site: male relatives I never met sliding into my DMs. Where are the women?

Why can they not find me? Am I the only woman who spat into a tube because I can't touch the kinship cup, can't feel our entanglements undulating, see myself in a warped glass in the cabinet of immortals, just me dumbly

gathering feathers from the backyard, a jay bluing the mix.

Faceless Ancestor, I was taught to walk away, to not know and be as fed as anyone who has never seen a full plate of greens or grains,

so I can't call you Grandmother in any language, and it hurts to not have a girl gang of aunties built into my DNA. I forgot the mother because I was told to, became someone else's good daughter with bad lungs,

finding birch bark long enough to write on, a deer bone, a bird's beard and the skeleton hand of Rose of Sharon, my hair studded with water bubbles. I never forgot the mother,

I knew what she liked: wood for the fire, tea after supper, tic-tac-toe, a grocery list. I learned to wait. Aunt You, can you see me when I throw my voice into elms in the summer dark when the aurora reaches down

to the prairies and sends crackling ribbons of light back through the years I cannot count? See me in the scholar's robes I earned because I was judged

to belong. See me searching for poplars, for yarrow and chives and rhubarb.

Hear me humming the song I honed to a science
to seed the clouds and rise up like rain.
All I wanted, Aunt You, all.

Adoption Reel

Make yourself uncomfortable.
Surprise is the new listening.

I was born then whirled away,
the offspring to be named later.

The quaver broke like a porcelain
cup. A crow posed on a BFI bin,

tinfoil in her beak, and shook
his shiny head. I slipped from hand

to hand like a baby made of soap.
Enough, then. Start again. Accent

on first and third beats. I left
in a hurricane and crossed

the bridge over the fault line.
I came back to you this April

carrying antlers of pussy
willows that show their teeth,

wearing a yarrow crown.
Make yourself tall in my arms.

Mother, not mother,
dancing is the new speaking.

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