

3: A Taos Press

FROM **COLLECTING LIFE: POETS ON OBJECTS KNOWN AND IMAGINED**

Edited by Madelyn Garner and Andrea Watson

Selected Poem from *Anthology* by Fiona Sze-Lorrain
from *Water the Moon* (2010), with some lines after Victoria Chang,
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Shoebox Filled with Mao Buttons

Stubs of sun, deflated saffron orns, scoop up a fistful—
they chink and clank, megaphones chime The East is Red.

Betrothal gifts à la mode, virgin factory girls gave sex
to comrades, and pinned their souls to Chairman.

Students bartered them for steamy pork buns,
a professor swallowed two to commit suicide.

Plexi-glass sunflowers, now italicized mementos.
Dragon-sons, phoenix daughters! Speculate and trade

your shamed nostalgia for museum fortune, Mao on money,
his mole is art, postmodern aesthetics, the rust is a lie.

Denounce it? Flip one over, needle enjambéd,
hook still kniving, yes, there us blood tinning on your thumb.

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FROM **SEVEN** BY SHERYL LUNA

The Breaking

We break and rise as the ocean, moon and stars.
Silence follows.
Were we meant to unhinge?
Low beat of morning.
We crack like children's bones;
mending is possible. The letting-go like dawn.
The piano keys strike
in time to the light shimmered pines.
We are plural and singular sadness,
broken in the high desert when snow refuses to melt.
Streetlights lull against the darkness.
Bats shrieking, bellow of strange heaven;
bats of bendable bones hang
in their upside-down thrones. Caverns light
with their darkness. Stalactites shimmer
with man-made lights.
Snaps of the mind: circling, turmoil in nets, flight.
A burst of shade flaps madly by the thousands.
This is the old dusk, the dark awakening.
But we break as glorious as whales breach seas,
as if we too must suddenly
and spectacularly breathe.

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FROM **THE LUMINOSITY** BY BONNIE ROSE MARCUS

When Death Comes

When death comes growling, gnawing, scratching at my door,
window, gate, when death comes gigantic, awesome, without
reason, suddenly slowly, minute by year, when death comes chilly
to the bone, sweating fire, when death comes to the place, time,
space of my waking, when death comes bloated, bestial, bantering,
battering, cajoling, calling, cat on a hot, cat on a cold, catapulting
my ego off the edge, when death comes tomorrow or the next
moment, comes suddenly on me like a fever or a bad dream,
daring, devilish or dressed in white wings, comes cascading, rocky,
raucous, ravishingly rude or (even beautiful in its fierceness),
glorious, gluttonous, no clue, no time, when death comes entering,
breaking, busting down the door, when death comes, I want:

I want to be radiantly ripe, peel scars into petals, joust judgments
'til they surrender, tattoo fierce faith on every inch of my skin until
the divine imprint becomes my own face, drown hesitation in an
ocean of mercy, waves spitting miracles, become emptiness, silence
shaking my bones, rejoice, relinquish, manifest my teacher, when
death comes, I want to rip out my heart, offer it to those without,
remember to remember to bleed suffering into forgiveness, dance
translucent rain 'til rainbows take me, when death comes, I want
to know, go graceful, glow, (flow rivers) into heart/breaking
transformation.

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FROM **TREMBLING IN THE BONES: A COMMEMORATIVE EDITION**
BY ELEANOR SWANSON

Charlie Costa Plays a Joke

With a stick, I draw a picture in the dirt
of a train and make the sound a train makes.
Woo woo, I call to my bare feet,
to my toes, wishing I could have
a real train or any toy.

I kick a rock past our tent, pretending
I'm playing Kick the Can,
but it hurts my foot, so I stop in front
of the Costas' tent where Mr. Costa
is pretending a circus is going on,
saying, "Come one, come all,"
and motioning to the kids nearby
who like him because he makes us
laugh, even when we're hungry,
and tells us to call him Charlie.

He says my name and gives
me a newspaper rolled up
like a spyglass.

He says it costs a penny
and his wife Cedi yells,
"Did you buy spyglasses
when we are starving?"
We kids yell too, "Let's see."
When he hands me my telescope,
I put it to my eye and look around
wishing I could see stars
or the moon, right now, in the day.
I look down the row of tents
for my mother.
I want to see her.
I want her to be pretty.

All of a sudden, everyone is laughing:
Charlie has put charcoal on our telescopes,
and we all have black eyes.
We are all laughing and can't stop.
Even though we are hungry,
we can't stop laughing
at our funny black eyes.

I put the spyglass up to my other eye
so I will look like a raccoon.
This time I will see things
only raccoons can see,
stars and planets just for raccoons.

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FROM **3 A.M.** BY PHYLLIS HOTCH

Crowned With Pale Blue Moonlight

If you are
the reluctant oracle
I am
the petitioner
renewing
forgotten hopes

White wimple
stark
above
tender
blue oval

Skirt of blackbirds' wings
spread wide
holds

sequestered fragments
streaming diamonds
fears burning
dark water

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FROM **EARS OF CORN: LISTEN** BY MAX EARLY

Matrilineal Winter

*Traditionally, at Laguna, the house is given to the oldest daughter
At Acoma, the house is given to the youngest daughter
The house belonged to Grandma Marie
Given to her oldest daughter, Jane
Soon, Jane gave Sister Clara
The family home*

Three sisters in their winter
Share their mother's house
They are Orion's belt
Wintry sister stars

Three stars softly fading
Reminisce festal shadows
Mom's chili stew cooking
7-UP in the Frigidaire

Three sisters embrace home
But not like they used to
Keep moving around
More aches flare

What do we do with your house, Mom?
We feel bad that you're getting old
We'll help you when we can
We miss the old you

Serious oldest daughter
Humorous middle girl
Cheerful youngest baby
Wintry sister stars

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FROM *ELEMENTAL* BY BILL BROWN

The Light That Follows Rivers

Like the light that follows rivers in the night,
a figure hovers ghostlike in my dreams,
my father or stranger; sometimes the same,
his blue eyes stained, his thoughts to read.

His gruff hands hover luminous in my dreams,
above my childhood slumber they touch my head.
His blue eyes like his hands I wish to read—
yet I am older than my father when he died.

Above my childhood slumber they touched my head—
his eyes, his hands, his storied voice, all lullabies.
Though I am older than my father when he died,
as men we travel alone, I know that now.

His eyes, his hands, his storied voice, his lullabies,
my father, my stranger, always the same—
As men we travel lonely, I know that now,
like the light that follows rivers in my dreams.

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FROM **ROOTWORK** BY VERONICA GOLOS

From The Lost Notebook, Mary Day Brown

**Hastings Street, Springfield, Massachusetts,
February 1, 1848.**

on the visit of Mr. Frederick Douglass to our home

It is late, very late, & I sit by the last of the fire.
Mr. Douglass visited us tonight. He sleeps
in the loft upstairs.

When he stood in our narrow doorway, he looked
to be filled with light; it shone off his shoulders
behind his head, through his fingers. Then

he entered. At first I thought him to be made
of cliffs—his cheekbones, his jaw, his thick arms.
His shirt so white, so very white, against the rock of his face.

Then there was his voice. How it rumbled, a deep roll
of sound that caught me in my chest. Not only
his voice, but his words.

What he knew.

The girls served him beans, corn bread
& a bit of the last of the lamb.
I stood back, near the stove, in case there was need.

I watched him. His large hand moved in circles along
our table, as if he would polish the raw, unvarnished wood, would
make it gleam, as he seemed to gleam. I felt, I suppose, pulled

by that hand, its back & forth motion
as he & John Brown spoke, argued, leaned to each
other—my husband full of fury and action;

Mr. Douglass,
his words. What he knew.

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FROM **FAROLITO** BY KAREN S. CORDOVA

Grandmother's Voice on the Telephone

66 pounds. Dying by ounces.

When she speaks, air within her
crackles like the sweetest dove trying to walk,
to flit on autumn leaves
without breaking them, honoring
those few moments
before haze shudders and rain completes,
returns Abuelita to her beloved garden
feeding roots of ancient plum and apple trees
that give both life and shade,
that lean into the *acequia*.

Yes, there will be that silent day
when leaves disintegrate and cover her, becoming
her *petate*. No. Not yet—
Brittle and crisp,
her voice still shades me
from harsh knowing she is leaving
as it crushes English/Spanish
into sound scented
paperwhite and fruit of *manzanares*:

*Come. See me now.
I'm here. Tell everyone good-bye for me.*

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FROM **GODWIT** BY EVA HOOKER

Of Soul I Keep Margins

utterly free, feet shod
for grievous walking: all

erasable footing, loose sheets of water, white
letters (your mark) in a black field.

I make preparation for the wake of breathing,
costly, perfect spillage & stumbling.

What if beauty is only a settling, a practiced
disruption polished to dangerous gloss?

I set my foot down to keep the index of bruising
tender to its supple edge. Trace

a wing.

Listen for the long hollow cry of the goose.

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FROM **THE LEDGERBOOK** BY WILLIAM S. BARNES

Before the Rain

The sand bar gives itself back to the river in scallops.
The conversation lifts, urges.

Fish rise: white-sided, plump, deeply scaled.
Side-by-side. The world is copper. Figure-eights touching
shoulder, rib, hip, thigh.

Bird tracks. A scarlet-backed damsel-fly.
A single tree, burnt. Black.

The wind is full of children. Cotton rafts in a copper river.
Southbound. Cloud boats. Full of seed.

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FROM **THE MISTRESS** BY CATHERINE STRISIK

Morning Glory

May I study you
by touch? Your

vine periwinkle
blue circling your slender

torsos? I want to touch
your centers, deepest where

marriage circles dark waters,
strokes your sacrificial hands.

Strokes your
hair and the balance between

each strand. Appearing
as separate, yet the heat

from your open mouths.
Only then will I carry

the bowl filled with pomegranate.
Oh how your bodies suffer beauty.

Wait. Where are you going
inside my touch? Off to

visit the Queen of Morning
Glories? I clip. I deadhead.

My fingers stretch the vine.
Your bodies without the attendant

reminds me
to hold my breath by its root. I'll hold

I will
as long as you will

until we are—
nothing nothing

ever felt this—route
to the heart—from the cornea.

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FROM ***LIBRARY OF SMALL HAPPINESS*** BY LESLIE ULLMAN

One of Leslie Ullman's own poems that illustrate her essays and exercises on the craft of poetry:

Reading James Wright on Flight 357 from Albuquerque to Chicago

Sometimes a poem offers a series of
chance encounters—partial phrases that slip
into the next seat and lift me before
I re-engage approved electronic
devices. Sometimes a poem reads my mind
in that private space before thought gathers
itself into subject/verb, cause/effect—
the shades are down but I can see in
or the words are clear and the spaces be-
tween them are shades closing off the whole sky
of what's been left out—a spare, thrilling diet.
When my feet touch cracked tarmac again, part
of me remains behind a high, golden
window. Sealed off from the thronged neon streets.

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FROM *DAY OF CLEAN BRIGHTNESS* BY JANE LIN

approximate

as in the words
for the repetition of a bird waking you
just as you begin to concentrate
as in vanish

recall something in the chest
flexed into hardness
every time your mother vexed you
as in water

how it can't move fast enough
when bodies collide
rises up when your child needs you
having always needed you
from the breast

how yesterday was pancakes
she asked if there was time and you said yes
then there wasn't and still you made them
because you love her and she asked

as in thirst, your mother gone
as in it could have been song
now you're late and put out put
upon it could have been
song

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FROM **BLOODLINE** BY RADHA MARCUM

A Brief History of the West

Like years, the desert
has no edges—red dust, red
dust condensed, busted ash—like years,
a corrupt uniformity we cut through.

:

Where miniature houses sail out
over shelves thrust up, where air breaks
down on rock, on conglomerate
that defines a sky.

:

Or dream dry salt seeps
from pores in your calves.

:

In one settlement, a headless
fire truck rusting by a shed, plastic
cowboys. In another, rancid
frozen confection.

:

One year, the lakes were too white
when we went by.

:

Where we go trailing
our own wake of glass, like years
we enter, enter again, stop seldom, and rest
in our own dust impressions.

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FROM *HUM OF OUR BLOOD* BY MADELYN GARNER

Surgical Mask in the Time of Plague

Half my face erased, only eyes
above horizon—unmoored
from a crooked nose,
muffled mouth.

The nurses insist I wear a mask—
white as blisters,
as bone, as mausoleum marble.

Snow fort.

What have other mothers done
in times like these:

Hide in their homes?

Come swaddled
in gown and booties, blue-gloved?

Or do some of them attend, defiant—
faces bare?

For days I have kissed my son
through paper—
sail billowing with each exhale.

Now watching him again turn away
from me as if a stranger,
I choose.

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FROM **DARK LADIES & OTHER AVATARS** BY JOAN ROBERTA RYAN

Sequel

Dear Husband and King,
I'm writing to you because I'm afraid
someone is rewriting our story.

Lately, your mother has been
licking her lips and eyeing
the kids rather strangely,
and knowing her ogre-ish
lineage, I fear she admires
Daisy's round arms and Dawn's
dimpled knees with other
than grandmotherly affection.

I know how important your war must be,
but I'm worn out trying to make
my lamb printanier and blanquette de veau
tender enough to please her. Unless
you return to the castle with haste,
we're in imminent danger of losing,
my dear, our happily ever after.

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FROM **THE DOCTOR OF FLOWERS** BY RACHEL BLUM

Who would have come
if the angel had not come

*Was there something
you wanted to tell me*

A river flowed
through my house

*so there is nothing
you cannot say to me*

Water that
begins in the stairs
carries a velvet dress

like plaster
when my legs
are failing

and salt like snow
so suddenly
your laughter

and the sound
is a boat and the
boat is my hands

and I remember you best
with my hands

there it is always
the same day

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FROM **BIRD FORGIVENESS** BY MELINDA PALACIO

The Praying Tree

Ten years of driving the same highway, past the same tree, the picture is at last complete. The eucalyptus tree and narrow birds above a blessed steel sea with no thoughts of yesterday, today, or tomorrow.

Black cormorants on bare branches spread their wings as if in prayer. A sunny day in Summerland, and the tree, visible only from the highway, hides its penitent perch from cars racing by too fast.

Four wheels swerve to avoid a sheer cliff, southbound on the 101. The fat sun slides its yolk into the glass ocean. Slow down. See an empty nest of woven round sticks in the praying tree.

Birds soak in rays without fear of cancer or the nature of forgiveness. Slick imperfections, wet wings open and close in Morse code for good-bye.

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FROM **TURQUOISE DOOR** BY LAUREN CAMP

Letter to Mabel—From a Door Turning Inward

I drove through the old blinking light to the ranch you gave Lawrence.

As if the road could take me through reasonable perspective. The road with its spindly bushes and dust. The sky, combed and curling.

The Ranch is bending down. The body of land baked in sun. Beside his door stands a pity of trees. Even Georgia's pine has suffered and suffered again, and is now without fragrance, needles whipped from the heat.

Despite sudden afflicted weeds and shamble, the needy arrive for opinions. Yet the house has shed its unsteady hand. Every breach, each final line, the pace of his sentences. Walls in the cottage crack.

We want his spelling of sorrow, all the trembling. Have we asked too much?

Up the slight hill, where he holds to his revolutions, yellow lumps indulge in a pattern. I nearly kneeled in its persistence, or I should say, reeled as it billowed.

The dark grew rough, and I left. Time was again to its pauses. I saw two horizons: one when I looked back, hunted by hawks.

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FROM **THE CAIRNS: NEW and SELECTED POEMS** BY BILL BROWN

The Cairns

They're stacked beside the creek
on a hidden gravel road—patience
and craft, the artful searching,

seeing, chipping, shaping. Mostly
limestone, each rock—millions of years
forming, fossilized, story-filled—itself a cairn.

The hours spent in rugged contemplation,
water burble, wind in leaves, the forest's sway—
a present for those who pass as the earth

crumbles in time what human hands have made.
I stack words to remember what words alone
can't say. *The tongue is an eye*, a poet wrote,

not just a choking muscle, fumbling with age.
The earth a grave of lost words, stones
and children's bones; a cairn, itself, crude and holey.

The gift is in the labor, mother taught—
scraped palms, broken nails, tired backs,
the ordered wonder of shape.

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FROM **WE ARE MEANT TO CARRY WATER**

BY TINA CARLSON, STELLA REED, & KATHERINE DIBELLA SELUJA

We Are Meant To Carry Water

like buckets on rope
haul us up and be quenched.
Like clay vessels,
like aquariums, like troughs,
you can lead horses to us.
Built to carry each other
between islands
from drowning continent
to drowning continent,
lungs reconstituting holy springs,
each time a breath
of accordion pleats
little fist of sound escaping.
We are water heavy,
collapsing wells,
thick water pumps
through chest holes,
skiffs slip down spackled
rivers churning silt,
lake-eyed child, her rod
in the depths wishing.

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FROM *THE UNBUTTONED EYE* BY ROBERT CARR

The Boat That Takes Me

Blanket my body
in the hull of red canoe

Lay its heavy head
on a needled pillow of pine

Suck the cold knob
of Adam's apple –

Say goodbye
Misting foot against

a bone boat
adrift in memory

A hand clutches
the trim of a gun

metal dock
Silent trigger

not so hard to push
off after all –

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FROM *THE UNBUTTONED EYE* BY ROBERT CARR

FROM *THE BURNINGS* BY GARY WORTH MOODY

See And Be Astonished By Whatever Will Occur

Before the black water withdraws to scale the lake's shore with brine like skin
incandescent after love
before the black room's green
night-heron's eye becomes the mirror revealing myriad criminal stars, thinned relentlessly
into foreign
constellations unremembered
tarnished by the shrunken unkindled arbor of vacant memory and men riding antlered
deer under the horizon into the valley plaqued
with burn before the burning whirlwind or boiling pool no matter how shrunken the gyri
or jiggling fibered tangles before the white ones
leave their floating wooden mountains no matter how many still thrumming hearts we lift
from opened breasts of those pinned
to an altar for burning we will all be only variant syllables joined and spun through
the aqueduct's opened mouth into the river's sacrificial throat
like cries against wind in dream

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FROM **GIRL** BY VERONICA GOLOS

Ten Miniature Gods Swirl Inside the Room

How old are you?

Ten.

Do you know our names?

No.

How long do we have?

Mother will sleep. See? Her bottle is empty.

Do you dream of us?

Sometimes.

When?

When I'm under water. In the bathtub. I go under water and I open my eyes, and there are so many floating sparkles.

Will you come with us?

Where?

Where do you wish?

To the sea?

You will become

Mermaid.

Oh yes, please.

Yes, pearls in my hair, silver tail, my nails

purple as cyclamens.

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FROM *godspine* BY TERRI MUUSS

Alternate Names for Rape Survivors

1. held breath in the half-light of red-eyed dawn
2. muscle tension before the brick is thrown
3. forgotten bodies piled on a dorm-room floor
4. someone's daughter
5. shade from a leaf gone once the sun moves in the sky
6. life-destroyer of the hometown football star
7. huddled masses yearning to breathe breathe breathe br
8. twisted knot, a hive of cuts on thighs
9. disembodied soul and the cat's 10th life
10. your teacher, bus driver, dental hygienist, the girl who sits
stone-faced at church
11. (me)
12. every third woman reading this
13. a reinvention of reinvention
14. the millisecond before the razor or the noose

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FROM *ANYONE'S SON* BY DAVID MEISCHEN

The Words Inside

Night rustles in the hackberry leaves.
A gate hinge complains, nudged
by restless yearning. Henhouse mutterings

from wherever dreams have transported
these heavy, flightless creatures.
From the house behind him only

silence, no sign from the others. Father,
mother, sister, brothers. Awake they look
past him, eyes empty as grommets.

Tonight—the dark, the stars, the cool
against his skin—he burns to know
if somewhere there are others fed

by hungers that cannot be
quenched: out of deepest dark
beneath the nearest hackberry,

a white plume cresting, a tail
held sassily aloft. The boy on one
side, this unknowable creature

on the other, his impertinent sashay,
as if winking at the boy, his longing,
the meager rooms behind him, doors

opening so easily out to a sky
like this. Confetti incandescing.
The boy takes in as much

starlight as he can hold. Sleep
opens in him, its delicate petals,
a voice without words, singing him away.

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FROM *VANISHES* BY D E ZUCCONE

The 6s & 9s

That first trick, like telling a bedtime story relies on your face
being able to appear to invent details of what doesn't exist

as happiness. Pleasure's such a surprise we kiss it goodbye
before it arrives. Cotton candy, satin sheets, menus, chocolate

truffles, our favorite confusions diffuse our desires. I'm going
to show you two cards; they don't matter. Imagine you don't

know what to bring from your cave of disappeared. The Soldier
or the Tinder Box, a lost cat, a shame you hide beneath jewelry,

memories constantly sauntering off as you sleep...you have lost
too many, so much disappears, I see that you're distracted. Here

look, aren't these your 9s & 6s leaping into my hand? Does it matter
how I managed this? What's in your left hand, another itch?

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FROM *ABYSS & BRIDGE* BY RENÉE GREGORIO

The Grace of Now

sometimes seasons change in a whirl of wind
then smoke into being.
sometimes we turn a corner
only to meet ourselves face-to-face.

if there's trembling to be had, have it,
if falling is the only way to touch the ground,
surrender to what's startling and right—

fierce light rising over dense mountain
the sound of water falling on stone,
and this body (always this body)
with its back of grief and front of desire.

what would it be like
to stay with yourself
(not ahead as if running for a bus
not behind as if left on the platform by departing train)
just here, just now
in this warm, still air,
earth moistened by yesterday's brief rain?

know that.
claim what is good.
then get up:
take your place in this world.

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FROM *MANIFOLD* BY E R LUTKEN

Ars Parabola

Luc Bat for Horace and MacLeish

Can't say what a poem is or not
but graph it and the plot
might trace that perfect spot for one
whose vertex taps the sun:
abscissa makes a run from rhyme
to none and metric time
devolves from frozen symmetry.
Equal distance of free
line and focal point defines sure
sense, logic's stare obscured
as symbols play in pure sound's bright
flare. White-hot words ignite
a sharp savor, the bite, the risk,
an ordinate of bliss.

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FROM **M** BY DALE M. KUSHNER

The Handless Maiden

The leaves are alive with the fire of dying.
Dried blood for the roses. Marsh hay
for wintering corms. Travail of
of tiger lily and dwarf iris. Travail
of ruby rugosas. Tale of death and renewal.
Of the handless maiden, her calculating father,
and the devil, that loneliness, craving her beauty.
And the king who fashions
a pair of silver hands. Amputation
is not always annihilation, a blunt
but important fact. Remember,
there is often a garden. Globes of potent fruit.
And angels, sometimes in the form of a snake.
I am not lying about any of this. Not just in fairy tales
the hands grow back.

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FROM *AGOREOGRAPHY* BY JON RICCIO

My Handwashing Explained

If life gives you lemons, render into cleanser.
Leeches, boil the vanity. Lynxes, reformat
your zoo. If sepsis gives you purpose, work
for the CDC. My twenties were bravura:

duets for fixation and support group,
contagions that frazzled like SETI anaphora.
Unproven, they Fahrenheited my derma.
What damage the nerve flimflam?

Pathogens, a steam fugue. If the brain
gives you leopards, atrophy with faucet.
Looking for a leeway, I burrowed through

the citric while my disorder courted sink-
magma. I'm surprised my hands held,
the scald imperatives they received.

3: A Taos Press

FROM SECTION I OF **BLOOD SECRETS** BY ANITA RODRIGUEZ, JOAN RYAN, & ANDREA WATSON

FROM **M** BY DALE M. KUSHNER

Amadio

I trailed a ribbon, and you found a ribbon,
as I walked about the marketplace, stopping there
or there, and when you stood above me and twined it
around my head, no words. I remember your eyes
were the cloak of cold heaven and your hair raw-
threaded indigo. Even with the din of morning,
I felt a thinness of sound, an easing in of you.
I gathered myself to ask your name: *Amadio*:
as in *beloved*: Perhaps an un-frayed wanting.
You asked mine, as return: *Rena*: I answered.
Only one thing is more beautiful than prayer.
You paused in telling. *I would like to call it Song.*
Your smile was a tapestry, half cendal, half satin.
I wanted to take your heart, stitch it onto mine.

3: A Taos Press

FROM *100 DAYS* BY JAMES NAVÉ

Day 61 Who I Am Now

Every day the memory of my surgery recedes like the Taos sunsets. The recent irritation at the bottom of my scar has receded along with the fear that I might never be myself again. Of course, I'll never be thirty-two, kicked-back on a festival blanket, watching jugglers and dancers whoop and swirl up and down, round and round. Who I was then is not who I am now, nor who I will be tomorrow, or later this summer when I'll stroll around Prospect Park, or cross 14th Street to catch a train, watch pigeons, or talk with my friends over coffee in an all-night diner on First Avenue.

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FROM *THE HEAVY OF HUMAN CLOUDS* BY ROBERT CARR

I've Split the Ash, and Now I Read Anne Sexton

I spent the morning splitting ash
and now could sit, all day,

in the mouth of my woodstove.
Its maw, slightly open, hoping

to burn my tongue.
The sofa's soft denim, braided

rugs pooling all over the room.
The windchime, clanging

in curl at the backdoor.
Whitecapped lake.

Is this the end I want? Backdoor
bells? This inanimate book of deadened

songs that cover the second voice
in my head? The phone on mute?

I stand at an unscreened window.
Gray-stained water moves beneath

the gray-stained wind. Pine needles
cling – wet lashes between my breath

and the saddest gale. The house
is heating up. I must put on my shoes,

get out, kick the fallen mice,
the acorns in the drive.

3: A Taos Press

FROM *LITTLE SOUL AND THE SELVES* BY LESLIE ULLMAN

Little Soul Begins a Series of Field Notes

First, it attempts to deconstruct
little. Not as in child. More like
background noise, backup singer on a stage
crowded with selves, girl-child
in a brace of boys, bookish, maybe
timid, maybe muffled, maybe
content to be left alone
until ambushed and brought to its knees
by craving. For spotlight. For the world.

Impish? Sometimes. Voice of tickle
or mischief, lone firefly lacing the dusk.
Or still small voice, whisper in someone else's ear
as counsel, old-soul wise, even as Little Soul
was put to bed too early
and was afraid of the dark.

Is it young? Has it been male
in other lifetimes? In this life, it has
no clue how to seek and hold dominion
(no wish, either) or what rape
has to do with desire—no trace
of ancestral testosterone, warrior
anger, singular focus, life-risking prowess....

Has it ever been mother? In this life
it has kept its body to itself—
inclined towards unpeopled spaces,
plants that seed themselves
when tended, river stones
sun-warmed in the palm, shy
hooved and furred creatures.

3: A Taos Press

FROM *TWELVE DAYS FROM TRANSFER* BY ELEANOR KEDNEY

Women Pruning Pear Trees

When someone in the grief group shared,
*Some mornings, I don't get out of bed,
or I hate my body; I wonder if my husband
will leave me; I don't know my purpose in life;*

I listened. Both hands in my lap, left
on top of right, palms up. I read aloud
newly written poems about autumn rain,
apple pie, walking my dog, Shana.

At the end of the eight-week session,
Jan invited us to her house to prune
pear trees. It was February, snow possible,
the weather perfect for cultivating hardiness.

She laid the tools on the ground: secateurs, loppers,
saws, pole pruners. We thinned out weak-crossing
branches, keeping the ones with the least angle at their origins.
Avoided cutting fruit spurs, removed water spores.

We took the dead and damaged limbs,
knowing the unsung trees might not fruit that year,
but with our work they might the next. Inside,
there was lentil soup and warm bread, a long table.

We hung our coats and sat down, joking
about who worked the hardest. I rubbed my cold hands
together. On my wrist, a small scratch flared.
My arms ached from reaching toward the canopy.

3: A Taos Press

FROM *LIFE AFTERLIFE / A BOOK OF THE HOURS*

BY KATHERINE DURHAM OLDMIXON GARZA

Earth Sign

And in the dream, you come to me as a mountain lion,
and say, not simply life as the animation of the senses

or flow of blood or chlorophyll, but as what lights
the crystal quartz and flows from the black obsidian,

life that rises from the dead (for which there is no word
in our language), and gives the luminosity of the dark;

life that is the mystery of the mayfly and the mountain—
muffled rain song, naked branches of the apricot tree,

life gazing at the horizon from the rail of a rocking ferry
or at moonlit stones in the bed of a moving stream—

Spirits of Orpheus, the mourning doves sing to light
the morning. It was spring then, too.