

SPRING

THAW

23

LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE





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Hush

Gary Boelhower

I don't let the skull tattoos distract me
the missing teeth the recalcitrant recitation of crimes.

What matters is not the reasons for the plea bargain
not the long litany of laments about the lazy lawyer

not the competing bravado among your band
of discontents with all their disgruntled complaints.

What matters is how you say the names
of your two little boys with reverence.

How your poem calls their names
whispers their names so they are here now

running in the sweet grass
climbing the apple tree quick as squirrels

and their faces are shining words
spoken as promises

in a kind of hush this place is not used to
like a soft breeze blowing

from the future into this cinder block meeting room
in the St Louis County jail

where we write poetry
and the memories enter through

the sally port and the metal detector
like the smell of their hair after a bath

and that night you took them running on the beach
the sand still warm under the pure light of the stars.



Have You Been
Kayli Salmela

Remnants

Jennifer Hernandez

Record drought
reveals steam boat wrecks
in the mighty Mississippi.

Hulls of crafts
long submerged
now blink
at unaccustomed light.

The lives of those
stolen by storms,
drowned and dormant
these hundred years
and more.

Their bones picked clean
by river pike, so long ago
my great-grandmother
had not yet left her native land
to cross the ocean,
start a new life
here in this one.

Between Rock and a Flowered Space

Renee Trunt



Salvation

Brooke Boulton

Light leaves us soon. November takes it.
Dusk urges our eyes to yellow, pale
as they darken. We swarm lamp-lit streets,
warm by moonshine. We wait.
When we need them most, fall leaves fail
to protect us. We cross ourselves
in snow, its glow cold, a galactic pulse
closer to soul. We fade from darker days
into darker nights, rely more on what we cannot
see. Faith is oil and wax, anything that burns.
Our hope, split wood.
Prayer, silent friction of voices, remains
salient, unfelt. Numb hands break
birch like bread, our lips blushed with wine.
We soak ourselves in sin, bait immolation.
Months and days we wait—until light, snow
melt, white mountain avens, takes us,
and we no longer need what burns.

Hiking at the End of Winter

Lane Henson

Northern air was harsh in our throats
each day we trampled the untouched
snow.

A line of shadow deepened the valley.
Pine-tops burst with dark birds.

You and I,
we ascended.

Something unseen pressed each
step across the rock face:
a lake-wind,
the air heavy with cumulus.

You and I,
we found moss urging up
through the snowy ground,
between roots and granite hollows,
from fallen timber the color of bone.

White trillium petals
opened on the hillside—

the paper birch shed its pages:
one by one the wind unfolded them,
scattered them like our muted words
over the rough stones.

Close

Brooke Boulton

The phone rattles, shrill and clanky. *Too early to be called in early*, Mosier thinks as he stares at the wall. *Then again*, he remembers, *the mines are always calling*.

He takes another sip of coffee before he turns from the kitchen window to answer the phone.

“Yes, hello”?

“Hi, hello, Mr. Keenan? Mr. Keenan, this is Marissa Manning calling. School principal. Yes, Mr. Keenan, are you there?”

“This is Mosier.”

“Mr. Keenan, I’m calling to talk about Doblin. It seems there’s been—well. In Doblin’s art class.”

She pauses.

“Mr. Keenan, could you please come in for a meeting this afternoon at 3:00?”

“I’m third shift in the mines. 4:00, Miss Manning.”

“Yes, I understand. This is a matter of urgency.”

“Ok, 3:00.”

He hangs up the phone before she responds.

Mosier returns to his window, his coffee. He watches the nuthatches, bending and swooping through pine and birch. There is a new one, a small yellow bird he hasn’t seen much. It darts from a branch to the feeder, then back to the branch in a swift, fluid arc. Mosier holds a mouthful of coffee, feels the bitterness seep into his teeth. Winces and swallows.

+ + +

At 2:30, Mosier zips his coveralls, reheats the coffee, and secures it tightly in a thermos. A gift from Doblin.

Why did you choose this color, Doblin? It looks like a highlighter.

It glows in the dark, dad. Duh. You can see it better down in the mines.

The cup makes him think of Doblin when he’s alone in the dark. He appreciates it enough.

+ + +

Mosier parks the truck and walks toward the school entrance. The rough canvas of his coveralls swishes like sand, steel-toed boots silent in the snow. He opens the main door and removes his gloves, conscious of the black beneath his fingernails.

Miss Manning is waiting. She nods her head at Mosier, welcomes him, and he follows the soft sounds of her clapping heels down the tile, past imitable classrooms. The art on the walls gets more recognizable the far-

ther they walk, until it stops completely, and color leaves the walls altogether.

They turn a final corner and enter a large room. The Art Room. Mosier appreciates the messy floors, splattered with paint and scattered clay dust, broken chalk and pencils, scraps of colored paper.

“Where’s Doblin?”

“He may or may not join us, Mr. Keenan.”

“Mosier is fine, Miss Manning.”

“Of course,” she responds absent-mindedly, clopping across the room to another table and returning with a drawing that she holds extended, as if diseased. She places the drawing on the table in front of Mosier, delicately. He begins to scan the image.

“Mr. Keenan, we know that Doblin is a talented—” she pauses, “artist.” She clears her throat. “The task for this assignment was to draw a self portrait—”

Mosier stops listening to her as soon as he notices Frank leaning in the far doorway. His black hair is smoothed in place with finger traces. His button-down shirt is just barely flannel and rolled to the elbows. He sips a cup that says “art teacher” in plain black letters, which Mosier thinks is funny, so he smirks.

“Mr.—Mr. Keenan?” Miss Manning redirects him. Mosier nods at Frank before turning back to Miss Manning. “Mr. Keenan, are you aware of the magnitude of this issue?”

“I’m sorry Miss Manning. What’s the issue?” He really wasn’t listening to her. Something about a woman in a red dress. Miss Manning looks ready to smack her rather large palms onto the table and rise, but instead she reaches for Mosier’s arm, regrets it, and clasps her hands together, leaning back deeply into the shitty plastic chair.

“Mr. Keenan, Doblin has drawn his self-portrait as a woman. As a scantily clad woman in a red dress. Provocative. And she is apparently twirling under the gaze of womanizers in a dark, smokey room! Mr. Keenan, the implications—”

Mosier looks closer at the drawing. His eyes soften. He swipes a finger gently across the paper, in one of darkest places that Doblin had shaded. Rubs his fingers together. “Is this coal?”

Frank walks over. “That’s charcoal, Mosier,” and extends his hand. Mosier takes it, noticing the many ways Frank’s hand was colored. A rainbow of stuff cakes his fingernails. What looks like at least week-old primer stripes his forearm. Frank sits down and smiles at Mosier. A sad smile. An “I’m sorry” smile.

“Charcoal is Doblin’s favorite medium,” Frank adds. Mosier leans back, thinking he might have seen Doblin lingering where Frank had stood in the doorway. He looks back to the drawing, filling his eyes with the woman, the red dress, the slight, twirling figure with downcast eyes, scratched out in coal by his son’s own hand.

Mosier scratches his head, his beard. He looks at Miss Manning who is waiting with so much impatience, the room is full of her.

“Miss Manning, maybe Doblin sees himself as a woman in a red dress. I don’t know. What do you want me to tell you?”

“We can’t have our young men portraying themselves in such a provocative manner. These works will be displayed as part of the Senior Spring Fair, clearly labeled as ‘Self Portraits’. What are we supposed to do? What

will the men in the mines think of your son?”

At this comment, Mosier rises quietly from the table. “I appreciate that you have some sort of concern, Marissa. I’ll talk to Doblin.” He pauses and nods, “Frank.”

“I’ll walk you out.”

Frank and Mosier leave Miss Manning at the art table, staring dumbfounded at the woman in the red dress, her copper hair so unlike Doblin’s, her skin so fair, a tiny wrist curled and risen in defiance. Miss Manning scoffs and leaves the room, almost slamming the door behind her.

+ + +

It’s 4:00am. Doblin puts on a pot of coffee. At 4:13am, the coffee is done, and Mosier is closing his truck door, shuffling through the snow to the back deck. He bangs his boots and walks inside, so delighted to the warm smell of fresh coffee spiked with bacon, maybe the hint of a snubbed cigarette.

Doblin’s standing at the stove, frying meat. “Hey dad”. He turns with a quick smile. He’s shirtless, his sagging sweatpants barely hanging to his hips.

“Thanks, Doblin.” Mosier sits as Doblin hands him a strong, hot cup of coffee. It says “miner” in plain black letters. Mosier recalls the cup Frank held earlier at the meeting.

“Dad. I think I’m in love with Frank.” He’s talking to the bacon, mostly.

“Can we talk about your drawing first?”

“Miss Manning is so stupid. She thinks I think I’m a fucking girl.”

“Doblin, she didn’t know your mom. She’s just trying to, I don’t know, keep her idea of whatever peace is.”

“You want to know the best part dad? I used fucking coal from the fucking mines to draw that. She didn’t even know! Just imagine what the guys at the mines would think if they knew!”

“I know, Doblin, *I know*. But Miss Manning doesn’t know. She’s new and she doesn’t know.”

Doblin sits down with bacon, a loaf of white bread, and a large bottle of Tabasco sauce.

“You still puttin’ that shit in your—” Mosier watches as Doblin shakes Tabasco into his coffee, then dunks his bacon in it. “Why you up so early?”

“I wanted to eat with you. I wanted to talk about the drawing. I remember when you told me about falling in love with mom at that stupid, stuffy party she made you go to. How she danced in front of all the guys that thought they were going to marry her. But you were there, and she had already decided that you were going to marry her. That’s what I wanted to draw.” Doblin twirls his hand emphatically. “That’s me, dad.”

“Well, try explaining that to Miss Manning. Just don’t provoke her. Have you seen her hands?”

This prompts Mosier to look at Doblin’s hands as he picks apart pieces of white bread, soaking up bacon grease. Black under his nails, rubbed into his skin. Doblin talks about the drawing, about school and Frank, who was “sorry, by the way,” Doblin ad libs. “He was embarrassed you had to be there. He couldn’t stop her, the b—”

“Doblin.”

“Sorry. Marissa wanted me there. Frank told me not to go. Did you want me to be there, dad?”

“I just want you close, Doblin. That’s all.”

After a while, when it was time for another cup of coffee, when the sun was starting to draw light and shadows through the trees, when the nuthatches and chickadees had set about their daily motions of flight and food, Mosier gets up and leans against the kitchen counter.

“Doblin.” He waits for his son to make eye contact. “Why do you think you love Frank?”

“I made you those coffee cups at the same time.”

“Ok...”

“Well, I don’t know. I guess I thought it was obvious.”

“That doesn’t answer my question. Do you think Frank loves you?”

“I think Frank knows that I’m 18 and a high schooler who graduates in three months. I think Frank knows that this is a mining town full of people with good intentions but not a lot of sense. Not a lot of depth, which is, I don’t know, ironic? What would they do, dad, your friends, if they knew? Sure, they protect me because they respect you, but—.” He could fight tears. “I’ll never leave you, dad. I won’t leave you here.”

“I don’t want you to stay, Doblin. But I want you to be close.”

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“Frank?”

“Hey Mosier, take a seat.”

Frank and Mosier sit at the bar, one of two in town. This is the teacher’s bar, which is a bit safer than the miner’s bar.

“My son’s in love with you, Frank. Well, he thinks he is—just a whisky, thanks,” he nods to the bartender.

“Doblin is something else. I’ll be honest, Mosier, we’ve spent some time together. Nothing, you know,” and he twirls his hand to avoid having to say anything more uncomfortable than what they’re both already thinking. “Mostly smoke cigarettes by abandoned mining ops. Doblin writes there sometimes...like, graffiti.” They drink for a while.

“That drawing is...it should be somewhere, Mosier. Doblin should be somewhere.”

“You know it’s his mom, my wife, Tora.”

“Yeah, I know, Mosier.”

“Will you take him somewhere?”

Between

Lane Henson

The stones along our path
were frigid in full sun.
We felt winter in those grooves our fingers traced
as if already filled with snow.

The wind spoke also
of it, dragging its few bright clouds
like white feathers along the blue wheel of sky above.

The vistas were basalt,
granite, grey,
then one maple in a sea
of maples flamed,
then endless green again
clinging to its dying season.

Pine-scent. The mile-high glide
of sandhills at altitude
carrying the sky south,
their warble an unearthly intonation—
a sound without origin.

We come again to this
silent precipice
 switchback of memory,
passing the cave's mouth
where the black bear slows its heart.

The season pierces our uncovered skin
 like the arrows of migrating
 geese overhead.

 We stand in reverence
 looking out,
waiting.

Later we'll pile our loose sticks,
set them ablaze.

We'll hold the deep cold in our bones close.

Walking Meditation

Jennifer Hernandez

What I really need
is to stand in the light,
bright beams breaking
through dim winter sky,
to stand and chant
an eight word mantra
every eight paces
for eight hours straight
until the infinity
of the number
flows through my pores,
seeps into my soul,
leads me toward whole.
We'll hold the deep cold in our bones close.

Quiet Visitors

Roberta House on Rainy Lake

Liz Jaeger

You would think that at 40 below zero all creatures would be tucked in, deep in the woods, close together to conserve heat.

Yet here they are beneath my window, deer venturing out in their thick fur coats slightly ruffled in the wind, foraging for bark and white cedar twigs as a deep red opens among the pines on the horizon, a harbinger of the snow storm ahead.

The deer do not gaze at the sunrise as I do, admiring it for its simple beauty here in the north country, far from the noise of towns. They walk away slowly, stiffly, a single line along the ridge of Rainy Lake, snow to their knees, avoiding the drop to ice below hidden by heavy snowfalls, as they reach for shriveled berries still clinging to branches of overhanging trees.

Suddenly they freeze with one hoof raised, held fast, poised for a forward motion or a quick retreat as through the window their eyes catch my shadow grey and indistinct. Then, seeming to sense no threat, they thrust it down forcefully into hard crusty snow, pushing onward, together, in the bitter cold.

I want to touch the brown-grey coats that they wear, stroke their soft ears, rub their noses, and look deep into their dark brown eyes to learn their secrets of community and survival in the wilderness.



Whitetails Playing in the Snow After a Snowstorm

Aaron Gilbertson

I Have Become Her

Liz Jaeger

On this morning that promises sultry heat,
I have become the best of my mother
rising early and donning a scoop-necked,
sleeveless shift dress of faded minty green
to make tuna macaroni salad
with tight, round noodles,
and no bake oatmeal cookies
abundant in juicy raisins.

I hear my mother's voice as I take each step,
"Do it before the heat of the day sets in."
I toss clothes into the washer,
hang wet clothes on the line,
check the roses for beetles and aphids,
then back inside, close the windows and curtains
to trap the cool night air.
My mother's secret weapon, the oscillating fan,
I resurrect from deep in the dark basement
and it soon provides a gentle breeze.

My knees and hands ache
as I move on with determination
through easier chores, thinking as my mother did:
Forget the pain. Tasks must get done.

For so long, I could only see the differences
between her life and mine.
Her choices and mine.
It is the unremitting pain this day
that wakens me to my mother's wisdom
and suffering for years
as her bones gradually softened.

I see her slope as I slide down mine.
I have become her.



Amused
Kayli Salmela

Things I've Lost

Anonymous

Several pairs of sunglasses: left at church, in hotel rooms, at restaurants, and in carpool vans. A pair of boots: at the bowling alley where my friend's 9th birthday party was, after going home in someone else's pair. My childhood fear of bigfoot, by means of imaginary bigfoot friends who kept me company. Imaginary friends: after realizing I wasn't afraid anymore. A pair of swimming goggles: in the bottom of Hale Lake when I was ten, because I thought they would float. Clear skin: when puberty started to make its mark on me in 7th grade. Endless energy: around the same time, when life became a chore instead of an adventure.

A belief that my family was healthy, after learning that constant divorce threats flying through the air on a battle ground known as the dinner table, wasn't normal. A great deal of hope that things would ever change between my parents, after a handful of counseling attempts. Arts and crafts projects that went from the fridge straight to the trash without my knowledge. Faith in the stories my older brother told me, at around 8 years old, after finding out that the arrow on the back of Walgreens was not pointing to the entrance of a secret underground subway station, but in fact, a drive-thru. My best friend: when my brother left for college.

Unending possibilities: when my indecisiveness turned into laziness. Opportunities to speak my mind, because I didn't want to be judged. Time: hours and hours wasted on video games and YouTube. Precious moments with family: tainted by my anxious thoughts. A sense of magic every time I look outside because I'm too stuck in my mind to notice the beauty around me. My cool: when people victimize themselves instead of taking responsibility for their actions. My integrity: when I end up doing the same thing.

Hope: in 2018, that the Vikings will ever win a Superbowl. Confidence in the future: my freshman year of high school, after a worldwide lock-down. My appetite: after looking at the news. A fascination with large cities: when I realized that being lonely is even worse when there are people everywhere.

My hatred for writing papers: in 10th grade, when Mrs. Blair showed me how fun it can be to create a written work you can take pride in. Pencils, in the corners of my backpack, and left in random desks and drawers. Sleep: since high school, over every assignment, test, and essay. Points: on many of those assignments, despite the self-inflicted suffering for studying. My dislike of learning: sure, it can feel like torture sometimes, but I like the mental challenge.

More recently, my disgust of "healthy foods." A large amount of my insecurity: last year, when I started to get comfortable in my own skin. My fear of the dark, after realizing that I love the stars. My desire to fit in: where is "in," anyway? My simplistic view of love: after seeing the complicated struggles and beautiful victories of the couples around me. Those darn socks: does the washing machine really eat them? My childhood: slowly over my teenage years, and yet so suddenly over the past few months.

Crooked Maps

LL Kelly

The frame had never been that crooked before. I knew we must have been in grave danger. A little tilt here and there with storms and shootings and political unrest was... well, maybe "normal" isn't the right word, but it wasn't unheard of. That morning when I passed the frames, the Minneapolis map was almost perfectly at forty-five degrees, almost defying gravity. I honestly don't know how it stayed on the wall like that, but when I gently straightened it it never fell.

Weirder still, the St. Paul map was only slightly crooked. We had the two vintage maps hanging on the wall right next to each other, just like the cities themselves, our little ode to old maps and history and home. If the tilt was caused by something bouncing one frame, you'd think both would bounce approximately the same amount, but not this time.

Then again, we knew by that point that the tilt was not caused by physics. I don't know how many times the maps warned us of something before we noticed, but eventually we did. The first time was shortly after a major car accident occurred just up the street from our home, and I noticed the St. Paul frame was ever so slightly crooked. I thought I had just straightened it recently, but... life in an old home, I suppose. The whole house had shaken with the impact of the cars, that must have tilted the frame. The...one...frame?

Then a few weeks later it was crooked again, and that night a house burned down in our neighborhood. It was an old neighborhood full of old houses, and this was not the first house to burn down, but the damn St. Paul map was crooked again, and there was no house-shaking boom this time. Not before or during the fire, though I noticed the map was crooked before the fire even broke out.

It was harder to figure out the messages from the Minneapolis map, as we didn't know very many people that lived within that map's boundaries. I started looking though, after the Minneapolis map was extra crooked the morning of a shooting. More often than not, something dangerous went down shortly after the map was found crooked. It was usually just one map or the other, and whichever city it was held the danger that day.

We had no idea where the maps originally came from, or what life they had led. We knew they were nearly 150 years old. We knew they were extraordinarily accurate for the time they were made. We knew that at some point, they had ended up in the hands of a book dealer who then sold them to us at a book festival. We, being old souls ourselves and devotees of our state and our cities, framed them with the best frames and UV-resistant glass we could afford and hung them proudly for display.

Originally, when I first realized what was going on, I thought the maps were magicked to warn of danger, but that seemed unnecessarily complicated. Why spell them to go crooked on the wall? What if they weren't hung on the wall? They weren't originally meant to be, they were meant to be used, handled by the people who needed to move about in those spaces. Eventually I began to think that they simply... became. Enough people poured enough attention and care into them that they began to care as well.

Obviously, they're just maps. They don't speak. They don't have opinions. They don't have fears. And yet, like the Velveteen Rabbit, it seems that they began to care. They Became, and in Becoming, they became talismans for those who would pay attention.

I didn't tell my partner that I thought the maps were... warning us... for years. Not until the Minneapolis

one was extra extra crooked one morning, the one day he was working downtown and then going to a work event downtown and really really could not leave the city of Minneapolis for 14 hours straight. The map was so crooked it set off a panic attack for me, because I couldn't convince him not to go to work that day. Turns out a panic attack and emergency room visit did the trick though, and it was while we were in the waiting room figuring out that it was probably just a panic attack that we heard.

There had been a massive gas explosion.

It wasn't in my partner's building, or even on that block, but it was on the edge of downtown, and dozens of people died. There was obviously mass confusion, and traffic and travel was messed up for a full 2 days. It was the worst incident since the Washburn Mill exploded, worse even than the 35W bridge collapse.

Anyway, that was the day my partner was convinced the maps were... clairvoyant, I guess?

No, clairvoyant is not quite the right word. They were warning signs, letting us know if one or both of the cities were going to be dangerous places to be soon. Most of the time they were just a little crooked, and the danger wasn't too bad. We went about our business on those days, because the odds of the danger being at the same place as us at the same time as us was pretty low.

Neither of them had ever hit the 45 degree angle before though.

Something that dangerous... how could it affect Minneapolis so much more than St. Paul? St. Paul was still crooked, but not nearly as much. Something big was happening, and somehow it was mostly only happening in Minneapolis. I never thought the cities were that far apart from each other, but if the maps said those few miles made a difference then we were going to listen.

We both worked from home that day. Around midday the news finally got around the Cities: Yellowstone was finally exploding, and it was likely going to be as big as they feared. Most of the park was already gone: all the wildlife, all the tourists, all the towns, everything. Our own American Pompeii.

Anyone living far enough to survive the initial explosion got in their cars and ran in the opposite direction. It didn't matter if they had family or friends where they were going. It didn't matter if they were heading for the Arctic tundra or the Mexican border, it didn't matter if they were heading towards familiar faces, or if they were leaving behind lifeless family. They just ran. Those of us far enough away to not see the smoke until mid-afternoon had a little more time to pack our treasures and our lives, but not much.

Scientists scrambled to figure out what a safe distance was, but those of us with family on the coasts just kept driving. It made more space for those coming behind us, we argued, but really it meant we would already be as far away as we could get. As happens with something never seen before, none of the predictions were perfectly accurate, but most of them got close. They all said the lava shouldn't spread farther east than the Midwest.

Right where we lived. Right where our home and our lives were.

In the end, the lava did stop in the Midwest. The smoke was everywhere across the globe, there was no stopping that. The ash covered most of the Americas. The lava stopped in the Midwest though, just as they predicted. It covered Minneapolis. It never touched St. Paul. It turned out the miles weren't the important part, the *Mississippi river* was.

We had packed up everything strictly necessary to transport two people and two pets halfway across the

country. We left behind books and pictures and heirlooms and memories that were precious to us. We left behind a nearly new car. We left behind almost anything we didn't strictly *need*, expecting that it would all be enveloped in lava. We never expected to see any of it again, but it wasn't worth risking our lives to try and save all of it.

We took those maps though, and drove them all the way to relatives in Virginia. We drove them all the way home after everything cooled too, and we never ignored a crooked map again.



Forgotten Frequencies

Brendan Stermer

I.

Listen: this is the station we all know.
It resonates in every human head.
All day I hear the never-ending show:
The anxious host, the same three ads reread,
The local news, the forecast for more snow,
The names and dates of locals newly dead —
Unless I turn the dial a few degrees
And listen for forgotten frequencies.

II.

Static. And then, from underneath the fuzz,
A woman's voice emerges, like a mist.
No schizophrenic chatter — no, she does
Not pester, does not lie, does not insist.
She whispers of what is, will be, and was,
Then kindly asks permission to exist.
If I pretend I am not listening
To that strange woman, she will start to sing.

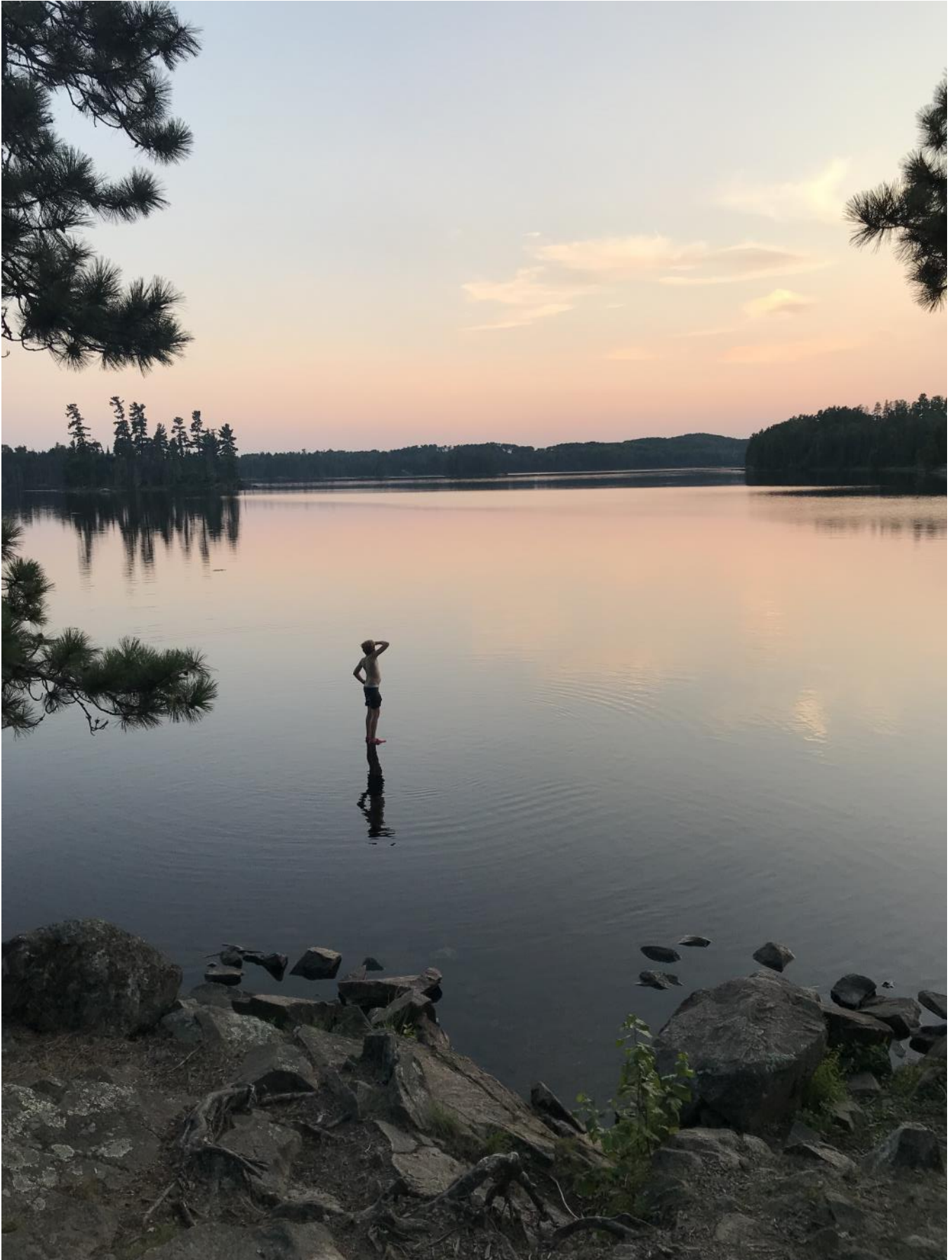
III.

Not by smart speakers in quick-moving cars
Are muses summoned from their secret lairs —
But by slow rivers, lonely, cloud-dimmed stars,
Love's shadows, and long pauses in our prayers —
Broadcasting dispatches from inner wars,
New language for old triumphs, old despairs;
But now the signal drops, and all I hear
Is local weather, punditry and fear.

IV.

If only there were time to walk each night
Beside that rising sea of swaying corn,
To feel those rural muses taking flight,
To hear that rural music being born,
To walk in silence toward some far-off light,
Some beacon, from a farmhouse or a barn,
By which to sit and write that music down,
And then to rise and drift back into town.

Untitled
Maiya Salmela





Pink Lady Slippers with Swamp Buttercup
Michael Hanley

Near the Road to Kitchi Gammi

Lane Henson

I went down to the water
between the Lester River's mouth
and the road to Kitchi Gammi—

no one was there.

Only those basalt slopes angled steadily
to the Lake like great slabs forgotten by glaciers
and the yellow hum of afternoon.

An impression in the rock held a storm-pool.
Below me, the waves were now a slow staccato.
I leaned over and the wind

rippled the surface to iridescence.
In the pool's depths, leaves were wild in my hair.
I leaned further:

flakes of light were my eyes.
So were the stones.
I wandered down through my face and into the stones,
and beneath them—

another reflection, and another:

I thought I might drown in those
mirrored currents.
I am the day's trespasser now

facing north in the dimming light,
toeing the boundary of evening.
When I lie down finally in my bed,

the water pools at the back of my skull like memory.

Spring Proclaims the Sandhill Crane

Michael Hanley

Nothing heralds spring so true
after winter's frozen grip
than wispy clouds in a steel-gray sky
and cranes on a northern trip.

From high above awakening land
they trumpet loud refrains
that echo across thawing lakes,
spring proclaims the sandhill cranes.

With feathers sleek and rusty gray,
legs out stretched long and fine,
they dance upon the thermals,
in a graceful, V-shaped line.

For miles and miles, for days on end
they wing north from a southern roost.
Which marsh is theirs? Which lake is best?
Will they feel their urge seduced?

They leave behind the southland
for the greening of the north,
to raise a brood of fledgling colts,
helping generations go forth.

How they know from where they came
is a mystery that long remains.
All I know is the joy I feel when
spring proclaims the sandhill cranes.

The Alchemy of a Leaf

Brooke Boulton

You spent the last year preparing to disconnect
forever. Now, as daylight falters and noon bends
too eager toward darkness, I find you near

falling. Your margins have drained
green to yellow, veins adept at turning
misery to gold—apex, midrib, base.

You've stopped eating, your petiole holding
to little more than tissue and scars, cells
severing stem from branch. This is no world

to cling to. Your roots belong to another season.
Pray for wind and transmutation.
The wait is worth your gold, the understory yours

to decompose. It's ok to let go, so long
as you forsake death as your unction.
You were never meant to last beyond Autumn.



Skipper Butterflies on Dark Blue Delphinium
Michael Hanley

Sensing Place

Steven Engel

I boarded the Denali National Park tour bus around noon, bound for Wonder Lake, eighty miles down the Park Road. At Stony Hill overlook the Mountain itself came into view but no one on the bus was looking in its direction. Instead, all eyes were on the grizzly bear busily digging for Arctic ground squirrels just seventy-five yards away. It was a huge bear that seemed to delight in sticking its rear end in our faces. At the moment we arrived on the scene in our yellow school bus, the front half of the bear was underground while a steady stream of brown earth spewed from between its hind legs.

My field notes say:

The bear is moving dirt like a team of badgers. Every couple of minutes it lifts its forequarters out of the hole, swings sideways and stares intently at the ground, as if listening. Face covered with dirt except for a thin streak of shiny saliva that outlines lips, gums and gleaming white teeth. It seems to be grinning in a self-assured way. Then it swings its big rear end back towards us and literally dives head and shoulders into the hole. As it digs you can almost see the ground deflate.

Then someone says, "He got it." Sure enough, the bear is out of the hole again and chewing on something. It steps on the excavated rodent with its front paw and pulls with its teeth. In less than a minute tiny hind feet are dangling from the bear's enormous muzzle, then they're gone too. The bear walks a few yards. It grabs the wind with its nose as though pulling itself into a world of smells. It defecates, then turns uphill and walks as only a grizzly can walk.

The long front legs merge rapidly into the bulk of the shoulders. The front paw, the same front paw that can break a caribou's neck with one swipe or move boulders like marbles, is lifted and flicked daintily out of the way as the hind foot swings forward and lands just ahead of the front footprint. The shoulder hump, a defining characteristic for grizzly bears, rolls evenly and smoothly with each step, as though absorbing the animals' weight.

The pads of the feet, just visible from our angle, are enormous, a shiny gray and black peeking out from the dark fur of the legs. Five claws protrude like stilettos but function more as shovels. The bear's hind end swells from the rest of the body like a balloon. The contours of the hind legs are hidden except when activity exposes them. When the bear was digging and had its hind feet on the lip of the hole the legs stood out like pillars, surprisingly long.

They say a bear's territory is wherever it happens to be, and the personal space of this bear kept us in the bus far better than any regulations. At the moment it is a professional squirrel digger: intelligent, strong, and knowing. Versatile. Later I hear that this bear chased and caught another squirrel above ground. Imagine 400 pounds of teeth and claws chasing around two pounds at the bottom of the food chain. It's not something you want to get involved in.

Down the road was a sow bear with two young of the year loping along behind her. The cubs, bow legged and flat bodied, looked like Wolverines on stilts. Their bear mass had not yet obscured the long limbs they are born with. A few miles further another lone bear was eating sedges and grass.

The diet of the Denali grizzlies is diverse. Fish are not a seasonal staple here as they are for coastal bears,

and winter comes early and stays late. In the spring newborn ungulates, such as moose and caribou, soon become too swift for easy capture. Fresh green growth and the roots of various plants are what fill bear stomachs until the berries ripen. Carrion is a bonus whenever it is found. Life is hard overall, in this mountainous tundra region. Consequently, Denali grizzlies are smaller and, some say, hungrier and ornerier than the coastal brown bears.

Nonetheless, the Park allows people to wander through the bear's world on bus, bicycle, or foot with just a bit of training on how not to become a source of bear food, directly or indirectly. It is a unique opportunity and when we reach the Wonder Lake Campground I decide to take advantage of it in the form of an evening hike to the McKinley Bar.

Most of the other campers at Wonder Lake were having their supper as I hoisted my daypack and walked to the McKinley Bar trailhead. I was itching to stretch my legs and a six-mile hike sounded great and doable, since sunset wasn't 'til after midnight.

The McKinley Bar is a flat stretch of glacier born river flowing west from Denali. A glacially fed river exhibits unique properties in its streambed due to changes in flow volume related to air temperature. Put another way, during the day more glacier ice melts and the river level rises. During the night, less ice melts and the river level drops. Each time the flow decreases, some of the gravel and silt carried by the river is deposited in the channels. When the river rises again it creates alternate pathways around channels now blocked by yesterday's debris.

The resulting streambed is called a braided river channel and it looks just like it sounds. It may be a mile wide but most of the water is confined to just a few channels at any given time. The water moves from one to another and over much time it weaves a network of channels and intervening gravel bars across the valley floor.

Standing next to such a river is disorienting. Liquid ribbons of gray, each at a slightly different level, weave amid gray rocks and sand. The channels run deep, run shallow, and then run dry as the fickle water chases gravity along the line of least resistance. It is a landscape vocal with the sound of rushing water and ground-up rock grudgingly moving downstream. Full of movement and stillness, it is difficult to say where one ends and the other begins.

For hundreds of yards on either side of the wet channels lie older channels gone dry. The finest silts and muds, those that give the water its gray color, have been deposited here, forming the perfect medium for capturing footprints in exquisite detail. This is what I have come for.

To get to the McKinley Bar you must pass through the largest expanse of boreal forest in the park, known as The Big Timber. Seen from a distance it is the quintessential "big-bad-dark woods." It stretches as far as the eye can see from left to right but is only a mile thick along the trail to the bar. It is bordered on one side by a stretch of muskeg containing several clear streams. Then spruce trees respond to the slightly higher and better drained soils to form what amounts to an old growth forest in this part of the world: four-hundred-year-old white and black spruce trees that soar all of fifty feet tall.

The trail through the woods is well worn, straight, and easy to follow. A myriad of boot sole patterns pock the mud, overlapping in direction and time. Not as obvious are the other creatures that also use the trail. The first grizzly bear track I noticed stood out in contrast to the wolf prints I had been keeping tabs on. Then I backed up and discovered the bear had been registering on the trail for some time now.

Grizzly bear and wolf, the two largest carnivores in the park, have both been here recently. By the looks

of it, the wolf came by today, going away from the bar. The bear had been here before that, travelling in the same direction as I was.

Okay, fine. Remembering the cardinal rule: "Thou shalt not surprise a bear in the woods," I began to have a conversation with myself out loud.

"Steve, listen to me." I said, "What are you, nuts? Turn around you fool. Get out of here. For one thing, these guys are bigger than you. For another thing they have sharp claws and teeth. And for a third thing, they have big appetites and no supermarkets. Turn around."

At least the sound of my own voice was reassuring. As a kid in northern Minnesota, you never could have told me that someday I would walk through the woods alone at night, but here I was, walking through the Big Timber in the footsteps of grizzly bear and wolf. As I ventured on, the dense forest let in less and less light. Finally, a glow through the tree trunks ahead signaled Mecca was near, the McKinley Bar.

Reaching the bar was worth it all. Just as I had hoped, tracks were everywhere. Caribou, wolf, and semi-palmated plover tracks laced the braided streambeds. I was beginning to lose hope for grizzly tracks when a slanting shaft of sunlight hit a patch of silt just right.

There, reflecting a dull shine and contrasting with the surrounding gray mud, were shallow but regular depressions laid down in a just-so pattern. Though faint, the size and pattern of footprints was unmistakably griz with the hind foot, eleven inches long and five-and-a half wide, placed just ahead of the front foot.

That evidence of this bears passing can appear through the veils of time when the light is just right is evidence that there is always more to see than first meets the eye. Old now, next year these tracks may still be here in the form of young willows whose cottony, windswept seeds were deposited in a series of depressions, laid down in a just-so pattern.

A Semipalmated Plover pierces my reverie with an alarm call. Like an echo, a ghostly gray Northern Harrier floats by. Though it leaves no tracks, its presence has been duly noted. In this open landscape of movement and stillness, I feel my usual point of view is at risk of being swept away. The distinctions I draw between the landscape and its inhabitants, and between inhabitants, are becoming less defined and more intertwined. More and more braided, like the river itself.

Soon it will be time to collect the plaster casts I've poured that tell stories of this shifting environment. And then I'll head back to camp through the Big Timber.

Any Lover Speaks
Liz Merrigan

Two white geese flew over the town,
Side by side, wing-dipped in joy,
Rising on the wind, turning into
Blue sky stretched wide by the journey,
Feathered hearts young with universal love.

That will be you and I, dear heart,
Flying side by side, gathering sun
And sky around us like a warm quilt of white
In case our flight takes us through
High ice and patches of the dark.

Love is on our wing,
Flying side by side
Over the town.

Untitled
Maiya Salmela





**Blueberries
Evolution**
Michael Hanley

August Eve
Holly Duester

Like a grandfather clock standing tall in the night sky
The moon is the only indicator of the passing time

Its light reveals to us the road ahead
So bright, it makes headlights almost obsolete
As the truck wheels persevere down the empty street

The taste of chocolate ice-cream idles in my mouth
Sweet, smooth, and too short lived
The perfect pairing to a day spent on the lake

The sound of laughter rings in my ears
As we tell stories from the afternoon
While licking clean our plastic spoons

Savoring this moment, I close my eyes
I am not yet ready to say goodbye
To these glorious hours of summertime

Soon the silent sound trap of the snow
Will confine me to the walls of my bedroom
And offer me no escape from the loneliness
Of that cold and constricting space

That is when I will remember these late-night drives
And that is when I will long for this feeling of closeness inside

The Necklace of Character

Holly Duester

Forged through fire and molded painfully
The pendent you carry is marked forever by trauma

But with the grace of the women who wear you
Those scars have been embraced for how they've defined you

Your simple, timeless beauty never fades away
Though the tarnish of your chain reveals your age

You came from an era when things were made to last
And you carry with you the wisdom of generations past

You don't fuss or try to gain attention
Not like your friends who grasp at every mention

They will all break and slowly lose their allure
But you're still here, complementing every complexion

Portrait—African Daises

Vicki Lessard



December

Brendan Stermer

Walk with me, dear friend,
Into the blustery night,
Beyond the rows of artificial light,
 Around the bend;

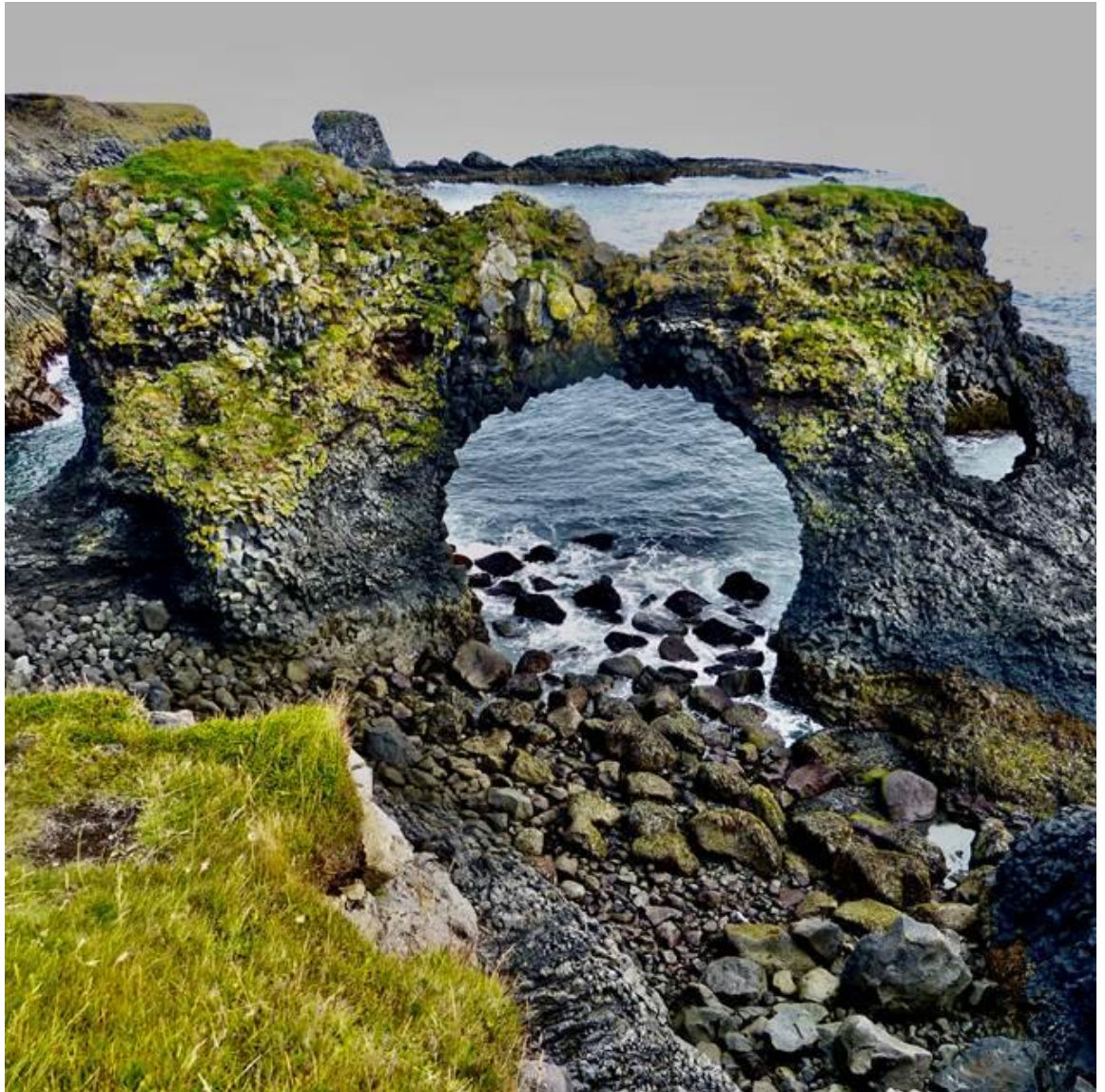
And follow me to where
The moon rests on the snow,
Far from the streets where busy shoppers go
 And carols blare;

And stand and wait until
The fever in your mind
Breaks in the silver breath of snow and wind,
 And you are still.

Untitled
Cate Belleveau



Untitled
Cate Belleveau



Betrayal

Brendan Stermer

The storm came suddenly, and we were scared.
We sheltered in your little house together.
Not one of our new garden sprouts was spared.
We watched them disappear and cursed the weather.

The tree that seemed to burst with golden glee
On Saturday, by Sunday was weighed down
With wet snow like a past-life memory,
And each branch bent into a troubled frown.

Then, like a friend who breaks a solemn trust
And later acts like everything is fine,
On Monday — while we scowled in disgust —
The sun rose and resumed its April shine.

But we were far too desperate to fight,
So went to bask in that inconstant light.

Baptism of Oats

Liz Merrigan

Mistress of Spring,
ten-year old Queen of April,
my throne warm with yellow grain
royally spread out about my feet.
I leaned expectantly in the wagon corner
as Dad guided the tractor
to forty acres south of the house.
We wandered the field
on a pleasant, priestly quest
as I filled the seeder box with oats
and tiny, golden bits spilled out
in lovely, contented circles.
Planting was always a new baptism
into nature's state of grace,
and mourning doves sang
their muted hymns just for me
the day dusty oats fell yellow
on the waiting ground.

Clean Start

Michael Davis

On a fresh washed sky
A bright splotch of chloroxed cloud
How the day sparkles.

An Ancient Willow
Aaron Gilbertson



Contributor Bios

Cate Belleveau resides on 160 acres of meadows, forests, and beaver ponds in far northern Minnesota. She is ever grateful for a father who took his progeny on extended trips hiking the Canadian wilderness, canoeing, and exploring especially the Great American West. Deeply afflicted with wanderlust which has taken her to teach in New Zealand, Kyrgyzstan, and to Japan on a Fulbright fellowship, she has also explored elsewhere. Cate has enjoyed kayaking in Greece, trekking to Mt. Everest Base Camp, as well as in South America and Europe. She is also grateful that her husband encouraged her to deeply explore her own backyard with its world class beauty. Cate holds a Master's Degree in Natural Resources / Environmental Education and spent the majority of her professional life as a director of Gifted Education on a local Native American reservation. Cate started a travel blog to encourage women past 50 to stay active and get out of doors for the great medicine that truly is found at www.kayakcate.com. Other interests are taking part in poetry slams, and she co-founded the Bemidji Sculpture Walk with her sculptor husband as well as the Mask and Rose Theater and Belle Thalia Creative Arts Space. Her three adult children all are travelers which gives her considerable joy. Her travel memoir *Kayak Cate* is available at Riverfeet Press.

Gary Boelhower has published three poetry collections: *Naming Rites; Marrow, Muscle, Flight; Sacred Times, Timeless Seasons* and a chapbook *Step Close In*. He served as Poet Laureate of Duluth, Minnesota for 2018-2020. He was awarded the Foley Poetry Prize from *America* magazine and the Midwest Book Award for his poetry collection *Marrow, Muscle, Flight*.

Kayli Salmela is currently a permanent substitute teacher at a K-12 school in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and shares her connection to nature and community through writing and photography. She loves sharing her intercultural experiences with students and credits her roots in Northern Minnesota and New Hampshire for her unflagging love of the natural world.

Jennifer Hernandez, a Minnesota teacher and writer, is a member of the League of Minnesota Poets. Her poems can be found in many print and online journals: most recently, *Talking Stick, Heron Tree, Spring Thaw, Steam Ticket*, and *ND Humanities*, but she most enjoys sharing her work in readings and public installations, such as Minneapolis Poetry Sanctuary, the Poet/Artist Collaboration of Red Wing Arts, Poets & Pints, the Nature Area Poetry Walk at Richfield Lake Park, and the Mankato Poetry Walk & Ride as the interaction between word and audience is where the magic happens.

Renee Trunt *no bio provided.*

Brooke Boulton has been an educator in Minnesota for almost a decade, teaching writing, creative writing, and literature at the community college and university levels. For her writing, she draws inspiration from her experiences in the northland, the wonderful characters she encounters, and the lives of Minnesotans, which she has come to love along the way.

Lane Henson is a writer of poetry living in Duluth, MN. His words have recently been published or are forthcoming in *Rust & Moth, Great Lakes Review, The Thunderbird Review, & Midwest Quarterly*. When not putting pen to paper, you might catch a glimpse of him along Lake Superior's shoreline or disappearing into the Northwoods with his wife and their two daughters.

Contributor Bios

Liz Jaeger worked for many years as a writer, editor, and photographer for nursing publications, in addition to contributing human interest stories and reflections to various newspapers and magazines. She has had poetry selections published in the book *Naming Hope: A Reflection Guide* and essays featured in the Benedictine Center and Habitual Gratitude blogs. She is a retired English teacher who volunteers at the Harriet Alexander Nature Center in Roseville, MN, and enjoys providing editing services for both poetry and prose writers.

Aaron Gilbertson is a student at Minnesota North College, Vermilion studying Natural Resource Technology. He loves to hunt and fish as well as explore his passion for archery and photography.

LL Kelly is a born and raised Minnesotan with a deep love for both nature and learning. She attended the University of Minnesota, where she majored in Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior (all the while fantasizing about writing). She currently lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota with her husband, her dopey pit bull, and her own personal grumpy cat. When not writing (or reading), she can be found working on new tricks with her dog, crafting, or gardening.

Brendan Stermer is a poet based in northwest Minnesota. His work has appeared in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Rust + Moth*, and elsewhere. He is also the creator of *Interesting People Reading Poetry*, a podcast where artists and luminaries read a favorite poem and share what it means to them.

Maiya Salmela is an eleven-year Northern Minnesota resident who shares her love of the outdoors through photography. Growing up in New Hampshire, she enjoyed mountain hikes and ocean swims. Since moving to Minnesota she has explored many northern Minnesota lakes by canoe, including her favorite, the Wabana chain of lakes.

Michael Hanley is an Associate Professor Emeritus of Advertising in the Department of Journalism at Ball State University, Muncie (Ind.). He taught advertising, mobile marketing, branding, media planning and buying, and mass media research. Prior to teaching, Michael was a magazine and newspaper photographer from 1978 - 1987. He won multiple local, state and national photography awards, including a Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting in 1983 as a photojournalist at the Fort Wayne (Ind.) News-Sentinel. He lives with his spouse Barb and son J.C. on Wolf Lake near Bemidji (Minn.) where he enjoys nature and landscape photography and writes poetry.

Steven Engel grew up in North Dakota on the banks of the Missouri River. Most of his adult life has been spent on the West Coast in Washington, California, and Oregon. In that order. Washington to attend Evergreen State College in Olympia and later to live in Seattle briefly. California to live in San Francisco for a year and then make Fort Cronkhite, in the Marin Headlands, his home until 1993. Portland, Oregon, was home until 2020. Educator, field biologist, collector of animal tracks, it was all leading somewhere. All along the way there's been documentation of one sort or another. And here we are. He now lives in northern Minnesota.

Liz Merrigan grew up in South Dakota and after college, taught 7th and 8th grade in Lincoln, NE, and later spent a 32 year career in Shorewood, WI, teaching 6th grade. She retired to her family farm in southeastern South Dakota and has spent her retirement taking courses in creative writing at the University of South Dakota in Vermilion, caring for her acreage that has been in her family for 130 years, traveling in the US and abroad, returning many times to visit colleagues and family in Milwaukee, enjoying the northern lakes of MN, and in general, appreciating the joys and challenges of each new day. After all, there's a poem out there somewhere!

Contributor Bios

Holly Duester is a current PSEO student at Minnesota North College, Itasca. She has loved capturing the beauty of nature through photography since she was a young girl, and is still learning to develop her skills in the art. She is also a student of written art, and has only recently began exploring her abilities in poetry, short story, and non-fiction.

Vicki Lessard is a lifelong resident of Grand Rapids, MN, currently living the rural life on Shoal Lake. She has been submitting my photography to *Spring Thaw* since 2014, and it has been an honor to have had two of her images chosen for the front cover, "Morning Sunflower" in 2014 and "Nature's Intricacy II" in 2020, as well as one chosen for the back cover, "Camouflage" in 2017. She looks forward to the arrival of the warmer seasons, where days are spent tending the vegetables and flowers, and roaming the countryside with camera in hand.

Michael Davis is a twice retired curmudgeon, once from the Air Force and again from working. He has a love for landscape photography and likes to share the fruits of his hobby with others.



**SPRING
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LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE