

An impressionistic painting of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat with a red ribbon. She is looking slightly to the left with a soft expression. The background is a soft-focus landscape with green foliage and a blue sky. The overall style is painterly and evocative.

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Submissions: Send poetry and art submissions to thesefragilelilacs@gmail.com. Please do not include any attachments for poems; instead, paste the poems you would like to be submitted directly into your email. You may submit up to five poems per submission cycle. Please do not send previously published work. If your work is accepted for publication elsewhere, please let us know as soon as possible. If you would like to submit artwork or photography, you may submit attachments of images via email to the email address above. Expect to hear back within 2 to 5 months.

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Oatmeal, by Abby Caplin
After Matthew Lippman

Most days I make fake instant oatmeal.
I throw in scoops of chia, flax, and psyllium and pretend it's healthy,
add hot kettle water and do the sun salutation.
I don't really do the sun salutation.
I make up that I do the sun salutation.
I turn on the TV and try to find real news.
Real news has been dead for years but I make my fake oatmeal anyway.
I tried to make it for my kids but they hate me.
Or, they hate oatmeal.
Or, they hate the feeling of feeling stupid
when I yell at *Good Morning America* and throw the clicker across the room.
I don't really throw the clicker across the room,
I throw my TV.
The TV is made by Samsung
which poisons my brain and grows my financial portfolio.
I am dead and rich.
This is my rage.
This is my sadness.
Once, I saw a twelve-year-old black girl with her backpack and Catholic school uniform
pushing a homeless person's shopping cart down the street.
The sun was setting so everything looked orange.
Or, it looked orange from air pollution.
I couldn't figure out if I was a rich white woman
or a white rich woman.
Both girl and woman were tired and hungry.
I wanted to bring her my stupid oatmeal,
get out of my car with buckets of oatmeal
to say eat
or hello
or fuck it, come home with me.
I wanted to give her a safe warm bed.
Every day there are people living under freeways in places like San Francisco
who wait in the exhaust in the noise
in bullet-shattered dead cars
for a low-income housing lottery ticket.
Thousands of people with kids and dogs and only twelve will get a key.
I can't bring them my oatmeal
but I try.
I stand at my counter and stir and stir
until it turns into a thick dough and I run it through the pasta maker.
I am not Strega Nona with her magic pasta pot
or the woman who serves lunch at Glide Memorial Church.
I am not even a true sparrow that trills lullabies over the city sidewalks.

What I am is a woman who can't get it right.
But, I try or I don't really try.
I sing the opening credits tune to *Good Morning America* and oatmeal crud
sticks to my face.
I don't wash my face.
I lick my face until my tongue gets tired.

It's a stupid cruddy world that has other choices
but instead offers up its packaged oatmeal
pretending it's a two-bedroom flat
with working heat,
hot water, beds,
and a real desk for homework.

Save Me a Panther, by Abby Caplin

After Matthew Lippman

Last night I ordered from Amazon.
I was hungry for the rich vellum boxes of Simply Gum
even though I hate gum.
I scrolled through flavors like fennel and coffee and cinnamon
and the whole thing turned into a steaming rain forest
with bulging tree roots wrestling around my feet on the forest floor.
Seriously, all those stinging red ants and fang-toothed mosquitoes,
all those dainty blue poison dart frogs and gangs of howler monkeys,
that sole colossal yellow-eyed panther licking its toes on a branch.
The panther was so beautiful I had to breathe into a paper bag.
No one else saw it.
Parades of leafcutter ants
circled me waving their little green flags.
Sloths with doe eyes grinned at me
while chomping on tubs of Rainforest Crunch,
and boa constrictors eyed my wristwatch.
I wanted so badly to reach out and cuddle the panther in my lap.
Nuzzle its neck like a mother.
Put my head in its pink mouth,
rest my cheek on its pillows of molars,
bed my body on its bubble gum tongue.
I wanted to pull it high into the canopy
and fling it home with my order of mint chewing gum
and cat vitamins.
Turn zoos into messed-up slaughters of broken glass and cinder blocks.
Because they are dying.
One day soon we'll wake up, turn off our computers,
walk out our front doors in our bamboo jammies to get the Sunday papers,
and they won't *be*, not in the jungle,
in the pages of *People*, secondhand stores, or Disneyland.
In their black tuxes with yellow-eyed buttons
they'll be collected by business suits and CEOs.

When the website asked if I wanted to place my order
I said *no* and got up.
I went out into the cold night looking for Artemis.
There she stood with her bow of bright crescent moon
nestled in the sleek black fur of the universe.
I tugged down the curved beauty and turned it in my hands.
Tested the bowstring.
Then I took out my heart
and shot it into a parking lot.

The Next to Last Straw, by Jim Zola

As I drive Spring Garden Street,
I notice yards patched with straw.
Pale yellow blankets, as if
the dead protect by example,
simply by being
the opposite of alive.

Today you tell me
you love another, or no,
that you have told another
you love him. There's
a fingernail moon
of difference.

I throw a bowl against
the wall;

rose petals snow the floor.
If I could hold
the second to last straw
in my hands,
what would it say?
Something about the camel's
dusty back, how houses

are best made of brick.
Would it ask to be returned,
or bemoan the fact
that the next straw is the last?

When I do find the last straw,
it is straight with gentle waves in it,
like a woman's hair
just unbraided.

Not Drowning, by Jim Zola

A boy at the bus stop
cups his hands to light
a cigarette in the rain.

You never want to wear
shoes again. But you
are a shoe. You want

to return as a bird,
the hummingbird
never seen. So the moon

wanes behind a fist
of clouds.
What you do not hear

builds until it deafens.
If you stare long enough
into the sway of trees,

you will see a body
of water. A fish jumps
into your arms. This song

of not drowning.

An old man asks, by Joanna Slusarewicz

on the bus,
“What are you reading?”

I read windowlit
strangers. Strangers shaking hands,

strangers with mullets
and purple flowerprint umbrellas,

strangers who laugh.
One woman with babies.

One man hums
softly. One bad man

sinks his toes
into my upper thigh.

Who else smells
gasoline? I am reading

papers for work
about energy efficiency metrics.

Apogee, by Seth Jani

The unassuming loss
Was a deafening silence
That fell over the world
Like volcanic ash.
The trees were mute
And grey even in summer,
And all those bright, distinctive forms
Turned to themselves
As if gazing inward.
No one had ever calculated
The space where religion fails,
Where grief rules with its
Long, black tongue.
It appeared to be brain-sized,
Heart-sized, the shape of
Someone's absence.
Above the city, the moon was
A rotor cloud of silver linings.
It gave evidence that the loss
Was an illusion.
All that light just moving
From body to body, and the source
Barely traceable, in the malbec sky.

The Palace of Confusion, by Seth Jani

We rely on this: the heart finding its way
Among the shadows,
Among the confluence of longing and routine,
Among the world with its spinning blue winters
And departing birds.

But sometimes a man is held
To the maze he orbits
Like some dogma through the ages.
He stays there, hunkered in the mystery,
Mechanical and confused,

Inhabitant of a rutted pattern.
He finds himself going in circles,
Passing his days like flotsam
In some forest vacuum,
Beautiful perhaps, agonizingly bright,

But just spinning in his place.
Eventually he might pause
And bow down to touch the dirt,
Dig through the worn-down litter,
Hunting rumors of some old mosaic,

Some faded fresco like those sometimes found
Under the crust of cathedral flooring.
He might dig up the looted heads of saints,
The evaporated looks of temple guards
Still searching for the one who trespassed,

Or maybe he'll stare up
At the blossoming garden of clouds
Indifferent in their eternal summer,
Forget among the journeying pinks
His troubles for a day.

But none of these are his:
Delicious past, ecstatic light-filled heaven.
His is the small palace of confusion,
Red light over the shoals and rundown taverns,
Bright love that alternately blesses and confounds.

Through the Gates, by Seth Jani

Become beatific at last,
I want the world as it truly is,
Bright light under patterned arches,
A cold, unruly ghost
In violent otherness.
If I take to the streets
To wonder about our acquiescence,
If I poke at the chests of strangers,
It is only to find the residing spark,
The correspondence between
Your life and mine.
I want that shared, exquisite fire,
That intelligible flame.
We hold it between us,
Shining now
Like a wild truce,
A bright addendum,
A deer-leap through
The gates of reason.

To the Young Poet with More Pressing Things to Do, by Carolyn Moore

Trust me when I say your gift's no handbag
to hoard until it meets its match in shoes.
Closet it, and it will wither drier
than the mummy's fabled curse of dust
full of fiery spores waiting to bore
to the bone, once the pyramid's last seal
lies broken. Squander time, and it will turn
against you. Even if you have a stroke
of luck and live, recovery comes slow,
another killing. Halting steps, lost speech—
even feeble pulse—must be relearned.
Your burning lungs! You stand before a mirror
sharp with reckoning and count the scars
of gifts deferred. You struggle to reclaim
a face from flesh stretched taut, strange—each pore
now scorched past memory, past recognition.

Evening Walk in Late November, by J.R. Solonche

It is cold, I have not brought
gloves, and I can put only one

hand at a time in my pockets.
Is it true that the light of a flashlight,

even one as feeble as this,
goes on forever into space,

which also goes on forever?
I have heard it is true.

I envy the lake, which forgets it is
water as it becomes the sky.

I have heard that photons, like
fireflies, find one another in the dark.

I don't know which is the greater mystery,
the stars I cannot touch or the trees I can.

Two Short Speeches for Sisyphus, by J.R. Solonche

First Speech: While Ascending

I torment my tormentor.
How?
I shut him out of it.
See how I punish myself
by pushing this stone I cut
from this mountain
up this mountain I built.

Second Speech: While Descending

How adaptable we humans are.
After several hundred years,
I learned to sleep on my way down.
I take my time.
No one pushes me.
After several hundred more,
I taught myself to dream the same
dream each time:
To go up the mountain without the stone.
I'm working on the next one now:
I was never born.

Take Me to the Museum, by Julian Accius Roark

Take me
Into the
Museum
That is your heart
And show me
The stained glass
Windows
And maybe
I'll let you
Look into
My own

The Difference between You and I, by Julian Accius Roark

The difference between
You and I
Is that
You view shattered glass
As what it is-
Shattered
Broken
And I view shattered glass
As what it is
In the sense
Of what it can be-
A mosaic
Limitless
In possibilities
Unbroken
And strong

Pronoun, by Richard Luftig

not

a *we*

or *you*

is ever

to be

used

in this

poem.

certainly

never

the first

person.

no, this

speaker

(unnamed),

is more

like an

actor,

a cowardly

(Continued on page 17)

Lion
perhaps
holding

his tail
for dear
life,

or the Great
Oz always
lacking

courage enough
to peek beyond
the curtain.

Solo Boxing, By Michael Lee Johnson

Solo boxing, past midnight,
tugging emotions out of memories embedded,
tossing dice, reliving vices, revisiting affairs,
playing solitaire-marathon night,
hopscotch player, toss the rock,
shots of Bourbon.

Half Life, by Claire Scott

Dead-half my life half-dead all my life
thumbing through curled pages
 that slither-slide away
some blank some illegible
 some in Croatian or Mandarin

or strange symbols of metaphysical math
that I ponder with a muddled mind
 praying for a message that will
reveal the meaning of my stagger-
 stepping-stammering life

the come-and-go-ness of it all
O Lord the come-and-go-ness
 one page sprinkled with paprika (sea salt) (sadness)
one with a sickle and scythe
 or perhaps the fangs of a werewolf

a Rorschach test for the truly insane
and sometimes I wonder
 O Lord I do wonder
so weary of the come-and-
 go-ness of this life

my slipped soul slithers
toward the
luminous light
 of Your last page

Virginia Woolf, by Rachel Tramonte

After the last of her inky scrawl she sealed the envelope
and walked out of the house at Rodmell.

She stepped over soft moss toward Ouse river
gathering rocks. There was nothing left to want and want.

In her costume she slipped into the brackish green waters.
Her overcoat loosened, white cotton sleeves billowed

as she touched brambles, as she touched roots
as she held the center stroke and every cell

called her downstream. The river tugged her body
back, tugged her body down

until it was found by children at the banks
of southeast, then her daughters.

It was 1941. The shutters of windows
rattled and the river went on.

Open Casket, by Spencer Smith

They often say the deceased appear to be
asleep, a restful slumber of final peace
smoothing the features, a contented pose
to remember when the coffin's eyelids tap shut;

but to see her nestled in pastel satin,
her wild black mane tamed just so and wearing
the face of someone else—for surely that expression
was mortician-crafted in plastic features—

I recall
the desperate dark eyes,
the hair-raking fingers,
the deep moan in her voice,
the shoulders curved inward,
the sandal-clenching toes,

the wound-spring soul finally released
in an ovum-burst of self-puncture, the life-nails
turned to cotton, frayed and dangling the threads
of her short existence to unravel alone.

Seven Wonders, by Spencer Smith

You may wonder
why I would say such a thing
and I wonder myself,
but all this wonder is only

bread without the circus,
slowly drying up on the sideboard,
wonderful velvety softness turning
to a crisp cake of white sand,

as if some woman had recently passed
and left only her footprint,
and no wonder—
I would not have stayed either,

with a voice of ocean
tempting me along into the distance,
wondering if it would be better up ahead,
wondering if it would not.

World View, by Spencer Smith

The day the world
fit into my eye socket,

revolving slowly
on my own axis

through nations and oceans
and icecaps and rainshadow,

they said
there was something in my eye,

and I giggled earthquakes
and guffawed hurricanes

until the eyelids of night
curled closed.

Integer, by Gale Acuff

One day I'll get married but not to her,
Miss Hooker, my Sunday School teacher, since
she's 25 and I'm 10 and that makes
fifteen years, fifteen years difference between
us and I can never catch up numbers-
wise so I've got to look for something else
to shrink the gap and it's a sizeable
one so what I'll fall back on later is

what she teaches us, Miss Hooker that is,
what she learns us about every Sunday
and that's *love* and if love's good enough for
God and Jesus and the Holy Ghost then
it's damn sure good enough for me, I'm not
much of a person and even less of
a student but maybe I can make love
do what Miss Hooker says it can do and

love gets you into Heaven besides though
I'm not so sanctified as to think that
you can get into Heaven some other
way, or maybe even love yourself up
a storm and still be best suited for Hell,
which is where I'm sure to go when I go,
not that I'm one of those lovers who was
on the edge and am a little too much

God himself to save him from Perdition.
After Sunday School today I declared
to Miss Hooker my love for her and how
we should get married when I'm 18
to her 33, it's a case of us
doing the best we can do even if
it's the thing that makes us *do* what we do
and our only way and brief out of it.
I don't know but that now I feel older
--maybe it's *maturity* and I'll bet
there's no number for that. Still, I lose count.

Aubade to Dawn, by Victoria Doerper

I'm addicted to the exotic crack
Of spring dawn possibility, to the hit
Of light in the first toke of smoky
Night giving way to the rosy glow
Of day. I'll cut sleep short to satisfy
My craving for the exquisite line
Of morning edging the far horizon,
And I'm dizzy for a first glimpse
Of new blooms in the awakening
Garden. My early AM thoughts
Intoxicate with heady promise
Of epiphany and poetic verve,
All perfect and lovely as gossamer
Wings of angels, surely hovering
On the shore, and in the yard,
Bestowing a vision of delights
Yet to come. And then the full
Blaze of sun moves in, beautiful
And compelling and heartbreaking.
Dawn dreams lift away
Like mist rises from a glassy pond.
The sun dares me to make a life
Still wonderful amidst daunting
Loss of perfect possibility.

Biographies

Gale Acuff has had poetry published in *Ascent*, *Ohio Journal*, *Descant*, *Adirondack Review*, *Worcester Review*, *Danse Macabre*, *Poem*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Florida Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Amarillo Bay*, *Santa Barbara Review*, and many other journals. He has authored three books of poetry: *Buffalo Nickel* (BrickHouse, 2004), *The Weight of the World* (BrickHouse, 2006), and *The Story of My Lives* (BrickHouse, 2008). He has taught university English in the US, China, and the Palestinian West Bank.

Abby Caplin's poems appear in *Adanna*, *Alyss*, *Big Muddy*, *The Binnacle*, *Burningword*, *Common Ground Review*, *Crack the Spine*, *Forge*, *The Healing Muse*, *McNeese*, *OxMag*, *Poetica*, *The Round*, *The Scream Online*, *TSR: The Southampton Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Tiger's Eye*, *Tikkun*, and *Willow Review*, among others. She was a finalist for the 2015 Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry Award, and an award recipient of SF Poets Eleven 2016. <http://abbycaplin.com>.

Victoria Doerper is a Bellingham, Washington writer of memoir, non-fiction, and poetry. Her poetry appears in *Sue C. Boynton 2013 Winning Poems*; *Noisy Water: Poetry from Whatcom County, Washington*; *Clover: A Literary Rag*; and *Cirque*. Her prose appears in *Orion Magazine*.

Clinton Inman is a retired high school teacher living in Florida with his wife Elba. He was born in England but was raised in the Carolinas. He graduated from SDSU in 1977.

Seth Jani currently resides in Seattle, Washington and is the founder of Seven Circle Press (www.sevencirclepress.com). His own work has been published widely in such places as *The Chiron Review*, *The Hamilton Stone Review*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *VAYAVYA*, *Gingerbread House*, *Gravel* and *Zetetic: A Record of Unusual Inquiry*. More about him and his work can be found at www.sethjani.com.

Michael Lee Johnson lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era. He is a Canadian and USA citizen. Today he is a poet, editor, publisher, freelance writer, amateur photographer, small business owner in Itasca, Illinois. He has been nominated for 2 Pushcart Prize awards for poetry 2015, nominated Best of the Net 2016. Poetry published in 33 countries, 133 YouTube poetry videos: <https://www.youtube.com/user/poetrymanusa/videos>. Michael Lee Johnson has several books, and chapbooks published and is Editor-in-chief of 2 poetry anthologies, *Moonlight Dreamers of Yellow Haze*, and *Dandelion in a Vase of Roses*. He is administrator of a Facebook poetry group over 12,970 members: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/807679459328998>. He is editor of 10 poetry sites.

Richard Luftig is a former professor of educational psychology and special education at Miami University in Ohio now residing in California. He is a recipient of the Cincinnati Post-Corbett Foundation Award for Literature. His poems and stories have appeared in numerous literary journals in the United States and internationally in, Canada, Australia, Europe, and Asia. Two of his poems recently appeared in *Ten Years of Dos Madres Press*.

Carolyn Moore's four chapbooks won their respective competitions. Her book, *What Euclid's Third Axiom Neglects to Mention about Circles*, was published in 2013 as winner of the White Pine Press Poetry Prize. She taught at Humboldt State University (Arcata, California) until able to earn her way as a freelance writer and researcher who now works from the last vestige of the family farm in Tigard, Oregon.

Julian Accius Roark, born May 23rd, 2000, is a full-time college student and poet residing in Valdosta, Georgia. He is a member of the Lowndes High Georgia Bridgemen and Lowndes High School Off Broadway theatre program. He spends most of his free time around his friends and is always looking to learn something new. More of his works can be found on Instagram @acciuspoetry

Claire Scott is an award-winning poet who has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize. Her work has been accepted by the *Atlanta Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Healing Muse* and *Vine Leaves Literary Journal* among others. Her first book of poetry, *Waiting to Be Called*, was published in 2015. She is the co-author of *Unfolding in Light: A Sisters' Journey in Photography and Poetry*.

Joanna Slusarewicz is a computer science student at Rice University in Houston, Texas. She likes math and writing.

Spencer Smith's work has appeared in over thirty literary journals, including *RATTLE*, *Potomac Review*, *RHINO*, *Roanoke Review*, and *Tribeca Poetry Review*. He is a University of Utah graduate and works in the corporate world to pay the bills that poetry doesn't pay (i.e. all of them).

J.R. Solonche has been publishing in magazines, journals, and anthologies since the early 70s. He is author of *Beautiful Day* (Deerbrook Editions), *Won't Be Long* (Deerbrook Editions), *Heart's Content* (Five Oaks Press), *Invisible* (nominated for the Pulitzer Prize by Five Oaks Press), *The Black Birch* (forthcoming from Aldrich Press/Kelsay Books), and coauthor of *Peach Girl: Poems for a Chinese Daughter* (Grayson Books). He lives in New York's Hudson Valley.

Rachel Tramonte was born in New York City and grew up in Brooklyn Heights. Her work is forthcoming in *Common Ground Review*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Jelly Bucket*, *Slab*, and *Third Wednesday*. She received her MA in English and Creative Writing from Binghamton University.

Jim Zola has worked in a warehouse, as a security guard, in a bookstore, as a teacher for Deaf children, as a toy designer for Fisher Price, and currently as a children's librarian. Published in many journals through the years, his publications include a chapbook -- *The One Hundred Bones of Weather* (Blue Pitcher Press) -- and a full-length poetry collection -- *What Glorious Possibilities* (Aldrich Press). He currently lives in Greensboro, North Carolina.