

~ Poetry NI ~



FourXFour 29

Featured Poets:

Vivian Wagner

Howie Good

Eve Lyons

Peter Wyton

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Featured Poet : *Vivian Wagner*

Vivian Wagner lives in New Concord, Ohio, where she's an associate professor of English at Muskingum University. She is the author of a memoir, *Fiddle: One Woman, Four Strings, and 8,000 Miles of Music* (Citadel-Kensington); a full-length collection of poetry, *Raising* (Clare Songbirds Publishing); and three poetry chapbooks: *The Village* (Aldrich Press-Kelsay Books), *Curiosities* (Unsolicited Press), and *Making* (Origami Poems Project).

Tikkun Olam

The Holocaust followed
my father like a sibling
he didn't like but couldn't
disown, always there,
always whispering in his ear.
He repaired what cars he
could, performed his
small rituals, wore his
hats, until one day
he woke up and
realized he couldn't
fix himself or the world.
His gun, though, was
cleaned and oiled.
There was that.

On a Mountaintop in West Virginia

At the Hare Krishna
temple we saw swans,
listened to chants,
admired the gold palace,
ate a prasadam lunch,
walked the sloping green hills
past deities forever
smiling on the landscape.
We didn't believe
anything in particular,
but it felt good to leave
space for belief in the
stride of our legs,
the openness of our
eyes, the everything
around us and within.

Cearu

It's my son's birthday, and I'm at my desk thinking about the day twenty-two years ago when he came into the world. I'm crying much like he did then, whimpering and weeping, overcome by hormones and emotions and astonishment at everything. Out my window there's a mourning dove sitting on her nest, as she's done every day these past few weeks. She's calming and grounding as she sits with me, her eyes catching mine through the glass. Together we acknowledge this particular kind of care: sitting, waiting, biding time.

Petrichor

After the rain, it
all looked different:
the streets once gray
now glittered, the
sky once heavy now
light, the sun once
hidden now shown.
And here: a puddle
reflecting everything
back to itself.

Featured Poet : *Howie Good*

Howie Good is the author of *The Titanic Sails at Dawn* (Alien Buddha Press, 2019).

A Genealogy

The place had no name and then it had too many. It was a good thing you weren't there. My parents made me take piano. Cable TV hadn't been invented yet. Grown-ups told the same stories over and over, just sometimes using different words. A voice warned against keeping the baby rabbits – hairless, anxious, blind – that I found abandoned under a big bush. I was six, maybe seven, and the yard was in shadow. We've all lost things. We've all had things torn from us. And not only things. Any instrument not played regularly forgets how it's supposed to sound.

Sad Stories of the Death of Kings

I ask a friend if she can remember the last time that the stars and moon hatched from a golden egg. She doesn't answer straightaway, just tucks a stray comma of hair back behind her ear. Because it's one in the morning, the darkness outside is more like a solid than a liquid or a gas. I'm suddenly really tired of struggling to stay awake. The answer comes later, when I read in the paper that they sliced open a dead whale that had washed ashore and found in its belly plastic cups, plastic bottles, plastic bags, and two flip-flops.

The End

The doctors say anger can give you a heart attack or stroke, and anxiety can give you cancer. I'm often angry, and when I'm not angry, I'm often anxious. Rivers of darkness are expanding and spilling, and a mass shooter has tweeted, "If you see me, weep." Dazed mothers wander through a bombed-out city with their dead children draped over their arms. This could be just one more sign that the end is about to begin. While we wait, some demand proof, some wear hazmat suits, some only sigh. I've painted my beard blue and stuck gold stars on it.

Small Town Living

My heart is a town so small it doesn't have a doctor or a cop or a priest, doesn't even have anyone on standby to plow the roads in winter or fill in the potholes in spring, and maybe that's why people say all those teeth-rattling, bone-jarring things about me, but you ignore what people say and undo your buttons and unpin your hair, and then it's like daylight at night, the light streaming in on a soft slant, poking at the black seeds in the corners and the weeds in the flowerboxes, stirring the town back to stunned life.

Featured Poet : *Eve Lyons*

Eve Lyons is a poet and fiction writer living in the Boston area. Her work has appeared in *Lilith*, *Hip Mama*, *Mutha Magazine*, *Word Riot*, *Dead Mule of Southern Literature*, as well as other magazines and several anthologies. Her first book of poetry is due out in May of 2020 by WordTech Communications.

It's Petty Jean State Park, Not Petit Jean

For Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin

Our one week in Arkansas
Waiting for the adoption to be finalized
No one said anything about the two white women
Cradling a black baby in the Moby wrap

What they did say was
Oh, you're taking him back to Boston?
You're raising him a Yankee?
Then laughed, but had that look in their eye.

Meanwhile, friends in New England
blithely told us *you're rescuing him*
You're saving him from the South.
It's like the Civil War never happened

Black bodies in Ferguson, Missouri
and Sanford, Florida
are casualties of a war
White people won't even admit we're fighting.

*On the Subway in Boston, the Summer
My Son Was Three*

Does every mother do this?

I can't seem to help it – I see them and wonder
if he'll turn out like them in fifteen years.

Probably not like this one, he's not Haitian,
he doesn't speak French.

That one seems so tough under his doo-rag,
the kind we could never get to stay on his head.

That one has beautiful long dreadlocks

My son hasn't even had his first real haircut –
Just a ceremonial lock for his *upshirin*.

This one went to law school at Harvard,
then Pakistan to lobby against drone strikes
authorized by our handsome, black president.

Our first black president.

Now he's in Alabama continuing the work of MLK
I'd *plotz* if my son turned out like him.

This one does theater in Chicago,
he seems so happy now that he feels safe
to come out as gay.

This one teaches in Oakland, California,
shares his insights about race and politics
with anyone on Facebook who wants to listen.

That one is a pediatric dentist, the compromise
with his white wife not to go all the way to Cameroon.

Kids need dentists in Maine, too.

I made my son a poster when he was three months old,
Images of Langston Hughes, Thurgood Marshall,
Jacob Lawrence, Chuck D. flanking his crib,
wanting him to know he can aspire to higher
than the world might encourage.

Of course, I had to re-do it to edit out Bill Cosby,
even a comedic legend can't overcome
forty sexual assault charges.

Some heroes fall hard.

I want so much for my son,
I want so much for the world
to never fear him.

Credo

Not all raspberries are perfect
Not every raspberry
in the plastic carton of raspberries
is perfectly juice, perfectly sweet,
succulent and delectable.
Sometimes a carton looks completely pristine
Sometimes all the raspberries are beautiful,
deep red, plump and just a little bit firm.
Yet when you bite into one or two
they're sour, maybe not quite ripe,
maybe too ripe.
Sometimes the raspberries that look a little wilted
are the ones that turn out to be just right.
Pretty soon,
you've eaten your way through the whole carton.
All the raspberries are gone.
You miss those raspberries
even the imperfect ones.

It's So Hard to Believe

"Snails do not despair for having short legs, but rejoice for being able to travel long distances in spite of them."

- Matshona Dhliwayo

It's so hard to believe snails have the patience for this

Slow and steady

If it takes them all day, they don't mind

This picnic table holds six adults comfortably

But it's an all-day hike for a snail

Small pebbles are a major detour

If you rush them they'll retreat inside their shell,

wait till you leave them alone

I need this.

Some days seem to go by fast

my six-year-old was just a baby

Some drag on

he's stalling to get in the bath or go to bed

He won't let us throw out his old toys

His books are exploding off his bookshelf

But when he comes into our bed at 4 AM after a bad dream

He's still our little boy.

What creature power can we extract from the snail?
The ability to walk long distances
without complaining or giving up hope
Their own slime heals the broken parts of their home
They can curl up inside their own shell,
wait out the storm or the bird
that wants to destroy them.

Featured Poet : *Peter Wyton*

Under his pen-name of Peter Wyton, Peter Fisher has had poems accepted in English magazines such as *Orbis*, *Smith's Knoll*, *Rialto*, *Outposts*, *Envoi* and many more. Over four decades he has won more than 20 first prizes in written poetry competitions and about the same number of performance Slams. He writes regularly for the magazine *Cotswold Life*. He has seven poetry collections to his credit, the most recent supporting Woman's Aid.

Born in Ireland, he attended Friends School, Lisburn, leaving at 15, which is why these submissions reflect his childhood.

Colouring In

I am colouring in, with ancient crayons
recovered from a drawer in Granny's desk.
I am out of practise. It is difficult to keep
inside the outlines of wild animals.
Everything is not as it should be. Somewhere
in the background the Light Programme
ought to be intoning the weather forecast.
I would be more at home in khaki shorts,
with a white or pale-blue Aertex shirt.
My feet are not supposed to reach the carpet.
They need to be dangling, in woollen socks
held up with broad elastic bands. Ideally
there ought to be eczema behind both knees.
I expect oxtail for dinner, with tapioca pudding
for afters. I shall be given a tablespoon
of Robelene following supper. Having completed
the anteater, the squirrel and the llama,
I am now concentrating on the giraffe, which
bids fair to be awkward, on account of the spots.
The four-year-old kneeling on the chair next to me,
having observed my artistry without comment,
has turned back to her lap-top.

Killeaton Estate, Derriaghy

I was there at your genesis, Killeaton.
The Park, the Gardens, the Crescent
sloping downhill to the Lisburn road.

Early purchasers, our removal van
nosed between already occupied houses
with newly seeded front lawns.

Scant yards away, this emerging order
dissolved into a wallow of plots ranging
from pegged-out foundation to near completion.

Competing with the rumble of laden lorries,
the sounds of saw and cement mixer formed
a constant challenge to family conversation.

While adults were preoccupied with settling in,
we youngsters had leisure, outside school hours,
to explore our ever-evolving neighbourhood.

Tight-rope walking on unfinished parapets,
making a gymnasium of all scaffolding,
we swarmed like inept gibbons around the site.

Minor vandalism was committed with water-butts.
Sand pits and gravel heaps were plummeted into.
I'm-the-king-of-the-castle endlessly enacted.

Come snow time, we fashioned slides on pavements,
which our imperilled elders spoiled with ashes
shovelled from fireplaces, to our indignation.

Eventually, habitations completed,
a parade of shops opened. Hoardings proclaiming
'J.F. McCall & Sons, Builders' were removed.

Somewhere between the last 'semi' sold and the opening
of the neighbouring McGredy's Rose Gardens
by Violet Carson, we achieved community.

The Brains I Was Born With

I was fifteen when I deigned to cast my scholarly eye
over his verses, penned in the Glens of Antrim
after he returned from the First World War.

Foolscape upon foolscap of barrage, impact, shell-burst,
the tortured landscapes and the twisted corpses,
skeletal trees, barbed wire, repugnant trenches.

His handwriting was appalling, for a bank manager,
Full of crossings-out, scored corrections, as if he sought
to bayonet each error with the nib of his Conway-Stewart.

There was nothing you could tell me about poetry
of course, having featured in four successive editions
of Friends School magazine, for goodness sake.

I had also made several appearances on Children's Hour,
at the B.B.C. on Ormeau Avenue, each performance
earning a book token worth seven shillings and sixpence.

From this literary high ground I advised his daughter
to bin the doleful stuff when she was downsizing
from a Killeaton semi to a flat near Dunmurry.

I presume she did so. I doubt whether I'd have sensed any reluctance. There was no evidence of his oeuvre when the time came for her effects to be disposed of.

Only now, actually employing the brains I was born with, do I come to acknowledge the immature arrogance of the complete poser I must undoubtedly have been.

They are both long gone, she who did so much for me, with so little reward, he trying to scourge his demons through writing, the whiff of gas lingering in his nostrils.

The New Wig

I unlock the door of the second floor flat,
transit the hall to her living-room,
with its view of the embryo Twinbrook estate,
acreage of skeletal scaffolding, backed
by the rearing bulk of Colin Mountain.

Familiar furnishings, exclusively
remnants from more substantial homes
stretching back across two centuries
in locations as diverse as Portadown,
Derriagh, Cushendall and Dungiven.

The weights of a grandfather clock
manufactured for Grays of Belfast
in the early nineteenth century
require urgent adjustment. I restore
its steady, ticking heartbeat to the room.

Mementos of previous generations,
an ivory mahjong set from Hong Kong,
silhouettes with starched shirt fronts,
wing collars, sustain the family credit
in an age which would astound them.

Trinkets fronting well-stocked bookshelves,
figurines crowding the window sills,
plumped cushions in the sole armchair,
a place for everything and everything
in its place, appear to await her return.

Only a hat-box on the dining-table,
round lid tilted against the wallpaper,
seems out of place. I lift out,
then replace the contents, absently
smooth Brunette hair as I do so.

The new wig must have arrived
in the morning, as she waited
for the taxi-cab to ferry her on
the short hop to the hospital.
She wouldn't have gone without it.

Eduard Schmidt-Zorner: *Outlook of a Traveller*

When I saw the steel-grey scarring sea in *Aberdeen*
in front of me,
behind me the cold grandeur of the granite city...
I felt that I had to flee
back to the hills of Kerry.

When I saw the pulsating, anonymous *London*,
with boiling traffic driving a strong surf against me...
I felt I had to escape from this dungeon
to the hills of Kerry.

When I saw the repulsive architecture in *Frankfurt*
the suffocating towers of money,
suffered from the hurting noise of flyovers
and urban motorways.
I felt I had to escape
to the hills of Kerry.

When I saw the overcrowded narrowness of *Dublin*
and the misery on the streets...
I felt I had to run
to Heuston Station,
to get back to the hills of *Kerry*.

CLS Ferguson : *A Little Like This*

Must've felt a little like this
Cool, slightly damp, with an edge of crisp

It must've sounded just a little like this
a crunch and crack of little branches and leaves beneath feet
the slightest sound of cars fading

It must've tasted just a little like this
stale alcohol, light cigarettes, cracked dry lips, not quite enough
saliva

It must've looked a little like this
brush and bramble stuck between creek and back road
branch just tough enough to support weight
the only evidence the lifeless body
no note or explanation

Must've smelled just a little like this
not quite pine, not quite grass, but woody
nature, like the earth sleeping, not ready to wake

It must've felt just a little like this
convicted shamed hopeless cowardly
yet somehow brave the last bit of strength from sliced forearms
holding the rope

tying to branch and then around neck carefully releasing
he had to finish it and not simply injure

cold

cold

a snap

a flash of pain

colder

numb

empty

over

leaving his mother to weep and mourn

Bruce McRae : *Governance*

It's a machine made for flying, possibly.
Or it's designed to travel underwater –
we, the committee, have yet to decide.
Long meetings into the night but we've yet to choose
from a spectrum of eye-watering colours.

Let's throw money at it, the chairwoman declares,
her campaign promises long a thing of the past.
And make it streamlined, demands a senator.
Make the machine make other machines.
It shall bear our sponsor's crest and have no purpose.

Steve Klepetar : *The Man Who Was Lucky About Bees*

He's lucky about bees, their stings don't bother him beyond a short, sharp pain. His eyes don't swell, he has no trouble breathing, even after multiple stings. For some, the sting means death without the quick intervention of an EpiPen, and even then swelling and hives and fear. Once he moved a branch as he mowed around a lilac bush grown large. There was a hive he didn't see, and bees bombarded him in their defensive rage. He ran to the house, burst in on his terrified wife. But he was fine, just mad as hell. He drove to the hardware store, bought two cans of insect killing spray, and drove home spitting fire and nails. He wanted to blast that nest, then blast it again, until it crashed to the ground. Then he saw bees among the lilacs, small yellow bodies against all that violet flesh. That night he dreamed of flowers larger than tall trees, with wind moaning through their leaves as moonlight filtered down and snowy owls swooped away into the shadowy dark.

Ray Givans : *Only*

I remember my mother in conversation
with Margaret Armstrong, two doors down:
the swirl of cornflakes in breakfast bowls

as Margaret's three progeny
readied themselves for school,
two younger than me, at an age

when I needed help to do my laces.
There were often comments about Mother
being, 'lucky...having only the one.'

When I think about those jibes against my mother
I'm sometimes tugged back to Portadown Hospital
maternity theatre, to picture her

lying on the cusp of the birthing table,
close to dropping off the edge;
the surgeon, with forceps, hauling me

back from oblivion, and I look out
through a covering caul, see my mother
smile benignly at Margaret's pointed finger.

Ray Givans : *High Heels*

For Rebecca Givans

I hear the singing set on the shelf,
the Andrew Sisters: 'I got the one I love,
I got the man and stars above.'

Summer. I remember the blanket of light
in which you carried me everywhere.

We stand at the gate of a village neighbour,
Mrs Lloyd. We hear talk of bringing flowers
to St. Michael's: gladioli, irises, michaelmas daisies.

We hear the pad of cats across her table,
where she and her husband slather butter on spuds.

We hear a splash in their rain barrel
as a thrush disturbs the waters.

And if you were to look more closely,
at the bottom you'd find a sack. Silenced
the cries of the black and brown contents.

*

I return you to the 1940's city.

You are wearing a floral-pattern pinafore
and a sack is bound around your waist.

You link arms with other Millies,
pass the cold eye of the gateman,

enter in to an underworld of thundering machines,
heat, steam and oil fumes.

*

The windows of the Floral Hall
shoulder heavy black curtains,
and cardboard and paint
keep pilots in Dorniers, Heinkels and Junkers
from disrupting the swirl of the dancers.

Under the art deco ceiling you sip mineral water.
You are curvaceous in a red dress, chunky work shoes
replaced with faux leopard-skin high heels.
On the floor, an excuse-me, a tap-on-the-shoulder
of your dance partner, brings him to you.
Close-shaven, peppermint tang of his breath,
and the promise of his 'Yankee' accent attract you.

*

Dufferin Quay is exposed
to eye-watering east winds.
The docked ship throbs.
Distant, on upper and lower decks,
men in uniform
are squeezed against the rails.

Only when he unfolds
a red square of cloth
can you pick him out,
return his parting waves.

*

Some days before the church bells sound
your commitment to my father's village,
a box arrives for you,
stamped with a U.S. air mail sticker.
You lock away his letter.
Your mother hides the pair of red high heels
in the dark at the back of her wardrobe.

Walter Ruhlmann : *The Fall*

She fell so many times
slipping on ice patches,
sliding on pebbles,
in the middle of a street.

Once she even killed herself,
anxious as always – who knows
why? – she flew from the top
of the staircase down into the wall.

Getting out of the car,
church-goer despite herself,
she crashed arms apart,
broke her leg, moaned, passed out.

What collapse could she handle now?
To know amyloid proteins have clustered
inside her brain to disorient her,
erase the life she has led so far.

Miriam Sagan : *Swimmer*

Barefoot on the hot cement
between the turquoise pool
and the ice cream stand
my scrawny seven year old self
with my small belly
pouched out
above the band of my bathing suit.

Suddenly I'm ringed
by the big kids, much
bigger than I am
mostly boys, one girl,
and they say
"let's throw you
in the pool
and see if you can swim."

I can swim,
I just don't want to be
thrown,
so I smile back
and mouth off
and say—"sure,
you can easily
toss me in

I'd never fight you
I'd never win."
And for some
miraculous reason
this makes them laugh
and walk away.

No longer threatened
I just jump in myself
chlorine stinging my eyes
water up my nose
and do the dead man's float,
beneath the rippled surface,
the legs of other swimmers,
I see the city
I've always known was there,
of coral towers
with pearl windows
house of peacock shimmer
abalone
with roof of oyster shell
shingles.

It rises from the painted
bottom of the pool,
I'm careful
not to cut my foot

on its pagodas
as I dive deeper down,

then surface
holding a penny
plucked from the drain.

Eimear Bourke : *Raw*

Acceptable in a fine dining restaurant
When wrapped in seaweed
and served with a dab of wasabi

Not with scales on
Or bones intact
Liable to get caught between teeth

Rawness has to be refined
Polished and presented

Don't come to me with your pure emotion.
Messy and unclean.

I want plated perfection.
A mint to mask the smell.

Viviana Fiorentino : *Approdo*

i

Cielo, tu sei troppo grande;
blu di Persia –
non ti conosco

ii

io ti chiamo, Terra;
dammi un suolo per questi piedi
una casa alle mie incertezze
un rifugio per dubitare.

iii

Un posto per vivere.

Landing

i

Sky, you are too big;
Persian Blue –
I cannot know you.

ii

Instead, I call on you, Land;
give me a place to put my feet,
a home for my uncertainty,
a place to doubt.

iii

A place to live.

translation by Maria McManus

Viviana Fiorentino : *Tra i denti*

Io ti racconto e ti racconto
così il tempo passa,
e ti piace, perché poi c'è voglia
anche di questo,
di lasciarsi come squagliare
del gelo, come qualcosa di dolce
rappreso lì tra i denti.

Io lo so che il vento
le spore e altro e poi altro ancora trasporta.
Perché sono le possibilità
di terre, altre, e speranze
come funghi tra muschi
e sfagni e altro, altro, ancora.

Come quella luce che è bianca in te,
che è venuta lei fuori dal seme
di quel dolore che avevi sepolto
nel tuo cuore fatto latente
occulto come pietra.

Between the Teeth

We blether, idling, chittering,
time passes,
like ice melting
or something sweet
dissolving in the mouth
yet thickening there between the teeth.

I know the wind
carries more than spores;
chances, places to fall, or settle
and root in moss, like Chanterelles
in Carraigin or Sphagnum
and others, and yet others...

There is white light in you still
grown from the heart of your sorrow's seed
hesitant, and latent,
secret as stone.

translation by Maria McManus

Bob Shakeshaft : *Seagulls*

The pillow hot
this side and that
second alarm
waiting
to ring

Seagulls crying
inside
no sleep
all night
too late

To dream
 how
unbearably bright
the morning
good morning

William Allegrezza : *nel mezzo*

I have forgotten
the act that
 brought me
 here, but I remember the
themes, the plotlines.

 somewhere the singing is
 true, and the words are
 carved in a stone
 we know.

but here, we have
the undone
 in piles--
 the garbage has become
the measure,
 and the map is
 imagined among it.

Sven Kretzschmar : *Homeland Horizon*

(for Bridget Borg and Luz Mar González-Arias)

It is said the Maltese consider the sea
their homeland horizon. Standing high
up on gold-blonde cliffs we see
vegetation pushing up, finding its way

between coarse slabs of rock. Come afternoon
backlight, it's almost as if the ocean
itself would blossom in spring,
a palette of blue against stone,

gold and white and brown.

By the water's edge cut-smooth pebbles
glimmer in the clean, flat tide of the bay,
so clear you can count their manifold shades

of grey. Come sundown, the water is silvering
out into rosé reflections of cloudscapes
moving not quite with the stolidity
of mountains. Up the bold cliffs, polished

for millennia by gales and saltwater,
the vague shape of a cave's entrance.

Washed-out rock arcs
gripped by rippling azure

are breakwater for the Mediterranean.

Tonight, we'll bed down in Victoria

and dream in colours

borrowed from the sea.

Ellie Rose McKee: *Cosmetic Cosmos*

after 'Papilla Estelar' by Remedios Varo

Do you congratulate yourself in taking care –
in feeding light to keep alive
that which you have caged?

That which is a now no more
than a shadow of itself.

Don't you pity the stars –
give thought to their sacrifice
in enabling such cruelty?

You can't force the sun to shine.

The moon reflects your transgressions.
Do not hide your face.

CS Fuqua : Photograph

With her back straight,
the scowl masked,
she became picture perfect
whenever a camera appeared.
If a car fender was near,
especially a police cruiser's,
she'd perch on it,
raise her chin,
pronounce her chest,
and become bearable,
even—shall I say?—
fun.

Like the time in the front room
after work, tired, her hair a mess.
When the camera appeared,
a blocking hand went up
but only for a moment
before the grin blossomed,
that hand fluffed her hair,
and the model struck
her fender pose
on the sofa's arm,
laughing, Wait!
Okay, okay...

No, wait!

Okay.

Take it now.

Okay.

Now.

Tim Dwyer : *Entering The Women's Prison*

My state ID hangs
on the rearview mirror.
I place it around my neck,
devotional scapular
as I walk toward the gates.

Jesus and Mary
where is your healing
for the shattered woman
who wishes to die
for killing her son,

and the woman tortured
for killing the lover
altered by meth,
who nearly killed her?

They dread the gauntlet
of the bare tree holidays-
Halloween, Thanksgiving,
Christmas, and a new year
as endless as the last.

Jesus, they wait
encircled by razor wire
for the homeland
in a far off heaven

Devotional scapulars are objects of popular piety, primarily worn by Roman Catholics.

Tim Dwyer : *Emergency On Call*

Maximum Security Women's Prison

She nearly ended her life-
bunkmate discovered her
suspended in air,

ebony skin turned blue,
an infant struggling
for first breath-

they pulled her back
to the grey earth,
and to this she said

I want to die
I have nothing

no Christmas letter,
no one.

The fellow prisoner
who had been
mother and lover
has paroled, branding her
crazy needy bitch.

To this her therapist
who will later drink until numb,
attempts sleight of hand,
urging her

to hold on for a future
less certain
than the sheet around her neck
offering immediate release

Larry Thacker : *Sometimes the dead*

demonstrate the best patience.

They stand in the corner,
with the leaning broom and dustpan,
watching your coffee cool
as if it might be the highlight
of the day. And it might.

They say there's a little thrill
in how long you forget sometimes
that your fresh cup waits.

That catching a final wisp of heat
off the top reminds them
of that time of saying goodbye.

Rebecca Ruth Gold : *Beautiful English*

Your nineteenth century speech
is more contemporary to me
than the news cycle.

Its measured iambs palpitate with
Shakespearian pentameters,
so abstracted is it from

the detritus of everyday life,
& so oblivious to the streets
I walk on while

awaiting your arrival
from Iran, your first entry
into my universe.

Then we can no longer pretend
to be divided by hemispheres
or rely on the civilizational clash

of East and West to explain
how our words cross borders
without reaching their destinations.

Your peculiar English
is a beautiful distortion
of familiar sounds,

bound together into knots
that roll softly on my tongue.
Every syllable punctures an illusion.

Your antiquated diction awakens me
as a constellation stirs the stars
in unexpected, opposing directions.

Your English is a survival skill:
disciplined & distant,
crafted as if to remind me:

*Language is mastery.
Instead of speaking needlessly,
we should bite our tongues.*

Every sentence manifests vigilance
& strips off the masks I use
to distance myself from you.

All my words
—all my Englishes—
lie exposed before you.

Meanwhile, you speak the veiled language
of Hafez & Sadi to your *mahram*.
Many secrets are kept from me.

Our civilizational gap
confines me to the outer edges
of your intimate galaxy.

This closure mirrors another division,
imposes another veil on your tongue,
as if our differences were the stuff of wars

& to speak would be treachery,
& the thing you placed in my hands
when I visited your homeland

was less a sign of our proximity
than a gift given to strangers,
passing through alien territory.

Mark Brownlee : *The Swallow*

Descending from great, lofty heights above
you are the soaring, swooping swallow
while I, the static, grounded tree below
where you and others eat my bitter flesh.

I'm the Bramley sapling that grew alone
which bears the weight of seasons in turn
but you're one among the migrating flocks
always leaving behind the winter breeze.

I call this northern land my own dear home
yet you will leave it time and time again
for southern seasons and warm summer shores
for I will never know those foreign lands.

"You have no home" I utter angrily
"The sky is my home," is always your reply
"But home is where you stay" I cry aloud
"No, Home's what you love" you laugh in reply.

Caroline Collins : *Kaeru*

Where the frog figurine
Made of acacia
Sits by the door,
Farmers rub the ridged back
With a stick for luck
And good weather,
On their way out
To paddies and fields.

“Kaeru”: in Japan, the word
For “frog” and “return”
Are the same, the root
Of fortune and fertility:
Rain-bringer, luck-giver,
Green grass-grower,
Herald, harbinger.
Who has not stopped
Near a railroad track
To hear them call together,
Who has not seen
Crowds of tadpoles
In wet ditches or puddles
Moving like a symphony,
Knowing they mean
Spring has finally come?

In the year that winter seemed endless,
Full of old challenges and new griefs,
When the cold kept leaving and coming back,
I went out the first warm day

Walking through tiny clouds of midges,
Heading to trails deep in the woods.
I climbed a hill, then heard a sound
I knew but couldn't recall,
thinking "What's that? What's *that?*" —
as it came once more, from murky water
below. Then it came clear,
And suddenly I was a child again,
Pulling a dark wooden cylinder
Shaped and painted like a fish
Out of an old, sturdy toybox
And dragging a stick so slowly
Over its grooves, my face filled
With wonder and delight
At the long, ratchety call--
As the new sound
Forgotten for so long
Returned to me.

Caroline Collins : *Elgin Watch Factory, 1929*

after a photo by Margaret Bourke-White

A thimbleful

Of twenty-thousand screws,

And watch-hands, thin as eyelashes,

Arrayed like dark petals

Atop a tiny spool.

Poised above, the maker's hands

Are sedate, mortal

Yet inscrutable. Who has not heard

The sand drop, grain by grain,

Deep in the watchworks,

Who has not heard the whir

Of angel wings beneath the glass?

Molly Rice : *Dumped*

He dumped me today.
No forewarning.
His black boot on my head
Making me little
To squeeze me into the
Blue-black Hefty trash bag.
He double-tied me
In with his leftovers
And his beer cans.

Settling in
And getting used to the smell,
I was shocked still –
Freeze frames of his eyes,
His mouth, when he said
Like scripture
There was somebody else.

Molly Rice : *Yours, Alone*

The Ring Wrestling Magazine
May 1968 featured a photo
Of my grandmother in their
Galaxy of Gal Grapplers.

The pin-up
Pinned-down,
In a scissor-hold
Of grief,
My heart
in permanent squeeze.

The rush of the find
Had me searching
The roll call
Of the hotbed
And how many
Bouts could be had.

2-to-3 falls.

The Saturday ringside of
The all-star era of Flair, Rowdy Roddy Piper,
Koloff, Two Ton, the giant, the mauler,
Valentine, the snake, the hawk, steamboat,

Magnum, Precious, Blackjack,
Valiant, Weaver, Rich, Young, & Wahoo
To name a few.

To be without her
I'm unmasked
I'm on the mat
In a Figure-4 Grapevine Hold
I scream "give give"
But nobody knows
When grief is yours
It is yours alone.

Chloe Thompson : *Wrong Sock*

Like a pair of mismatched
socks, we were folded
together. Creases, holes, loose threads,
and all. Bright colours,
faded.

You're a size too small, constricting me.
vein roads bulging, mocking
my wrong turn. Decisions, decisions.

Time worn, thread bare. I yearn
for simple love and care. A gentle stitch,

but, too busy busy busy
My sock hunt will have to wait.
Dinner. Dishes. Tidying. Crying.
Mourning
for my lost sock.

Chloe Thompson : *Matryoshka*

A Russian doll
mismatched, it's all
wrong, trapped in the wrong vessel.

Eyes, lips, breast and hips
nothing fits. Invisible cracks and bits
of wood chipped.

Quick! Before anyone sees,
throw it in the closet.
Deny its pleas.

Do not listen to their lies.
Only you know who resides
within the shell, deep inside.

Richard Waring : *The Monkey Pt. 2*

He sits on the shelf and looks around the room.

Looks at what is left.

That is how it started.

At least I think that is how it started.

The words I wrote for my brother in class.

The words that were rejected by Her.

“ No Richard.”

The family is smaller now.

There is a hole.

That feels right.

But it feels wrong too.

I want to get them back.

The words matter but when I think of them the feeling is wrong.

Hate and anger instead of love and loss.

“I’m not accepting this work. “

Named for him.

Named by him.

That's feels so right.

Soothing somehow.

But the feeling doesn't last.

I know the words are wrong no matter how close.

"You've obviously copied it from somewhere. This isn't your work."

Tears can't fall from those black eyes.

But if you look closely they are there.

Over the years I've told myself it's a compliment.

But it's a lie.

Compliments shouldn't cut.

Shouldn't leave a wound that festers and erases beauty.

"Someone like you couldn't have written that. "

He sits on the shelf and looks around the room.

Wondering who will love him now?

That is how it ended.

I am sure of that at least.

He sits on the shelf and looks around the room.

Wondering who will love him now?

I will.

Paul Butterfield Jr. *I love you more than God can
make a star*

She
Ran away
One night
With
The poet's sky
I stayed up
All night
Looking out the front
And
Back garden
Consistently
With my coffees
I went
To the local shop at 6am
The shopkeeper said
You looking for your dog
She continued
She's in the school
I smiled
I ran
To the steel fence
With
The spikes on top

She was right there
I jumped over them
Without
Hesitation
And
I thought
When I hugged her
You twat-bag
But then I wondered
Of all she could have seen
As I said
I love you more than God can make a star
And then I thought
She probably seen that too

Paul Butterfield Jr. : *If I don't write, I don't
feel right*

She walks over
And sniffs the books
We're getting ready to eat
But I think she's in the mood for literature
My hair as greasy as the cheesy moon
We live
Like a box of wet matches
We are in this
Like the cut of toe nails
Where the appendix is ready to burst
Where the heart really hurts
Where a smile means love
Then
She lies on you
To hear a story from your dreams

Submission Guidelines

For Featured Poets, send 6-8 poems.

Four poets will be selected to showcase in each issue, with four poems each.

For General Submissions: send 1-3 poems.

We're particularly interested in poets from the island of Ireland, but will happily consider poets from elsewhere.

- Send submissions to **thepenpointsnorth@outlook.com** with 'FOURXFOUR' as the subject.
- Send all the poems as one attachment (either .doc or .docx), along with a third-person biog (max. 100 words).
- Include a cover letter in the body of your email, along with your address and contact details.
- All submissions must be previously unpublished (either print, online or broadcast).
- Please note we do not accept simultaneous submissions.
- Deadline for the next round of submissions is October 31st, 2019.

Thank you for reading!



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