

failed ~~haiku~~

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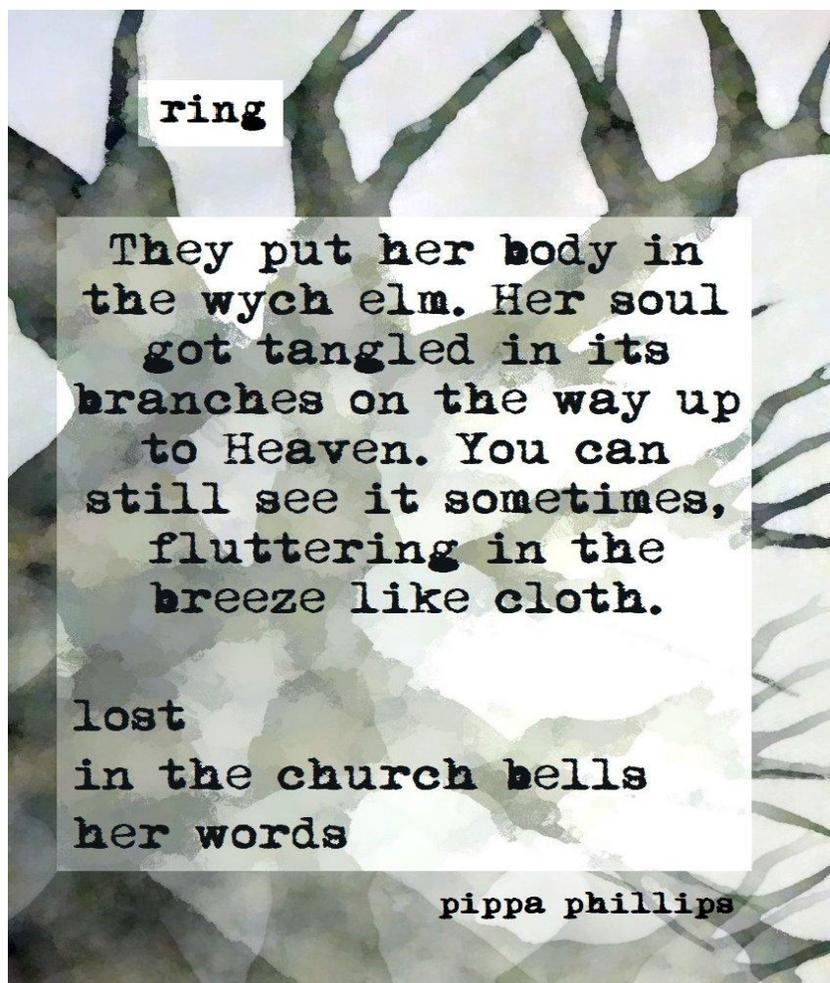
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Cast List

In order of appearance

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Ann Smith

Pris Campbell

Tim Cremin

Mary Arnold

C.X.Turner

John J. Dunphy

Bryan Cook

Kristen Lindquist

Colleen M. Farrelly

Richa Sharma

Deborah Burke Henderson

Robert Epstein

Chen Xiaoou

Maxianne Berger

dl mattila

Keith Evetts

Ram Chandran

Reid Hepworth

Ingrid Baluchi

Natalia Kuznetsova

John Zheng

Rick Jackofsky

Pitt Buerken

Pippa Phillips

Gayle Worthy

Richard L. Matta

Susan Burch

Diana Webb/Alan Peat

Linda Papanicolaou

Adelaide B. Shaw

Christa Pandey

Cynthia Anderson

Neena Singh
Gil Jackofsky
Herb Tate
Mona Bedi
Kala Ramesh
Shasta Hatter
Ronald Scully
Caroline Giles Banks
Marianne Paul
Joanna Delalande/Oscar Luparia
Kat Lehmann
Richard Tice
John Budan
Ravi Kiran
Jackie Chou
Daya Bhat
Diana Webb
Kath Abela Wilson
Lakshmi Iyer
Robert Witmer
Amoolya Kamalnath
Marilyn Ashbaugh
Pete Dunstone
Hazel Hall
Valentina Ranaldi-Adams
Neera Kashyap
Joshua St. Claire
Paul Beech
Simon Wilson
Cynthia Rowe
Jenny Shepherd
Anna Cates
Glenys Ferguson
Mike Gallagher

Peter Jastermsky

Tracy Davidson

John J. Han

Mark Forrester

Carol Raisfeld

Stefanie Bucifal

David Oates

Susan Beth Furst

Dave Chandler

Arvinder Kaur

Antonietta Losito

Gabriela Popa

Terrie Jacks

Bryan Rickert

Delicacy

In the delicatessen I catch its eye. I have the impression it is watching me and the queue. Its claws are clamped in rubber bands. It is quite still but the hairs on its legs move as though pedaling a bike and occasionally it waves a slow wave at me. I want to comfort it and its companions who are piled one on top of the other four and five deep.

starving
in the tank
seafood dinner

Ann Smith

Body Matters

Pain from a blood-clot operation gone wrong in my foot is dragging me down. It won't finish healing so I spend one of my seven lives at the Wound Care Center, the doctor flushing, packing, binding the tunnel into the side of the foot. When a flap still blocking the tunnel stubbornly remains, a deadening needle is jammed in the wound and the flap cut out. More pain. With a sponge and tube attached; a wound vac sucks blood and other fluids for a week. My personal vampire!

Screaming nightmares hit, waking my husband — a red cape is in my path, blood spilling from it. Brambles slice my skin. Humpty lies broken on the path with me.

The prince doesn't come.

grandma's baking —
a sleeping wolf
raises its head

Pris Campbell

What Are You Doing with Your Life

Well, the band is still together. We get to play most nights. It's not about trying to hit it big anymore—now it's all about the music. We don't mind just getting by if that's what it costs to keep on playing. To be completely honest, I do still dream about fame sometimes. I know it's not going to happen, but I like to practice dreaming so I don't lose the skill.

book of spells
the morning lasts
well into afternoon

Tim Cremin

nobody

He is long hair and a skateboard; shirtless and cigarettes.
She is skinned-knees and crayons; all trust and curiosity.
He makes her feel as dirty as the bottoms of his bare feet. "You'll be back. You'll like it," are the last things he says to her, as she pedals quickly home.

She is now secrets and shame; sleepless nights and silent tears.
No more bike rides to the woods. No more stories at the dinner table.
No one asks. No one knows. No one seems to notice, as she disappears.

captive in shame's silence free to be

Mary Arnold

tears drowned

accepting the last scoop of rum & raisin ice-cream, swallowed by a large waffle cone, I felt the bite of sea wind on the corners of my mouth; i'd spent all of my coins on the slots, before cold wet sand pressed against bare toes, and I laughed so hard, my face cracked, almost falling from the edge of the world

the call of the sea
I let each of its waves
wash over me

C.X.Turner

Only the Wishbone Gets Broken

After last year's debacle, we decided not to take any chances.

Thanksgiving family dinner
we seat Democrats and Republicans
in separate rooms

John J. Dunphy

GUILTY?

Enjoying a spring thaw stroll, I avoid a deep puddle by stepping into the bush. I almost trip over a body. Eyes closed, he lies in a fetal position, fully clothed, surrounded by plastic bottles and a boombox. He appears to be in his thirties. No obvious rise and fall of breathing. I shiver at the sight of apparent death.

Aware that he might be violent should he revive, I hide behind a nearby elm and punch the police hot line on my phone.

“There’s a body at the bottom of Willow Lane and he may be dead.”

“Hold the line and we’ll dispatch an ambulance.”

Should I administer first aid, check his pulse? I lack mask, gloves and naloxone to stimulate him out of an opioid overdose. Hanging up, I walk away, knowing that professional help will come, not wanting to be involved. I feel guilty. I’m not a Good Samaritan.

I retrace my steps to keep an eye on him. He’s now surrounded by police and paramedics with a stretcher. He’s alive, thank goodness, sitting upright, seeming dazed. The rescue team appear happy that they are not dealing with a fatality.

Not stopping, I glance back to see him being wheeled into an ambulance. He’s safe now, though I still feel guilty.

*at the playpark
hypodermics hidden
in autumn leaves*

Bryan Cook

Simple Rules

The body is more buoyant in salt water.

Sun and rain can create a rainbow.

The body is a fragile thing, bruising easily.

The body is a durable, flexible thing.

Low tide follows high.

Two drinks get me drunk.

Don't sink the eight ball till the end.

In the end, they always find out.

collateral damage

not allowed to even speak

your name

Kristen Lindquist

Bildungsroman

The fort is conveniently located on the back of her dad's property, far enough from the pond where we emerged covered in muck as kids and far enough from the highway where a passing squad car might happen upon our swiped stash. She retrieves a beer for each of us. The moonlight catches a can and spins shadows onto the plywood. Stale leaves crunch as I squat beside our other cousin, freshly bruised from another chemo infusion. We don't know she's sick, too. For now, we sit in silence, sipping our beers and sharing our secret adulthood.

shadows stalk
our fragile shelter
future ghosts

Colleen M. Farrelly

For or Against

Everyone, including me, was gracefully dressed in black from head to toe. Faces hidden but identities well prescribed. We all walked in a particular direction. I wondered if anyone of us knew where we were going? All I could hear were cautious whispers. We were to reach some gargantuan, marbled edifice. Was someone or something waiting for us there? How are we ever to know what awaits us at the destination we seem to plan so meticulously?

cold rain
a heap of me
quivering

In that moment, I chose to open my veil and halt there and then. Constantly questioning myself, I realized I couldn't be a part of "they." So I decided to turn back and began to walk the empty ground they had abandoned. Such was the fresh air of authenticity consolidating itself amidst futility. There was no desire for completeness or security.

Once in question, any identity will disappear like a soap bubble. Not meaningless, but the trace of ambiguity reigns. Perhaps, this is my beginning towards a certain freedom of choosing changed ways in the game that never has a winner.

black butterfly
i cross the diameter
of a myth

Richa Sharma

Silver Linings

*storm surge
a winter of broken things
offers new life*

Wise ones say *the teacher finds us when we are ready*. After losing Sis, my life went dark. Melancholia woke up with me most mornings. The 24th of every month brought a trembling. All those occasions where I should have seen her face or heard her voice, she was not to be found.

*hindsight
navigating white waters
brings clarity*

Weaving the torn edges of my life together, I found a strengthening occur at the thin places. This was such a gift. Sacrifices can become times of growing, more than giving up. Grieving expands one's empathic sensitivities. When things fall apart, trust the path will open to a new world. Look for fresh meaning. Practice being content in the moment. Let color and vitality fill your well, refresh your spirit, enliven your being. Everything that comes our way and everything we co-create, when fully embraced, helps us grow.

Deborah Burke Henderson

Caught by Surprise on a Cable Car

I have no idea what day or year it is; I am wholly absorbed in this dreamy moment. It's a warm, sunny afternoon in a city like San Francisco but smaller, cleaner and safer. I hop on an open-air cable car like those that tourists like to take up Powell Street in SF. With no clock to punch and no destination in mind, I quietly doze off as the cable car meanders up the incline, but I awaken with a start, feeling squeezed on the seat where I am slouched over. Turns out it's my father sitting close to me, his left arm draped around my shoulders. I'm surprised to see my Dad, which prompts me to pepper him with questions: "Did you already finish with your meeting? How did you know I was riding *this* cable car? Where did you get on?" None of these questions matter. What matters is the miracle that I met my beloved father again early this morning; that is, 10 October 2022, since Dad died on 9 June 2002.

between two worlds
a wish comes true
I didn't know I still had

Robert Epstein

An Old Car

I am on the way to meet my friend Kim. We have not seen each other for quite a long time due to the COVID. Now that the restriction is getting not so strict these days, we decided we should have a meeting at the tea house where we used to have a drink and chat.

Well, while I am driving my Focus, a slow old car runs ahead of mine, at the rear of which is a strange brand name, a name I have never heard of before. Fixing my gaze on it for a few more seconds, I begin to realize that something has come off, that is, a letter is missing in the name of the old-style car, actually a first-class auto of Japanese make.

When I arrive at the tea house, Kim is already sitting there at a window table. After quite a few months we have so much to talk about that we do need a long afternoon chat with tea.

oyota
all we need is
a cup of tea

Chen Xiaou

After Issa

I took my father to his cardiology appointment. I didn't realize he had a jar of urine with him, else I might have prevented the outcome. **But I *always* bring a urine sample**, he insisted, belligerently, after spilling it all over the carpet in the doctor's office.

I waited outside for my mother. We were going to see her neurologist. She finally came down the front path, her little poodle tugging ahead on the fully-extended, taut leash. *But Annie **always** comes with us*, she insisted, pouting, as I belted her in before taking the dog back to the house.

Annie had a UTI, and I was the designated daughter who would collect the urine specimen for the vet. Why didn't anyone tell me beforehand that to get a urine sample from a dog, you're supposed to use a soup ladle.

cracked Imari cup
its dark tea stain
the keepsake

Maxianne Berger

Religious Belief

I'm reading the list of legal reasons for absentee voting. Most states don't require a reason, but mine does. Though I fervently believe this to be a form of voter suppression, I also believe in scrupulous adherence to the rule of law, which is why I can, in good faith and even as an atheist, vote absentee on grounds of religious belief.

protest march
he tells me I look
really hot

dl mattila

Fogging the film

Let's chuck out all the junk

*two halves of a conch its frilly edges worn by lifting tides found in a shallow
dive when a boatman left us on the Ilha near the fort where drums had beat
beneath the moon*

the auctioneer won't take

*the hollowed carborundum stone a gift from Tim the reaper who taught me
how to use a scythe before he died these many years it has supplied the
kitchen with sharp knives*

the broken

*wooden toucan painted unreal bright that swallowed quarters saved for tolls
the days they took cash on the Bridge*

and the worthless

*Dad's screwdriver with a yellow resin handle its shank a little bent the head
all worn and rounded used more than any other but then for scraping muck
without damaging the surface and opening cans of paint I think of him*

beyond repair

*his Agfa camera spoil of war in its tatty leather case the bellows full of tiny
holes why ever did I keep it*

my commendation
for good conduct
saved for the coffin

Keith Evetts

The Zen Thing

Of all the mammals, squirrel is the cutest according to me. Its short and zigzag pattern of movements always reminds me of the indecisiveness of me. If you observe a squirrel for some time, you will find that it has a zen attitude to its life and it practices mindfulness, doing anything with full attention, like cracking a nut. I have never seen a squirrel sitting - like say a monkey -and watching the surroundings idly.

funeral rituals-
a porch squirrel
makes it interesting

Ram Chandran

Instinct

I see him every day at recess. He sits by himself on the floor by the boys entrance. He doesn't eat, he just sits quietly and keeps to himself. I think he's like me. Lonely.

whispers in the playground

I push past
my butterflies

Over the next few days, I make sure to smile at him as I walk past. He doesn't acknowledge me and instead stares right through me. Nothing new there. I remain committed and keep at it until he finally looks at me. I have to admit it's not the most welcoming look, but I take it as an invitation and plop down beside him on the floor. I do all the talking, he just sits there and eats my snack.

your hands

pinning me down
schoolyard chants

Reid Hepworth

Flotsam

She's there again this morning—a regular in town. Ankle boots with kitten heels, a flamboyant full-length skirt ablaze with Frida Kahlo flowers, tight-fitting top. Hunched on a low wall in the square, she unwraps a handout chocolate bar for breakfast, oblivious to everything.

It's doubtful she has washed in months—or at least her hair. Mid-length blond, it falls in thick twisted snakes around her ravaged face, age indeterminable.

Before long, head down, she traverses the hectic crossroads, gaining the pavement diagonally opposite by way of the central roundabout. Traffic edges by warily until she reaches safety. Gabbling on, she doesn't notice.

We all know her. If life were different, she could well be one of us.

this urge
this fear
to reach out

Ingrid Baluchi

ONCE A FIGHTER ALWAYS A FIGHTER

My favourite pastime of late is fighting with ghosts and skeletons. No, no. It's not a new online game designed for retirees. No. My foes are my own old ghosts and pesky skeletons from the past. And my battles with them so far are losing battles.

Yet I don't give up. I never do.

a crushing fall
onto my own shadow ...
the shadow intact

Natalia Kuznetsova

Missing

Mom cooks alone while others chat in the den or watch Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Now and then dad gets up from his reclining chair and wobbles to the kitchen to help. But mom doesn't need an extra hand on her backstage. When mom places dinner on the table and after dad says grace, we become hungry performers on the front stage. Forks and knives start tap-dancing while mom laughs like tinkling wind chimes.

ginkgo leaves
the churchyard covered
with golden sunshine

John Zheng

Sticking to It

After having four wedding dates canceled due to COVID lockdowns, our daughter finally got married this summer. A couple of weeks after the big bash, I happened to catch a glimpse of a shooting star streaking across the northern sky. I took the opportunity to silently wish the newlyweds a long and happy life together.

The sight of that meteorite burning through the atmosphere also brought back some old memories. As I watched the star come tumbling down to Earth, I recalled a little girl saving up her money to buy a package of glow-in-the-dark stars. That little girl then carefully applied the stickers to her bedroom ceiling in the shapes of the various constellations she had learned to identify. Unfortunately, it wasn't long before the adhesive began to give way and, one by one the stars, and the tears, began to fall. Seeing how sad she was, I tried to console her by telling her to look at the bright side—some of your stars are still up there, and every time one falls, you get to make a wish . . . She used the rest of her money to buy a tube of glue.

filling the space
between two stars
a cricket song

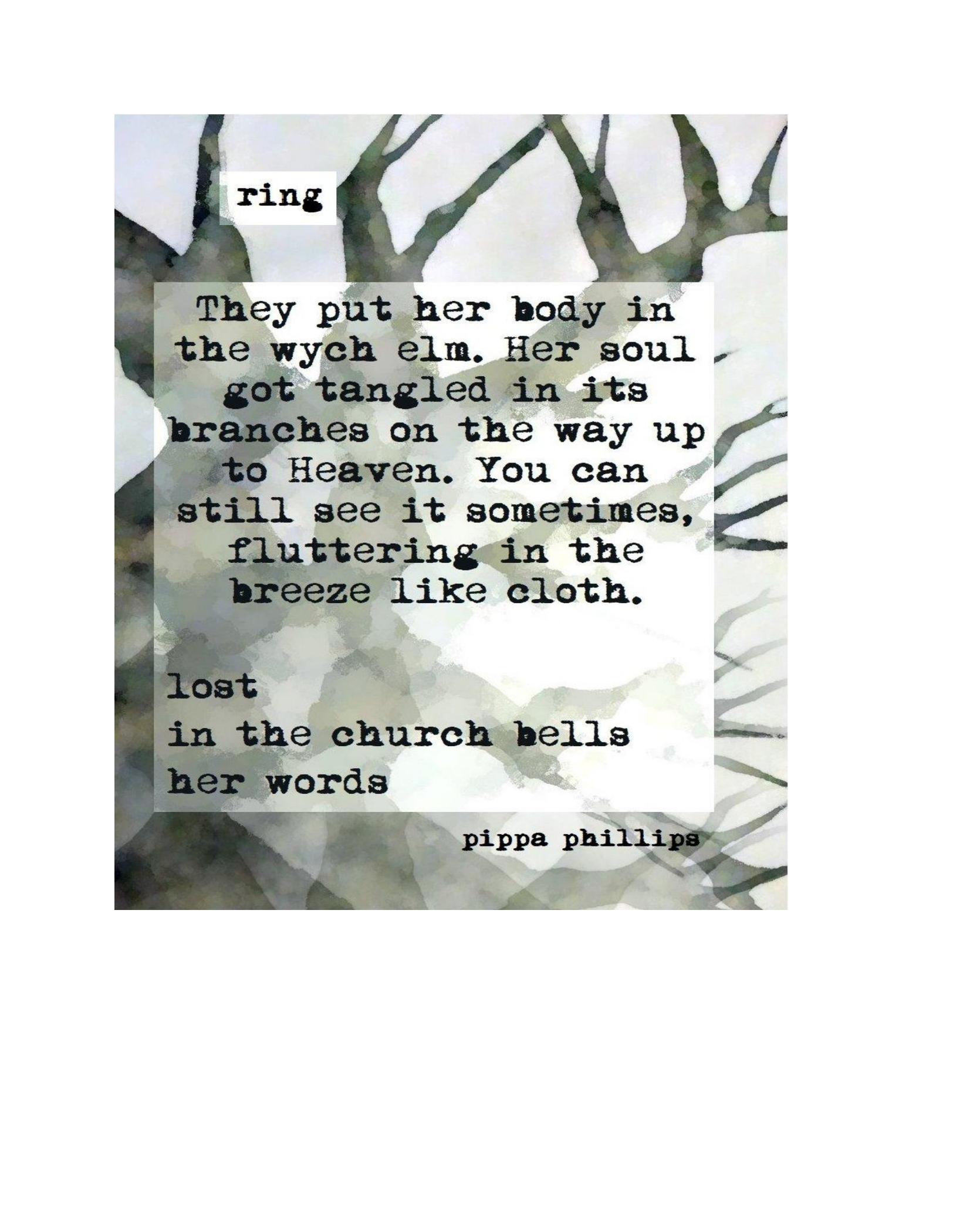
Rick Jackofsky

Start Small

My youngest daughter's relationship with her school could diplomatically be described as strained. It began with a disappointment, when she realized, that she would not be joining her siblings at the high school, but would be starting her career at the elementary school. Reluctantly, and with the full conviction that there was only pipifax to learn, she trots off in the morning in the opposite direction from her older brother and sister. Under these circumstances, she says, she doesn't want to go there and would rather wait at home until her siblings are back. Today she carries out a token strike.

learning foolish things
constant waiting for the break
peeves

Pitt Buerken

The background is a watercolor illustration of tree branches in shades of green and brown, set against a light, textured background. The branches are thin and delicate, with some showing small leaves or buds.

ring

They put her body in
the wych elm. Her soul
got tangled in its
branches on the way up
to Heaven. You can
still see it sometimes,
fluttering in the
breeze like cloth.

lost
in the church bells
her words

pipa phillips

Insight

I let my two-year-old sit with the other children on the floor of the museum for a folk concert. Standing in the back of the room, I gasp when I see her little hand shoot up in response to one of the performers who asks if anyone has made up their own song. She walks onto the stage and sings the *Alphabet Song* into the microphone. My heart sinks. This is not a song of her making. To my great relief, the audience cheers when she finishes, and she leaves the stage with her confidence intact. When the concert is over and I make my way to her, she beams and says, “I sang the ABC’s to *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star!*”

first flight
a fledgling returns
with a story to share

Gayle Worthy

Play Day

The agitated swan gives chase: deadlines, deliverables, dollars to be made. I want to turn and say, “tag, you’re it!” Instead, back to the cubicle. I’ve made it like the fort in my childhood basement, stashed candies in drawers, even bazooka chewing gum. I imagine words I want to type: “rain today, let’s splash in puddles and see who gets muddier.” But I don’t type the words, they monitor all that.

giving birth
to a rainbow
the bubble wand

Richard L. Matta

Collapsing Nose

My ENT explains that just like some people have floppy ears, others have floppy nose cartilage.

“You’re just
made that way”
instead of getting help,
I get another
anatomy lesson

Susan Burch

Stand well clear

They gossiped and they gossiped how they gossiped while they washed those clothes and sometimes someone on the sidelines would whisper - *if words could burn she'd turn those poor souls to cinders.* But the stones couldn't hold talk and the old gods poured all the water away.

*worn smooth
where others touched
the water basin's lip*

Diana Webb
Alan Peat



Linda Papanicolaou

Partners in Crime

After dinner, our parents and grandparents are cooling off on the porch. Big Sis and I are upstairs in our bedroom playing checkers. The window is open to catch any breeze. For once, we don't squabble over the game. Suddenly, she flaps her hands, jumps up, sending checkers and board flying, and screams. I am only five years old, and I scream even louder, although I don't know why. She runs around in circles, her arms waving back and forth. I do what she is doing.

"Oh, my God!" Mom stands in the doorway. "Are you hurt?"

"A moth," Sis cries. "A moth on my face."

Something heavy thumps on the floor. It's Dad, fallen in a dead faint.

family reunion
the different versions
of stories we tell

Adelaide B. Shaw

Cologne 1943

Ukraine war news and photos of destruction evoke long-buried childhood memories. Especially the sound of air-raid sirens pierces as if yesterday. That yesterday of WWII, where sirens sent us scrambling from deep sleep to stumble down two flights of stairs to our safe room in the cellar. Secure behind an iron door and double basement walls, where recently two break-throughs had been cut to neighbors on both sides, as ours was the middle one of three contiguous homes. Loud noise close in one night prompts Father to turn the heavy handle of the iron door, only to shout OUR HOUSE IS BURNING, we must get out. One by one we crawl through the small opening to one neighbor. At daylight we four children and the maid are sent by train to an aunt in another town. Our parents stay to scour the cooled wreckage for salvageable possessions.

second-hand childhood
a battered baby doll
dearly loved

Christa Pandey

Stone Soup

It's all he knows-how to make something from nothing. His only possession is a stone that he carries from place to place. He gets one meal each time he spins the story, then moves on, afraid to linger once he's found out. Itinerant preacher, he offers salvation to starving villagers who give everything for that promise, even their last onion.

skunk cabbage
old man at the crossroads
still grifting

Cynthia Anderson

Pabulum

The Halfway home - *Ujaala School Ghar* is a ray of light and hope for economically underprivileged children. A home for 6-12-year-old children whose parents are daily wagers and work long hours, so children come to this Home after school.

Entering the class, I see the children in their blue school uniforms sitting on a red *dari* (woven rug). The teacher is drawing Mickey Mouse on the blackboard. A curly-haired boy shows me his drawing of Mickey. I narrate the story of Walt Disney—how an imaginative boy passionate about drawing can have a brilliant idea and create a world of fun for kids. I also share videos of my visit to Disney World on my laptop. They crowd around me and their excitement is palpable at seeing this magical animated world on the screen.

posse of fireflies...
light sparkles
inside and outside

Neena Singh

Ready for the Junkyard

Now in my tenth decade- I get two massive doses of cortisone in my creaky knees. Two nights later, my wife is in a panic, although asleep, my resting pulse won't come down from 125, my breathing labored, I'm rushed to the emergency department hooked up, poked, tested, vitals taken: blood sugar an alarming 300. I am hydrated, given all kinds of tests, get consult after consult, and am medicated. After 36 hours, they tell me what I don't have but can't tell me what's wrong.

faithful Toyota
three hundred thousand miles
everything wears out

Gil Jackofsky

Straight Flush

She kept on asking me where I'd been. Just driving, I said, to clear my head, get some space, give her a break. Every day I had to make sure I got home first so I could sift through the post and stuff the letters I couldn't let her see into the glove compartment for later. I might have burnt them, I suppose, or just torn them up and hidden them in the bottom of the bin. But it felt safer, somehow, on my way home after a session, to ram them down the bog in the public toilets. And every time I thought of coming clean I told myself I would. Tomorrow.

*laying my
cards on the table -
Ace, King, Queen, Jack...Eight*

Herb Tate

Change

A slight chill is starting to be felt in the morning air. The sun, though bright, has a touch of winter. I feel a shiver run down my spine. Autumn leaves are waving goodbye. Colored poplar leaves swirl at my feet. Stepping out into my garden I revel in the dappled shade of the mango tree. Faraway, a koel sings.

shifting shadows--
the mind that refuses
to stay still

Mona Bedi

Voice

The advances he makes are measured as even a lioness wouldn't move half as stealthily towards her prey ... his movements were gradual, allowing the young girl to get used to a few touches, here and there, that she didn't even think anything was amiss.

a lily plucked -
the deeper murmurings
go unheard

Kala Ramesh

Three on a Match

My pain isn't any worse today than usual. It is about a 4 on the 10 point pain scale. It might become a 5 if I get up and move around. Plenty of days I've cleaned the house, washed the laundry, or volunteered in the food pantry in more pain than this. But today I just sit and think about my favorite cousin. Her husband of fifty-nine years died earlier this month, two days after she requested heroic measures be stopped. The celebration of life will be in two more weeks.

casseroles
on a potluck table
one less plate

I sit and think about my youngest sister. Earlier this week, her stepfather, who has loved her for forty years, lost his battle with a litany of diseases. My sister has cared for him for the last eight years, quitting her job last year to give him full-time care. At the request of the decedent there will not be a service.

his favorite TV channel
no longer fills the air
flowers at the door

Another cousin is also on my mind. His older brother died two days ago of complications of Agent Orange. In a chat, my cousin tells me of his anger over his brother's decades long struggle to get care and benefits. My siblings and I go in on a blue and white sympathy bouquet with same day delivery.

Agent Orange
ending the war
one vet at a time

Shasta Hatter

Cosmos

Since we met that night at the observatory,
feted Erendell's discovery and you waxed on
about the Hubbell, the speed of light,
redshift and the department's dwarf stars,
while I took a peek at eternity, only for a moment,
I still wonder to this day who was close enough
to steal my wallet.

full moon
snowy owl tracks
the slightest move

Ronald Scully

Call and Response

The barrage of images from Ukraine is heartbreaking. My pen is shell-shocked into paralysis.

Blank sheets of paper on my desk are white flags of surrender to complacency, silence, and

remorse. Then I see **CHILDREN** plainly written with the white paint of innocence on the

grounds of the drama theater in Mariupol where women and youth have taken shelter. As a

mother and grandmother I am summoned by this single word, this cry, this plea, this entreaty to

spare the innocent and to safeguard the future. An image, a word lifts the fog of war. We all are

children. Children: thusness of hope.

rockets can't read

their names

109 empty strollers

Caroline Giles Banks

Bitten

My Fitbit sports watch knows me intimately. Knows when I fall asleep and when I wake up. Knows when I've had a bad night, tossing and turning. Knows what sets my heartbeat racing. Sends me little love notes when I've done well. And when I reach the pinnacle, the coveted goal of 10000 steps a day, celebratory fireworks explode across the watch face.

*Pavlov's dogs
I wonder if
he loved them*

Marianne Paul

FLOWERS FOR MARIANNA

I am bringing you white roses that remind of summer garden.
Because this is the one thing I can do: to give you flowers, to put them
on a cold granite slab, to sit close for staying a little with you. You
liked music so much, mama, and here we are surrounded by such a
deep silence. Only my heart beats the rhythm of life, while I am
thinking once again about what was and will never come back...

*daily bread –
how I would like
to share it with you*

Since many years, on the contrary, I meet you only in my dreams, in a
night space lighted by your smile, where your ringing voice resounds
and you look at me tenderly. But this dream goes away at dawn, your
smile and voice disappear when I wake up. And a new day starts...

*every morning
your gentle gaze
in the frame*

Joanna Delalande
Oscar Luparia

Sometimes I'm Their Mother

The ice skater finalist.

riverdance

The child dressed as a tree in the school play.

the tears

Stray cats with crooked tails.

that don't belong

The teen whose eyes sink into mine.

to me

Kat Lehmann

Chocolate Droppings

There was the time I placed several chocolate-covered sunflower seeds in a cupboard: “Aagh!” my wife, Kathleen, yells later that day. She comes to fetch me. “Richard! We’ve got a mouse.” In the kitchen she opens the cupboard and points. “Hmm,” as I examine one by a stack of plates. Picking it up, I pop it in my mouth. “Richard!”—putting a name to the action. One by one, every sunflower seed gets eaten, though Kathleen tries to stop me. “Problem solved,” I say at last.

toothmarks
in the butter—only hairs
on the glue trap

Richard Tice

Generosity

The famous mariachi singer performed to a sold-out audience at the El Paso stadium. But when the wealthy star departed from his motel, he failed to give Isabella a tip. Instead, he left the minimum wage earning “cleaning lady”, a signed photo. When I visit her at her tiny apartment adjacent the laundry room, she is feeding her pet parrot, Carino. I notice a photograph lining the bottom of the birds cage. But because of the numerous white bird droppings, I cannot make out the writing or image.

trash bin
the birthday card
from my dentist

John Budan

Slippery ground

I still remember my first foray into the stock markets. I was not married and been working a few years after graduating. I had saved some money and was thoroughly impressed by the stock market legends. After a little while of tracking specific stocks in the markets, I picked up a couple of stocks. I was delighted when their Net Asset Value (NAV) rose steadily for a couple of weeks. Then for some reason which I neither foresaw nor understood, the markets took a turn for the worse.

I remembered the expert advice that as a long term investor, I need to stay invested as short term swings are common in the markets. As weeks became months, my investments were turning deeper shades of red. Finally I gave up and sold my entire portfolio at a loss. A few weeks later the markets picked up again. And then I read about how Mutual Funds were a safer bet...

muscle beach
the rise and fall
of waves and biceps

Ravi Kiran

Persimmons

My sister brought me persimmons the other day. They were from my uncle's tree. Each bite was a taste of familial love, in this care home where only apples and oranges are served with our meals. Some people call persimmons Chinese apples. I like them ripe to the point where they're sweet and soft.

Chinatown trip
the yuck face he makes
at the fruit stand

Jackie Chou

Pulse

She gathers the fallen nutmeg fruits from around the plantation. The areca leaf boat boasts of fifteen fruits. Not one must go waste – what he repeated in all their married years, niched in her ever since. Tracing a mental map of all the patches covered, she hurries home. At eighty-two it's the twilight she does not trust, and the shadow that follows her.

porridge hour
debates at the kerb
end abruptly

Daya Bhat

Breakfast with Cezanne

'How would you have wanted him to paint you?' I ask them in my coffee shop. A boat shaped pot of butter. A paper serviette. A sugar bowl. They are all in white and talk among themselves.

Let him infuse me with glaucous blue, ' says the cup. 'Deep as the sea and gleaming. '

Transform me into a pear,' says the boat shaped pot. 'Let the butter ooze through my contours, rounding them out and making them glisten. '

'Turn the spot of sunlight touching me , into a tulip, ' says the sugar bowl 'Make me blossom. '

'Shift me into a cloth ,' says the serviette. 'With concave folds and forestation.'

latte froth
swirling it into a peak
so many ways

Diana Webb

Fava

It was a family soup. My Maltese grandmother was the head of cabbage. She hardly cooked anymore but left her rocker for this. She insisted on a hambone. The soup was "minestra". No pasta needed. Simmer gold onions, olive oil, chunks of pumpkin, squash, garlic, oregano, salt, pepper, parsley and thyme. Better the day after. My father was a fava, mother a cauliflower, the kids red beans. I, the oldest, was grated parmesan, stirring it up at the end. If you're vegetarian don't tell nana just leave out the ham. Add a little more of me sprinkled fresh, on top.

family picnic
the salad
too big for the bowl

Kath Abela Wilson

Learning

Going back to basics was always tough but I slowly picked up the art of learning a new subject. Whatever and how much ever we go deep to the roots, if we don't respect and honour each other's views; there is no point in studying. Transparency in relationships is a must. It must be crystal clear and it's always nice to solve all hatred once for all.

imitation
at least she can never
be my shadow

Lakshmi Iyer

Perspectives

He sipped his butter tea in a corner of the dark room. A poor peasant mother did her chores near the hearth, occasionally tugging a string that rocked her infant's cradle on the floor about midway between the trekker and the tug. A common situation on the Himalayan trail some 50 years ago.

What the Nepali woman saw as she stirred the pot. What the foreigner in his absentminded rest saw in that dingy room. What the thin chicken pecking at the dirt floor might have seen. The baby in the cradle with its eyes looking upward at the smoke.

The chicken hopped about, pecking, moving nearer to the cradle, which was covered with a blanket that was itself covered in dust and the regurgitations of the baby who rocked there peacefully. The mother cooked. The trekker watched. The chicken hopped up on the cradle and pecked. Pecking, pecking, slowly moving up the blanket, toward the baby's face.

If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound? Perhaps the sound of one hand clapping. Or the sound of a trekker's boot swiftly through the air, on its way toward a fated fowl.

The hero to a baby's eyes. A crazed outsider come to kill our eggs. The visitor could not explain the punted hen—its final squawk—the puff of dust in the yard beyond the open door—the feathers settling down

around the lifeless bird. The mother at the hearth could only gasp.
The baby cried.

hearth smoke
a thin chicken with one eye
on the iron pot

Robert Witmer

The bride to be

A small quantity of water hangs out with a lotus leaf. The pond is in full bloom with both pink and white petals.

mom whispers
detachment is key
the girl yawns

Amoolya Kamalnath

Fire in the Sky

At a pyrotechnic festival, one enthusiast flinched and cowered at each firework. He later told me he was a war vet. I asked when he returned but he only looked off into the distance.

(never) home from war

Marilyn Ashbaugh

Photo Finish

MRI, X-ray and bloods. 'Come on, faster - burn some rubber'. It's taken me ages to find a wheel chair, the appointments are too close together, and now we're late. Following the blue line we blast past palliative care and oncology making police siren sounds warbled further by laughing. A man coming out of orthopedics flattens himself against the wall, yet she flaps her arms 'Out, out of the way'. As we pass she gives him a slight shrug and her best smile, a sprinter's in with a chance smile.

walking frame
four more feet
to kick leaves

Pete Dunstone

Crunch Time

I have often thought that good poems are like crackers, plucked from the super-markets of our pleasure and stacked close at hand to savour with Shiraz. Crisp and salty, they're ready to display their diversity with countless toppings, each more tasty than the last. Take those lines, spread them with assonance and top with a metaphor. May they not grow stale, sealed in their copyright packets. Don't let them rustle forever in the biscuit tins of anthologies, concealing once-delicious dreams. No one wants a soggy poem. Hand them out to all and sundry sprinkled with seasoned salt and congratulations. Without them cheese and cabanossi would never taste the same.

rambling rose
your red pen slashes
my poem

Hazel Hall

The Neighborhood Store

Everyone calls it "The Confect". It is a Ma-and-Pa enterprise that sells groceries.

Walking to school, children make purchases there of penny-candy.

chalk moon -
fading lines
of the hopscotch court

Everyone calls it "The Confect". It is a Ma-and-Pa enterprise that exists in photos.

Posting to Facebook, grandparents recall purchases there of penny-candy.

Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

Unearthed

On the first day of my morning walk, I am unable to figure out why there are so many earthworms crawling on the park's walking track. It has not rained. On the second morning, I see many more. It is then that I first smell, then see the wild grass dug up, and the soil laid bare on the edges of the walkway. The worms slide over the surface of the moist soil onto the stone track like slithering ribbons. Around my shoes, I feel their vulnerability.

closet
painful memories crawl
out of the night

Neera Kashyap

Job Interview

Here's where the receptionist sits. Here's where your office will be. It's not as nice as mine. You have to earn your way into the corner office. Here's where the staff sits. The partner offices are back here. Have a seat. I need a *real* accountant. I need a stud. I need someone who can produce. Remember Steve? He's always talking about *compost*. Angela back there, she didn't marry well, if you get my meaning. Tyrone wanted paternity leave. I don't have anyone I can rely on. I can tell *you* get it. You remind me of me. Did you see my Porsche in the parking lot? I always drive one of my classic Porsches in on Saturdays. What do you drive? You have to have drive. You have to understand our clientele. Our clients have drive. Our clients need to know we can run with them. What's your handicap? What's your drink? We serve all the prominent families in the area. Old money rich. They got land grants from William Penn. If you want to be rich, invest in real estate. Our clients have expectations. We structure these transactions to eliminate their tax burden. It's complicated, but I'm confident it's legal. Confidence is key. You have to look the part. You have to schmooze. I'll never forget that morning when I woke up with his wife on the doorstep. I'll never forget when he found me naked in the kitchen. My wife still laughs about it. I'll never forget when I was too drunk to remember. We still joke about it on the back 9. We still do tequila shots in the clubhouse after racquetball. We never had time for children. Are you married? How many women have you been with? You wouldn't believe some of the women I've been with. It's important to stay in shape. You're in great shape. What do you bench? You have broad shoulders. I'll bet you can push up 315. I see you don't skip leg day. I watch what I eat and work out at the club. How's your golf game? You have to be comfortable with seven days a week for half the year. You have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. You just have to give up some things up to be a success like me. I can see you're good-looking enough to send to

clients. I can see you've got hustle. You can help me whip this place into shape. HR will reach out on Monday. Welcome aboard.

wondering
why I never called him back
narcissus

Joshua St. Claire

THE CONTEST

We've been many hours on the road. Dad driving, Mum at his side. We three boys in the back. Yes, many long, boring hours...

But now our spirits soar.

We've left the grime of our Lancashire mill town behind. The smoke and stench of factory chimneys too.

Now we have a Welsh mountain purple with heather. We have salty sea air. And a first glimpse of the Menai Straights with Anglesey and Puffin Island beyond...

Dusk is falling as we reach the guest house. Penmaenmawr lies below, first lights twinkling.

I help Dad carry our bags in.

adventure books...living the life

Sunrise...

After a leisurely breakfast, we walk into town. Kid Bro and I are with Dad, Mum trailing with Junior.

A sudden bang echoes down the mountain and we freeze on the spot. Dad explains they're quarrying for granite. He buys Kid Bro a beach-ball and me a crabbing line.

back-alley skiffle...whoops and laughter

Sunset...

Whilst Mum is putting Junior to bed, we older boys walk down to the beach with Dad. And there he teaches us to fling stones so they skip over the tide.

A golden ebb tide it is. And Dad's first flat stone skips six times. Kid Bro and I manage a miserable two skips each, but we're determined to beat Dad's score.

Half an hour later, in the deepening dark, we give up. My best score was three skips, Kid Bro's four. But there's always tomorrow...

box brownie days
black-and-white memories
we treasure

Paul Beech

Full Circle

Old age and flatulence, according to my observations, go hand in hand.

The ladies playing whist in the Care Home conservatory dissolve into childish giggles when Mrs Hollom (aged 96) lets one rip.

“What they don't realize,” says the carer who is helping me prepare, “is that at their age breaking wind is dangerously close to playing Russian Roulette.”

We carry on setting the table out, but I fear my presentation on apples (even with the samples of freshly pressed juice) may not hold their attention.

after laughter
waiting for the son
who never comes

Simon Wilson

Sun Music

We play Spanish music on the stereo, drape our bodies in tender white linen. The walls are white. The sun on our skin is white hot when we venture onto the esplanade, blinking. Surfers saunter past in flower-scattered shorts with boards slung under their arms, sunscreen smeared on ears and lips. While we lick sorbet, lemony, tangy, cool as ice dripping on a grain of sand.

wave sets...

*tucking white-edged hibiscus
into her sarong*

Cynthia Rowe

Chronicle of a Death Foretold

On 8 September, 2000, my baby daughter died inside me, six weeks before she was due. I gave birth to her the next day, as I was told that whilst a caesarean section would be quicker and less painful, I would have to wear compression tights for six weeks, and obviously, have a scar. The doctors were concerned this would affect my mental health much more deeply, so I took their advice, against my original feelings.

I was induced, and they gave me as much pain relief as possible, as we didn't need to worry about endangering the baby. I howled as she slipped out, and then I held her warm, perfect body. We decided against an autopsy, as I couldn't bear the thought of her being cut up, and I didn't think knowing why her heart just stopped beating, would ease my grief.

On the 22nd anniversary of my daughter's death, I woke, to the news our 96-year-old Queen was fading. I was certain she would not last out the day. Early in the evening, we heard the news that she had gone.

unlit candle
outshone by a lighthouse —
seeing it still

Jenny Shepherd

Sacrifice

Primordial floods deluge Aztlan, spewing refugees. Star-mappers, escaping by boat, chant toward the heavens, seeking guidance to distant shores. Reptilian eyes keep vigil in the night. Drawing closer to land, they feel the warm wing beats of his lice-filled feathers. They hear his slurping hiss. They taste the sting of his Judas kiss.

each waxing crescent . . . a half-eaten heart

Anna Cates

Inevitability

I thought I would ask the question. “Would you be able to write a prescription for some anti-inflammatory tablets to ease my troublesome arthritis? I’m a reluctant ‘pill-popper’ but feel I need some help”.

My GP looked at me with kind eyes and said... “Unfortunately, we don’t recommend that medication for elderly patients because of the possible complication of kidney damage”. I was shocked. Not about the kidney damage but by the use of the term *elderly*.

“What is *elderly*?” I asked.

On looking at the date of birth on my records in front of him, he nodded slowly, smiled and said... “Sadly, you have reached that certain number when we consider the term clinically appropriate”.

impulse buy
lace-trimmed knickers
in black

Glenys Ferguson

Missing

I don't even remember what Patrick and I used talk about all those years ago, – probably girls and football. We were always the last two of our gang to leave Smith's shed. The boys from the village gathered there most nights, chatting and messing during the couple of years between leaving primary school and scattering to England and a lifetime of labouring on building sites. The last time I enquired, his mother said that he had been in Preston but his friends have not seen him for yonks.

hearing
the call of the corncrake
an age ago now

Mike Gallagher

Terrain

For years, he'd whisper the word *Bayonne* and smile. Not because he'd ever been to Bayonne, or liked the sound of it, even. He always wanted to own a house on the water and figured Bayonne was the closest he'd ever get. But the coast isn't always clear. Tonight, he'll dream of dead fish and oil spills and wake up musing about mountains.

second opinion
a bar still open
somewhere

Peter Jastermsky

Lucky

Grandma's 'lucky' clock never stops its annoying tick. Not in fires. Not in floods. Not in earthquakes. Lucky? I throw it away. "Look what I found!" says cousin Jack. I donate it to charity. "Look what I bought!" says aunt Ruth. A funnel cloud drops from the sky. Clock still ticking.

creeping dread
the devil deals
another hand

Tracy Davidson

[@tracydavidson27](https://twitter.com/tracydavidson27)

The Right to Life

I have a heart for preys in nature—squirrels, pigeons, ducklings, deer, and jackrabbits. Even rats that fall victim to sharp-clawed birds elicit my pity. I don't like predators no matter how beautiful they look and how some cultures adore them. Can't they all live—or at least try to live—on plants and leave other animals alone?

beach restaurant
a staring competition
with a seagull

John J. Han

Making Do

My wife knows that I enjoy a good Reuben sandwich. Still in our honeymoon phase, she is determined to surprise me with a special treat. Having never eaten a Reuben, she researches how they are made. Returning from the grocery store, she proudly unpacks some Swiss cheese, a bottle of Russian dressing, a can of sauerkraut, one tin of corned beef hash, and a tiny loaf of cocktail rye bread.

making camp
all of our corkscrews
still at home

Mark Forrester

Lift Off

Taking off from the pond, with head nods all around, one goose flaps off followed by the whole honking crowd. Rising into the sky they spread out into a V, with some geese flying frantically to close gaps and neaten the line.

The most experienced geese take the lead, trading places with other birds--it's exhausting leading the way, buffeted by the wind. One thing is certain no matter which goose flies at the apex of the V, it's always a female.

recess

the teacher takes

a head count

Carol Raisfeld

A rose by any other name

A snapshot, black and white. The face of a girl who decades later will be my grandmother. Desire in her right eye, wishes in her left. What kind of ambition hides behind that smooth forehead?

I imagine the woman she could have become if war, husband, house, children, death and sudden strokes of fate had not gotten between her and life.

For the first time ever, I feel close to her.

amidst voluptuous blossoms
a single bud
that will not open

Stefanie Bucifal

Visitor

The spaceship settled in front of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, barely fluttering the grass, though its weight pressed deep into the ground beneath it. The craft was the size of an ocean liner, which made onlookers think it must contain an army of aliens, but it was so large because of the size of its sole passenger.

A seam appeared in its hull, which separated to reveal an opening with a gleaming ramp. A gigantic alien slurped down it onto the vivid green lawn, and while the creature looked like a yam-colored cross between a slug and a mop, it was many times the size of the President's house.

politician
used the dog whistle
scared of the pack

It slimed its way along its base, a sort of mucous shelf that rippled it forward. Perhaps it enjoyed the feeling of lawn under it, even though it must have been unlike anything it had ever felt. The Secret Service, of course, was swarming to the front of the house. One agent said, "Stop where you are!" Then felt rather foolish, since it probably didn't understand. At any rate, it didn't stop.

nightmare
"duck and cover"
back again

A huge hole opened in the beast's side, a thin dark line glistening inside as it neared the portico. It bit down hard on the front of the house. While it took a lot of the building, because the creature was so

big, it gave the sense of a nibble, a small taste to see what the big white cake was like. It seemed to approve, so it bit deeper into the center, as the Secret Service agents (those who hadn't been cake sprinkles in the first taste) started to shoot, feeling helpless as the bullets made brief little pocks in the glistening flesh.

what is this?
let's call it casserole,
shall we?

The creature didn't seem to mind at all, nor did it seem to be eating agents on purpose, just including those on the porch and at the front of the house with the pages, the visitors with their tour guides, in its meal of wood and plaster and concrete, gold rugs and chandeliers.

crowded bed
the couple
and the lie

Having finished with the middle of the house, but leaving the basement open to the sky, it started on the East Wing, the residence rooms. The staff and customers at the basement Arby's scrambled to escape. The Pentagon was rushing resources but struggled as to what would stop something like this without destroying what was left of the White House – or the District of Columbia. Five fighter jets on government-protection patrol strafed it but held their missiles.

The First Lady and her son, along with much of the household staff, were able to clamber out the ground-floor windows before they became morsels in the monster's meal. The President was at his Florida estate, but at first didn't respond to calls from the Secret Service, since he was typing a tweet.

picking a plastic bag
before walking the dog
checks for holes

Suddenly the alien stopped. It backed slightly from the ravaged residence, the edge of the hole in its front (if front meant anything with this creature) ringed with plaster dust, bits of board hanging from its edge. It paused and started to ripple, just around the maw, then shot out a gigantic rush of air, fragrant of building debris, and turned away.

40-yr.-old man, 280 lbs.
does his old trick
“Clean your plate!”

It slimed back across the lawn to its craft. Just as the craft opened, the creature turned to one side and ejected a huge wave of noxious beige fluid filled with shredded building and bodies. It flowed back up the ramp, the portal closed, the craft shook – and it was gone.

And that is why the Galactic Yelp! gives Earth only two stars, suggesting that visitors avoid the desserts, but praises the feel of moving across a newly mown lawn.

returning home
the keys in his pocket
heavy again

David Oates

The Gig

The sky is dark and threatening rain. There's a homeless man up ahead on the median. I stop, roll down my window, and drop a couple of bucks in his jar.

on the road again

I notice his teeth. They're perfect, white, pearly, and I'm pretty sure they're starting to glow. I ask him his name. He grins and tells me.

Gabriel

I look up to see a semi in my rear-view mirror, and it isn't slowing down—Honk! “Miraculous,” I tell myself when the dust settles. I look back to see if Gabriel is okay, but there's no one there, just an old trucker.

blowing his horn

Susan Beth Furst

www.paperwhistlepress.com

Animal House Speech

A friend once told me that during his first year of college he ended up in an animal house fraternity. The brothers were so boorish and offensive that no one else would talk with them. So gradually they fell into their own degenerate language. Their speech consisted largely of three words: their universal noun “benny”; their all-purpose verb “hoover”; and a brother’s reference to himself, which was always in the objective case, “me”. More nuanced meanings were usually conveyed through intonation, grunts, and gestures. So, for example, a sentence such as “Uh-um [nod to the refrigerator] hoover a benny uh me” meant “Please bring me a cold beer from the refrigerator.”

Impoverished as their language was, it blossomed in two areas. They had dozens of words to express condemnation, contempt, disgust, and nihilism, many of which were obscene. For example, you would often find a fraternity brother slumped on the stairs in a drunken stooper during the early hours of the morning, moaning something like, “damn, zero, black out, zilch, son of *##*##!, mother ##***!#, ah-ah-ah-ah!” But it was unclear whether the young man was cursing himself, or someone else, or just expressing existential despair.

Their language also contained a rich vocabulary for women, none of whom would be caught dead speaking with them. Virtually all references to women were obscene, and the obscenities were often interspersed with the epithet, “sweat hog”. Perhaps as derivations of this ugly term, a woman who was considered especially attractive might be referred to as a “sizzle”, and a woman thought to be less cruel and rejecting than most members of her gender, someone who in common speech might be described as cute or sweet, could be spoken of as a “hogling”.

For months after transferring to a different college, my friend was nearly mute, often unable to recall ordinary words and afraid he would blurt out some filth that would alienate him from new acquaintances. Consequently, he was still a lonely man, and he had a recurring dream in which he tried to approach a woman in friendship but could only speak in his animal house tongue.

uh hoover me
uh black out zilch me benny
sizzle hogling
um hoover no zilch
hoover me uh hoover benny

[oh come to me
worthless as I am
sweet girl
and through your act of affection
set me on a better path]

Dave Chandler

Endless

She seems just married and comes with her husband to the construction site. Her skin is flawlessly dusky, a streak of vermilion parts her dust laden hair, her large questioning eyes follow me as if she wants to ask, 'what is the world of fulfilled dreams like?' I dodge her gaze and get into the car, my jhumka* doing a playful jig. She looks at them and feels her own earlobes to see if the broken broom ends that she wears are in place.

diwali night
a wishlamp drifts
beyond the horizon

Arvinder Kaur

*Chandelier type earrings worn mostly by Asian women

1969

For the first time men from Earth had walked on the Moon as the midwife cut the umbilical cord after my birth. According to Chinese astrology, it was the Year of the Earth Rooster. The year the Beatles performed live for the last time on the roof of Apple Records in London, the year of the Piazza Fontana massacre which shook Italy, the year Easy Rider was released. Three days of peace and music overwhelmed Woodstock. My father was late to the maternity ward. He was at work when my mother's waters broke. At the midwife handed my body he said he would be father only of boys.

forget - me - not blooms
my father doesn't know
my birthday

Antonietta Losito

Chicago flight

She stops by my seat, and signals that the middle seat is hers. I stand up and help her with her luggage – a delightful tiny suitcase with floral motifs. Less than two minutes into our chat, the question arrives: “Where are you from?”

“You mean...where ...my accent is from?” I ask in turn, smiling.

“Yes.”

“It’s Romanian.”

“Ah, how interesting. You know, I’m retired now, but I’ve been a violinist. I love European music. I love this Romanian composer, Bela Bartok.”

“Bela Bartok is a great musician, indeed, but...” I want to tell her that Bartok is Hungarian, but she is faster:

“Tell me the name of another Romanian composer.”

“Enescu,” I say. “George Enescu.”

“A, of course...and, one more?”

Ciprian Porumbescu comes to mind, and although I hesitate a bit, I go ahead, pronouncing the name slowly. She repeats it; we both laugh. Chatting softly about everything and nothing, time passes pleasantly.

After we land, she turns to me and says,

“My name is Lucy. What is yours?”

“Cristina.”

We say goodbye and she moves toward the exit. There, she stops and waits. When I reach her, she whispers softly:

“By the way, my name is Claire; what is yours?”

pine tree forest
in the darkest shade
off-key chirps

Gabriela Popa

The Memorial Service

Raining all morning, temperatures dropping, the cemetery is soggy, and the wind off the river adds to the chill. Mourners under umbrellas that turn inside-out. A miserable morning weatherwise and a solemn occasion. It is a short service owing to the rain. When it's over, all hurry to their cars; departure is swift.

cloudburst
chalk doodles
cease to exist

Terrie Jacks

Oh How the Mighty...

The primary school bully friend requests me on Facebook. It's been over three decades since we were in school together. Although I have no real interest in his current life, it seems we actually have quite a few things in common. So, I decide to post a message on his page.

"I'll accept your friend request if you can promise me you're no longer an asshole."

The next morning I wake to find my query has 117 likes and one response from his wife, "Aw hell no, I have his ass in check."

women's apparel
I nod to the other guy
holding a purse

Bryan Rickert

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