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Dustin Brookshire
Jacob Butlett
A.C. Cambers
Karen DeGroot Carter
Hugh Findlay
Eirene Gentle
Carole Greenfield
J Kramer Hare
Wayne David Hubbard
Susanna Lang
Kirk Lawson
Andrea Marcusa
Rebecca D. Martin
Bob McAfee
Vidya Premkumar
Jeannie Roberts
Kerry Trautman
Elinor Ann Walker
Wendy Wisner
Danielle Zaccagnino



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submission guidelines

Our submissions are open the full months of October,

January, April and July of each year.

- We welcome work on any subject, including and beyond works celebrating reading, libraries, and books.
- New and established writers are welcome. 18 years or older, please.
- Please find our full submission guidelines on our website.

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about us

Painted Pebble Lit Mag is a journal founded with the aim of publishing quality short form writing. Like "little" pockets of kindness which exist solely to help one another, we think small works can have a big impact. Our mission is to celebrate our wonderfully diverse world of writers and readers by reaching them wherever they are.

Each issue is published both online and as a PDF, each available for free. We hope readers like you will help bring our lit mag to any place someone might enjoy finding a bite sized read.

Share it with friends! Keep a copy for yourself! Pass it into the hands of a kindred spirit who might like it! Please visit our website if you'd like to download the free pdf to this issue to keep, print, or share.



Made to Share

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Susanna Lang's chapbook, *Like This*, was released in 2023 (Unsolicited Books), along with her translation of poems by Souad Labbize, *My Soul Has No Corners* (Dialogos Books). Her fourth full-length collection is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press.

Kirk Lawson lives in Ulster County, New York, and the Shawangunk Mountains. He enjoys poetry as a creative outlet to explore and enhance meaning in living. Publications: *Discretionary Love*, *Months to Years*, *Thorn and Bloom*, *Pulses*. Grateful to husband Jim and dog Leo for joining his journey.

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contributors

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Jacob Butlett received an honorable mention for the 2023 Academy of American Poets Prize (Graduate). His work can be found in *Colorado Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, and *Lunch Ticket*, among other places. Published by Kelsay Books in 2024, *Stars Burning Night's Quiet Rhapsody* is Jacob's debut book of poems.

A.C. Chambers is a member of NYU's Veterans Writing Workshop. Her plays have been featured in MCPA's Night of One Acts and City Theatre's Key Biscayne City Reads. Her poetry has appeared in *Eunoia Review*, *Same Faces Collective*, *Dream of Rust and Glass*, *Last Leaves*, and *Defenestration*.

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Hugh Findlay's writing and photography have been published worldwide. Nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2020 for poetry, *the Best Microfiction Anthology* in 2024 for prose, and *the Best of the Net Anthology* in 2024 for photography, he is in the third trimester of life and hopes y'all like his stuff. IG: @hughmanfindlay. Web: <https://www.hughmanfindlay.com>

Eirene Gentle writes, mostly lit, mostly little, usually from Toronto, Canada. Gratefully published in some amazing journals.

contents

What Helps	Karen DeGroot Carter	4
Night Music	J Kramer Hare	5
Rising Water Villanelle	Dustin Brookshire & Kerry Trautman	6
Gratitude for What Is Seen & Unseen	Lana Hechtman Ayers	7
Oak, Your Quiet Strength	Jeannie Roberts	8
The Last Pair of High Heels	Andrea Marcusa	9
What was it	Eirene Gentle	11
Torchlight	J Kramer Hare	12
How Lost Words Haunt Like Wings Behind Glass	Elinor Ann Walker	13
Poetry	Bob McAfee	14
Metaphors	Wendy Wisner	15
My Baby Fights Sleep The Way My Father Fights Death	Danielle Zaccagnino	16
Two Haiku	Hugh Findlay	18
Dragons That Fly	Carole Greenfield	19
Boyfriend	Jacob Butlett	21
Limn the Place	Rebecca D. Martin	22
What the Birds Know	A.C. Chambers	24
Making the call	Kirk Lawson	25
at therapy intake / amid	Vidya Premkumar	26
Unprepared	Susanna Lang	27
Afterword	Wayne David Hubbard	29

What Helps

Karen DeGroot Carter

With many thanks to Andrea Gibson

Communal grief. And wonder.
 Moments you've given yourself
 by heading out on that new path
 and spotting two deer, buck leading,
 doe lengths behind but intent,
 both beelining to a hidden thicket
 of comfort and care. I've seen many
 lately on hikes, I forgot or failed
 or just had no breaking time to even
 consider going on all those years of getting
 things done, so focused on the next thing
 and the next. Time helps. Time and hikes
 taken that lead to glimpses of deer,
 stately antlered or sublime,
 on a mission together or alone,
 until suddenly, silently, gone.

Afterword

Wayne Hubbard

for Mary Oliver

i can say what i want, but the poems
 are no more accidental. their outlines
 stay present, trailing me through each season,
 waiting for stillness to give life its chance.
 they teach me how to study the winter,
 how to note where the redbud leans forward
 into the frostbite, how the wild grass
 lets the bitter wind lay its stalks supine.
 the leaves may blow dead in the fields, but they
 are not broken, not lost, nor discarded.
 they give their last offerings for summer's fruits.
 they ask me to follow their lead.

So still, not even
searching for fish—his gray coat
fades into the trees

J Kramer Hare

Night Music

Our dishwasher is water tumbling over stone:
a laminar, clear column, water smoothly breaks
and clings to stone, polishing and polishing.

Our dishwasher is a beehive near the waterfall:
ever industrious, the laborers sing their labor's
droning harmony, chorusing and chorusing.

The waterfall and beehive (which together are
the dishwasher) hide around the corner from
our bedroom door. Beside me, you are sleeping.

Awake, I hear them from the bed. Intermittently, a stag
must come to the stream, or another large mammal;
I hear a great thirst slaked: slurping and slurping.

I think to wake you; together we could sneak
up to water, up to stone, to bees and stag:
pounce! catch the magic everybody's seeking.

But stag, bees, stone, and water would become,
were we to accost them: a dishwasher,
which they are and will continue being.

Dustin Brookshire & Kerry Trautman

Rising Water Villanelle

A contoured villanelle using "Little L.A. Villanelle" by Carol Muske-Dukes

Without the threat of flood, I could learn to love the rain.
Last fall, our neighborhood pond overflowed—
rising, receding, and rising in seasonal refrain.

We waded in water six inches deep, a pain-
wicking cold up my shins. Cars sped past with wipers
swiping, reminding—I could learn to love the rain

if I could swish it away at will, like washing a stain.
When I was a kid, I'd stomp in puddles and scream—
voice rising, receding, refracting in wet refrain.

I never thought much of storms, even if they had a name.
Now, I fear drowning, saturation. Last night I dreamed
of a world covered by flood, leaving me scared of the rain.
I crave parched earth and drought. It sounds inane
to be haunted by such contrasts, to crave the sun's light
while resigned to rising waterlines' relentless refrain.

Helene struck Asheville, and the city cried *Why me?*
Her lying eye churning our cries stronger, faster.
A community decimated by the flood. I now curse rain—
anxiety rising, rising, in sleepless, ceaseless refrain.

Susanna Lang

Unprepared

The cold shouldn't have taken me by surprise, but I'm not
ready. Can't find my mittens, my wool socks have last
winter's holes. Roses and snapdragons freeze to their
stems, still in their summer colors. Ginkgos drop their
yellow leaves.

I hear the cries before I see the swirling V's—
hundreds of wide-winged
birds, high in the sky, calling
each other's forgotten names

The sandhill cranes, leaving late. All at once, like the
ginkgos. An old man stops on the Irving Park bridge,
head tipped back. No one else looks up.

At the confluence, the old heron stands unmoving on his
stone. I didn't see him last winter, though I came every
week to dip a vial in the river, measure the concentration
of road salt. I thought he might have died after his mate
did, or joined a migrating flock. But if he's still here now,
cold as it is, he will not leave this year.

Vidya Premkumar

at therapy intake

she fills in a form
asking where it hurts

she writes 'here'
and points to the space
in between lines

amid

the long sentences
of migration
a short pause
on the wire
with wings folded

Lana Hechtman Ayers

Gratitude for What Is Seen & Unseen

a haibun

Sudden moonlight slipping out of night sky's sleeve of clouds. I want to name it foolhardy, but isn't it something else? The mirror that holds your beloved's breath after they've gone. The ladybug circling the glass of a sealed window. Lonely frog singing his late autumn song. All of these & also the withered lobelia that no longer velvets our eyes with purple.

remembrance
only a few kisses
of rain

Jeannie E. Roberts

Oak, Your Quiet Strength



Kirk Lawson

making the call

my dad needs a year
to overcome his anger
son's gay confession
I ask my husband
before his dad's visit
to share your story
you comply
your dad's simple question
are you happy?
why not be
the man on the moon
always smiling

A.C. Cambers

What the Birds Know

Flamboyant birds flit
through trees, singing

sweet harmonies as I search
for my scarf lost

last December, when I used
it as a blanket for an injured

squirrel, who vanished
with it before wildlife

rescue arrived. If the birds know
anything, they don't say, only tease—

Seek. Seek.

Andrea Marcusa

The Last Pair of High Heels

While cleaning our basement, I found a pair of three-inch patent-leather heels resting under papers in a file cabinet. Elegant. Expensive. Forbidden. My hands shook. I could be arrested. No questions asked.

Ten years ago, heels were banned. Men and women in blue-jean uniforms with *Golden Age* pins rounded up all heels and skirts and destroyed them. Now, we wear government-issued drab green pants, shapeless jackets, gray athletic shoes—double knotted.

My fingers sweat holding the shoes. Should I leave them there or try to dispose of them without Government cameras recording me? Turning them in's too risky. I could land in jail. I push them back under the files and shut the drawer.

Before the ban, women wore athletic shoes on their trip to work, then switched into heels at their desks. So did I. My colleague said heels accented her calves, despite painful bunions. Back then, skirts were still allowed. I cut a fine figure in mine.

My granddaugther doesn't know about "heels," "skirts," or "gowns." All non-regulation clothing and footwear have been deleted from the digital universe. We are forbidden to speak of them. "Follow the rules," I tell my daughter. "It will keep us safe."

Later, while walking in the woods, slender trees rise, their slim trunks like graceful calves and thighs. Branches billow like skirts. I imagine those trees in spiky heels and sleek hose and remember how we danced at formal weddings in long fitted gowns, and satin and rhinestone high heels. In a clearing, I can almost hear us swaying in moonlight with joy and passion.

When I was a young girl, I owned a doll with a skimpy sequined dress and silver heels on her permanently arched feet. But those shoes never stayed on.

One day, I noticed they were lost.

Or I can, but I don't want to. When asked, "But what about your children?" I roll my eyes. Obviously, I want them to learn to like themselves, too. Touch their boundaries and limn the place where they meet the world.

Rebecca D. Martin

Limn the Place

I'd like to think we all go to the coffee shop alone sometimes. I've done movies by myself, including every Wednesday of Spring 2002 after that baffling three-hour Victorian Poetry graduate seminar. *Memento* and *Count of Monte Cristo* from the center of the back row, returning to myself. Some people I know say they could never dine alone. Every Saturday morning for a year, I ate breakfast at Sunny Point Bakery in Asheville, North Carolina, only stopping after another patron took an interest. I have lived alone. Daytime, I wandered the silent apartment barefoot, sunlight on pine floors. When I got a roommate mid-lease, I thought I would choke. Even when she wasn't there, she was: lights on, the iron where I didn't put it. My teapot from England in pieces on the floor.

Many autistics say they don't like to be perceived. That's true, but this isn't that. This is sensory deprivation under a warm bath. Bus rides alone. Those heady flowers in Northwest Wales that I could smell but never identify. Call them wilderness; call them truce. The little girl inside me who got lost behind the trauma four decades ago. Liking her comes easiest when alone. I can't explain why.

Eirene Gentle

What Was It

Another heatwave. Don't go out, they warn. Bolt doors, lock windows. Slam cracked lips on all that smoke and wind. It'll pass. They say. Maybe. Until then, cage dry teeth. Snap when pressed. Crawl in the spice rack. Boil until flesh is white and flakes easily. Before this ash-tongue, before this murder-eye, what was it again? Hot we say meaning something else.

J. Kramer Hare

Torchlight

Paths are blurred and boundaries
soft in this landscape of cobwebs,
smoke suffused. A scent
I savor cautiously: to catch
that spice in a forest signals
either other people's presence or
immediate danger. Sometimes both.
To set a fire here—(note
I don't say light)—to set
a fire here may show
momentarily the glint
of onyx of the spider's orbed back,
eight pinpoints marking
eight eyes, her web's topography.
But smoke is night's accomplice,
and anything gossamer makes
good kindling.

12

Jacob Butlett

Boyfriend

a palimpsest based on Karin Gottshall's "More Lies"
Somedays I say I'm going to hang out with my boyfriend—
even though I have no boyfriend—simply because the truth
is too hard to bear. I've always felt lonely, ever since
I was a kid, closeted, in remedial reading classes,
unable to grasp the simplest books. Today, I drove
alone down icy streets, wearing a flannel scarf, hoping
pedestrians might wonder where I was going. I borrowed
a book of poems from the library, the building windows
frosted. August flurries are a kind of omen, but I pay
the cold no mind. I tucked the book under my arm
and sat in a park gazebo. I like the alabaster boughs.
I like how my boots squeak and squawk on snow
like birds singing to one another, a playful tune,
a seductive trill, or just a friendly chat. Just then,
I saw two men strolling by, holding mittened hands.
I thought about reading the poems, but I couldn't look
away from the men as they passed by. All over town,
there are men, single and kind. None of them are mine.

21

"Do they remind you of anyone?" I ask.

"Yes," she whispers. "You."

"I was thinking the same thing, just about you," I reply.

We both smile just the slightest bit, avoid looking directly into the other's complicated, shining eyes.

Elinor Ann Walker

How Lost Words Haunt Like Wings Behind Glass

(a cento)

The ghost girl/ makes no noise,
a restless ghost in a house the wind owns;
there was no fanfare no terror only a blue silhouette
forever in your house, in your garden, in corridors,
 our own omissions in a room;
she will spend all day counting their shadows like stitches
opening, and ghost-
like butterflies, errant and flamboyant,
unanswered messages like ghosts in the throat
the way a lost/ word/ will come back/ unbidden
 — with its *no one* without its I —
glass, ghostly opposition, vowel
that I would be—dryadic, gothic, fanatic against
a spirit-lantern to spin shapes inside:
 one need not be a chamber to be haunted
only myself. You see, I was the ghost
 there's no such thing/ as an unhaunted house.

Sources in line order: Dougherty, Pankey, Quesada, Huntington, Jennings, Richardson, Cohen, Baudelaire, Limón, Armentrout, Forché, Lerner, Brock-Broido, Wunderlich, Dickinson, Kelly, Twohy

*full names available on Painted Pebble's website

Bob McAfée

Poetry

I screw words into a poem like forty-watt lightbulbs.
Often, the poem smells like a dead fish by Tuesday.

Other times, I bake it and leave it on the windowsill
to cool like a freshly cooked apple and rhubarb pie.

When I open the window to my soul, a burglar sneaks in
and absconds with the best lines, usually escaping

to Argentina, where he sells my words as burritos
at a taco stand in the art district of Buenos Aires.

My words appear thankless on the page, non-committal,
forgetting, as it were, that they were conceived

as I hugged an interior wall of the house during
the tornado that grazed Kansas City in October.

I watched them learn to crawl on their own,
rubbed my fingers against their gums when they teethed,

poured my wisdom into their pointy ears,
gave them their first bicycles with no training wheels.

Will you remember, my children, when you leave my
home

at such a tender age, where you were born

and who it was that raised you, the love children
of an incredibly inept and lonely single parent.

Carole Greenfield

Dragons That Fly

I meet her at the front door every weekday morning. If I
don't, she won't eat. If I do, she goes with me into the
cafeteria, plucks up an apple or orange, sometimes a
muffin, maybe even a stick of string cheese. "Take it for
snack," I tell her. "You never know. You may get hungry
later." She keeps her arms covered no matter how hot it
gets. I don't want to know what she is hiding. The first
half of the year, she wore a peach-colored parka that
reached her knees. The school social worker gave it to
her, even though she has one that fits in her locker.
Sometimes those who want most to help get it so terribly
wrong.

I never know from one hour to the next which side of her
will greet me, this child of many facets, some days
glinting in the sun, some days all her light obscured by
the storms inside that overtake her, send her collapsing
to the floor or fleeing to the girls' bathroom to hide.

In my small classroom one morning, we read that
dragonsflies are strong fliers, despite their delicate
appearance, their fairy-knit wings wrought from
spiderweb tracings.

Hugh Findlay

Two Haiku

all these sick people
bent over like crescent moons—
look us in the eye

Passenger Pigeon,
where did you go...finally?
Cincinnati Zoo

Wendy Wisner

Metaphors

Mom, this morning on my walk, a tree I couldn't identify
had already shed its leaves, but a lone white flower
lit its branches. So odd, I thought. In a different autumn,
you would have said the flower represented hope
or determination. You always thought in metaphors
and taught me to do the same. But when I saw that flower,
my mind blanked. It was as though the planet had gone dark
without you. I don't mean literal darkness.
I mean the idea of nothing. The nothing that existed
before I did. Under your skin, I was a clutch
of pearls. A change purse swinging beside your hip bone
as you walked down the block—so young then:
cropped black hair, beaming smile. I was nothing.
Then I was something. Inside your dazzling body, I opened.

Danielle Zacagnino

My Baby Fights Sleep The Way My Father Fights Death

He's up in the middle of the night, and so am I. He is greedy with love. He has never known me. His gums are swollen.

He thrashes wildly against the mattress. He screams.

He has two tattoos of the New York Yankees' logos and

one of Jesus Christ. He is brand new to the world.

Empathy has yet to find him. He wants his formula and a pacifier.

He needs Medicaid to approve his application. He gets

baby Tylenol in a syringe. He is sick, and it's killing us all. He cuts off my sister and blocks my mother's number. He beats on my mother's shoulder and puts my sister's sleeve in his mouth.

He yells at the nurses, "You woke The Scumbag up now," some never-before-mentioned alter-ego who lay dormant inside him, apparently activated and ready to enact his revenge on the incompetent world. He shouts "gah!"

This was the loneliest Thanksgiving of his life. He tried pumpkin puree for the first time. He lay on the floor for hours, calling for help. He took backwards steps in his walker.