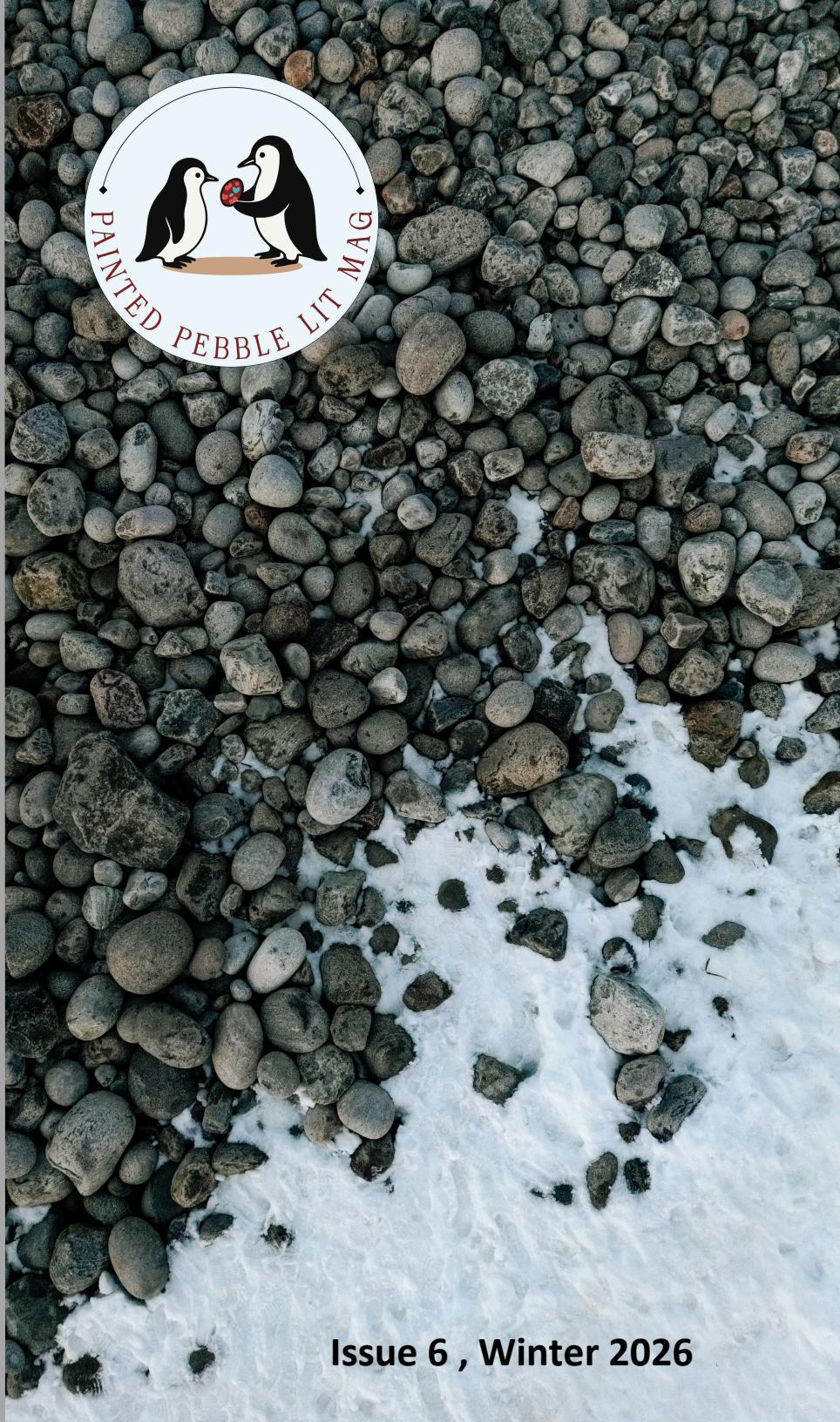


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Marjorie Maddox
Jess Simms
Meghan Sterling
Andrea Tillmanns



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- Please find our full submission guidelines on our website.
- New and established writers are welcome. 18 years or older, please.
- We welcome work on any subject, including and beyond works celebrating reading, libraries, and books.
- Our submissions are open the full months of October, January, April and July of each year.

Submission Guidelines

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Susan Bucci Mockler’s collection, *Covenant (With)*, was published by Kelsay Books in 2022. Other work has appeared in the *Mid-Atlantic Review*, *The Delmarva Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *The Paterson Literary Review*, and *Lunch Ticket*, among others. She teaches writing at Howard University.

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Andrea Tillmanns lives in Germany and works full-time as a university lecturer. She has been writing poetry, short stories, and novels in various genres for many years.

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

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*.

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Jacqueline Jules is the author of *Manna in the Morning* (Keleay Books, 2021), *Itzak Perlman's Broken String*, winner of the 2016 Helen Kay Chapbook Prize from Evening Street Press, and *Smoke at the Pentagon: Poems to Remember* (Bushel & Peck, 2023). Her poetry has appeared in over 100 publications.

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Marge Duncan lives and hikes in NJ with her husband, Brian, and the ghosts of two dogs, while their two soon-to-be-elderly tuxedo cats mostly sleep at home. Her poems have appeared in various places online and in print.

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Megan Diedrichs writes poetry and fiction; everything from macabre can be found in between the lines. The 2025 Rhystring Award Nominee is the author of *the darkest of times, the darkest of thoughts* (2022, self-published) and *The Coffin Chronicles* (2025, Island of Wak-Wak). Learn more: bit.ly/meganandiedrichs

contributors

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A native of Syracuse, New York, and a graduate of Syracuse University, **Karen DeGroot Carter** (she/her) (@kdegrootcarter) lives in Denver. Her first novel, *One Sister's Song*, is in print with Pearl Street Publishing of Denver, and her fiction, poetry, and nonfiction have appeared in *BigCityLit*, *Interim*, *Publishers Weekly*, and elsewhere.

Luanne Castle's poetry and prose have appeared in *Copper Nickel*, *River Teeth*, *JMWW*, *Grist*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Verse Daily*, *Cleaver*, *Bending Genres*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, and many more. She has published four award-winning poetry collections. Her hybrid memoir-in-flash, *Scrap: Salvaging a Family*, will be published by ELJ Editions in spring 2026.

Deborah Corr is the author of *Naked Rib* (Finishing Line Press). Her poems have appeared or will appear in several journals including *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Booth*, *Catamaran*, *The McNeese Review*, and others. She received honorable mentions from both Connecticut River Review and the Streetlight Magazine 2024 contests.

Paola Jo Corso is an award-winning author of poetry and fiction books set in her native Pittsburgh, with more public stairways than any other city in the country. She features them in her poetry and photography book, *Vertical Bridges* as well as art exhibits.

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NEW YEAR'S EVE

Andrea Tillmanns

Flag in the Breeze

William Dorenski

Who works in such a bland setting?
I lasted two weeks in Hallmark
Cars, faciliTy in Einfield,
Sorting greenings for shipment,
Unloading boxcars arriving
from Kansas, where steam presses
spewed thousands of glitzy cards
at the state highway garage.
And quit to paint snowplows or range
Rushing past this warehouse with flag
I couldn't take all that sentiment
Proud on its stem, I remember
orange paint in my hair, everywhere.
Scrubbing myself for date nights
just as I like traveling by train
Still, I liked working outdoors.
nearly deprived me of my skin.
past these ordinary places
that adroitly rhyme with my life.

At first, we only saw the exploding lights, as we do every
year. But when they were supposed to go out, they
scaly lights shifted until they enveloped an air-filled body
in the air and defined its shape. The fish of light floated
on slowly, moving its fins of light and pushing off from
the night, moving faster and faster until it disappeared
behind the distant houses.
We didn't know where it swam to. But perhaps it would
return to the place of its birth next year, when the lights
lit up the sky again and hid the night for a moment.

Just as scales enveloped a fish and defined its shape,
scales enveloped a fish and defined its shape,
just as scales enveloped a fish and defined its shape instead.
Just as scales enveloped a fish and defined its shape,
scaly lights shifted until they enveloped an air-filled body
in the air and defined its shape. The fish of light floated
on slowly, moving its fins of light and pushing off from
the night, moving faster and faster until it disappeared
behind the distant houses.

Stir in gray air, a flag accents
a slab of industrial landscape.
Dull windows less metal-sided
warehouse capped with ventillators.
Who works in such a bland setting?
I lasted two weeks in Hallmark
Cars, faciliTy in Einfield,
Sorting greenings for shipment,
Unloading boxcars arriving
from Kansas, where steam presses
spewed thousands of glitzy cards
at the state highway garage.
And quit to paint snowplows or range
Rushing past this warehouse with flag
I couldn't take all that sentiment
Proud on its stem, I remember
orange paint in my hair, everywhere.
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just as I like traveling by train
Still, I liked working outdoors.
nearly deprived me of my skin.
past these ordinary places
that adroitly rhyme with my life.

William Doreski

Snowy Morning Near Cleveland

Seen from the train, the slur
of wooden houses muddled
with snow looks like disaster.

The snow-slur is on the window,
though, an ethereal avatar
that doesn't damage anything.

I'm glad. These square Ohio
houses look homey enough
to linger in the memory of those

reared here and gone away
to Chicago, LA, New York
where money flirts for real.

Maybe tired of urban glamor,
some will return. Maybe
by train, the familiar back yards

gaudy with snow, and the blur
on the window a teardrop
any old traveler might shed.

Jess Simms

On Becoming a Great Auk

You were king, once. Before strangers invaded, you ruled
benevolent, a giant in small lands, so secure in your
belonging, you lost the knowledge of flight. Once upon a
time, your bones were seen as holy, your feathers magic.
And they were, once. When you needed for nothing.
When you were free to swim and nest and thrive in your
secluded kingdom.

Where Do Trees Go After They Die?

Kat Bodrie

I wake to hear a fresh crack
outside, a thud.
The house hasn't trembled
but I don slippers and sweatshirt
anyway, make sure we don't need
to get flashlight ready. Beyond
the wooden light pole, a hemlock
from the public park
has fallen into the street.
Tomorrow, a tobogganed man
will chainsaw through the body,
haul away limbs on his four-wheeler.
But now sharp, splintery tines
point to snow-splashing heavens
and all I can smell is Christmas.

In the dream, I was writing a poem for a two-headed
bird. I only remember the last line—the self, past and
current. Current as in the pull of the sea. Current as in
the electric truth of who I have become. How much I
have changed, wild bird. Even in dreams, I see pieces
of my past drifting away, broken like the hulls of ships
way through is that block the route forward. The only
dashed on rocks that block the route forward. The only
strange bird. I am covered in sores, blisters where my
flesh charred at change, wounds where I stayed too far
from the path. How much I have gained. I look in the
mirror at my beaks, my helixed head. What I know now:
The past creates a current. It drags you toward yourself.

Sonnet for the Janus Bird

Meghan Sterling

Jacqueline Jules

What Did Widows Do Before the Internet?

Alone in the house, late at night,
the toilet flushes with a whistle,
followed by a squealing sound,
like tires skidding on black ice.

Is it urgent? Worth the extra price
of an after-hours plumber?

Alone in the house, late at night,
there is no one to ask except Google,
who thinks I can wait till morning.

What did widows do before the internet?

Without a 24-hour source to consult,
like warm arms inviting me back to bed.

Margie Duncan

Until I Met You I Was Merely Human

Turtle loves its shell, that weighty carapace
that makes anywhere on earth a home,

and shell loves its turtle, the promenade
through any thicket toward adventure.

You're my palankeen through brush and storm,
and I'm your speckled shelter from the beasts,
though there's an argument to be made
for the other way around.

Moon Rocks

Mary Anne Griffiths

UFOs and Euphemisms

Megan Diedericks

mother, what will they pull out of me?
Legs, thinking if they had taken the moon out of my

My mother is in the turquoise sewing room, trapped with
her hate of mending and thread, stiches, needles, and
scissors, all things that cut and bind. I walk in, crying and
crying, unable to remember why. But it's all upheaval, an
out-of-control thing I can't possibly rein in with my
littleness. She tears the cloth she has just sewn together
and is wringing it over and over, and the room is too blue
for me, and I can't breathe, and the room pales and
begins to fall away. She saves me by taking a murky bottle
out of the sewing box, holding it up in my face. Inside I
see a part of the moon, small white rocks with jagged
craters floating in brown-black bile, and she yells and
yells, shaking me with her other hand saying, This is
what they have cut out of me, these are the rocks they
mined out of my gut. Look, look, look!

When the shooting star
is just an alien spacecraft,
be careful
what you wish for.

Margie Duncan

Pinecone Dolls

Dried leaf mosaic
a faded quilt –

olive, amber, flax –
covers sleeping pinecones

lined up in the battered box.
Dressed long ago

in petals and ferns,
we buried them

under sky and swings.
Dig them up, release

their seeds, feathery
as child-whispers, as wings.

Sarah Laskin

Breakfast with the Stars

Up walking Rocky in the proto-dawn,
turn the corner where the trees open
and Orion is exposed to view, always

steps behind the seven sisters, his prey.
Stand and watch, wait for the signal
that says *Orion, time to give your bow*

*back to the prop master, make way
on the stage for the Sun, her chariot
arrives soon.* Is it a specific tone

of cobalt that allows the hunt
to slow overhead? Or some cosmic
horn I can't hear? At the first bands

of lavender and pink, the chase is over,
the hunter and hunted faded out. I wait
for Rigel, Betelgeuse, Alnitak, Alnilam,

Mintaka and the Pleiades sisters to change
into their street clothes, descend together
to the corner of 18th and California. We

walk to the Diner to fill ourselves with eggs,
hashbrowns, joke about each star's timeline to
cosmic retirement, watch the Sun take the stage.

sauna secret

Kirk Lawson

Making Apple Crisp on New Year's Day

Deborah Corr

nestled in your dreams
a tiny cedar haven
and three granite boulders
maked inside
our steamy spirited sweat
the red-hot stones
rocky ledges
wet pine needles
and chililing falls
the water
whispers
wake up

With the right, I wield the peeler.
The apple fits the curve of my left fingers.
Its soundtrack, a soft scrape and grate
as I rotate the globe, round and round
until it trails a long tail that falls to the sink
like holiday wrappings that fall to the floor.
Just days ago. I lift this damp ribbon.
Its spiral is a triumph. No break.

in its twisted narrative. Translucent
in the window's light, it sings

Two white halves tumble open,
The knife splits the sphere, a crunch
and a thud on the cutting board.
Two white halves tumbled open,
revealed outlined trenches where

This new year is already slicing in with explosions, hunger, and death.

Making Apps Cr

Jim Bellanca

The Prescription

My
left hip
creaked, shrieked,
moaned "I hurt."

Doc says,
"Pay first."

I stir my worries into the syrup,
oats, and cinnamon. Let them bake

and soften with the apples, serve it
to my son and his wife when they

sit at our table, where we eat
the sweetness of still being here.

As you approach the road through the desert,
 the coyotes howl, their high, silver cries.
 Proof that something lives in these hills.
 Moon-quiet. Valley purpled with thought.
 Boulders gather like lost gods
 broken by the angles.
 Raven's large wings swoop so noisy
 she reminds me what it is to be human. In the sage,
 the invisible owls bark
 their warnings.
 Ghosts of the Chuhilla watch over
 these large spiders crossing a road,
 birds twisting into sand.
 When the road dies,
 the desert finds you. An emptiness
 so complete you can almost call it home.

Why not lose yourself in Black Forest,
 dress yourself in Red Velvet, speak German Chocolate
 fluently while upside-down in Pineapple? Because.
 Look past your own table. Sure, in this no-cake-walk of a world,
 savor
 over Angel, but always pass the thickest slice to your neighbor.
 Cartot, Apple, & Strawberry; weigh Sponge & Pound; choose Devil's

attributed to Marie Antoinette

Let Them Eat Cake

Margorie Maddox

Tresa Fay Haefer

A Reminder

Karen DeGroot Carter

Haiku

Winter longing slopes
from drifts of weighted worry.
Burial defied.

Sarah Browning

For the Editor Who Called Grandmother Poems *Sentimental*

I never saw my English grandmother cook a single thing. She was raised by Victorians, vegetarian. Dinner was store-brand canned vegetable soup and cottage cheese. Lunch, canned peaches, and cottage cheese. Breakfast, cold cereal, or maybe cottage cheese.

So, a surprise! The *Sunset Magazine Vegetarian Cookbook* she gave me to begin my adult life was actually good! Not 80s good – tofu stir-fry and lentil soup – but good as in I still make the French white bean salad with mustard, tarragon, and a touch of honey.

Nana gave strict orders on tea: A rolling boil and steeping until the tea *had authority*. But then she drank it with an A&P graham cracker. Nothing hand-baked, home-stirred, whipped, or kneaded. She needed very little; she ate almost nothing. She tried, she failed, to teach us this, the art of restraint.

Luanne Castle

Dear Kitchen

Stop with your drooping face when I pull a supermarket meal from the fridge or let the bananas go black and-- goddess forbid--throw them in the trash instead of making a loaf. I suspect you remember the days of flourred counters, the scent of rising dough, and baking bread. Other days, the air redolent with curry or bibimbap or a crispy-skinneid Thanksgiving turkey with fixings. The sizzle of pan-fried breaded yellow squash. Our specialty, crispy latkes with dill and chives, sour cream. All those years, I took the lead. I'm worn out. Isn't it your turn to feed me?

Dad's old garage is full of gadgets, some with small engines. The instruction manuals always contain many languages, but there is never any diagram or mention of the essential thing. The wall is cubbies of gently shifting objects I empty the garbage. They appear again, interactably. Somehow, it is the way we want it. In the middle, obscuring the workbench, rests a hill of boxes full of The Collection. A still life.

An old metal pitcher. A milk can. A bent sander. That time we made a wooden folding knife with a jigsaw and nail. An old go-kart. A remembrance. The Golden Gems of Life and other books. A lifelong marriage in the grand old style. Fifty years running. A coffee can full of full handles that will let me open anything my whole life long.

Jay Howard

Winter Cleaning