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"Babbling Brook"
by Donna Davy

P O E T R Y



"Foundry of Art" by Joshua Davy

With syntax we forge masterpieces
Unrefined masses of raw materials
Similes, phrases, words, like lumps
Of ore, with streaks of greatness
Hidden within the idea.

This mess is thoughtfully piled,
Assembled to make a homogenous
Rough billet of potential,
Our initial draft is formed.

Billet in hand, we start refinement,
We hammer out unnecessary slag,
Draw out to desired form,
Precisely bevel edges to be clean, crisp
Finally, the scale is ground back,
Gleaming beauty is seen.

The process is harrowing
But, it tempers our Damascus
Finished, its gilded appearance is luminous
It has an air of regality, perfection.

Our very own, unique, masterpiece

"Early Winter"
by Hunter Ayers



"Cleaning Lady" by Paige Mauzy

Carefully cleaning twenty log cabins to support my family,
Lots of bumps, bruises, and sore muscles,
Early check-ins make me furious,
Always bothering me while I work,
Never have enough time and energy,
Insufficient funds,
Nature passes me by,
Going to lose my mind.
Let me out here,
Already had enough of cleaning,
Day is ending slowly,
Yet I still have to clean my own home.

"The New Year"
by MJ

Today
starts the beginning
of a new year
as I sit and look
out a window
I see bare trees
their branches
sway to a cold
winter breeze
And I think of you
Life put us together
for the briefest of time
but once met,
the lessons you taught
resurface at peculiar times
you taught me to see
with more than my eyes
You taught how to listen
love a good poem, an author
and a well written line
So as I sit in the quiet early hour
of a new year
watching a cold, winter breeze
command the bare leafless trees
to sway, dance and
celebrate the new year
I think of you



"My Life" by Leigh Romer

My life is like a timeline
Everything happens for a reason
People come and people go
We never know what is going to
happen
One day it is good
The next is all wrong
Life is just a mystery
Today you will cry
Tomorrow you will laugh
Today someone is born
Tomorrow someone dies
But in the end
Life is just a timeline
We are waiting for what is to come....

"To My Baby Cousin" by Mariah Baublitz

Bright blue eyes like a cloudless sky,
Hair as black as the dark of the night,
To never want a single tear in your eye,
To always want that smile so bright,
To hold you close into my arms,
And kiss you before I have to leave.
You may not have lived on a farm,
But you had the love of animals who now grieve.
God has you now holding you close,
Until we can all see you once more.
On your grave I will place a rose,
Because I will never again see you in the store,
We will meet up with you again one day,
Because a drunk driver wouldn't allow you to stay.

"Beauty After the Fireball" by Alonzo Edelen

Sitting alone late at night
With the fire burning low
Embers now, scattered around

I take the poker bring them all together
Blowing gently, I wake up the old fire
Blue flames show themselves and lick about
Their cool blue light hungry seeking food

On a whim I reach over and take a sheet of paper
After flattening it I lay it over the embers
There is smoke as heat builds under the new blanket

Brown shows where it is hottest

3
2
1

With a low roar a fireball bursts into existence
Shortly the fire has run its course
All is dark save for the cool blue flames

The paper blackened lies in a corner of the grate
Sparks and waves of orange run up and down it
Patterns too chaotic and beautiful to recall

Slowly they work their magic
Transforming black to white
Pure white



**"ASL Beautiful"
by Ronald Epperly II**

To my hands from my heart
To gesture with handshapes to
communicate

To make silence talk

To feel movement through the air
To hear with my eyes instead of my ears
To speak with my hands instead of my
mouth

To feel vibrations as my alarm
To have pride in my deaf culture
To have ACCESS thanks to ASL



**"North Fork of the Potomac River"
By Seth Hoyt**

"Broken Connections"
by Sarah Kettermann

Water fills my lungs,
As I gasp for air.
I'm being pulled deeper,
As I continue into despair.

The cold nights
And chills in the air.
The people talk,
But the answers are never
there.

The pain of not knowing,
Is eating me alive.
How much longer
Must I struggle to survive?



"Bleeding Heart" by Sarah Kettermann

"The Cleansing Flame" by Alonzo Edelen

Fire purifies wood
With its insistent light and heat
All impurities are drawn to the surface
They are then burned till only white ash remains

Humans are no different
For as long as the winds of change blow
The fires of time will burn
The darkness of humans will be drawn in turn

So ask yourself this
My fellow humans
What might fire
Draw from you?

"Plucked Petals"
by Gerica Hose

Mid-Teenage years, I was just starting to bloom
Slowly poking and peeking out of the ground
Never would I foresee my imminent doom
Being swayed by the wind until I was found

Had yet to finish sprouting but plucked so soon
No more roots: now I must take care on my own
My sun eternally faded into an unforgiving moon
Wilted and withering: I'll never be full grown

Have not been watered in what seems like forever
Once a promising flower, now treated like a weed
Tugging at my petals in an attempt to dis sever
My hopes, my dreams, my uncomplicated needs



"Petals so Plenty"
by Gerica Hose

Found once again, I will never know how
This time is different; no more pain
Transplanted into a kinder pot now
Watering me daily, flourishing veins

He knows the importance of my sunlight
Sits me in the window and watches me grow
Mended and loved, my stem is now tight
Blossomed anew, just look at me glow

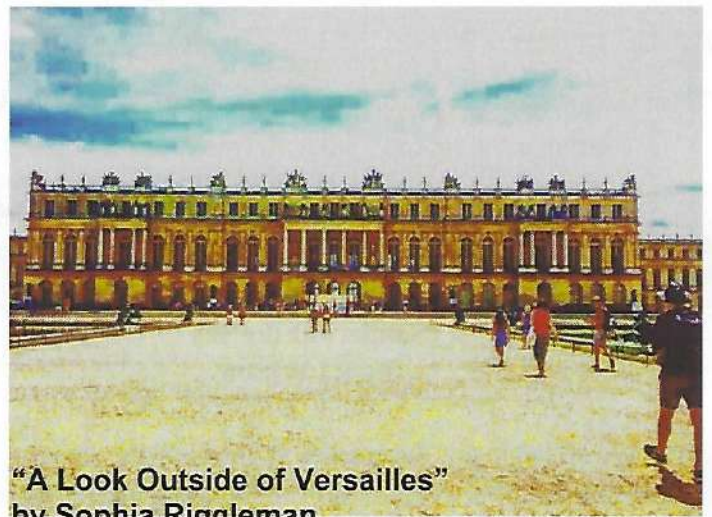
Petals not plucked, but remain rich and plenty
Full and promising, much like our future
Proud and counting: there's nineteen, that's twenty
Grew and healed me; gracious for each suture

"Double Promises"
by Sophia Riggleman



"The Soldier" by Connor Fahey

He departed the bus and stood in the line,
Drill sergeants yelling, a salute is his sign.
Running and drills, push-ups and miles,
Blood and tears without any smiles.
Fear and anger at the treatment they deed,
All to become the soldier they need.
Six weeks and it's over, off to the fight,
Nobody mentions who's wrong and who's right.
Now the war's ended, a lonely flight back
He lost his friends in the sands of Iraq.
A soldier he was, a soldier he'll be
The fight continues so all can be free.



"A Look Outside of Versailles"
by Sophia Riggelman

"The Sun" by Ronald Ayers

I sit in awe, watching you dance across the sky, so close yet far away.
I ponder do I dare to try, nay, even dream of hoping to join you in your glorious ballet.
What if you leave my sky, and it goes bleak and dark never to feel your warmth of heart.
What if like great Icarus before I attempt to ascend the lofty heights to join in your dance but my wings fail and melt away?
Will you burn my wings away for daring to join in your ballet, for thinking I am worthy of your warm glow?
Do I dare to dream that you might hold me in your embrace and we unite forever as one dancing across the heavens in perfect harmony?
Do I dare, I ponder this and my doubts cast me down, my wings bound so that I may not even take flight to try.
But is it worse to dare think I could share your sky and be burned for my hubris, or to stay here never taking flight to try?
I think the latter would be the more punishing but the shackles of doubt weight heavy upon me and grow more cumbersome the closer to the precipice.
The demons gnash and claw, drawing tighter my bonds, seeking to pull me to the abyss never to see your light again.
If only your light would shine upon me I would find strength anew and rise free of my bonds to take my place beside you.

PROSE



"Soldiers of the Sky"

by RJ Wilson

We all begin our decent, not at precisely the same time, but a lot of us fall at once and in quick succession. The chill of the air rushing past us as we plummet doesn't faze us at all. We're prepared for this; accustomed to the cold. Our mission is to land and overwhelm whatever find. Cover any trace of what was once there and hold our ground for as long as we can. Time is both our enemy and our ally. A subtle change in the wind could alter our course drastically. This is the first of many onslaughts that will take place in the coming months. We are the beginning of a bright and bitter new era.

We all look identical, but upon closer examination we are all different. Some shape and size, but to each our own unique face. There are so many of us. It's easy to feel as though you don't matter in a sea of anonymity. Some of us won't make it to the ground, but that is a risk that we must take. This mission is for the greater good. Our home is overcrowded and we must expand. I don't know where we come from. None of us marry or mate. There are no children. We just....happen. You're suddenly there and prepared to fall. It's the same story for all of us. I'm not particularly a religious man, but what other explanation is there?

I'm growing closer to the ground. My mission nearing completion when I hear a wail unlike anything I've ever heard before. I pray that it is only the wind, but I know that I'm wrong as soon as I see it. I giant gaping hole. An abyss into nothingness has appeared before me. I am unable to slow my decent or even alter my course. I am at the mercy of the elements. I watch as my brothers and sisters fall without hope into the maw and vanish from existence. Another wail, a squeal even, emerges from the abyss. And the hole closes. Jagged edges come together and once more I safe to resume my mission. I hear my howls

from where the hole once was, as if it is trying to speak, but I cannot understand what it is saying. Perhaps this is just my mind playing tricks on me. It's a hole, an unfathomable abyss that swallows my brethren as if for sport. It can't possibly speak. I glance back only to be overcome with dread. The jagged edges part once more and I am mere seconds from entering, what I believe to be, the gateway to Hell. I feel warmth emerging from the dark, red pit of death. Steam pumps out of it like an active volcano in a rain storm. I land in the hole. It's not completely dark, but slightly red. I can feel my body slowly fading away into nothingness as the warmth envelopes me. I know that this is the end, but I pray that my fellow soldiers of the sky succeed in their mission. I wouldn't wish this Hell on anyone.

"Mommy! Mommy! I caught another snowflake on my tongue!"



"Lost River Barn"
By Donna Davy

"Eggs" a one-syllable short story exercise by Curtis Hakala

From the back of truck, Jeb could see her hair in the glow of the lights. Her hair looked grey, like old wisps of corn stalks shucked and pushed down. She yelled quick and sharp when the Ford hit holes in the dirt road, and puffs of smoke popped out of her tar stained teeth with each bump.

"Jack! Shit, do you have ta hit ALL the holes? I mean it's fun and all, but take it easy." She slapped Jack on the rim of his cap and smiled as she sucked more stale smoke down her throat.

"I just want that hick to get what he deserves, Dee. I mean we only have so many eggs, and here this guy grabs a whole bunch in the night like some ole' crazed fox. Is he still tied up?" Jack smeared his palm on the back glass when he pointed and left a streak of grime.

Dee craned her neck out and looked. Jeb's hands were tied with duct tape; his red coat caked in straw and hen shit. With legs stretched out and his back pushed to the side, Jeb could see her grin.

"Yeah, that ridge rat is still wrapped up. Fuck those hill trolls. They think they can sneak down in the night and steal our eggs. Stay up on yer turf young buck, or you'll get what's right." Dee threw her spine out straight when she said this and laughed.

The truck came to a slow stop at a fork in the road and dust rose in the air as the bald tires and brakes heaved. The truck sat still for a while, and then lurched towards the right. Jeb smelled the rust flakes in the night haze and as the truck wound down the one lane road, Jeb heard a stream wash up on some rocks.

Jack pulled out some Skoal, packed his lip, and filled his lungs with air. "That deep hole down from the old damn will work. He'll find a nice home there if he floats. If not, serves him right."

"Well, hell. You ain't got no more plans than that?" Dee hitched her neck to the side and put her hands on her hips.

"Na. Let the good Lord do his will." Jack ran his work worn hands on the truck's side and popped the back gate. Jack yelled and cawed like a crow when he grabbed Jeb's legs and he pulled him quick to the back end.

"Now on three, real quick, he'll be through the air like a fart in the wind and land in the deep part just next to us. Ya see? It's up to him then. Any last words?" Jack ripped the duct tape off Jeb's mouth. Strings of white paste streaked his lips.

"Them's my eggs, as I see it. You too dumb or cheap to lock the coop. Might get broke in twice if I can float with my hands and legs tied like a hog." Jack smirked and grabbed Jeb's ankles.

"One, two, three ... huuuuuh!" Jeb's legs spun forward and flipped through the air. He struck the wide part of the stream hard and bobbed like a lure, up and down, up and down. Dee smirked as she climbed through the truck door and plopped down on her seat.

"Eggs is eggs." Jacked turned the key and the lights popped on. The old Ford crept down the dirt road and as the truck's lights grew dim, the stream was once again calm.



"Our Flag Was Still There" by Hunter Ayers

"Field of Tears" by Zachary Davis

The war torn night fed off of the terror that engulfed the remaining soldiers. A young woman could be seen slouching over her fallen companion, mourning, and full of shock. A hand from the nearby soldier forcefully yanked her shoulder, as if to pull her back to reality. Gunfire that was ripping past their unit was visible in the reflection of his bright blue eyes. The soldier's arm showed the intensity and urgency of the situation simply from the pull and stress on his body. Debris from the endless feud was scattered about by incoming mortar shells trying to hit their targets. One warrior had the look of insanity gaping from his green eyes as frenzied crimson flashes erupted from the barrel of his gun. A chilling breeze whisked through the valley of twisted metal that remained, carrying soot and despair. Putrid odors of burnt timber, cordite, and flesh offended the nostrils of any that were left in the area. A ballad of bullets from ongoing warfare in the distance erupted with colors of red and yellow flashing against a thick wall of smoke. Over-turned trucks seemed to be guarded by roaring flames that blazed across the dunes allowing none to pass. Bombs and screams echoed in the distance breaking any who survived the onslaught to their core.

One phrase stood out and emotionally moved the soldiers in the vicinity; for this everlasting sentence reverberated on all hearts and minds: "Is this how it ends?"



"I Ended up in the Emergency Room" by Gerica Hose

Hostility and tears occupied the room as I picked up my weeping self from the brown, shagged carpet that held a part of me: last week's blood that leaked from my nose. As I got up to try to mend the pieces of my shattered dignity, I could not help but stare at the shards of yesterday's fight, the lamp's glass laying askew. *I haven't picked it up; I'll probably have to pay for that later.* I can only talk to myself because what I have to say is never valued or requested. I felt a trickle of liquid falling from my cheek; I wiped and noticed it was only my body's way of crying out in pain. It was in this moment that my senses came back to me. I smelled large increments of cheap booze, and I saw the discarded bottles everywhere. I finally mustered the strength to get up, and the smell of regret filled the room, choking me. As I fought for air, I saw my highly intoxicated, with yellow-green vomit on his shirt, captor passed out on the floor where I woke up. This was my chance to leave and level my head. As I waddled to the door that harbored a split down the middle and a rust-caked knob, I noticed the light snow descending from the dark blue sky, so I grabbed my long-tailed, olive-green parka with the fuzzy, Eskimo hood I always loved so much. I've had it since I was 16, which is probably why it does not zip over my seventh-month baby bump, so I did my best to hold it closed to keep the unforgiving chill from touching my little peanut. I shuffled down the walk and painstakingly reached my 89' Chevy Cavalier with the black, faded top and the rusted-up, red doors. My breath clouds were as cold as my keeper's blackened heart that I am sure does not even pump properly anymore. While I was making my way out of the driveway, I noticed the ice on the bending roads. As I changed the sticky gear from reverse to drive I thought to myself: *I have to be very careful, or I could land myself in some serious trouble*, but I knew I could not be in any more trouble than I was. Noticing the shiny lights coming around the bend, my mind made me believe my car stalled, but there was only one thing that ran through my mind: *I can't bring an innocent baby into my world.* The blinding lights should have been the end of my story, but I found myself waking up to them. My skin was cold and dressed in a tacky gown. This was apparently the third time an officer asked me if I was aware of the time. *December 21, 2014. 8:32 p.m.* I faintly remembered a different voice telling me my seven-pound miracle baby's heart was beating healthily. A smile crept onto my bruised, blood-crusted face knowing that I, and my baby, was going to be okay at least for that night. I effortlessly drifted off into a slumber. For some, ending up in the emergency room is not something that would ease a mind, but those people's minds have not been through the abuse mine has.

"The Last Human" by Alonzo Edelen

My family and I are the only humans left in the world. Everyone else has forgotten how to be human. The world is rotting, steeped in hypocrisy with madness and a sacrilegious form of sanity to help with the flavor. This is what I've come to believe ever since the night I got arrested.

It was a pleasant fall evening, the air was cool with a gentle breeze, a bright moon shone over head (whenever there was a gap in the racing clouds). I was out for a walk after the family dinner. Already, that's three ways that I'm different from the rest of "civilized" society; nobody notices what it's like outside, I doubt anyone knows what a family dinner is, and I'm the only person who ever just goes for a walk for fun. At first glance it was a normal neighborhood, all the brick houses were exactly the same, four room floors and two floors each, plus a basement. The front of each house showed the same scene, one door with a window on either side and two more above. Facing any house, the right window was larger than the other and inside I could see the residents rooted in their parlors with the Family-visions (F.V.s), giant screens that take up an entire wall. Of course nobody calls them Family-visions or F.V.s; to all the rats running in this society's wheel they are "The Family." Bile reached up the back of my throat as I thought about the happenings (or lack there of) going on in the other buildings. Flipping up the collar on my midnight blue trench coat, I continued walking and tried to think about other things.

Losing interest in my surroundings, I retreated into my own mind and thought about my family. I live with my sister, her husband, and their two kids (one boy, *Shiro, age 15 and one girl, *Yami, age 13- these aren't their real names just the nick-names I call them by). And, we don't nor will we ever, have an F.V. "Over my dead body!" was the answer Eraina had given her husband on the one occasion he broached the question, and there was no logical argument for getting one. It wasn't like a law was passed requiring each household to have one. The "Sons of Order" simply relied on the intense peer pressure of these manufactured neighborhoods to "encourage" the people to get one, and it didn't hurt that as an added bonus, the government would pay for the power it used. The funny thing was, once it was off the truck, installed and turned on it hardly ever turned off. It wasn't like you couldn't turn it off, more like you didn't *want* to turn it off. That's our world, a world where the people allow themselves to be oppressed, or rather they have been tricked into oppressing themselves. Ed, Eraina's husband, is an excellent example always concerned about what those insects he calls neighbors think. Basically, picture the most ordinary looking man you can, and you've got Ed. We're not an ideal family, and we don't want to be.

A strange scent on the air drew me out from my thoughts, as I resurfaced I realized that I had walked farther than usual. I was then in what used to be a main street shopping district, now part of a housing project. The street was deserted, with a light fog starting to roll in. As I was trying to regain my bearings, I heard an engine start up and a car coming up behind me. I don't think much of it until...

"HALT! This is a law enforcement automated vehicle. Lone male pedestrian, cease walking and await our arrival." The voice was synthesized, designed to have an authoritarian effect on people. I stopped and did as I was told, as the chances of me out running a car that drives its self are not all that good. It wasn't that far away, so it's already pulling up alongside me.

"State your name and purpose."

Taking my ID from my wallet I hold it up to the scanner on the driver side door where the handle would have, should have, been.

"My name is Lawrence Crawly, and I'm out taking a walk."

The stupid machine made a whirring noise, that sounded like a computer thinking as it was processing my ID.

"Is your car in need of repair?"

"No, I'm taking a walk."

More whirring. "Why have you left your residence?"

This is starting to get ridiculous. I think to myself, but I say, "To get some fresh air."

Even more whirring. "Is your home's atmosphere circulation unit broken?"

"No." *Dumb computerized car.*

"Explain meaning."

Now I was really starting to get irritated. I remember a time when I would never have had to explain myself for taking a walk, not to a human, and certainly not to this poor excuse for an artificially intelligent car. "I am taking a walk, so that I can clear my head before retiring for the night."

Again with the whirring.

The passenger side door opened, "Get in." Even though I was annoyed, I also knew it's pointless to try and argue. So I walked around the car and got in. At first we started heading back the way I had come, but then we turned on to a road leading away from home. I'm not the type to ask pointless questions, and I'm certainly not going to initiate a conversation with a car. Regardless, it didn't take long to figure out my fate. There are only two buildings of importance on this road and they are right across from each other. They came into view just as we reached the end of the road and turned on to the round-about. On the left hand side is the National Bank. Whether by a trick of the air currents or a feat of sentience the fog seems unable to touch the place. To the right, looms the Mental and Behavioral Health Clinic, and that name has to be the most bold faced lie I've ever heard. The place reeked of nightmares and madness. The fog seemed to flow, falling from the decorative columns and cascading down the stairs. It would be more honest to call it an asylum, because that's what it is.

The car pulled up and dropped me off in front of the asylum with instructions to go inside. I was already checked in. Inside was even less honest than the outside, it was white, too white. The walls were white, the ceilings were white enamel, and the lights were those harsh white tubes. They were radiating torturous rays that bounced off the walls and stabbed into my brain, and pricked my eyes like needles. The floor was a black and white checkerboard, and behind the front desk was a secretary in a pressed brown coat with a cheerful liar's mask smile and pleasant voice. Though trained to help put people at ease, it just irritated me even more. I didn't really register what was said, but in the end I was guided to my room.

It has been three years. From what little whispers I hear, it sounds like Eraina is trying to get me out of here through the legal process. I'm not going to hold my breath, but I wish her luck.

My family and I are the only humans left in the world. Everyone else has forgotten how to be human. The world is rotting, steeped in hypocrisy with madness and a sacrilegious form of sanity to help with the flavor. This is what I've come to believe ever since the night I got arrested.

*Shiro is Japanese for white, and in some context can also be translated as light. Light is symbolic of clarity, intelligence, and (among people/characters carrying the name) a reserved calm demeanor.

*Yami is Japanese for darkness. Darkness is symbolic of secrets, cunning, and (among people/characters carrying the name) a soft frailty masquerading as strength.

"Vernonia Wings" by Adelia

