



plum creek review

cover art by Ann Calandro
“Footloose”

fall 2022

plum creek

review

oberlin, ohio

*published by
the students of oberlin college*

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Dandelions

desmond hearne morrey

Most of these dandelions have spun out their bright white float, are left bald, baring their pale bare stalks in quiet benevolence. The child who takes the last full flower, stands and spins and tells mom

“I am the dandelion fairy!”

will be working in this craft coffee shop in seven to ten years and I’ll walk up to her with porcelain beetles singing in my ears, which I will take out and ask for a dirty chai latte, which is

“With whole milk?”

by which I know she is asking if I remember the milky white of whole dandelions disappearing into her mouth, by which I know she means me to remember the quiet evening of my own petals, my own child lifting me into the dizzying air:

“I am the dandelion fairy!”

putting her lips to my forehead, her breath, my white hairs lifting off and taking root, growing into children, who pick each other up and rub yellow into each other’s cheeks and weave each other into crowns and become baristas asking each other if that will be

“With whole milk?”

The street got full of water so we put on our rainboots

zoe goldstein

Mine are purple polka-dotted yours with straps
like someone might lift you up
We have whole centuries to splash
because school is delayed
and the flood has stopped three cars in their tracks.

John will be late for work he yells
Water sloshes over sidewalk lines
slither-stops submerged wristwatches
and swirls at the sewer grates we like
to drop
pennies in

The lady with an umbrella says there might be some chemicals in
there

but we swamp our giddy elbows in
to this most enormous puddle

We gather our nightgown
hems and haw over goose-legs
We twirl waltz prance prince
like frogs holding hands

The water glugs our gamboling boots inside
out and when we look up
there are so many people.

On porch edges swampy lawns and
leaning against groaning fences
They are complaining
and making a plan to walk to the movies

They are peering
into the water over everything
at its flat leafy surface
at our upside-down reflections and theirs too
passing a cigarette

back

and

forth

and

back

Praying for Dawn

chloe casdagli



an ode to skinny jeans that never quite fit in the warm months of spring.

kate margaret luke

To the soft pouch of pale
belly pouring over blue
denim—a whale breaking
the horizon line with curves
and ripples ready to blow
holes in restricted space—

button up your waxen body
don't let it melt, suck
in life, filter it through
the yellowed brushless of your
teeth—not too much now, you
wouldn't want to bloat
or rock the boat too
much, people might
get wet—

No Words

ann calandro

No words describe the place
Where one color meets another.

Where purple soothes and comforts gray,
Where fiery brick crumbles into red.

No word explains those times
When the life we live

And the life we dream
Collide

At inconvenient minutes
In unexpected places,

While your fingers tease open
The small buttons on my sweater

That the cashier called haze
But to me is air.

You Think This Weather is Bad?

peter fray-witzer

the midwest weather?
well let me tell you—
over there it rains thumbprints,
all unique, like they say.

someone
reaches inside a home,
reaches inside a pocket, wet and raw,
and doesn't feel the blood through a glove.
(does a soldier worry about staining his wedding ring?)

in ohio we have no need for gloves:
our hands are so washed and beaten and battered clean by the snow
That we dream we know what chapped knuckles feel like, and drift
down slush-streets,
concerned about ice-rubble on the sidewalk,
concerned about alarms going off at nine.

all wars are cold, whisper tires on the april black ice,
shooting glances at us puffing warm breaths into our pink and ready
palms.

walking the other way, a group of men hunches into the wind as one
(if you strike me, will I, or your fist wear down first?)
and keep their hands pulled back, pulled off.
ah, such is the midwest winter,
tell them:
it's no use, your fingers will only get colder.

Path of World

ariel roberts

I trace wood grain lines
in a sticky fervor, one of
push pin precision and
buzzing building.
I'm predisposed, I suppose,
to search for deities in
the anatomy of centipede legs, their
impractical forms like
the copper that blooms
between my eyes as I
meet the horizon and climb
up, up, up. Funny
how I reach no answers, how
the stars are just as far
and the truth is never spoken
until trees grow from the dead.

Osmotic Layers

peter fray-witzer

So?

You got older,
unhitched
that stupid old baleful horse of yours, told it
get lost.

Always whinnying,
hanging
around the chamomile,
the smallest,
frailest flower you've got.

And good luck to it,
you thought as it wandered off the property,
gait no faster—
the dumb thing, it could have run, now,
gotten out
of sight quicker.

It's quieter in your house,
you can't hear or see it out the window— one of the great things about
life

is you can convince yourself
you've always liked it that way—
and not that you miss it, the horse,
but you're irked to no
end

that it's still one of those pesky, unwarranted
little things that pop up in your head during
sex.

You moan.

Wonder where it's gone.
Outside your warm house,
your flowers grow to bursting, then
drown,
victims of overwatering, over-loving,
you.

Common Raven
kash radocha



Memento Mori

ursula hudak

tw: death

On a summer's day in the passenger seat of our Subaru I tell my mother how I would like to be buried. She shakes her head as the country whips past and the wind catches her white hair into susurrus clouds. I want After the Goldrush to be played, the version by Prelude, I want to be wrapped in a shroud and placed in a simple cedar box, the way my grandfather's pipe smoking grandmother was in the old country. She tells me to stop talking about it and I understand but also do not. She cannot die after I do, a sequel being written as the original text continues. But this feels like planning Easter dinner ahead of time, so we know what to get at the supermarket. If it just happens to happen, I remind her, I want you to know, if you embalm me I'll haunt you. I remember the touch of my great aunt's forehead, creased in furrows and waxy as she laid in state. Though they'd subtracted and added back to her she looked less than she had when I knew her whole. The deaths started when I was young and they follow each other closely— I no longer have qualms about the grave dirt and how soon I may be under it. I know she knows this, though it's hard to swallow; dissector of a corpse herself, she saw her best friend buried in a box carved from white pine, nursed her dying father as he cried out in his mother tongue, which no one understood. With my father she saved for my schooling since the day I was born, left the city a year later when 9/11 touched down, having walked the length of Manhattan to get home. Together we eat sweet corn and listen to the birds at the feeder and watch the sun set as the night sky rolls in. We know that this is living— to die a bit every day and to go on living in spite of it. I have torn the meat of this world with my teeth, I have called on and forsaken God, I have given away all my change and then some. I have choked on my words, I have bitten my tongue, I have screamed with nothing left to say. I have mourned the living and the dead alike, and there will be more to mourn tomorrow. I called home from my car accident on my way to school glad for my life but more so for the way I had made sure to say goodbye and I love you. Just in case. Just in case, I ask her to request an extension to her parent's plot, as we pass it on the highway going into town, blowing kisses to them as they rest above flood level. She says okay.

Back in the room—gravity,
evolution, back to creation again
Edens—
Mine and yours,
meet like a zipper,
locking together
tug up.
Pulling closed—
Pulling close.

Metastasis.

shannon schulz

I saw it on the news
A storm with your letters tearing
Up state after state
And I've always wondered why we
Name the things that hurt us
And draw them closer to ourselves
Like my heart as it chokes me out
From the inside.
Red flashes. A warm freeze.
Water becoming wind becoming gone.

It smelled like pine in the living room,
Bluegrass playing in the olive light and
I was still small enough to sit on your lap.
The ocean was across the way but
We were floating on the music
Tethered to each other in the
Eye of the storm.
I thought "there's nowhere I'd rather be"
Part of me, knowing and not knowing that
This would be the last time.

You didn't want to go.
You were clawing and screaming and digging your nails into
Anything that was left
Stumbling after your dreams as they were slipping away
And cursing time for running out.
You didn't want to be seen like that.
So you became the storm, rushing through, tearing apart
Breaking trust. Holding on.
Water becoming wind becoming gone.

And we love you still.
But we've never recovered from the destruction.
Our cities are ransacked, our houses displaced.
And something is missing.

Untitled

liam campbell

The morning rumbles subtle beneath the park.
The air is kind where I am sitting.
My history cowers behind a tree trunk.
My search is calm, as I am still waking up.
The street has always rattled my solitude.
Today, I have no plans of my own design.

Reaching the End
chloe casdagli



Sweet Ritual

peter fray-witzer

I am thinking of eating the mangoes I saved for you—
I won't,
but nothing should escape my teeth tonight.
The sunset, sweet-glow calls me,
as I realize
I am just the way I was made, bright and warm and terrified.

And you, my dearest—
What have you done this evening,
since calling me Helios, eyes wide?
You,
with the many ghosts kissing your cheeks, and wound between your
fingers,
blue palms upturned—
Have you ambled, sleeping in a circle, all eyes and memory?
Has the full moon told you she loves you back yet tonight?

How to dig yourself out of a hole

ella bezkorovainy

Obtain a shovel and dig diagonally upwards to create a path to ground level.

No shovel?

How 'bout a rope?

Take stock of your abilities: do you have the capacity to hoist yourself up out of this hole? How deep is it?

Talk to yourself. It's not weird if no one can hear you.

How long have you been in the hole? If it's been a very long time, why haven't you been able to get out?

Do you have someone who can help get you out of the hole? If so, do not call them. You have to do this on your own. But thinking of them might be helpful.

Try jumping very high. Can you see the edge of the hole?

Sit for a moment and think. Are you upset, or distraught, or were you anticipating the situation? Do you feel any pain, fatigue, or uneasiness? Why are you here? Did you do this on purpose...?

Could you, perhaps, have prevented this?

Analyze your conditions, your surroundings. Is it wet? Dry? Does that tell you anything?

Cry, if you want. It might make you feel better. And it'll dampen the soil, giving you a better grip.

Try making indents in the earth on the sides of the hole to step up on, like a ladder, or stairs.

Pray, if that's up your alley. No promises that it'll work though. He leaves many a believer hanging. Or, rather, in a hole.

Sit for a moment and take your pulse. Is your heart racing? For the average person, your resting heart rate should be between sixty to one hundred beats per minute. You can take your pulse for 15 seconds and multiply it by four, if it's easier.

How's your breathing? Is it shallow, or erratic? Do you have enough oxygen?

Retrace your steps—think backward.

Can you jump any higher now?

Villain Arc

gwen gemmell

9. Cognitive Dissonance is a daily ritual. I spend time dissecting the ideas of my current season of life and realize the hours have passed by. I have not eaten. I was talking to a friend the other day who said that she has decided to stop looking for love. She told me that she has spent so much time looking for someone who is the “right one” and placing people up against her expectations that she is freeing herself by ending her search. When she finds them she will know.

6. When I was in Elementary school, my bus driver would say, “goodmorning sunshine,” every time I got on the bus. I was the only one who would thank him for getting us back and forth to school. Sometimes I did not want to be sunshine. Good intentions don’t create comfort. I did not want to be seen. My teachers stood at the door of the middle school and measured our skirt length upon entry. Even if they let me pass, I still would shake for a good part of the day. Grids and

3. Sometimes all I do is clench. Sometimes I wake up and I am screaming. Once I woke up and I had punched a potted plant on my nightstand while asleep and the ceramic was shattered everywhere and I couldn’t get the dirt out of my carpet. No memory, the proof being sore knuckles. Sometimes I think that the things that I dreamed of actually happened, but it only lasts a moment. I have a lot of opinions. Sometimes when people ask me what I think there is only fog in my brain. It reminds me of the moors.

8. During the daylight ones from the night b of it ever gets very far of the wind; I have a s job is more important oranges in the oven a cinnamon sticks to ha Dream with intention wear liquid eyeliner in into little flowers. I an in my villain arc: They

5. I do not think we s

I don’t think that we s away with hurting us anger anymore. I am voice is hoarse from s a deep breath. My bra am out of gas.

2. Dissolvable stitches setting these days. Or Sometimes both at one about my villain arc. I Taylor Swift Reputation My listening to Fiona A Revenge seeker. The o listening to lately is au and is called, “sad Gir grinding my teeth at n stimulants. Hand trem

t I do not talk to the
before. It is not that any
f. I leave with the howl
sky to light up. My day
t. I want to dehydrate
and string them with
ang above my desk.
. I'll put on makeup and
n every color that I draw
n not sure I can do this
y don't allow pastels.

ould drop our rage.

should let people get
, but I cannot carry this
tired of road rage. My
screaming. I cannot take
akes need replacing. I

s. Anger is the default
performance.
ce. I tell my friends
say I am entering my
a Era. My Fleabag era.
Apple incessantly era.
nly playlist I have been
utogenerated by Spotify
l Starter Pack." I am
ight. Effects of
nors. Footprints of

7. intersections. Struggling to fit the box. A tag in the back of my skirt that irritates my skin. Perpetual blush of shame. Red tomato face. I feel myself less and less. I crave the villain arc. Dark and concentrated plum suspense temptation. A symptom of forced acquiescence. Sometimes I see no point in proving myself. No point in expression. I read romance novels and in the scenes before sex the character always feels heady. I don't go on tinder until it is late at night.

4. I tell myself that I cannot live in the grey. No morning mist, in between boulders dwelling. Only clear choices. I do not know if I ever learned to prioritize myself, but I have no space for grudges against those who have hurt me. When I skipped class I wrote in my journal, "they hate me, but I was created by them." People-pleaser. Lately, I cling to the idea of inner peace. I want so much for things to stick. Sometimes I am slippery, though, and my thoughts are green slime and goo and boogers and I can't make sense of pressure.

1. I have now entered my villain arc. Prickly little hedgehog spindly painful. Once I walked on crutches for two days when I had a sewing needle stuck in my foot. My mom thought it was nothing and that I just wanted to use the crutches because they looked cool. However, my foot swelled and I had it X-rayed in my friends' mom's mobile vet van. There was a broken piece of needle nestled in the muscle. A nurse practitioner at the ER spent forever digging it out and I got stitches. She numbed my foot but I could still feel the pressure.

The Minor Keys

ann calandro

Sometimes I wonder where I'll be
When I'm gone, although
There's a plot in the cemetery
Reserved for me.
I'm not sure I like that choice.
I could be a bird,
My hollow bones soaring high above
The world's pain. I could be a book
That at least one person wants to read.
I could be near others who love music
In all the minor keys, which
Telemann called "pensive, profound...
Expressive of grief, and deep-thinking."
I could be a red-gold cello, or an oboe,
Or a flute, but I already love
The piano. I'll be one of its many
Keys-- not sad low A or shrill high B
and never middle C, ubiquitous and eager to please.
I'll linger somewhere above or below
Whatever note you expect, slightly
Off balance, surprising you each day
With my dissonance and charm.
Look for me near your favorite Chopin nocturne
On that Steinway concert grand
I played but never owned.

Concerto
ann calandro



Blues for Clark

ella bezkorovainy

Inspired by Clark Coolidge

Blues in the words, in the sound
of notes hitting the wind, ripe fruit
bursting from the taught skin and I,
nothing but —
everything and an audience member,
become a part of the music and remember
and remember

Nina singing to me in my cradle,
awash in pain and my father loves the sound of
Muddy Waters and sharp pebbles underfoot,
water flowing over skin and trails of past
and present and maybe a voice crack but
never a moment of pause;
hesitation has no name here in the room I spin and
spin and ring the sound of chords —

Drumbeat follows me home, echoing
off the walls of the buildings that line the street,
the alleys where blues singers croon from between the bricks,
where the notes of a double bass tiptoe out the back door
and the drum breaks the windows with a shatter and
then puts them back together again,
rearranging parts and shards and hi-hats
crash, tit for tat

Tripping up the stairs and my
heel catches on the rim of the moon, gliding
past the milky way to reach the gloom, the blues, the sky
and the mic needs no stand
anymore, afloat in the air
on the train of thought, the A train and
the clickity clack of the tracks.

Blues when I come home and take off my shoes,
slide on the wood in socks on the balls
of my feet, I bounce and the notes carry me
down the hall and into the heart of the home,
a clear path leading me to the soul of the
drum of the
music of the
blues knock knock knock at the door.

Segments: Sleep Disorder

peter fray-witzer

I.

I hold myself higher
 against the doorframe,
 using the tension to push my shoulders up
 (I have never *leaned* in a doorway,
 heaven forbid)

once, I marked my heights on a corner beam with each passing year;
once, I felt growing pains in my sleep and would lie awake
 clutching the sting close, echoing inward, laughing, glowing;

 once there is a fingernail in the furrow of my bark, it becomes part of
 the wood grain. look at the rings: this year a fire, this a flood, here
and there a first and second love, and—between my mother's scrawled
 years—the hope of a garden,
 a thirst for paper poured down the throat, never quenched.

know thyself

... so, then, what to do with all this useless poetry?

II.

The window's cold aurora snatches up the plants;
the rain is coming down hesitantly, as though it
can't help
itself

as though it would rather gather its folds back up like a
bundled quilt, screaming, sorry, naked, heavy,
and
ashamed,
just like
us

and in Chicago you shake off your umbrella to go see about a
nightstick and a paper bag, Boston wafts the steam from a fifth cup
of coffee up to your nose,
you march towards a promised land you've never doubted for an
instant—
and tell me,
which of us is living preciously?

I am older; I no longer laugh at my growth pains.
I (in fact)
do not prefer not knowing.

III.

Silence pools in my evening walk, slowly like a honey drop, and yet everywhere I hear my name. This name.

I am as barefoot and seethrough and unowned as the ball jars in the thrift store.

IV.

and if I seized that part of the past and tugged on it—

every time I reach for a wound it has cauterized.

I want my fingertips in the blood of my brain stem, I

want raw, hipbone,

take-your-shirt-off,

palm-strike to the chest:

Fuck, man,

Think!

Or, say:

My string tongue bows under the weight of the air

If only it would rain on me here, wake me up.

Sleepless City

chloe casdagli



Peacocks in Primary School

kate margaret luke

It is like a child
Being burned to death,
That noise. When you first hear it
You think
The angel of death
Has come to peck out your eyeballs
And peel tiny fibers of nail bed
Out from under their covers.

But it is not.
Feathered with falsified benevolence:
Yes. A harbinger for Hades:
No. Not quite, at least.

Sometimes, you would get lucky:
(if you could call it that)
And one would be silent. Un
Interrupting of your Very Important
Multiplication tables education.

You could sit peacefully in your plastic chair
That snagged your headbanded hair,
And count the yellow trapezoids
On the slightly too-tall table.

When it came time for lunch, though
That is when disaster would strike—
Climb daint-ly up the stairs
On barely-there feet to stand
Guard outside the door.
Beak poised to shudder in feigned surprise.

Melodramatic bastards with air
Horns for throats, littering sound
And “diseased” feathers we were
Not remotely allowed to touch
As if infection of the bloodstream
Could be worse than decimation
Of hard-won childish focus.

Of course, it was always the males.
With their pompous propriety,
Preening in presumed admiration
Presenting their plumes like Hera’s
Gift to Floridian children.

They would block your path
To smiley fries and boxed chocolate milk
Unsettling blue-yellow-green eyes swaying
Back and forth like too-perfect puppets—
Hold all *your* strings in their knowing gaze

Before trailing you home
In warm, kiddie-proofed light
To settle on your scratchy front lawn
Or tap-dance on your sun-bleached roof
Or rip holes in the newly-patched shade screen
And annoy the shit out of your cat

Whose yellow-green orbs
Were much softer to stare into
As you ate away your afternoon
Snack on the breezy lanai

Preferring the palm leaves
With their ever-present hush.

A Conversation with my Pet Bear

robbin sachs

I ask my pet bear, do you know that your ears are cute and round?

My pet bear makes a bear noise.

I say, oh yes, they are. I ask, and that your tummy is fluffy and soft?

My pet bear makes a bear noise.

I say, yes, yes it is. I ask, do you know that I'm awake night after night, slowly being crushed by own loneliness, that I'm almost ready to believe in fairy tales again? That I can almost feel that magic of my childhood, just before my fingertips when I reach out in the dark? Are you really a man who made a deal with the devil to wear a bear's skin for seven years, so that he will make you unimaginably rich if someone can fall in love with you, a bear?

The bear says nothing.

I say, I love you.

The bear says, I love you, too.

The Octopus

fionna farrell

In a leaf, a fatty purple-gray,
rejecting light, searching for tide;
that glimmer, the table's edge,
crashing waves, the unfilled laughter.

Bulbous eyes from the bulbous head,
across his silence is a dare:
Grab the stick with no sharp ends.
Will to crave, a craven will.

Legs wrapped the indivisible,
now plunged into the orifice,
and sufficed to live in the Mouth.
Bite the mother lip.

Incisors beat the accessory hearts,
but unfathomably does he move,
as the thought moves air around:
What's it like to live in the sea?

They don't really care to know,
nor what it's like to live on land.
Swallowing after minutes of ardor,
craving what's alive, not to be.

Re'em

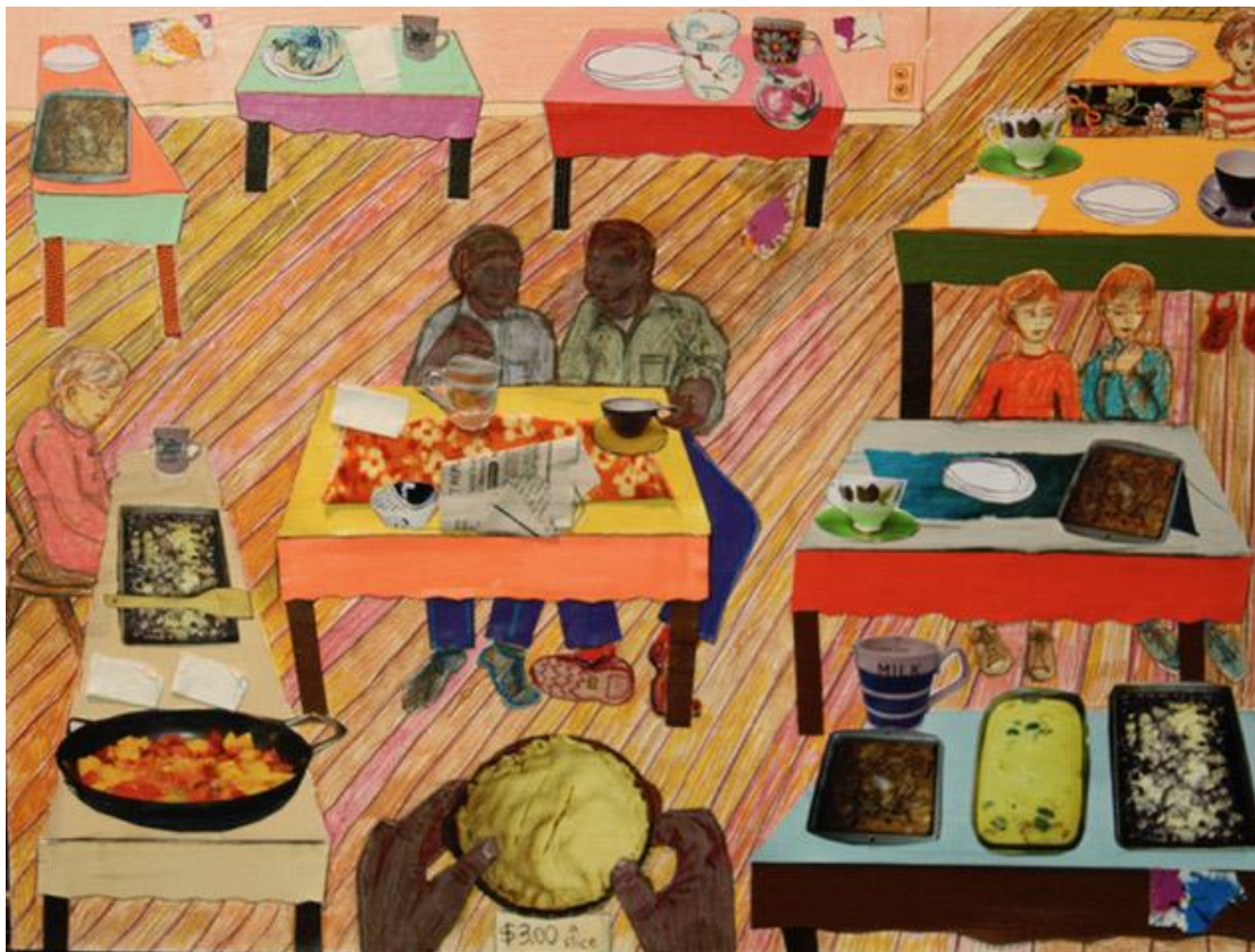
ursula hudak

TW: Gore, blood

On my walk in the forest,
traveling deeper than planned,
I found in the middle of a meadow
a beautiful unicorn.
In absolute awe,
I approached it carefully.
It made no move
to shy away,
but when I got too close
it lanced me clear through
my stomach. No matter.
Now its soft face was within reach
of my gentle touch.

“Joined together for at least my life,
I will love you until my blood
coats your face
and you are all I can see.
Even when you shuck me off
to be claimed by the wild,
I am at peace knowing part of me
will stay with you,
if only until
the next time it rains.”

Potluck
ann calandro



Pieces

ella bezkorovainy

Inspired by "Home Wrecker," by Ocean Vuong

I feel unworthy of being, loving, wanting love I do not have,
have never had, like the ability to communicate in my father tongue, so

my mouth stays open, gaping, saliva forthcoming and overrunning,
making trails down my neck and forming wells in my collarbone,

from which I offered you a drink and you pulled away, repulsed by my
inability to understand, so my liquid fermented, turning to vodka,

forming droplets of liquid confidence on my skin that seeped in but
did not translate and still does not translate like the Russian my
father refused to teach me and

the Russian mixed with Latvian and German my grandfather
mutters under his breath, his beard saturated with fallen droplets
of tea and memories of Eastern Europe kept safe and sacred

and the war that clings to him like the war in between our bodies,
flush against one another but so far apart I cannot breach the distance
in a single leap —

so unlike the artificial bodies that I coveted, the porcelain-
headed Russian dolls, the ones that my grandmother gave me
every birthday that I kept in a box, safe and sacred, and

so unlike the bodies tossed carelessly into the rubble,
falling bombs and refuge found in basements apartments, a haven for
young beings,

young beings like you and I but also so different because those
bodies hide because they just wanted to live and all I seem to want is
to hide away to avoid the world...

and yet we dance just the same, skirts swishing in circles like
the countrywomen who donned their great gowns as if they
were really that beautiful and not just

remnants of a culture tarnished, ripped apart at the seams like how I
took apart my grandfather's coat and stitched the lining back in,

safe and sacred,
or so I thought until the push of our bodies pulled
out the stitches, and all that was left were the pieces
of the coat, pieces of myself,

and pieces of you and me that I cannot seem to sew back together.

my math folder is red

kate margaret luke

she does not remember when odd numbers started
sending a trail of needles down her spine

she cannot pinpoint why she holds breaths
until she deems the world rightened

tilted on its axis at the right angle when those books are
pushed into place according to size order

she cannot tell you what small anxious child
inside these grown bones grasps onto

in the concept of the number 12, how it
feels so leveling—I mean maybe

she could, but then she'd have to
believe in something else

Warn(er)(ing)

caeli massey

Something sacred settles here
and lives beyond remembrance

Loved, and lost, and loved again,
yet ignorant of absence

Honey-glazed, and wise as time,
its belly shakes with purpose

Everything will ache someday,
but only when the light shifts

On the Cusp
kate margaret luke



**I'll Teach You the Stingray Shuffle, But Only if You Rewind the
Hands of my Waterproof Watch to Kid-Tinted Times**

kate margaret luke

For Taylor

Our stucco sand-colored house—
with a bowed palm tree out front,
and a swash of perfect-cartwheeling
grass that pinched your ankles like crabs—
is only remarkable in the way passed
over moments can be.

The peak of golden hour: the sun
all melty, shimmering chocolate in the sky.
An artist painted washed colors between
the wispy clouds, which stood out like flying pieces of hair
behind the silhouetted fall trees.

The sky *had* to look like that.

It had to make up for the flaky leaves spilled
over the front lawn. On Long Island, the land of drawn-out
vowel sounds and endless nail salons,
their deaths were beautiful, stunning—here,
the leaves were withered pieces of skin,
chewed witches' fingernails,
crunchy, spoiled bones. And yet—the sky.

Never had small-big eyes seen such a sight.
Floridian sunsets are altering, of words like *glow*
and *breathtaking* and *free*, mentally reconstructing
one's notions no matter

if they're witnessed over a rippling horizon
or above the pointed peaks of palm leaves, pedestrian
in the face of a dewy-lidded future.

The sky demands nothing much in return;
you claim cautious stake in the *Sunshine State*.

~

To be young and hopelessly enamored
was to be sticky. On October's dying
front lawn, I watched the world above
me—
the air rivaled that of steam coating
the mirror after a too-warm shower.

To be young and shiny new on the block
was to hear the crunch of wearied rubber
on weather-beaten gravel. To make
acquaintance with the squeal of giggling
heads
popping up from behind the cab of a truck—
panoramic grins carelessly offering me
evening plans.

To be four and in love with dress-up
was to agree to belly aches and sugared
gums and dares—discounted if I didn't
actually touch the haunted house's
door.

To be me in memory-form
is to notice the edges of a picture I
didn't know I was holding. To embellish
the echoes,
the wrung out emotions of almost
touching nostalgia. With weary fingertips,
I flatten the crinkles of time-won
wrinkles; I brush the dust off the
frame.

~

All elbow edges and knobby knees,
with bangs so thin it was a trick of the
light towheaded in the way washed-out
children are she took conversational
charge
and soon the rest of our childhood

As fledglings, we met on the corner of the curved street—
the one with the sidewalks that jut out their
bottom lips in hope of tripping up the rubber
wheels of a scooter— the one with the stop sign
to sling one's own body around

The end of my driveway was the edge of the
world: an island from which to wave to
passing ships of steel plates, rods, and tubing.
We would run over green hills; we would
search for stray white balls; we would stray
towards sand pits and stick whole hands into
holes. We would go anywhere— together, like
plastic neon necklaces from Justice: tangled
in content—as long as we were home before
the lightning bugs came in full force

It was our specialty— lightning
capital of the world, our Tampa Bay:
We had to be dragged from the chlorine,
eyes goggle-rimmed, when it rained
but we argued the electrocution angle
when it was time for baths. During
weekend thunderstorms we huddled
in the tent in her living room— one
meant for camping, used for traveling
the world instead. Needing under
the-sink-warm Yoohoos and stale
peanut butter smores to conquer
the rumbling grey and even
more rumbly stomachs—
I miss the microwave
marshmallows
more than I
care to
admit

~

I am not in the habit of manufacturing memory: *moonlit escapades* would be a meek attempt— to mention freshly cut grass and the buzzing of creatures dipped below the day's curtain— exact words chosen fallaciously for your amusement. In reality: the world begs you to be sufficient in your spending of time before the end comes ringing your bell

Childhood ended on the cusp of sixteen
Along with my sunshine state stage
Setting down laurels and luggage on scratchy grass
Subconsciously aware of gators in the lake
Punch in the gut aware of her face:
Less towheaded, still pale, and crumpled
Like a candy wrapper in the bottom
Of a pillowcase once used for sleepovers

We hugged on a sidewalk lacking
Lips and leaning stop signs; near a grassy
Hill void of sandtraps or golf balls
The only thing to chew on too-sticky truth

Sweating out of eyeballs sometimes looks like crying
But the humidity wasn't causing the stains on my cheeks
As the morning sky sighed softly behind our shadowed forms
And I said a last goodbye to my first hello.

I Learned How to Speak Last Month

peter fray-witzer

and I want to use the word “love”
as generously as my grandmother is
with the sugar in her coffee
Sweet:

I want to let my love gather at my fingertips
and touch them to the back of your hand

please,
I say,
read from psalm to psalm
(from honeylight mornings to peachtree days)
and stop a thousand times in between

you part the pages of the book with two fingers, you clear your throat,
you find your place, you start to read, you

breathe, sigh,
whet the air with
voiced-s-hiss,
press your tongue against the sunset like you’re toying with it,
(you must be
biting down on the angels)
you convince me that love isn’t too bland a word
and not so rich it will make me sick

Dear:

I have never been very good at writing love poems, so
there is something so wonderful about how every book you read is one

there is something so wonderful about how you lay yours out gently
every day,
like you’re making a bed with them, like you’re folding a blanket over just
so

you look up from reading, and ask “do you want more?”
Oh, Beloved:

your heart is a cloth I have felt before,
familiar as my favorite shirt,
and yet, explain it to me if you like,
tell me about each thread,
tell me anything at all.

Spidersilk
kate margaret luke



Toward the End

ann calandro

Toward the end she stopped doing
Much of anything, just cried and cursed
The aides, accused them of stealing
Her dying plants, shrunken socks, unused dentures,
Unwrapped candy, photos taped
Against the wall, pages torn
From envelopes sent sailing through the air.
What she wanted was her youth, life, health--
To be the one who baked a dozen loaves of bread
Most days and gave them all away.
Holding the newspaper was the only thing
That calmed her, so the aides learned
To tuck it right between her elbow
And the chair. Once she sense its presence
By her side, she smiled.
I remember when she read that paper
Front to back each morning.
Waiting for the loaves to rise.

The Plum Creek Review is Oberlin College's oldest literary + arts magazine, published semesterly.



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