The editors of Shapes invite you to submit your poetry, prose, and artwork for consideration for publication in the Spring 2022 issue. Poetry should be typed and single-spaced. Please keep a copy of any poetry or prose that you submit. We promise to handle all artwork with care.

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of Manchester Community College
Spring 2021
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Spring 2021
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Kathleen Roy

Breaking Up

for John

After midnight I awake from dreaming of blue-black wings circling over my bed. With stiff plumage, sharp beak, you came cawing, pulling out long strands of hair from my head.

Wings dark as night, falling over my face, your feathers fluttering around my eyes, you steal parts of me to build your own space, as sadness rains down from your own dark skies.

With loud, raucous calls, you rattle and scold, seeking your revenge for my broken vow; my promise to love you as we grew old, but my love for you was a swaying bow.

Love was a limb tossed and torn in the storm, lost and forlorn are two birds with no home.
Arianna Antonakos

**Current Tendencies**

You sit there
surrounded by boxes of cakes, cookies and pies,
ice cream, chips and everything good,
delight in every crunch, every crisp and cream filling.
A landfill of sorrow,
a bottomless pit of salty tears,
a brine to drown in.
Comforted by sugary nothings and bitter, zestful devotion,
like an addict with a mound of cocaine,
you ultimately decide on sweet relief.
An overdose takes place
as greed and want foam at your mouth,
rabid for more,
rabid for something.
Rigid reform must be set in place,
rules made and restrictions obeyed.

It's a nice thought.
Regret is swallowed down
with another bite.

---

Tori Tucker

**Ode to Camp**

Hear the flops off the dock into dark pond waters, cheers for water polo champs,
hanging on picnic table tops.
Taste brilliant red bug juice consumed in afternoon heat, cookie sandwiches. See
the brightest beams of white sun, bright braided friendship bracelets, temporary tattoos,
henna painted along our skin. See
her hide from her date for Sadie Hawkins.
See secret salty snacks at midnight's hour,
dancing Friday nights on the friendship court.
Read love letters inspired by the hike
to Rhode Island. Here, with interlocked hearts
and fingers, sewn one, we light our candles
under luminous stars. Say we don't have
to leave. Say we can stay here forever.
After Patricia Fargnoli’s “Easter”

Along the deserted dead-end road, fading cottages stand side-by-side, their front windows vacant and staring, as if watching for signs of spring.

A “for rent” sign dangles on the door of a tiny cottage named Dew Drop Inn, while outside of The Gang’s All Here, a tattered flag flaps in freezing winds.

Black ice stretches along the path leading to the beach, where brackish salwater laps along the shoreline, spews white foam over cold, hard-packed, untrodden sand.

Overhead, seagulls soar at high tide, keeping a keen look-out for unattended wicker picnic baskets and coolers that will come again, or not.

At road’s end, a red and white evacuation route sign spins in the wind, its arrow pointing in all directions.

I waded into the water after his sandy hair, his sea glass eyes and glistening surface, past my calves and knees, up to my waist then neck, nearly submerged, so far in I didn’t notice dark strands of seaweed writhing like sea snakes, wrapping around my legs, yanking me down, into the icy undertow, so far down that sunlight shining on the waves hid my outstretched hand, rendering me invisible to him, and bound to the ocean floor in seaweed shackles, I desperately held my breath only to look up through the glassy water to see his lips touching hers and the last bit of air was drawn from my lungs.

I’m a sailor but he likes sirens which is something I will never be.
Stripped Bare

They fell from the tree branches, baby squirrels, skin pink, flesh soft, puffy eyes sealed shut, their spines curled inward.

My siblings and I peered at the shaking, quivering newborns then ran to our father for help, hopeful and spirited.

_Come, hurry_, we urged him.

He strode out to the tree, our innocent eyes widening in horror, our protests falling on deaf ears as he brushed them into a dustpan and threw them into a green pail, the thud of their vulnerable bodies hitting the plastic bottom, the sound of silence piercing our young hearts, pounding in hurt confusion.

We saw that the babies like us were powerless at his remorseless indifference, and we saw his cruelty stripped bare and our eyes were changed forever.

Vespers

Each night our evenings end with a raging, luminous creature of flame. Our necks craned, gazing at the sparks in flight hitting the dewy-eyed leaves above our heads, we sit in grass stained clothes on damp seats. The salty sweat has dried on our skin from the chilled wind tailing the sun, leaving shivers that lift hair follicles on our arms and legs.

Mosquito bite on our sweet flesh, so lightly, unnoticed.

Our voices sing in unison with the gulp of frogs, chirp of crickets, and the quarreling of the trees protecting us from the bitter world just a mile away.
Hunger

I was more intrigued than I was afraid—and like a tiny white mouse, I crouched down inconspicuously, behind the kitchen door, hiding, the way a photographer might, when trying to capture the perfect cover for National Geographic:

With guiltless awe, I watched my father tear into a chunk of raw chicken, like a hairless over-fed vulture, sewer ing and pulling greedily the flaccid pink breast with clawed fist, bits of flesh tumbling off his chin, and clinging onto his chest, exhaling with such fervor, as if his lungs had been picked off his torso like some dried, decayed fruit—

And in his breathless satisfaction, he ventured forth a primitive sound from parted gates of brutal red, a sinking growl, a guttural groan, the kind that bends the skin, and shatters the skeleton of a small animal surrendering its own entrails in defeat, the frequency discernible only to that of the tongue of crude beasts with cavernous eyes, a pair of gaping holes where the air collapses and rushes back in a stream of black tar swallowing the universe.

I thought I knew hunger—
But I’d never known an appetite so voracious, so urgent, so fluent in savagery. It was almost as if his desertion of us was less a conscious betrayal, and more a rebellion against his own humanity, so as to bypass the guilt, the pain, the agony, of living as man.

Marielena Cartagena
After this is done, 
after staying home 
away from friends, 
after looking at them 
through the virtual windows, 
after missing them, 
their warm bodies, their sweet voices, 
will we share a dance and drink? 
Will we explore in a walk around town? 
Will we meet mysterious shadows?

Or will we judge again 
each other’s skin color, 
the shape of each other’s eyes? 
Will we cackle at each other’s languages? 
Will we live in fear of one another’s touch?

In the world after this, 
may these weeks 
be a note in a Beethoven symphony. 
May these weeks be like a harsh winter, 
after which, flowers bloom in spring.

Jesus Bueno

Pascual Whitter

Coming to Grips

I have lost my temperature, 
lost my sunny days. 
Without you, no place is warm. 
With the rain comes more pain. 
Even when I cry 
the hurt inside does not release its grip. 
My body feels frozen, 
every part of me is cold. 
I cannot escape this tundra, 
where there is no end in sight, nowhere else to go.

art by Enrique Diaz

art by Pascual Whitter
Marielena Cartagena

Egg

I was a damaged thing:
a hemorrhaged egg, abandoned,
shipwrecked,
at the bottom of the fridge:

an almost-embryo,
once fluorescent with life,
still yearning to at least breathe the burn
of my own demise; fate set to burst

urgently over a terrible flame,
a diaphanous knot of membrane
and yolk dripping umbilical cords from a bruised shell,
like cold pearls slipping off a string, crowning the sun—

and as I lay languid in defeat, my dimensions dismantled,
bubbling in the stiff stone tomb of this frying pan,
I imagined a life where I did not need to be shattered,
split open and fatally altered,
to become something worthy of hunger.

Pascual Whitter

Born in It, Molded by It

Money's Soliloquy

I am the root of all evil,
born in it and molded by it.

I like that people indulge in me,
that the world was built in my name.

I am the center of it all,
destroying lives, drawing blood.

Yet I want to do more, be more. How can I repay the damages I've done?
Like Columbus found the new mundo, my parents took us from our casa and moved us here, where we were looked at as outsiders, eight-year old me, with my foreign idioma, my Spanish palabras, strange English jergas. Sometimes, I kept quiet, as if my mouth was sewn shut.

But Columbus was a conqueror like me, and we all bleed red. Here in this land I went through a metamorphosis, from a caterpillar, worm-like and wet, to a butterfly. Like the country’s flag, its colors bright, I added blue to my red and white. They call me a citizen now, but nothing changes.

To some, I’m still the niño with a mouth stitched shut.

I don’t remember being rescued, just that I must have been. I was under for less than a minute, managing not to swallow water, yet all I remember is the water’s loving embrace, how it squeezed the air from my lungs, and attempted to replace it with a fatal kiss. I remember how dark it was, my hands nothing more than murky shadows, formless through the muddy more-green-than-blue haze. I remember how I lost all sense of direction, pushed and pulled from all sides, unable to find the surface. I remember how my fingertips stung, sliced open from an earlier jaunt, down the short slide that ended midair. I remember how my tongue turned sour with the taste of over-chlorinated water.

But most of all, I remember the fear, the second-long centuries that I spent trapped, alone in a world unknown, smothered by the silence, the distant pain ringing through my head, the third-person replay of my fall from grace, just missing the handle of the zipline. I remember the shock of disappointment as I realized that I had climbed to the top for nothing.
Nostalgia is an Action, Like Rigor Mortis

Marielena Cartagena

I forget my indifference, my blueprints for escape,
when, from the window of my crumbling tower,
I see your city line; Hartford,
an abbreviation of buildings floating behind
an exclamation of blood-orange,
a glowing gash of wound
stitched together by the sleepy darkness
that makes us all the same royal shade of blue;
I think of your Preston Street,
the million nightmares that crawled
between its timbered russet cavities;
your Winship Street, where the nightmares
followed us in our bedposts, our lamps, then went off
like a brown bomb in our softest sleep,
when we were almost comfortable;
I think about your Franklin Ave,
the Italian bakeries on every corner,
like apologetic palate cleansers, washing the metallic taste
of last night’s bullet off our tongues;
Mozzicato near the credit union,
where our mothers cashier’d their checks
for the mouth, and bought us more time,
and a few rainbow cookies, but only si me dan — if I’m given;
your Main Street, and the gilded building
that casts our bruises in gold, turned us into polished relics,
our dollar store gems briefly measured in karats;
the “rich” streets, the “mansions” near your Goodwin Park,
where at night we imagined ourselves dancing
to Chopin, or Bach, or Mozart,
behind their open windows, in their empty living rooms,
our souls fully furnished and drunk off their imported wine;
I look out into your city, Hartford,
and remember your walls pregnant with our Crayola outlines
over cheap plaster, your gleaming garbage bag windows
that kept us lukewarm and imprisoned ——
your flooded gutters exhuming Newport butts
and childhood prehistoric paper boats with no survivors;
from a distance, you look like an almost dream,
an impressionist painting, exchanging shallow breaths
for brush strokes, violence for gestures, struggle for color;
because art only begins where there is resistance:
and you remind me that I was there, Hartford,
that I resisted — that I was art.
“Hello, Jane, welcome! How are you doing today?” the nurse announces from the lobby entryway.

She seems nice, I think. She’s young, maybe a student? I’m not sure, but her smile seems genuine. That’s one thing I’ll always be able to tell.

I make eye contact to acknowledge her, followed by a single “hold on” finger in the air, the best I can muster. It’s inappropriate to have this kind of conversation across the waiting room anyway.

Standing isn’t a given anymore. The legs just aren’t made of the same stuff they once were. Getting up is mostly on the arms now. Got to let the armrests do the work until the transfer to the cane, but I guess that’s part of why I’m here.

“It’s great to meet you, Jane. Please, follow me right this way.”

I can tell she’s walking slower than she has to. Good thing. She’s still smiling. Why is she so happy? I don’t think she’s really this happy to see me. Maybe she read my file. What does she know? Why is she smiling?

She leads me down the hall and into a small, square room. “Right this way and please have a seat. Thank you.”

In the center of the room is a table with two chairs on either side. She gestures to the chair next to the window. “Thanks for coming in today. If it’s all right with you, I think it best if we just jump right in.”

I nod once slowly with eyes closed in agreement.

“Today we’re going to be doing a few activities. Some will be easy, and some will be hard. All that matters is you try your best.”

Of course she smiles at me when she says that. She read my file. I bet she knows I’m not gonna do good. She’s always smiling. Why the hell is she always smiling?

“... and then you’ll write your answer here. Do you understand?”

Ummmm, what the hell did she just say? Shit. I just missed that, all of that, and I can’t ask her to repeat it; that’d look bad. I’ll just nod my head and tap this pencil.

“Okay. Great. You have twenty minutes, starting now.”

Okay okay, focus. You can figure it out. Go ahead, you got this. Okay. Question one: “Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, how depressed do you feel at the current moment? With 1 being not depressed and 5 being very depressed.”

Geez, they really get you on the first one. How depressed am I? How depressed are you?? Ha, yeah, that’s right, but really, why do you even care if I’m depressed? I’m not here to see if I’m depressed, I’m here because my son made me. My son, my only son, how could he do this to me. I’ve been nothing but good to him his entire life and he sends me here, to this. Here, with the lady who always smiles and the questions about depression. What even is depression? I’m not depressed. Well, I’m not sad and I don’t wake up and cry every day. Sure I don’t move around as much cause of the legs but I wouldn’t say I’m depressed. I wish Philip was here. He would know what to say to get me out of this. He had a way with his son. Philip was a good man. I miss Philip. We used to have such fun. I remember when he would take me down to the theater to dance on Fridays after his shift at the quarry. He wasn’t tall or in great shape like some of the others, but boy could he dance. I haven’t danced in so long. I don’t even think I could anymore. What would give to go on another date with my beloved Philip.

“... and time’s up,” she says as she walks in the room. “Please put your pencil down.”

What? Who said that? Pencil?? Oh, this pencil? Where did this pencil come from? What are these papers? Who is this woman here and why does she keep smiling?

“Who, who are you?”

“Who, who are you?”

“I’m nurs-”

“Who, who are you?”

“You seem nice. Are you a student? You have a lovely smile.”

“Ma’am I-”

“Is Philip here? Where’s Philip?”

art by Taurean Brown

art by Molly Jacobsen
I knew Her as Greggory

I knew a girl
before the world had the chance to destroy her,
spitting hate in her face
and causing her makeup to run
in tacky black tears down her cheeks,
leaving too dark streaks
against her coffee skin;
only, I didn’t know she was a girl.

I remember when she started wearing headbands,
and how all the boys laughed.
She was stuck within a male skin,
and she didn’t fit in.
I remember how she smiled,
like a spotlight in the fluorescent lit room,
when I told her it looked nice.

I remember the rumors,
after she left,
about how she was expelled
for having the courage to be herself.
How she was sent home crying,
when she refused to change out of her dress.

The thing that haunts me,
in the end,
is that I wasn’t her friend.
I was a simple satellite,
floating just outside her orbit.
I didn’t even know her real name,
the one written on her soul,
all I had was her dead one,
the one painted across her skin.

Being Black in America

When we say black lives matter,
y’all get offended, saying,
all lives matter,
but do white men get shot every day?

Did a young white man get shot
for holding a bag of Skittles
and an Arizona iced tea?

Did a young white man
with a baby face get shot
for standing outside of a liquor store?

Did a young white boy, a child,
get shot for playing with a toy gun?

If all lives matter, why do statistics
show black men are more likely
to die at the hands of the police?

If all lives matter, why don’t
white mothers lecture their sons
on what to do when cops pull them over?

If all lives matter, why can’t
white men go to the store
without getting followed by clerks?

If all lives matter, how come
white boys can wear black hoodies
and jog around the neighborhood?

So, white people, all lives don’t matter.
Ours do.
Ashley Hemphill

**Contortionist**

I bend to make a bridge,
twisting my back
so that I become a creature
that screams for pity.

No longer a steel spine,
I have become a woven mat
made with bone marrow.
If I don’t do so
there would be no welcome mat
for the place I call home.

Phallon Steer

**Blazed**

*after Donika Kelly’s “Fourth Grade Autobiography”*

We were in Beijing, China.
There were lots of buildings and so many interesting faces.
We took the subway,
my first time,
on our way to see giraffes at the zoo.
My favorite animal.
The thrill took over me
as I twirled around the open space, moving like a snake,
throwing it back using the hand bars for support.
My first show.
A man watched intently, his eyes dancing with me
approval on his face and arousal in his pants.
My first admirer.
I turned around to an elder
frantically ignoring the man’s sneaky peeks,
black lace under a daisy mini dress.
My first fetishizer.
Their examinations forever lay on me.
This was the last time I rode the subway.
If I was a Poet

Ayobamii Oseni

If I was a poet,
I would compare your sense of humor,
the echo of your laugh,
to Eddie Murphy’s cackle.
If I was a poet,
I would tell my last boyfriend the way you hold me,
with your dark, protective arms.
If I was a poet,
I would tell the world how you treat me,
like Nefertiti,
a gorgeous, Egyptian queen.
If I was a poet,
I would describe our adventures to my friends,
11:00 p.m., caressing, shimmying and running
in the thundering, pouring rain.
If I was a poet,
I would tell my mom what really happened that night
in Motel 66 on Cromwell Avenue.
But sadly,
I’m not a poet.

Rebecca LeBlanc

Until She Met You

She was a beam of light,
glowing from a fluorescent bulb
until she met you,
with your slick black hair
long and greasy, hugging your shoulders
like a willow’s branches sweep the earth’s soil,
your deceitful white smile
hiding leftover secrets, wedged
between mangled teeth.
You claimed her,
chained her to your ego,
and refused to release.
You molded her into a bashful
boomerang, bent her spine
so with every flick of the wrist,
if you waited just long enough

she’d come hurling back.
Men like you have powers like that,
the kind that bend and twist a girl,
the kind that sends her running in circles,
the kind that leaves her wanting more,
until she has nothing left to give,
but even the greatest magicians
eventually spoil their best tricks.
It’s just a matter of catching
them in the middle of the act.
Erin Starkey

Sunflower

Peeping up amongst the grass, shining her golden yellow, capable of being seen for miles, her thick stalk unable to be plucked, her roots fixed strong in deep fertile soil.

She stands up against frequent catcalls, her head bowed down, doing her best to avoid attention that her aura brings, but she is no daisy easily torn up by a dog’s claw.

They try to axe her down with a blade full of darkness but she continues to grow tall, sixteen feet above to prove her importance which shouldn’t have to be proven.

Victoria Chrostowski

Dinner with a Friend

One year visiting my grandparents’ farm, the farm I went to every other summer, dirt roads and hot sun in a small European Village, a farm in the middle of corn and cattle, my sweet grandmother caught one of my summertime companions, a chicken she grabbed by the neck like a purse handle, took it over to the house, and with her shiny cleaver on the small outdoor table, she raised the knife, and chopped off its head.

The feeling stays, useless and confused: grandmother continues prepping, moving as though she didn’t just cut off a head, feet still in place, chicken’s body still in motion. She grabs the pot, emotionless, cold, and we go back inside and prepare for dinner as the night continues on.
Rebecca LeBlanc

The Tale of the Drunken Sailor

He sets sail at night, amidst the hurling ocean tides cracking open a bottle of single barrel bourbon, the most essential staple in a diet of a man far from home.

The sailor eases his mind, sip after sip, with skin tainted yellow, lumpy, like unchurned butter. His hands, old and worn, quaking like unsteady seesaws.

There’s trouble ahead.

Before battening down the hatches he takes one long look at the sorbet horizon, wondering where and how his calculations went wrong, what the tide took from home, the lives he nurtured, his own identity.

Blaming the boat for the miscalculations, he curses at the wind, and at the tattered sails, only to realize he had the control this whole time.

If he was going to make it to shore, he was going to have to navigate himself.

Emer Paulin

Underneath a Home

Boxes stacked tall and stuffed to the ceiling, Christmas decorations, a baby crib gathering dust, empty bronze birdcages, bins filled with plastic shaped like animals and people, primary color Lego sets broken and smashed from the trip downstairs, toys from my dad’s childhood, even my old moldy doll tucked in a box under my bed. When you have nothing growing up, you keep everything. You never know when you’ll need a handful of plastic Easter eggs. Everything too precious to throw out, but nothing special enough to stay. Maybe what we don’t see makes the home.
I wish I could be as versatile as a potato, an adjustable flavor to fit finicky taste buds, baked, boiled or steamed, fried or scalloped, shaped into fries or tiny Hash browns or crunchy Crisps.

But humans are not like potatoes. They cannot be squashed into a partner’s dream, or whittled to think differently. They cannot be put into an oven, coming out as a different version of themselves, still full of gusto to satisfy another.

I cannot repurpose myself to fit the assorted molds you have, to gain your approval, in order to qualify for a spot on your impeccable silver plate.

Humans are not Potatoes

Cynthia Caraballo

letting you go

after countless years of friendship, you confessed your love and I accepted your feelings like a letter I had been waiting for at the end of it all you drove your love knife into me 6 inches deep you reminded me of my worthlessness how I could never compare how I was a toy to be played with then tossed away when I had finally emerged from that dark pit I let go of you like a child lets go of a balloon slowly, then all at once.

Erin Starkey

art by Diyana Kaleva

photo by Maura O’Connor

Humans are not Potatoes

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Morning

Before blue descends
Hushed by dark limbs
The sky is a Sea unfurled
Over a body
with forgotten shores
Over stones still
their cold true selves
Over the tongue
resting in its moist bed
Anchor and safe haven
relinquished
to swells and furrows
Even the breath
rocking back and forth
does not recall itself
And the only dream
perhaps
of rain

photo by Jennifer Paquin
Drink water. Watch the news. Sleep.
Admit you have a problem. Look at the news. Eat some chicken and dumplings.
Remember what life is like for minorities. Listen to rain sounds.
Burn the flags. Get drunk.
Don’t lie to yourself. Go to rallies.
Take pills. Break social norms.
Meditate.
Sign a petition.
Find beauty in others.
Reject the president. Accept the news.
Marissa Minor

**Bittersweet Addiction**

Mama keeps her favorite perfume bottle on her bedside.
It smells sweet like roses, champagne,
expired '80s love,
and swells red on her wrist.

Daddy keeps his favorite brown bottle on his bedside.
It swishes in his mouth and swirls on his swollen lips at 8 o’clock every Friday night.

Says the liquor stings, says it tastes bitter, says it makes him sick.

Then promises he won’t drink again.

But nothing is worse than his plum colored knuckles hitting walls, shattering glass, and replacing every empty promise with another brown bottle, cracking every wall of trust we ever had for him.

But now, every Friday night
I subdue my past demons with a companion shaped like the top half of an hourglass, and I guess you could say I’m just as bad as them.
How to Fly Down Stairs

It’s not a power to abuse. There must be a reason, an urgency, to employ it.

The best setting is a stairwell, ten or twelves steps, then a landing. The secret is a tight grip, then a leap, then a stop.

But not really a stop; the foot simply touches the landing long enough to pivot the body down the parallel descent of steps.

This is not the sure-footed gait of the youth skipping steps. That sensation is still earthbound; it is not flying. This is.

I believe I have done it; I remember having done it; I never doubt I can do it again.

I am simply awaiting the next urgency.

art by Andreas Varnauskas
Porch Light

“Keep the candle burning, keep the light on for me... don’t lose hope.” – Fishermens’ wives would keep a candle burning in the windows, to guide their husbands back from deep-sea fishing trips. – Urban Dictionary

All day, I sew
dry tissued squares
freed of the leafy tea remains
they once held,
corners carefully prised, one from the other,
streaming cups of comfort
long forgotten, wrung from the transulence, puddled onto paper, ready for brush-painted lines.

All we want is innocence—
someone
or something who will not
lose our moorings, pin our corners flat, pour our heart onto the floor.

The cold months are not finished with us.
Stones on the walk,
collected from the forest, chosen from the riverbed,
arranged in triskeles
under the pine tree in the backyard
still, the embroidered scraps, like milky shrouds leave nothing else rendered.
The porch light flickers, goes out.
I reach for the scissors
snapping thread. Scaling the step ladder, wondering at the redundance of both ‘step’ and ‘ladder’ with screw driver teetering on the top rung.

What if I become the fallen?
Who would find me crumpled on the floor?
My mind’s eye races—
reeling in a lifetime of memory,
In the darkness, who would come first?
the next pup or the cat?
My son is far away, inside that small wreckage of a phone I’m always searching for, with its promise to bring the world close.

Held in some careful embrace, I keep my balance and so does the screwdriver. The flashlight between my teeth, I unscrew the anchors, pry away the shade loosen the old bulb.

I hold the dusty orb in my hand, close to my ear, joggling it back and forth listening for that tiny, inner chinkle of lost berth, the insides unbound. But nothing.

Twisting the new bulb from its package, I’m hoping it’s not an electrical problem.

Momentarily blinded by the sudden light, I lurch back down the steps of the ladder, back to the table, back to sewing, back to the lines drawn,
each punch of the needle, every slip of thread the familiar comfort and rhythm, of day into night.
There is a place far north
where hills groan
up so high
you can press
a cheek their sides
dip beneath
and ascend
sometimes
turbulent curves
you come to
birches
thick arms
reaching past
even surprised
and sturdy evergreens
branches stark against
blue sky
raining down
marking the place
always
of beginning
and release

After a brisk October run
along bosky trails,
I soak in a hot bath
and breathe in the steam
through a face cloth,
and also breathe in the durable scent
of where I was, of leaves,
the bark of trunks, limbs and brush,
of varied detritus and clods of earth.
It’s all in my lungs and nose,
abdominal cavity,
feet, hands and hair,
in my skin, and vibrant recall.
I inhale and exhale the woods
until the place is no longer there,
when the air inside of me changes.
Steve Straight

**Glitter**

*April, 2020*

Slowed to a crawl, isolated from each other, turned inside ourselves by this invisible glitter that travels as a fine mist and clings to everything, or might,

we are all poets now; savoring the garden soil between our fingers, astonished at the sprout of a pea unfurling from the dark,

aware of each flash of goldfinch to and from the feeder, the confetti of white petals snowing from the pear tree, across the street a shimmering vernal brook,

while far above us the sky heals itself right before our eyes.

---

Steve Straight

**Escape Room Pantoum**

This map of the Arctic might be a clue. Remember: solutions can be large or small. Is it warm in here, or is it just me? That clock is fast, if I'm not mistaken.

Remember: solutions can be large or small. Right now we’re trapped inside our own notions. That clock is moving faster than it was. I wonder what the rubber boots are for.

Right now we’re trapped inside our old notions. If we don’t solve it, will we get a new room? Now water seeps in; that explains the boots. Things don’t seem connected but they really are.

If we don’t solve it, will we get a new room? Is it wicked hot in here, or is it me? Things don’t seem connected, but alas they are. This map of the Arctic just has to be a clue.
Jeanine DeRusha

Sonnet with Metaphors

When I’m gone find the black hole shaped like me. 
I’m leaving every bruise I ever got.
Paint your walls with them, those blue injuries.
My bones will tell a story of kneeling 
Use my heart as a door stop, my skin your carpet. I want to soften your footsteps, quiet your load, clean dirt from your boot treads.
Use my hair to clean your gun, grind my teeth for buttons. I can hold you, fasten you.
When what’s left is ash, sew a flag for me. Carve stone. I want to say I gave it all
I had. You cooked my raw bones to flavor your soup. You ate a good meal and felt full.
What’s love, after all, but a lathe?