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At the Edge of a Cliff by Rachel Hart

Awakened by the light coming through the window,
I walk out into the night to sit at the edge of the cliff,
barefoot, Pendleton blanket wrapped around my shoulders,
the dirt and grass cold between my toes,
I feel the ocean vibrate below me as it crashes into the shore.
I look up at the stars, squinting to make them out,
The moon's reflection overshadows everything,
But I can see the white foam of the waves coming in for miles.
The wind blows my hair around my neck and into my eyes,
As I breathe in the cold salty air,
and try to make out where the ocean meets the horizon in the night sky

Balance by Mark Burns

Late one fall afternoon
I pause in the Harman Center parking lot
fork fingers through the chain link fence
and scan the school track and playing field below,

There is a young father with his daughter there.
She is about six with a brown ponytail.
It's her first day without training wheels.
He stoops awkwardly, runs beside her holding her upright
as she pedals around the oval.
She smiles, a watermelon at a Sunday picnic smile, and laughs.
He holds her up two, three laps.
My back hurts watching,

"Again" she cries.
Again they go.
Again he stoops beside her blue bike.
"Let go!" she yells. And he does.
She crashes into grass.
She hops up.
"Again" she insists.
Again he starts her and then lets go.
She stays up one-Mississippi longer
then crumples into gravel.
"Again" she demands, climbing back on the seat.

So they go, and again he runs alongside her
Longer this time.
She doesn't know he has let go.
She stays up until the first curve.

I turn for home and think
That we never stop trying
to steer and stay upright
to find our balance around life's daunting curves.
We never stop wanting someone to hold us
and still we cry to be set free.
Divorced, edging the cliff of retirement,
I admire the dad's stamina, the girl's grit.
I straighten my shoulders,
smile and say
"Again".

Baskets, Apples, Tumors, Trains by Chris Jeffris

Words have no biological properties yet
they can stink like soured milk.

Words often fail me—trickle off the page,
dissolve like a cloud.

Once, in the past, when this happened,
I placed a museum quality, Navajo sweetgrass wedding basket by
my keyboard—an offering to my poem. It was filled with
loaves of bread, apples and the healing powers of Yei.

When that didn't work,

I proffered a set of inoperable tumors
fortified with a bible, bowls of bushmeat and
several broken hearts.

Ignored.

I tried whale and a derailed commuter train.

All but useless.

Even after I dragged a fallen empire over a white mountain,
filled it with sad children and slaves, wrapped it in a plague, and
laid it at the foot of my poem, there was
no reaction.

Finally, desperate, I hurled a
crock full of my mother's bones and
the smell of death
across my desk.

That worked.

BLOOD RED MOON by Rod Nelson

Are the numbers,
the photos,
not enough to convince?
that the winds of climate change
are blowing a blacksmith's bellows
across the globe,
boiling up hurricanes,
whipping up wildfires,
burning down paradise.

Do the doubting Thomases
need to run their hands across the blackened hulks of burned out automobiles,
poke their fingers in the eye holes of the charred cadavers,
stare into the drought-dusted mouth of famine,
to understand,
that the fossil fuel robber barons,
the Judas Priests of our society,
are hawking their lies,
selling our grandchildren's tiny bodies
for a few more pieces of silver.
Sending their popup Senator to the forum floor,
carrying snowballs,
and crying "Hoax"

Ten thousand white-coated scientists can't possibly be right.

The pleading eyes of the mothers over the millennia are on us.
The mothers who labored their children out of prehistoric caves,
nursed them through dark-age dungeons,
preserving humanity's DNA,
walking us to the very steps of Utopia.
The earth's creatures,
God's Garden of Eden creatures,
look on anxiously,
as they scurry about newly-formed deserts,
watch their young drown in the floods of rising tides,
their numbers dwindling,
disappearing.

Yet we drive our big rigs past
the Last Chance Saloon in Paris
down that hot, dry road to Armageddon.

The tiny frog sits humbly at my back door,
trusting its steward.

My young granddaughter smiles and holds my hand,
trusting her grandfather.

Yet,
still,
we all barrel on,
toward a Malthusian perdition.

The canaries grow silent,
while Caligula fiddles with his tweeting machine,
and newscasters speak of porn-star spankings with magazines.

Yeast dying in our own excrement,
there'll be no deus ex machina,
cause the rapture won't save us from our god given free will,
capitalist innovation can't stage an intervention in this Tragedy of the Commons,
and Darwin's Galapagos can't evolve ahead of the bulldozer through the meadow.

The four horsemen of the apocalypse are on the ride,
soon to have their day,
their way,
with us all.
It's an ashen rain a comin'
a blood red moon on the rise.

Bounty by Terry Lockett

When I was five maybe six
a neighbor's hen got out.
It was a hot reservation day
paved roads like clotted lava.
She asked me to catch it.
I sped away, barefooted.
That big red hen was a scrambler
made choppy flights over pavement,
gravel alleys, rose gardens.
It took me all morning.
Welts on bantam arms and legs,
Blisters on my feet, hair soaking wet
a shiny quarter warm in my fist
confetti of scarlet feathers
As I flew home.

The Boys from Michoacan by Linda Brown

for Saul Valencia and Salvador Bravo

I go to school because I love the stories
that take root in my fifth period class. You know
these stories are lies, Maria tells me. I don't care.
Lies keep me alive these days. Each morning
I search for new ones in the bathroom mirror.
I need them as much as morning coffee and mascara.
Besides, Nadine Gordimer says that honesty
is what you know about a person. I know nothing
about the boys from Michoacan. It is enough.

Saul swaggers into class each day, says
I'm his favorite teacher. Then he laughs
and reminds me he wants "A's". Mostly,
I like his wide grin and raised eyebrows.
They promise a story and I am never disappointed.
"Favorite teacher," he says, "you like to eat iguana?"
He asks as if he has just said "peanut butter and jelly".
"No, really," he says, kissing his fingers,
letting the class feast on a tale of pet iguanas
at the Country Store and a manager's rage.
"Write it down," I beg him. "An iguana poem."
He laughs and pretends to write a poem in the air.
All of Saul's poems are smoke, but not enough fire
to roast an iguana. Tomorrow he might write
about sea turtle eggs or boots soft as
a good woman's breath. Not today.

Salvador arrives late. He slides into his desk,
runs a hand through his too pretty hair. He
knows stories. When the laughter settles
he will take us to a different Michoacan
where mountains taste bitter as wild grass,
where horses graze lazily as though the dead
do not call them by name. We lean in close
to his fire and smell the charred remains
of forgotten fathers and sons. We
take his memories into our mouths
and hold them gentle as reins until
he guides us north across the river.

Some day Maria will understand
the importance of lies. Each day they carry me
away from myself. Each night I taste
roasted iguana, travel the path of the moon,
glad for one more day of stories.

A Collage of Rotary Phones by Kathy Stancik

A blue rotary telephone hiding out in a rickety shed, smack in the middle of an orange grove. A blue telephone with binoculars, perched at the top of a valencia tree, watching for strangers. An orange telephone swinging on a coiled twelve foot cord, looped over the branch of a blue valencia tree. Blue telephones swimming laps in blue sky, nearly invisible. An orange valencia tree with perfect orange fruit, nearly ripe, shaped like rotary dials. A lone blue handset, crying. The horizon layered orange with rotary phones, sleeping on their sides. Blue telephones call each other orange, just to get a rise.

Cutting Each Other's Hair During the Corona Virus by Dorothy Armstrong

We are two women who got married
seven years ago
but that is not our story of courage.
This story is about
sitting in the yard
in a plastic chair
an old towel around my shoulders,
clippers, scissors with teeth
on a side table
and my wife
with an anxious face
coming toward me
with sharp, small scissors.

If you think
we have no training for this job,
you are wrong.
We watched an old guy
with thinning hair
cut his own
on YouTube.

But now,
my wife lifts the clippers
to the back of my neck.
The goldfinches in the apple tree,
dapper in their bold spring plumage,
chirp encouragement.
Our dog watches
from the sidelines,
face filled with alarm.

The clippers buzz their way
along my neck,
then she grabs handfuls of hair
on top and lets the toothy scissors
munch on each clump.

When we switch, I let the clippers
linger and a bald spot
glares on the back of her head.

After,
when we look in the mirror
my formerly fluffy hair
is flat and the back of her head
is too close to bald,
but we glitter
smiles to each other
as if we had just renewed our vows.

The Edge by Fain Rutherford

The skeletal juniper on life support
laughs her canyon-lipped refusal, cliffed-
out and leaning over the plumb-line drop
into air heated blue by the desert below.

Roots, tangled and rattling.
Confused tubing fastened to feldspar.
No longer vascular. Capillary action
inactive. Transpiration shallow.

Corrupted bark falls away in black shingles.
Shriveled seed pods past procreative hope.
Amber sap drools incontinent, staining the slickrock.
Blown branches all grown in one direction,

like the wiry black hair of an ancient crone,
grinning as she steps over the edge.

Estate Sale by Kate Bowditch

My life splinters before me.
Shards fly across the lawn,
Falling into younger hands.

GHAZAL: MY LIFE UNDERWATER AT THE HOOK, LINE, AND SINKER by Joanna Thomas

It's not easy, being a mermaid. The silver, sometimes it flakes from my tail
(which, let's be clear, is not a fish's caudal fin, but a fluke, like a whale's tail).

And yet, believe me, I do not yearn for human legs, replete with countless toes. . .
why should I, when my own fine spindle body glows its greenish-blue-iridescent-teal?

I press my palms against the glass, and pucker to blow a kiss. My bubbly smile unfurls,
spinnaker bright, as tips fill up my jar. But inside this tank, submersion takes its toll.

I tell you, my silver, it flakes. This bar's a dive. I miss the dinoflagellates, my mirror
and my comb. I miss the moon, the hurricanes, the slender seagrass waving tall.

The bartender pulls another beer. . . I pine for the ocean's white foam.
Fishermen jockey for front row seats. They want a good look at my tail.

Goats Who Stare at Pedestrians by Susan Sampson

I am striding along on my morning walk
past the field where a neighbor herds
fourteen pygmy goats.
Fourteen jaws stop chewing,
fourteen sets of eyes turn to stare
like I am the drum major leading a parade,
or more, I am the princess on a floral float,
I am the low-rider
switching my hydraulic lifts,
I am the high school marching band,
the sheriff's mounted posse—
I lift my feet a little higher
because I am the whole parade

MORELS by Joseph Powell

At that moment when the calypso orchids
put on their speckled slippers, their thin legs
stretching from mottled green skirts,
and grass is high enough to bend,
morels poke their heads out of the duff
then sit like those old women in hair dryers
lined up at a beauty salon, bent on reading
the time away until dried and set.

My Uncle's Third Eye by Mark Fuzie

My uncle's third eye first appeared
As a worry line on his forehead
A blink-less wrinkle above his eyebrow.
The first few days, it stayed closed.
On the fifth day it opened, blue,
Not the dirty brown of the other two.
It looked left and right, up and down,
But my uncle said it worked none.
On the sixth day he could see the mountains,
And the weather wave patterns and cold,
But only from a distance, he said,
Like people were in a diorama, he said.
His clear vision came on the seventh day.
His wife was a rabbit beating a drum
And singing a gambling song she never stopped.
His volcano brother spat eggs and hummed along.
The bookkeeper scratched velvet off her antlers
And two days later a rattle snake
Came through his boss's eye.
It swallowed eggs like pills then
Ate its own tale, rattling a warning
Not to swallow the venom while
My uncle's boss sounded a tattoo.
The battle ripped up the hill.
When my uncle didn't know what he saw,
He asked a doctor to sew it shut.
"We have threads the same color as
Your eyebrow," said the doctor, sewing
"But leave them in past five days,
Those who see you will see the scar"
My Uncle now lives in Sequim where
He looks the Strait across to another country.

Now it is April where we lost control of the controlled burn last October by Susan Johnson

And the ground spinning beneath us goes on talking
—Joy Harjo

Walk with me through this forest. Do you hear
spring beauties burst through burned
ground? Listen to them open in praise song
here along the edge of charred trees.

Taste and see the sweet flowers, these
tender leaves. Give thanks, then nourish
yourself with their resilience, food of earth
from which you come, to which you will return.

Listen to glacier lily. Do you hear the bright
yellow call of that one, alone in blackened litter?
And here on the border of the burn,
listen to grief of green needles, fallen,

clustered at the foot of pine, the dirge
of dried ferns flattened on forest floor,
and there on the trail, do you hear scattered
petals of fir cones call out for renewal?

ONCE A FISHING VILLAGE by Chuck Forster

The taxi driver handed me his cell phone
opened to a photo of the town we were leaving.
It was dated 1965 -
small thatched-roof houses, chickens in the dirt road,
dogs lazing in the tree shade,
in the near distance the sea -
a scene befitting a Hemingway novel.

But now on both sides of the oceanfront road
it's high-rise condos, nearly every parcel of vacant land
framed by a fence with drawings of a future
sure to bring you 'The Good Life You Deserve'.
Gone are the guava, papaya and avocado trees,
gone too the leaves and branches raked into
perpetually smoldering piles, fragrant ribbons of smoke
mingled with the heady scent of flowering plumeria -
the sweet smell of small-town Mexico.

Where the road west comes to an end at the beach
a few fishermen still anchor their dinghies above the tideline.
They come early most mornings, drag their boats
to the surf and venture seaward to set their nets.
At the midday return they unsheathe knives
to gut the catch on a tall wooden bench.
Pelicans line the sand to spar over tossed entrails.
The pescador throws a bloody handful skyward -
hovering frigate birds dive, snatch the guts and dash seaward,
tenaciously harassed by hungry competitors
for the dripping tendrils of viscera dangling from their beaks.

Los pescadores, the avian squabbling and acrobatics,
the breeze from the sea.

OUTER SPACE! By Damarez Vasquez (age 10)

Outer space is a unique place, it is my work space.

Outer space is my tiny home, it is my cozy, quiet place.

Outer space is my movie theater, it is my library for all my favorite books.

Outer space is my game room, it is my get away space.

Outer space is my preferred place to be in.

I LOVE MY ROOM!!

Portrait of Beachcomber by Nancy Atkins

A forehead etched
in timelines of the tide
is dotted with freckles and age spots—
storytellers of life lived under the sun.

Temples the color of a weathered boardwalk
give way to wispy windswept strands of hair
blowing in the wind
like a fraying flag.

Eyes of beach glass green
strewn with glints of amber
peer out over a sandcastle nose
drooping in life's mid-afternoon.

Clamshell cheeks ride high
upon an easy, wide smile
that rolls out waves
of laughter.

A shy chin recedes
into a shadowed cove
hiding a scar of disobedience
from walking on the jetty.

Conch shell ears grow larger every year
but still young enough to hear the
sound of crashing waves in the
shells she gathers from the sand.

Precarious by Terry Cooper

The bird has talons that help it perch
On spindly fingers of trees
They are born in a snag of branches
Toppled by a mere nudge
From wind or predator
As precious as vulnerable.
Can you imagine spending your life in the air?
Navigating gravity, wind, rain
Winter
Currents
Gusts
On the watch for larger birds
Or creatures who climb?
And, still they sing, flit, soar, hover
Is all that grace and freedom
Desperation?

I've seen eagles
Soaring off the cliff
In circles above the Pacific
Then overhead
Perched in a tree close enough for a good look
I'm pretty sure it could ruin me.
And yet their world is in the air

Nest, egg, eaglet,
Wind, rain
Leaving the nest for the first time
Could be the last move
Hunger
Always the hunger
Their food supply shines in the shine of water.

And here I stand. perched on two feet
My own spindly legs
Stubby toes for talons
Straining at times to stay upright
It's the inner forest that's most treacherous
So many snags
Flimsy perches
Shadows
And how do we hang on,
Much less forgive
When the storms are of our own making?

Sageland Spring by Claire Carpenter

The revolving Earth proceeds along her traces.
Soon her northern realms won't point so resolutely to the dark.
The snow will melt from sagebrush-covered ridges.
The sun will rise a little higher on its arc.

The hills will fill with grass widows and Lomatium.
Young salmon ride the river to the sea.
White-crowned sparrows return to flit among the branches
and yearning gardeners will finally plant their peas.

Creek-beds in the canyon run with water.
Cottonwoods shake out bright new leaves.
Like the trees, I'm seeking resurrection--
springtime sun a balm for winter grief.

Like the northern hemisphere through the months of winter,
I have been tilted toward the long dark night.
A green mist has spread across the valley.
It's time to turn back to the light.

Tableau by Ed Stover

Mother stands at the dining room window
gazing out at the empty driveway.
She holds herself,
left arm across stomach,
right elbow resting in left hand,
the long, delicate fingers of her right hand
gently tugging the soft folds of skin
beneath her chin.
She is processing what has happened.
There are no tears.
She is beyond that now—
the melodrama, the noise.
By her side are the children.
Both girls crowd close, hold her skirt.
Why is Mama so quiet?
They are too young to understand.
The boy does understand.
The boy is a blank piece of paper
on which a story is being written—
a story he will visit again and again,
never tiring of the characters,
the twists and turns,
the images, colors, smells, and sounds.
He is in the story,
yet he is not.
He is a boy in a house
with his mother and sisters
gazing out at an empty driveway.
It is winter, but there is no snow.
There is only the wind—cold, cutting.

To Be Composed on a Balcony Overlooking the Plaza by Marie Marchand

I want to write a left-handed poem
called "Autumn in Santa Fe."
It requires travel, for a whole season.
It requires attention. It requires rest.

I will study the movement of light.
How a gentle luminosity caresses
the cinnamon hills at dusk,
and how a mellow mist infuses
dewy sagebrush at dawn.

Then I will report back to the world
all the beauty in the days and
all the beauty in the nights
and my job as a poet will be done

El Valle by Angie Araujo

¿Y porque en el valle hermano?
Es por las manzanas y su olor
Es por los colores del otoño
Es por la nieve en los picos de las montañas
Es por el sonido del rio cuando me siento junto a el
Es por el peligro del cascabel
Es por los venados que alcanzo a ver
Es por Monarca y su interior
Es por el coyote del Canyon

(English translation)

The Valley
And why in the valley brother?
It's because of the apples and their smell
It's because of the colors of autumn
It's because of the snow on the mountain peaks
It's because of the sound of the river when I sit next to it
It is because of the danger of the rattlesnake
It's because of the deer that I can see
It's because of the Monarch and its interior*
It's because of the coyote of the Canyon

* Artist note: this line is difficult to translate with full cultural meaning

THE WATERFALL by Suzanne Bishop

We awoke congratulating ourselves on four years of marriage.
Our hands hugging my belly tightly round from 32 weeks and 4 days of pregnancy.
Despite instinctual nervousness uncharted waters seemed smooth that day.

I'm sorry, there's no heartbeat.

No stopping it now, the force that pulls me under.
Death's stinging steals my footing.
I'm washed into "right here, right now".
Doors close and love amplifies the emotional thunder.
It warns me of the fall ahead.
I hold my breath.
Regardless of the white paper I lie on, proving gravity, I can't feel it and reach for something to grab onto.
Tears, heart, stomach drop.

My husband's hands soften the fall. I come up for air.
Hearing cries of life next door still makes for an abrupt landing.
Swallowed by numbing grief time keeps flowing, swiftly pulling me around the next bend.
She's gone too soon.

Loss is felt throughout a woman's body.
Blood pressures rise from pent up sorrow. Milk ducts ache with love longing to be expressed.
Arms go limp with emptiness. Ears rupture from the silence in our home
Stretched ribs protest finding their previous shape. Stitched labium burns furiously at the unfairness.
In time I learn to ride each wave with a raft of softened surrender.
Were these rapids of emotion or hormones?
Both.

My husband's loyalty is my lifeline, patiently reminding me of a truth I ground myself in.
Although the umbilical cord was cut, the spiritual connection between mother and child will never be severed.

Why I Left Tinder by Samuel Faulk

I'm done lighting matches on my skin
and calling the spark love.

I don't want the burning inferno of love anymore.
I want a slow burn.

I'm done screaming at forest fires,
wishing I was strong enough to stand.

Give me a candle flickering in the night.
Warm, supportive love.
light the hearth, and blow gently.

I'm done chasing wildfires just to feel alive,
while coughing up my lungs.

I'll take the fire of love, sure, but let it be a spark
I can hold without burning myself down.