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BLUE RIVER REVIEW

VALENTINE'S DAY
2022

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“why tacky heart-shaped decor/candy/everything should be sold year-round” by SG Huerta

we both know loss knew loss
too young and maybe that’s why
we see eye to eye on living
it the fuck up (within our (slightly
more than meager) means) cute
coffeeshop dates so we both get
a break from making each other
too-full cups from our own pot sparkling
grape juice celebrations for every
occasion we can concoct or co-opt
for the gays i can’t wait for february’s
excuse to be even more obnoxious
nationally-sanctioned night to our-
selves when you left for work
this morning i wanted to cry into
your pillow but you’ll be back
in nine hours right where you should
be right where i am waiting in this
home our home





“right red light” by Elizabeth Ellson

vacancy sign on
for thrilling flips of stomach

the kind of kissing
you’d fall sideways for

the kind of kissing
that makes you wonder

what else came before this?
what else will you

create art from
that once was my own body

“The Siesta of Restraint, the 3rd Ecstasy” by S. T. Brant

Lips of total Life, the sun that is the upper
 setting in your lunar lower,
The moon when it is most low, as in the ocean,
Sings to me from the sea
And I sing back from shore, the lolling
 and the louder roiling,
Lips transfigured as the waves...

 The waves that wash to me
I return them kissed to you O Moon...

Were I the meadows and the grass, the hillside,
I would kiss your feet
As you frolicked, and longer lived
Deeper up the hill where all the flowers wait
To life you, my lips
 would mark around your ankles
 to your shins,
And the singing of the meadows would begin
 the singing of the birds
That chorals through the universe, leaves
 alive, blown
Becoming roses in the wind
 and golden terebinths,
Apple boughs across the land!





“beneath your hands i am” by Elena Rielinger

a golden shovel after Taylor Swift

a silk cloud unraveling. a seaside cliff with salt
water mist dimming & dampening delicate air:
a figment of god or Brontë’s imagination. rain &

cold champagne. gentle curl of vanilla smoke & the
clear candlewax cooling to opaque. copper rust
shuddering a steel beam to pieces. chartreuse gleam on

grass from golden sun. bitter sip of hops off your
lips. a fresh kettle set to boil, an unlocked door.
lightning— white on violet without the violence. how i

saw a shiny trinket on a shelf & thought of you. a clock that never
chimes. nectarine peeling. the way yesterday’s coffee needed
sugar & cream. sweet milk bread dreams & anything

pink: rose quartz, seashells, blush sunrise going scarlet, reddening more.



“last people in the world” by Vienna Gaspar

it's just you and me,
last people in the world
browsing cds
still warm from each other's hands

“HAIBUN TO THE STRANGERS WHO HAVE MY BLOOD” by Quinn Forlini

Nobody knows anything for sure about St. Valentine, except that he was martyred and buried on February 14, 273 AD. We don't know what for, or if he's a conflation of two people, at least—*Valentine* was a popular name. Still, we trust his sainthood. We celebrate his death with truffles and rom-coms and this year, I go to the hospital blood bank to give my body for the first time, a divine romance, self entering self, organ infusing organ, red blood cells and white humming their pulses into new veins. As I lay on the wheeled bed, draining into a plastic bag, I feel like I'm drifting in a green sea, and I have an urge to watercolor, and new insight on drag queens, how their celebrations of self help us see constructs as false, changeable, show us how we are expansive. A suppressed love of pink opens in me like a morning glory. Science can't explain why we have blood types, and I love how definable and mysterious we are inside. And after, the bank keeps calling, begging me to return. But small blue pills cartwheel through my bloodstream now, and the packaging shrieks, DO NOT GET PREGNANT, DO NOT DONATE BLOOD, beside line drawings of babies with deformed heads, one cone-shaped, another like a balloon. *Don't read the list of side effects*, my doctor said. *There's no reason to worry until something happens*. The last thing I remember from that wheeled bed was the quiet conviction that I might understand more in that moment than I ever would, as a thought began to emerge, like frost on a winter leaf, and I watched my vision—*how strange, intriguing*—become wallpapered with sporadic holes to the rhythm of a

rumba, slow, quick-quick,
one here, one there, until I
couldn't see at all





“Vow Me” by Daniel Edward Moore

Not only did this covenant break
the silence our bodies held,
breath taught hands what to do with words,
as feverish tongues blistered our mouths
with the heat of anti-theory.

Permission was not requested.
Fear not given another chance
to punish the flesh with guilt from the past,
a sickly monastic thing.

Regardless of how long it had been
since wearing the gowns of transgression:
we draped ourselves in dangerous dreams,
pulled from the racks of Magdalene.

Then naked, we stood, in the power of promise
with bodies bigger than sorrow,
two beautiful muscular sculptures
aging in the garden of time.



“For My Husband on February 13th” by Hilary King

Perhaps one day there will be
this call for submissions:

Poems about husbands.

*Send your new, fresh words
about the person you’ve seen
every day for 18 years.*

I might get off my butt then,
write up your gray-blue eyes,
your strong shoulders, the way
you speak in complete paragraphs.
How I fell for you right away, how
I still need to earn your kindness
and remember your mystery.
Tonight I try. Tomorrow
I will take your roses.

“LOVE POEM TO DANDELIONS” by Courtney LeBlanc

I didn't know they were weeds, didn't know
their golden heads were a menace to grass
and gardens. As a child I picked them
for my mother, smiled as she filled
a pickle jar with water and placed them
on the table. My father, home for dinner
after a long day in the fields, would always
comments on the weeds that graced
the table but I didn't care. Even now
I love their cheery color, their bright
petals huddled together in a tight embrace.
And sometimes I still pluck one when
its head looks like my grandmother's hair –
gray and radiating out in a perfect sphere.
I still close my eyes and blow, make a wish.





“Home” by Elsa Talvi

If home

Is where the heart is

The safety of your loving arms

Would be where I reside

“be (my forever valentine)” by Katherine Shehadeh

be mine, be ours
be him/his/theirs
be there, be here
be somewhere near
be nor, be for
be and/or, or be but-for
be the *before*, before the storm
be sunshine, be sleet
be the dirt beneath my feet
be earth, be crust
be pizza parties, be Cheeto dust
be dirty, be clean
be the period in between
be a question mark, an EXCLAMATION
be a semicolon (questionable in operation)
be the doctor, be the patient
be forgiving of my impatience
be ready, be dressed
be wrapped-up in your Sunday best
be a present, be the past
be the future, be the last
be the first place, be best in show
be the only one I want to know
be no, be yes
be sure or at least maybe
be 99% certain (like Maury)
be the father of my baby
be him/his/theirs
be ours, be mine
be my forever valentine



“art museum” by Alexis Lee

listen, art? really not my forté. but my breath
still catches every time you smile
and my heart trips and falls flat whenever you laugh
so i couldn't really say no to the art museum

the museum directory in your hands, along with my heart of course
you flew past the vases, brush strokes, mountains
you marvelled at the paintings, darted around the statues, look, look they're so pretty!
i choked on my heart lodged in my throat and let out a 'yeah they're nice'
when what i meant to say was that they have nothing on you

truth be told, i have not a fucking clue on what was in that museum
but you were in it so i could have stayed for eternity in there
i'd stay like that forever, if you'd be happy to
you looking at the art and me looking at the art that you are



“The roses are not just red” by Ila Railkar

We were high school sweethearts
Young and beautiful and perfect – the envy of all
At dusk on the gondola
He showered me with red roses that Valentine’s Day
And under the Bridge of Sighs asked if I would be his
I had fairy lights in my eyes
I accepted him

Three anniversaries, three Valentine’s days
Three years of hugs and kisses and arguments and silences
Epiphanies and misunderstandings
Though terrifying at times
We still danced in the kitchen as I baked fresh bread
The roses were as red as ever

He sent red roses every Valentine’s Day
Perhaps it was the baby, his new promotion, or my weight gain
But when he laughed at the wife jokes
And declared himself the best parent ever
And watched the football match as I cooked dinner
I knew they had wilted

He called me crazy when I divorced him
And said I lived in a fairytale world
Today on Valentine’s Day
I explore Venice solo, huge smile on my face
And buy myself a bouquet of roses of every colour I know
White and black and pink and peach



“how to feed your Valentine your own heart” by Nicole Callräm

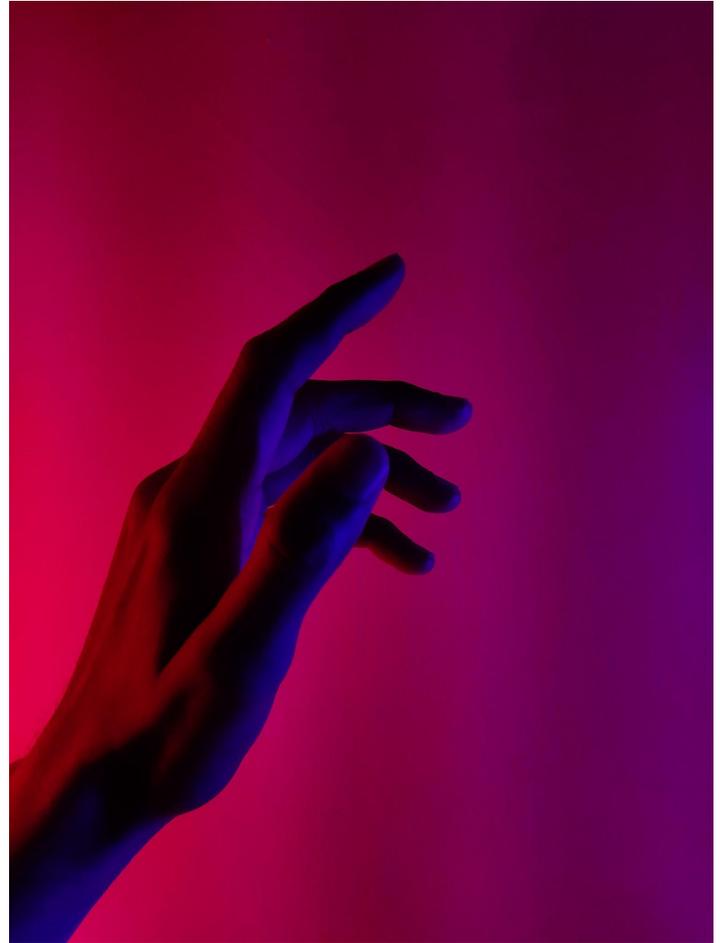
certain paths lead to certain pain
I know there isn't a way forward that doesn't include
my heart being destroyed in ten thousand separate ways
words like *smithereens* and *scraps* seem appropriate
shards as well, as though my heart were exquisite Murano glass
or some oversized Burmese ruby
no-- mine is more like a pig's heart
the type that would be delicious in a soup
steaming and hot

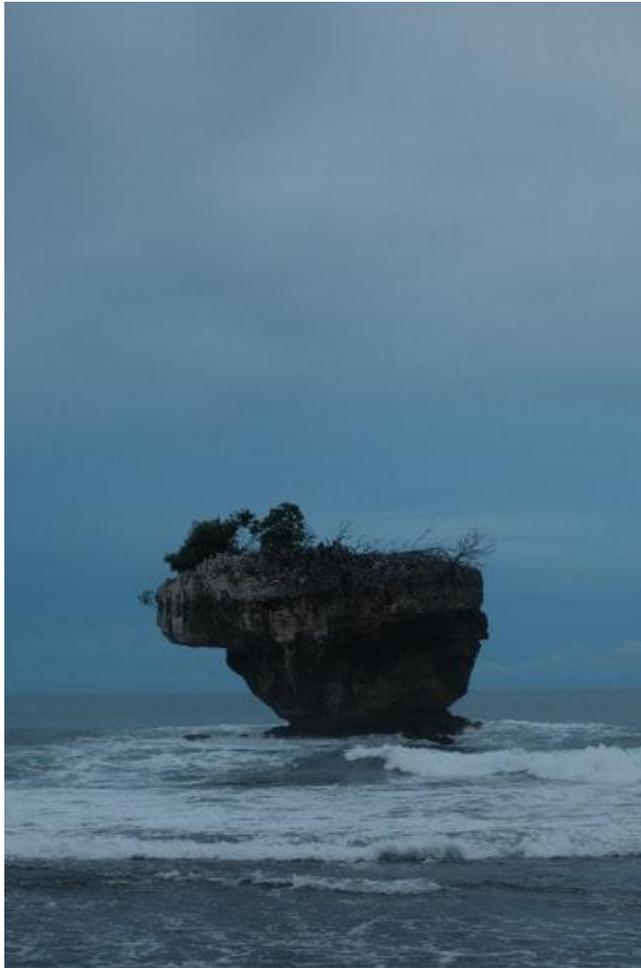
1. spread it out, slice off the fatty parts, veins, blood clots
grab it, my love-- give it a good wash, cold water is best
2. you are going to want to blanch it, remember, it has been sick and broken for awhile
this step is important to eliminate the dirt and sadness
it will keep your broth clear
3. add water
turn the flame way up
(you know how I love the discomfort, it reminds me that I still feel)
5-10 minutes should do



“[IN]BETWEEN” by Olivia Onyekwena

Peel back the layers of your soul
lay my heart in between every piece
for I belong to each of them
under every moonless sky and
the celestial bodies that lie above
I call you mine in every universe
of halves and wholes
on this day and every tomorrow after
this is what I'll say to my lover
if I had one
but across the fireplace,
my heart is still shredded
from all the love I gave and took
the silence in between my every desire
to hold another body next to mine
maybe next year will be different
but for today,
I dine in wine and peaches
for no particular reason.
Phone in hand
scrolling through the internet
leaving heart emojis
on every open ended conversation





“If We Are Not Soulmates, I Don’t Care” by Kirsten Reneau

I am no longer trying to wish on stars. The moon keeps changing whether I am there to watch it or not. The sun comes up just like it did before you were born and will set long after our bodies are nothing more than sun-soaked bones bleached clean in their naked deaths.

Instead, I am interested, now, in impermanence. In watching water inch its way into the coast, grinding out the footprints left by the day, turn it all into flat sand again. Seeing where the shore meets the sand following the creatures living in the in-between of it all. I would like to hide inside mountains and sit still for a thousand years. There, I will learn the language of bats, the way they can find each other, even in the dark; let the moss grow over my shoes & watch the stalactites create their twin before it collapses into dust again and again and again and again.

Maybe we are not written in the stars. Maybe we will break like a shoreline. But maybe - I will find you after the sun expands and swallows us whole.

There, I will see you — even in the dark.



Poetry Contributors

S. T. Brant is a teacher from Las Vegas. Pubs in/coming from EcoTheo, Timber, Door is a Jar, Santa Clara Review, Rain Taxi, New South, Green Mountains Review, Another Chicago Magazine, Ekstasis, 8 Poems, a few others. You can find him on Twitter @terriblebinth or Instagram @shanelemagne.

Nicole Callräm (she/her/她) is a nomadic bureaucrat and disciple of existence in all her life-affirming and confusing manifestations. She adores rideshare bikes, red wine, and Osmanthus flowers (preferably a mix of the three...all at once). Nicole has been published in Full House Literary, Nude Studio, Kissing Dynamite, and Rat's Ass Review. You can find her on Twitter at @YiminNicole.

Elizabeth Ellson (she/her) is a midwesterner who has transplanted firmly into the eastside of Los Angeles. She is the host of I Offer Poetry, a podcast that aims to share poetry the way we share music: fluidly and accessibly. She is a sucker for an 80's love song. Find her on Twitter @ellsonelizabeth

Quinn Forlini (she/her) has writing published or forthcoming in Catapult, X-R-A-Y, Jellyfish Review, Longleaf Review, Milk Candy Review, and elsewhere. She earned her MFA from the University of Virginia and lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. You can find her on Twitter @quinnforlini.

Vienna Gaspar is a student located in the San Francisco Bay Area. Outside of writing, her passions include reading and rollerskating.

SG Huerta (they/he) is a Chicaxn poet from Dallas. They are pursuing their MFA at Texas State University. SG is the author of the chapbook *The Things We Bring with Us: Travel Poems* (Headmistress Press, 2021). They live in Texas with their partner and two cats. Find them at sghuertawriting.com or on Twitter @sg_poetry

Hilary King's poems have appeared in *DMQ Review*, *TAB*, *Minerva Rising*, *Belletrist*, *Fourth River*, *PANK*, *SWIMM*, and other publications. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Courtney LeBlanc (she/her) is the author of the full length collections *Exquisite Bloody*, *Beating Heart (Riot in Your Throat)* and *Beautiful & Full of Monsters (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press)*. She is also the founder and editor-in-chief of *Riot in Your Throat*, an independent poetry press. She loves nail polish, tattoos, and a soy latte each morning. Read her publications on her blog: www.wordperv.com. Follow her on twitter: @wordperv, and IG: @wordperv79.

Alexis Lee (she/her) is a pseudonym for a person from Hong Kong who writes and photographs. She usually takes ugly emotions and tries to turn them into beautiful things, but when that's not possible (and it often isn't), she resorts to being unusually good at Tetris and being less good at Twitter at @alexisleewrites.

Daniel Edward Moore lives in Washington on Whidbey Island. His poems are forthcoming in Notre Dame Review, Front Range Review, Ocotillo Review, Iron Horse Literary Review, San Pedro River Review and Steam Ticket Journal. His recent book, 'Psalmia' was a finalist for the Four Way Books Levis Prize in Poetry.

Olivia Onyekwena [she/her] is a writer from Nigeria. She enjoys reading fanfictions and lit mags. Olivia is a lover of the halfmoon and sunflowers

Ila Railkar (she/her) is a doctor based in Mumbai, India and is a poet by passion. She often writes on themes of identity, belongingness, and human rights. Her work has appeared in LiveWire, Indian Cultural Forum, Indian Periodical, and is forthcoming in Beyond the Panorama. She can be reached on Twitter at @IRailkar.

Poetry Contributors

Kirsten Reneau is a writer from New Orleans. A Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Best Microfiction nominee, she was the editor for the anthology MALL RATS and runs Final Girl Bulletin Board. Her work has been featured in The Threepenny Review, Hobart After Dark, No Contact, and others. She's on twitter: @Reneauglow.

Elena Rielinger is a Pushcart and Best New Poets nominated writer. Her work has appeared in *perhappened mag*, *streetcake mag*, *Moonbild Magazine*, and *Crêpe and Penn*. You can find her debut microchapbook, *Cast Not Your Pearls*, in *Ghost City Press's* 2021 Summer Series. Follow her on her website elenarielinger.wordpress.com, Twitter @elena_rielinger, and Instagram @elenarielinger.

Katherine Shehadeh is a writer, mom, attorney, and perpetual student (this time, in creative writing and religious studies), who resides with her family in Miami, Florida. She can be found on Instagram @katherinesarts or on the www at katherinesarts.com.

Elsa Talvi has been writing since she can remember. She is currently working on a number of projects and has recently been published in Cult of Clío's debut issue. Follow her on Twitter @lost_lacuna for more.

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