

**A Stream in Late Autumn**

by Judith R. Robinson — USA

From higher ground I see  
the river wend its easy way,  
its rhythm peaceful as my blood:  
my blood is quiet now,  
a stream in autumn  
mourning rage, pining spring.

All trees are bare.  
I watch their bald limbs bend  
in rhythm muted as my own:  
my bones are spindles now,  
autumn branches  
grieving fruit, pining leaf.

No leaf to come will mourn for me,  
no blossom, bird nor bough.  
Nor will rushing waters weep,  
nor will locusts call.  
The earth will green, the worm renew  
and I shall be no longer captive.

**Unknowable**  
by Evie Groch — USA

She was a winter solstice  
whose bleakness spread depression.  
She was a melody sung off-key  
that couldn't correct itself.  
She was a geyser that faithfully  
spewed relentless love.  
She was a prison in which  
unspeakable and imagined  
events took place.  
She was a language no one spoke.  
She was an enigma on the  
outskirts of normal.  
She was my mother whom  
I learned to love more fiercely  
after her death.

## **Your Office**

by Jamie Wendt — USA

How many times have I been in this room –  
stack of children's artwork and cards in the letter tray,  
heavy-keyed calculator, receipt printer, carpet stain.

Your ties hang like colorful vines in the closet.  
Family faces age in frames on the wall,  
your smile and white hair consistent across decades.

When I was little, I liked to stand next to you  
at your desk, watch red peppermint swim against your teeth  
as you taught me tricks with thimbles and cards.

Every morning, sitting in your brown swivel chair,  
you stared at the windowsill, the potted barrel cactus  
asserting its spot – tan, orange, and beige

the desert sat you down to work. I never asked you  
if you studied the cactus: its spikes taking up  
your view, or did you ignore it like pain,

how little it needs to survive. You cried every time  
you said goodbye to me your last few years,  
your hands a fragile strength in embrace.

Time was a fogged distance you could stretch  
yourself out toward, the couch warm for stories.  
I would like to say I'll meet you outside at the breakfast table.

Your decaf coffee, my green tea,  
a backdrop of mountains and hummingbirds,  
desert lizards skittish under my feet.

## **In Visible Light**

by Elaine Mintzer — USA

*"We are made of star-stuff."* — Carl Sagan

Between the infrared and the ultraviolet  
lies the narrow spectrum of visible light  
between things that move into the past

and those that approach.  
It seems petty in the scheme of things  
that I should worry

about my specific genetic signature  
being passed forward  
in this cosmic relay race

into an iffy future  
compromised by holocausts  
natural and human-made

and susceptible to the vagaries  
of time and evolution,  
infection and accident.

I have faith in that which can be seen  
in the visible spectrum: the Dead End sign  
that rises at the entry to my street

and the science that tells me  
we're likely to be consumed  
in the conflagration of a nova sun,

henceforth visible only in the redshift  
where the past lives.

## **Skimming Stones Towards an Imagined Island**

by David Allard — UK

At dawn, the milky water lost its opacity.  
Golden flecks spotted the surface calm  
Until the sun filled the sky with its intent.

We chose flat grey stones, white stones,  
Seeking out each sanded smoothness and  
How it must hug the inverted c  
Formed by thumb and first finger,

Then flicked them with bent arm  
To skip across the surface like water-boatmen  
And hoped to never see them sink  
But rather, land on an imaginary island  
Tree-bent with tamarisk and terebinth.

For we were buoyed up, each of us,  
With each flat smooth stone  
With a comfort – to be like the stones,  
Floating: such a sweetness, their distant immortality.

Yesterday, now fewer, we searched in the mud  
For jagged stones to rest on the flat marble,  
A year on from another departure  
Towards an imaginary island,  
That might lurk, or not, in the sky.

Spirits danced unseen around us as we bent  
Down, down, for the stones, so sharp,  
The purple bruises of time staining our skin  
Like the red hues on white-tipped waves, at sunset.

## **Silence**

by Gary Corbi — USA

They came as silent as the sun,  
creeping down the lanes; sneaking through the fields.  
Bringing with them a false dawn.  
And taking with them what we most loved.

I am asked to identify your body.  
It lies before me silent.  
A broken machine,  
missing the spark no mechanical process can produce.  
Longing to escape, I picture your smile the day we met,  
recall talking into the night as the lights around us winked out one by one.  
But no escape is possible.

Outside, the air is still.  
Even the birds have fallen silent.

When the winter rains pour, I will miss you.  
I will miss you searching the clearing skies for the trailing rainbow.  
When we harvest next year's plantings, I will miss you.  
I will miss you singing to yourself, as we worked together.  
When evening falls, I will miss you.  
I will miss you lying beside me in the night's long silence.

**At Shabbat Dinner, an Old Friend Asks Me,  
“What Makes a Poem a Poem?”**

by David Silverman — USA

At Shabbat dinner, around the table of an old friend,  
who would not know a poem if one came up to him  
on the street, put out its hand and said, “I’m a poem,  
pleased to meet ’ya,” he asks me, “What makes  
a poem a poem?”

And I, who have read 50,000 poems and written at least  
a hundred, struggled to give him a coherent answer.  
One of the other guests, another old friend, feeling bad  
for me, I suppose, volunteered a variation of that old cliché:  
“Poetry is like pornography...” And while poetry is nothing  
like pornography (at least not the poetry I read and write),  
I appreciated her assistance and admired the alliteration.

And, as the conversation among the guests gravitated  
to other subjects, I was distracted, thinking of all the things  
I could have said, as if explaining what makes a poem a poem,  
was more important than discussing the war, the hostages.  
More important than the despair that descended upon us  
on October 7<sup>th</sup>; our collective, existential dread.

And then I noticed a single berry falling off the side of  
a fancy fruit tart my friend’s wife had lovingly prepared.  
It was fat and purple and oozing with liquid, its top dusted  
with a *kipoh* of confectioners’ sugar, and I thought about  
how sweet life can be if you stop to notice.

I thought about all the times I have sat at this table and all  
the times these friends have sat at mine. I thought about  
my children and theirs, and, now, our grandchildren.  
And then I wanted nothing more than to break my  
perpetual diet and taste that voluptuous berry, whose  
sole reason for existence, it seemed to me, was to burst  
in my mouth and provide me with pleasure.  
And when no one was looking – or maybe they were –  
I snatched it from the tart, and when I tasted that  
sweet berry, I was no longer thinking of poetry.

Or, maybe, probably, almost certainly, I was.

## **Insomnia**

by Iris Dan — Israel

I notice that one of the sheep has a limp.  
Again I wonder why there aren't regulations  
against branding animals or piercing their ears.  
A ewe lambs; the delivery is difficult; the lamb  
looks retarded. As a matter of fact, the whole species  
isn't very intelligent. The wolf always approaching,  
and they remain placid. We aren't much brighter.  
But then you when live on a danger plateau  
the brain copes by raising placidity hormones.

The guided meditation guy speaks in reassuring,  
carefully cadenced sentences; you would believe  
he is a bodyless entity, speaking from heaven.  
I know how he looks: he has the constitution  
of a body builder, the face of a club bouncer.  
If I hear once more the word spiritual, I'll break  
the medium through which this message is broadcast.

The worst thing about insomnia is the feeling  
of being an outcast: respectable people,  
those who have put in an honest day's work,  
sinned well, repented well, entrusting  
their souls to divine approval and forgiveness –  
they are those deserving of sleep. You are not.  
Your offering has been rejected.

When finally you fall asleep, a fat, yellow,  
self-satisfied sun mocks you by piercing  
curlicued rays into your rain-splashed windows.



## **Six Hostages**

by Laurel Benjamin — USA

*And my scream is made of strange edges like a complicated key.* — Yehuda Amichai

Morning walk, I lose the housekey, come home  
looking for my husband who is out searching  
for the key, then wait so we won't miss the vet,  
but I don't care – key house cats husband –  
I sit down on the porch.

Later, the hardware store will cut new keys.

\*

Scissors cut my hair to breathe, sharp  
edges ready to be dulled.

I mis-read a poem entitled "Painblank"  
as Point blank.

\*

I can't talk to my husband about the death of Eden  
age 24, retrieved body weighing 79 lbs. Named  
for the beginning of time.

Instead, we sit down to a weekend breakfast,  
fluffy eggs a metal taste like it's October 7th  
all over again. I spit out yellow bits and chunks.

\*

Uphill at the park sparrows call hostage names  
*chirp – chirp*  
One oak branch the width of a trunk – marks  
fresh jagged  
as if my family  
rounded up, floorboards lit, safe-house pried open –  
as if we – as if we –  
the burnt edges.

\*

In my dream at the cliff edge,  
  
some face the receding foam, others idle  
towards slight clouds. I don't know  
anyone. We speak  
without words.

**In the safe haven of Maale Hacarmel**

by Naomi Yalin — Israel

And now like the snail  
you have withdrawn within your shell  
to suffocate in your dilemma.  
So fragile,  
exhausted,  
shivering with fear,  
almost drowning, almost gone;  
But still calling  
to be rescued,  
crying silently for our care,  
drawing us in.  
Letting out smoke signals  
of distress  
for us to decipher.

Come dear one,  
escape from your demons,  
your punishing dreams.  
Take our hands,  
let us comfort you,  
let us calm your fears  
and quell your terror  
of living a normal life –  
the doubts and dilemmas  
of relationships.

Slowly, if you wish,  
emerge from your shell.  
Step by step  
feeling your way  
back to the fearful reality of freedom.  
Gradually,  
from closed ward to open,  
from open ward to hostel  
and to home.

We are here,  
waiting to welcome you back,  
to hold you close.  
All this world is a narrow bridge.  
Do not fear at all.

**...but for the grace of God...**

by Miriam Webber (aka Rumi Morkin) — Israel

In my bedroom  
the cell phone alarm rings  
and morning sun pours in  
between shutter slats.

*In the tunnel  
I have no way of knowing  
if it is morning, what day it is,  
stale air, no sun, no window.*

I wash, take a fresh towel,  
choose what to wear,  
make my breakfast,  
with a mug of coffee.

*I wash only when they let me,  
wear the same clothes,  
eat whatever and whenever I'm given  
but I am so hungry, so thirsty.*

I talk with friends, read the newspaper,  
watch the evening TV, news:  
streets are filled with thousands  
crying out to free the hostages.

*I know nothing, hear no news,  
Is my family fighting for my release?  
Do they even know if I am alive?  
I miss them so badly.*

I sleep in comfort  
after a satisfying, routine day  
while negotiations drag on  
and hostages are being murdered.

*I toss in uneasy, snatched sleep  
tense, terrified, what is going to happen?  
Are they going to kill me?  
At any moment, without warning...?*

## **Ode to a Young Mad Hatter**

by Fran Levin — Israel

When the chips are down and the sky is grey  
and nothing exciting happened today,  
there's something you can always do  
to stop yourself from feeling blue.  
Choose a hat and put it on,  
and all your troubles will be gone.

When you're in a rotten mood  
just slip on a little snood.  
A matching stripy cap and scarf  
can make the saddest person laugh.  
Sport a fancy picture hat  
and you'll be an aristocrat.  
What you don is up to you,  
even a hair-net will do.

Try a cute Victorian bonnet  
with bows and frills and flowers upon it.  
A flirty little '20s cloche  
gives you style and looks real posh.  
Wear that Stetson with a passion  
quite the height of Texan fashion.  
A bowler, homburg or a trilby –  
a happy soul you certainly will be.

For Eastern flair, take a turban  
to stop you looking too suburban.  
A fez will add a Turkish touch  
that will suit you very much.  
Catch that up-town Harlem manner  
tie your curls in a bandana.  
Tichels, sheitels, streimels too  
and you will look a proper Jew.

So here's the moral of this tale:  
When you're sad just "take the veil."  
And if there's no comfort in that,  
Well, my dear, I'll eat my hat!

## **Unsettling**

by Elisa Subin — Israel

the texture      of mourning  
is without exception  
                 unsettling

touch  
water                      born  
from memory's          breath  
                 mist

hold  
hand outstretched  
from forgotten          dream  
                 desire

trace  
image drawn  
from day's              last  
                 light  
                 shadow

feel  
hunger rise and fall  
with ocean's endless  
                 wave

and here, where  
sand's bed waits  
                 beneath mourning's tide,

I feel your soft, wet kiss

*Winner of an Honorable Mention*

**Kindness**

*(A haiku)*

by Pesach Rotem — Israel

A wounded sparrow  
cries out to you for comfort.  
Do not walk away.

**My Father's Synagogue**  
by Pearl Abraham — USA

If, like me, he'd preferred trees to people  
he would've had a standing *minyan* for Shabbos –  
without waiting at the corner to beg passersby  
on their way to another *shul* – & fulfilled  
his mother's ambition for him, renown  
like the grandfather he was named for. He could've  
had forests, multiple *minyans*, tens to the nth  
in trunks of every texture, thickness, height,  
quorums of trees for collective prayer.  
Even the *Baal Shem* believed a private appeal  
to God, speaking plainly, in Yiddish even,  
alone in the forest, more powerful.  
If my father had accepted the tall  
pines in his yard as members, if like me.