

2022

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JAMES CROHL JACKSON

april 14, 2008

after inflatables

and Friday night I went to the House

after making fun of King

Kong with the brothers

Dance Marathon we first talked

then went to Pizza King with Dabs

accepted oxygen in my water as trees

dead napkins we returned to Constitution

played sober via HORSE

with bottle and recycle bin

earlier I helped Gary with the Poker Mixer

it was either the cheesy bread

or Gatorade that got me

we went to Walgreen's for beef jerky

along the way we stopped at Sara's for Orloff

at Fisher's for refried beans



SHARON LOPEZ MOONEY

the withdrawing

each day a little snow has fallen
collecting in crevices
changing his temperature degree by degree
so faint that only he can notice

large round flakes fall
onto his arms face breast
hold their shape for a moment
melt

He sees a dusting of snow on his shoulders
Caressing these last weeks accenting their bony shape
no energy to shake it off almost does not feel
the loss of warmth slowing blood

dark wind's fury grows sneaks in through cracks
blows flakes smaller at an angle
onto his side making
mounds on hips

weight almost nothing
each morning muscles tighter
slower becoming rigid
blood cold almost ice

buried under drifts bound joints
frozen flesh
entombed in a home of snow

deeper eyes closed
hiding
snow-white
lost



WILLOW KING

planetarium

i.
I was dancing in the dark, alone
to the howl
of a phantom piano
when the shamanic postman
delivered your flashing obituary

ii.
The moon is a junkie's orb
& the only dowry
I can leave at your altar,
glorious god
of absent, unsuspecting bodies

iii.
The peacemaker arrives
as capsules of glitter
on the naive wizard's wagon
Look at his charms, how
poisonings are made joyful

iv.
When I awoke
in the motorcycle's dawn,
rising like potions from the
sand dunes, were exploding nebulae,
butchered by sleeper satellites

v.
Even before our last
batteries sung their swan song
Mayday, Mayday,
the river nymphs had dug memorials
from cavernulous corals
for bodies cocooned
in uncharted vacuums

vi.
Today painkillers fill the void

of your solar system, steeped
in the unrestrained gleam of an usurper
You are what the settlers pray to
& in your godless absence
I tread on this tenuous freedom

I watched mom transplant seedlings yesterday

saw her gently tuck bushy-eyed roots
into the sanguine soil between our wired fence and back porch,
a rugged land of dry terracotta.

i wouldn't mind seeing growth blush the parched clay,
watch plantlets spring from the baked earth,
pretty like the thought of
youth: the sun of ephemeral summer and
mom's hands combing my thick hair after chlorine swims.
no, i wouldn't mind at all.

but, the lukewarm tap, poured from her pear green watering pail,
isn't their only drink. they suckle on
anxious sweat dripping from her brow,
and niggling pinpricks of hope trickling down peach-tinged cheeks.
it's the same way

I suckled on her tits until they dehydrated,
drooped,
dead trees bending over their dead roots, unknowingly mothers still.
and if the fickle seedlings
drown themselves in the epiphany, or
drink too close to the sun and wither,
she'll bury them in her red, living heart,
grieve like dewdrops in the morning,
arriving and dissipating, unexpectedly and infinitely.

so i wish sprouts grew their spindly roots into legs
and cotyledons leafed as lanky arms.
i'd tell them how terrible it is to be mothered all your life,
teach the euphoria of rebellion like
robin williams teaches poetry because
there are too many mothers giving still.



MAR'A HARRIS

the guilt in my carryon

i understand why
my grandmother cries
everytime she leaves
her childhood home

the guilt she carries
of freeing herself
from the confines
of that Faulknerian town
resembles the burden i carry
by leaving my own

like a little girl
carries her favorite doll
like a woman
carries her child

i make room
for my guilt
in my carryon
alongside my socks
and underwear

we weep when
we wave goodbye
to the strangers
on the front step

is the freedom
we're fighting for
better than the
confines of home?



MARINARA PIZZINI MARINARA

the discussion of dying

death
and dying
is a dinner table topic
in its most basic
form. break bread
and break open
souls to bear
the weight of a
doomed soul.
It's not easy
to digest spaghetti
with table talk
turning around
gravestone engravings
and cemetery flower
choices. but death
is for everyone.
today we will
share a meal,
while tomorrow
we may share a
soil plot. worries
dissolve away at
the same rate as
bones, so in our
cold, natural home,
I'll hold on to
your hand until
it becomes dust.



SUBHASHREE PATILKAR

an ode to my fingers

They let me taste the spice my mother compromise
Cooks inside the kitchen of horrific
Worried if the ratio of salt and pepper would melt on
The tip of my father's rusted tongue to please him
Aware of the fact no matter what
flaws find him way better than fate (hers for example).
They refuse to hold plate served with patriarchy, and try to snatch it away from mother's
rough hands.
They trace my lover's face, his secretive scars
His divine stretch of
pretty skin and his aching back. My lover says it puts him at ease, like no
other escape
entangles his fingers in mine as a dialect of love, says
would never let them go, and holds onto slumber like a kid.
My fingers, his platinum paradise like a vintage 1999 dream
of crushes creating
butterflies in hopeless throats, a catastrophe of comforting safeness.

They hold the coffee mug, actually every such fragile thing ever made
With such
precariousness like that while holding a thermometer, Never letting them fall and
break into shatters, unlike my nibbling mind and the stupid visions of tarnished intents
(which was never their fault) while the neurons in the back my head continuously keep
displaying shiny images of the pyre of fragility of my bones and others.

Each time my nerves are in a shaking rage
I bring them down to my
palms, as if I would Break them right away in a snap (which when they do I
think
A lot goes into destruction)but they end up breaking walls instead
Of the things I hold when all that takes over me is An uncanny urge to spill cuss
words and let my tongue turn into that of an angry witch.

My fingers save me from my own anger. My fingers know no other way of saving me from
my own anger.

My fingers sway in the darkness that comes as a surprise
searching for an
ominous presence they could leave their imprints on, like they do under soft
sunrays and
monsoon- sultry plays and winter's cold air



SUBHASHREE PATILKAR

an ode to my fingers

My fingers let me feel, feel things so bad

I end up in the flames of intoxication.

And my fingers are such vigorous artificers of poems

I write, they do so until

they bleed and the lines carved on them

beg to be seen and remain. They write

poems Like madwomen run from their husbands, like all the clocks would
stop and sunglasses would cover the world.

My fingers- only they know how to touch me

only they know the way

the woman in me wants to be touched

and so they do in unspeakable ways, when

melancholia

longs to be forgotten and all that burns within me is a desire

and a yearning of being in a wild feminine utopia

wet with the rains of ecstasy

and rapture.

Only my fingers know the secret, to cause a havoc inside me

A havoc that is plenty

sweet and a havoc that lingers unlike any.



ALEX COLTRANE

dance on breaking floors

they dine in yellow but we weigh in bullets
a feather tilted with soft intent
or hand raised in command to fire
oh to sleep the night in traincars
a prayer for those without a future
may the patron saint of fear bestow upon you
the bravery to carve a path forward
or the peace to die before you fail to do so



ALEXA MURRAY

ohio

In the photo I am small, hair
disheveled, in a glossy blouse
and black dress pants, looking
out over the grey fields, juxtaposing
the smallness of childhood
with the vastness of the world.

It was a fine place to grow.
Back home, the hills rolled down
to the trees, the lake, and beyond
the highway whirred gently
behind the soundwall.

At night, the sky
burned red above the jagged tree line
and the deer came out to nose
their heads above
the concrete porch.

The pool out back was too
abandoned and mossy and filled
with life to use, but the expanse
of the front yard was open for kite
flying on cloudy days,
field of white clover and grass resting below muddied light.



JOHN J. ROYAL

leaving thebes

Tut, rigid glyphs touting his immortality,
Stayed in Egypt, the role of national trope.
As did Hatshepsut, Thutmose, the Ramses clan.
Unlike the sub-celebrity dead,
The mummy diaspora who journeyed off
By plane or train, a stagecoach, ship,
To Europe, the East, the New World.
Like Princess Kherima (Princess of the Sun) –
A nobody really, nicknamed thus,
A teen or twenty-something from Thebes,
No tragedy attached, no B movie curse.
For all we know she was a moony thing
Who slipped, distracted, on a cobblestone
And, clueless, subsequently sailed to Brazil.
Or maybe not. Osiris would say, 'No,'
That stowed with fine fabrics and gems,
Oasis dates and her fellow relics,
The unimagined ocean's rise and fall far
Beyond her usual routine, any mummy's really,
The young woman or teen actually enjoyed herself.
And even better, arrived in Rio
To curator-coined honorifics, to fame
That lasted nearly two hundred years,
Thinking in stick: "Oh, Afterlife! Oh, Ka!"
No doubt you read of the fire in '18 –
The dry hydrants, the no sprinklers,
The comical cause an air conditioner.
The National Museum burned to the ground,
Billowing a shroud of ash and ghosts –
Its residents, in fire's heartless jargon, toast.
No doubt her family wept in ancient Egypt,
Paid gladly for embalming and linen wraps.

The welcoming Brazilians, much affected,
Were anxious to anoint their nameless freight.
We, windward, must bless again
This winsome thing who came of age in Thebes
That she not vanish, utterly unremembered
On her second death, another accident.
Who at her age is not careless and in love?



the opera outside my window

It was the first night away
the dawn unfolded
the light flooded my room
I put my hand
over my face
to block the light
the sound of an Opera singer
bounced off my walls,
her voice was tender and clear
as if she was
right outside my window,
singing a morning love song
undulating in perfect harmony,
flipping me out of bed
like how the moon
flips the waves
I walked toward
the blinding light
shining through my window
sliding it open
with one hand
and with the other
I pulled my body out
wearing only pajamas,
I hung outside
holding onto the ledge
beneath me
A whole sea of eyes

now looking up
carefully but confidently,
I stepped down
from the ledge
I got back into bed
And Closed my eyes
with sunglasses down
dreaming of the lover,
I left behind
probably making eggs
coffee, and toast
while the opera
continued to play
A song of love
laying there,
I thought to myself
Boy,
I've heard this one before.



EMILY COPPELLA

fingernails

i look at his fingernails and they are
smooth as purple Smarties.

my imagination grows arms and reaches out for them.

one by one, i press his nails to my top lip.

the gloss rubs off.

i give him this:

matte fingers for touching someone else.



STEPHEN MERD

something to do

Some days were almost voiceless,
the silence cut by the grocery clerk
or speaking with the meter reader, nominal contact:
hello out there.

I steered towards music instead,
put in a tape, requiring that light
to push back walls, raise
the roof, feel air become seas,
the vibrant siren
choir. Also,

I have one particular cassette,
a cassette of friends fetched
from an old answering machine
& ushered forth by every pictured face,
all their words of significance.

I can trace relationships & break-ups this way,
who was having
a bad moment, who was ecstatic
to have time off.

The tones show it all, give a collage:
Where are you? I can't talk.

How about lunch ...

Sometimes I consider combining them,
tape of songs, tape of friends, keeping furies at bay,
but the more often I play them, fast forward, reverse,
the more I hear how transparent the space was and is still,
and their voices, the same.

R. GERRY FABIAN

fully charged cellphone

Eating loosely scrambled eggs
and a burnt English muffin
with black raspberry jelly and
melted butter
at 3:27 in the morning
and a glass of white wine
almost finished
and a crescent moon
peering through the window,
I am one cigarette beyond
waiting for your call.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS + LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

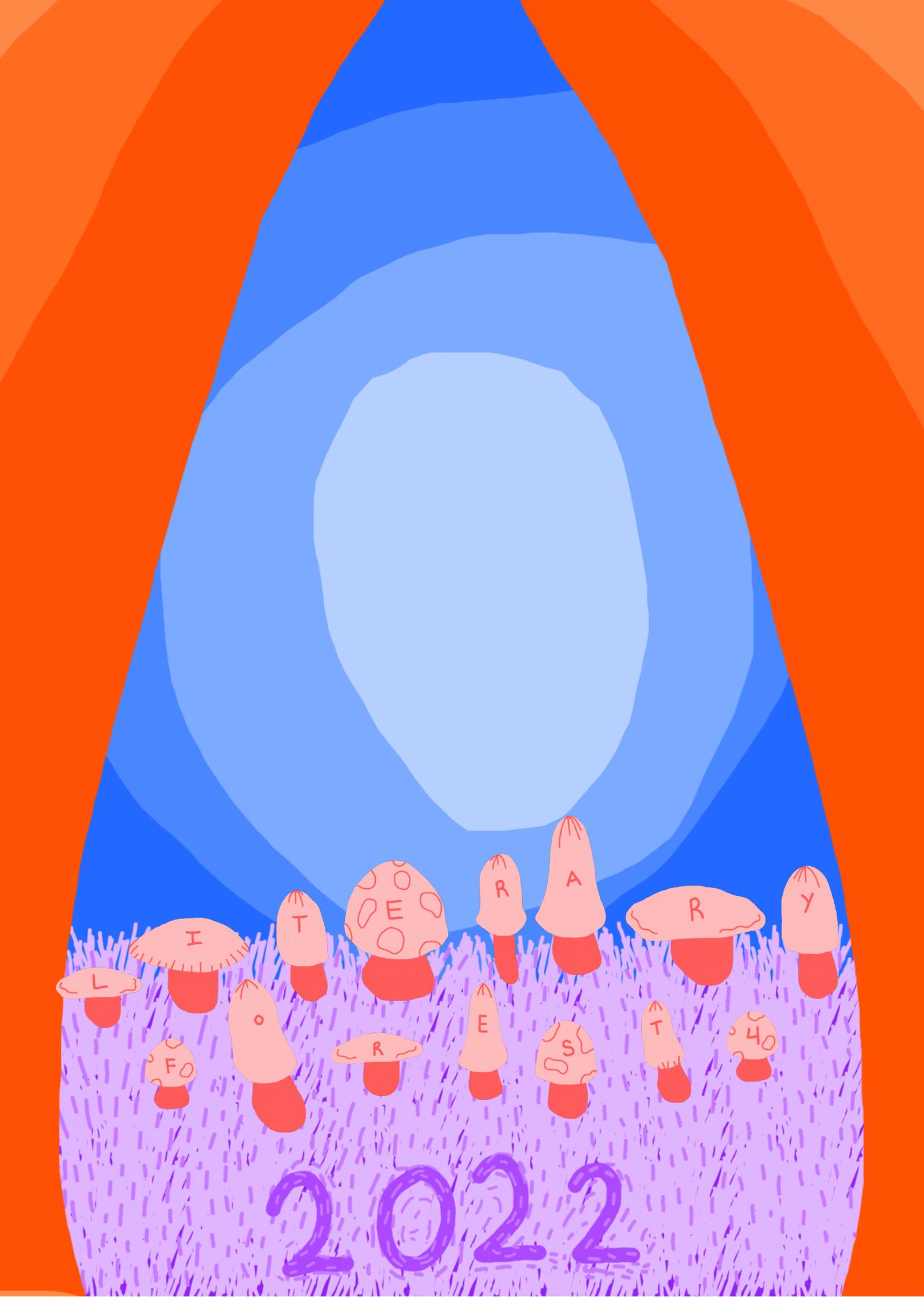
hello! welcome back for a fourth year. i appreciate you! i just wanted to thank all 14 of our lovely contributors this year, as well as all 50 people who submitted! we could not keep this running without your continued support, and we hope to continue our dream of providing free high quality poetry and publishing opportunities to those that need it. i love you guys, forever and always!

i know this year's format is a little bit different, but as always, I am seeking to bring litfor closer to a print edition. someday! hopefully soon. thank you for reading, i hope you like the style change!

lots of love from me to you,

abby hart, editor in chief





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