

the literary forest poetry magazine
issue six (2024)



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR
ABBIE HART

we meet again! welcome back to issue six (can't believe i'm writing this). it's been an adventure of a year, and i'm glad we're all still here. i'm glad i still get to curate amazing writing. literary forest has brought me so much joy. for those of you who are new to lfpm, i've run this magazine since i was 15 years old. you've all quite literally watched me grow up, and you have no idea how immensely i value that.

this year, as with every year, is an exceptionally special group. liz irvin is questioning the body. pleasant nneoma stephen is loving the body. frank freeman is thinking about andre the giant and tiny cars. maria duran is hoping for friendship. d.s. maolalai is reminiscing. ron riekki is contemplating alcoholism. sarah hanson is at the wedding of her grandmother and bill murray. louis faber is living six nights. özge lena is disappearing into a murder of crows. sahil mehta is pondering war. jack deboyace is a fan of cindy sherman. sydney guida is an ocean elder. ian parker is experiencing misfortune. cian onus is on the internet. constantine contogenesis is anointing a body. all are experiencing life as we know it, as best we can.

i hope you continue to love this publication as much as it loves you. issue six awaits, and issue seven stands at the end of the road. be good.

sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Abbie Hart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "t".

abbie hart, editor-in-chief

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ENTER THE FOREST.

— YOU LEARN TO SEE THE BODY IN SECTIONS
LIZ IRVIN

The CT takes a slice
but leaves the pieces
intact.

If you stare hard enough,
anything can be seen in
axial view:

like a navel orange wheel with pithy spokes,
or a coin of tree rings
chopped & discarded

You learn all the ways
the body can be
un-done.

Is it really possible
to love the body
like before,
after all of this
is over?

When you dissect the thenars
in anatomy lab,
you look up
and everyone around you
is holding hands.

The student and silent teacher
in tacit prayer.

You always thought
being there
would make you
sea-sick

you'd toss in the bowels
and think about God,

YOU LEARN TO SEE THE BODY IN SECTIONS
LIZ IRVIN

but truth be told,

it made you into something

bright &
 impervious

and you jumped off the bow

and got reeled back in

with a fishing net,

your skin mottled from the cold.

And when you come home,
 there's always

the wild cottontail.

She burrows under the porch

but ventures out past dark

for bark & frost-matted
 clover.

Fixed in your high-beam glare,

she stares past you

and you stare past her

until you're

both looking

at some point

far enough

in the distance

that the two

points converge

YOU LEARN TO SEE THE BODY IN SECTIONS
LIZ IRVIN

and you're both seeing
the same thing.

Like a wave
blasting
against
another
wave.

Liz Irvin is a writer and second-year medical student at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School. She holds a B.A. in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Barnard College at Columbia University. Her essay "Seasick: Lessons in Human Anatomy from Hyman Bloom's *The Hull* (1952)" appeared in *Hektoen International*. She lives in Worcester, Massachusetts.

BODY OF THE MOON
PLEASANT NNEOMA STEPHEN

Clasp me in your eyes,
 relish me in your senses,
 and smell my being;
 whatever flaws I possess
 you consider no faults.

You do not demand that I be a bright, silver body,
 a pale, yellow body,
 round, half, crescent;
 I happen to be.
 And you dote,
 you dote so heavenly
 on the body of the moon.

Painted on a navy canvas
 is my body, shameless,
 in naked darkness, glimmering.
 I am of unusual and peculiar variations subject to time.
 The whiff of my being is persistent in the air,
 mixed with the odor of exposed feet on the warm earth.

Bodies are meant to quicken bodies
 when, say, lying at your comfortless bed,
 staring at the window, awaiting a bosom of lenity.
 Rest, rest
 delicately and ruggedly
 on the body of the moon.

Pleasant Nneoma Stephen is a poet, student, and writing coach. She is an ardent lover of doodles, rainfall, and African mythology. Pleasant is a Gold Award recipient of the Senior Category of the Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2023. Her works are published or forthcoming in Decolonial Passage and Vagabond City Lit.

**SAM
FRANK FREEMAN**

how he turned there
on the bank of the
dark river and said
fook you, get all those
books away from me.
and I stopped and
said, well fook you too
then. he seemed to like
that and smiled.
and I said Sam
Sam what am I going
to do? still smiling
he cocked his head.
you keep going,
keep going till
the end of the road.
and what then I asked
what then?
he said nothing, just
stared at me still smiling.
the dark river flowed past.
how in Paris, I've heard,
he used to give
a young Andre the Giant
a ride to school
in his tiny car.

Frank Freeman's poetry has been most recently published in Grey Sparrow Journal, LitBop, MORIA, Poetry Super Highway, Rat's Ass Review, San Pedro River Review, Sequoia Speaks, Shot Glass Journal, The Decadent Review, The Opiate, The Raven Review, Verdad, and is forthcoming in Main Street Rag, The MacGuffin, and Triggerfish Critical Review. He is a member of the NBCC and a Pushcart nominee. He grew up mostly in Texas, went to Boston for grad school, married a Maine woman who wanted Maine back. Writes in the mornings to stay sane, keeps books of small family businesses in afternoons to stay alive.

A LIFE WITH OLD GIRLFRIENDS
D.S. MAOLALAI

I can't stop remembering
 some lives with old girlfriends.
 walking up bathurst
 with cora toward k-town,
 both in foul moods and the mood
 for spiced noodles –
 a separate concern. and brambles
 which reached over
 footpaths at ankles
 like interruptions in arguments
 on hot sunny days. the drying-
 out yard sales we passed, going
 brown as old apples and grey
 as a bramblebush leaf. then k-town
 and then feeling better
 at the end of the meal.
 but you make spiced noodles
 much better than cora's, better
 than the best in toronto.
 I wish I could eat them
 without being reminded
 of cold conversations
 and calls I made afterward,
 to cut off an eight-
 month long fling.

DS Maolalai has been described by one editor as "a cosmopolitan poet" and another as "prolific, bordering on incontinent". His work has nominated twelve times for Best of the Net, ten for the Pushcart and once for the Forward Prize, and has been released in three collections; "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016), "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019) and "Noble Rot" (Turas Press, 2022)

I GOT DRUNK ONCE
RON RIEKKI

or twice or a few hundred times
until the doc told me my liver was
fucked. We're allowed to curse,
right? Although, just to clarify,
I'm not putting a curse on you.
If anything, I hope you're blessed.

I hope your birthdays have you
in such blissful buzzes with no
hangovers, so the headache won't
overhang your next day, where you
feel older, because you are, because
we always are, but I'm getting to
the drunks, one where I woke up
in a stranger's bathtub and then
another time where I woke up
in a forest with my pants down
covered in vomit and it was raining.
I didn't drink for a long time after
that one. And then the time we
were in a transsexual bar in
Hollywood and we were boring

drunk, just sitting there, me and
two actors, one who was on Mad
Men and another on CSI, small
speaking roles and both quit
Hollywood, but back then they
were dreaming that everything
would fall in place and nothing
did, except for marriage, two
marriages for them, none for me,
a girl visiting me today from North
Carolina, but the flight got canceled,
so I'm alone and old, because
the seconds tick and tick and tick
and I think we drink to slow down
time, and don't drink and drive,
by the way; instead, just drink.
Don't drive. Just walk everywhere.
That way you can drink as much
as you want. That's how me
and a friend did it. You can walk
twenty-one miles drunk and not care.

I GOT DRUNK ONCE
RON RIEKKI

And we found people just pick
 you up, take you to their home,
 let you crash there, so that one guy,
 we slept on his couch, and woke
 early and were mostly sober and
 decided to quietly turn everything
 upside-down in his home, turning
 the couch upside-down and lamps
 and all his books and his shoes and
 a clock and a painting and we'd have
 turned the roof upside-down if we
 could have, but we wanted to go
 before he woke up, so he'd have
 the shock of his life, and the time
 after she left where I didn't want
 to be able to think anymore, so I
 just bottled my brain and I was in
 Québec and went to a bluff and
 I could see a fjord that looked like
 it was made by Caravaggio, night
 and day fighting it out, light-dark

battling, this hollow in my chest,
 how I tried to pull it out, wrestling
 with my guts, trying to shove my
 hand into my thorax, and this
 couple, fucking, nearby, seeing
 me and me seeing them, naked,
 open space, blanketed, not caring,
 and me, mad with loss, and fight-
 clubbing myself, trying to get
 the alien out of my throat and
 I stopped and they stared at me
 and I stared at them and they
 stared at me: Danaë, Samson.
 Léon Bonnat and Artemisia
 Gentileschi. They owned all
 of the world. All of it. And
 I'm a Hyde on an evening on
 Karl Johan Street, and I'm lost,
 then, now, still, meditating in
 just how lost I am, desperate,
 so desperate that I got banned
 on Bumble for life for liking

I GOT DRUNK ONCE
RON RIEKKI

too many profiles, how you
have to be selective or you
will be excommunicated for
life, and I am, so that Bumble
hopes I die, because they only
want the lovely and the abs
and the rich and the fake and
the bots and the Hell of what
dating apps are, but we need
drinking apps, where you can
learn how to erase your head
and David Lynch is my life
and this poem is going to die
soon and it will be forgotten,
buried in with all of the other
poems in the graveyards of
literature, lost, rotting, hope-
ful that someone will dig it
up, embrace its zombie soul
& love it despite its ugliness

Ron Riecki has been awarded a 2014 Michigan Notable Book, 2015 The Best Small Fictions, 2016 Shenandoah Fiction Prize, 2016 IPPY Award, 2019 Red Rock Film Fest Award, 2019 Best of the Net finalist, 2020 Dracula Film Festival Vladutz Trophy, 2019 Très Court International Film Festival Audience Award and Grand Prix, 2020 Rhysling Anthology inclusion, and 2022 Pushcart Prize. Right now, Riecki's listening to Blonde Redhead's "23."

When a crow finds another crow
dead on the ground, wings spread

like a silk cloak, with a ruby flower
on its chest bleeding silently, it caws

an alarm to call other crows to see
the corpse, then at once a murder

of crows gather around together,
still and mute to witness their own

death. That was what happened
when I found you on the crisp bed

of the lake, with your soft flower
on your heart, long after you left

the shelter to find potable water.
That was how I screamed an alarm

for others to witness that the pain
had no wings, it lied stiff on the dry

earth in the form of a hunt thing,
innocent and radiant like a daughter.

Özge Lena is an Istanbul-based poet. Her poems have appeared in The London Magazine, Abridged, The Selkie, 14 Magazine, and elsewhere in various countries including the UK, USA, Canada, Bangladesh, Iceland, Serbia, and France. In 2023, she was nominated both for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. Özge's poetry was shortlisted for the Oxford Brookes International Poetry Competition and the Ralph Angel Poetry Prize in 2021, then for The Plough Poetry Prize in 2023, and for the Black Cat Poetry Press Nature Prize in 2024.

WAR AND GRIEF
SAHIL MEHTA

1200:35000
 (And counting)
 Is that a ratio
 or a proportion?
 Teach me the math
 behind
 proportionate response.
 Does one dead mother
 and a left leg
 make my punishment
 proportionate
 to your grief?
 Or should I offer
 my right leg, too?
 I don't have
 another
 mother to spare.

The Muscogee language
 has five
 past tenses,
 each used depending
 on how far back
 an event occurred.
 How many pages
 of history
 are you allowed
 to turn back
 to stake your claim
 on the here
 and now?
 What if we can't
 agree
 on which page
 marks the beginning
 of the end?

Temple of David
 or Temple of Doom
 (rel.1984)?
 What tense
 should we use?

Over in India,
the answer is
apparently
pre-Islamic times.
The Hindu hordes
have recently discovered
200 million intruders
of the worst kind.
Centuries of cohabitation
and the Taj Mahal
notwithstanding,
these uninvited guests
must go home.

A blot on *Bharat*
and it's greatness
of before,
Take your Taj
and foreign ways
back to where
you came from.
Prayagraj
is the new
Hindu verb
for wiping out
an entire people
from your personal
browsing history.
Just ask
Bilkis Bano,
saffron
is the most
expensive
spice.

Go home.
Go back home.
What is home?
Where is home?
Is it the
leaky boat
packed with
desperate humanity
and fading hope?

WAR AND GRIEF
SAHIL MEHTA

Is it where
 you eat
 memories
 of beloved foods
 to fill your
 shriveled soul?
 The place
 where even your
 dreams
 are riddled
 with bullet holes?
 The killing fields
 where bumper crops of
 dead bodies
 outnumber
 the leaves on
 the last standing
 tree?
 Should I be
 grateful
 I didn't wash up
 on a beach
 in Bodrum
 for the world
 to shed
 a tear?
 Was it actually
 a tear
 or did the
 Arab Spring
 just
 aggravate your allergies?

Sahil Mehta was born and raised in India. He currently lives in Boston, MA, where he works in the hospitality industry. He has over two decades of experience in educational publishing, but his foray into fiction and poetry is much more recent. His short fiction has appeared in Foglifter Journal (nominated for PEN/Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize for Emerging Writers), Roadrunner Review, and South 85 Journal (2023 Julia Peterkin Flash Fiction Award, second runner-up).

CINDY SHERMAN IS A BIRD
JACK DEBOYACE

yes there will be the wind &
I'll be your method actor / witness
my sins are devotional cannibalized
hymns when played backwards O
I can see the canyon! & the canyon's
in drag wielding a sledgehammer
wearing a graphic tee Bart Simpson
w/ Juice WRLD dreads Britney Spears
drowns herself in the "Everytime" music video
silly ruse wakes up & smiles at the
camera in the end I'm used to a metaphor
so to grieve is an uncanny performance
suspended in air every night I go back in time

Jack DeBoyace is an emerging poet from Pennsylvania. His poetry has appeared in The Bucks County Herald and Writes of Passage.

CENTO ON ILLNESS
IAN PARKER

- after Richard Siken, Rafael Campo, Andrea Gibson, Marianne Moore,
Henri Cole, Billy Collins, Karen An-Hwei Lee, and Mutsuo Takahashi

These things are complicated says the Health Department.

I ask that they describe an object right in front of them,
into my doctor's stethoscope, say unkind things with kindness:

*Sometimes awful things have their own kind of beauty:
this little airless room, peonies of bone-marrow, the painful light.*

(after Paul Brooks, Logen Cure, Randall Jarrell, Pablo Neruda,
Arthur Rimbaud, Alli Warren)

After the end of the world, I've got something
to show you: misfortune was my god, nothing
and stars, almond and seahorse, I am aware
of my heart. I missed Los Angeles, the not-
happening restricted universe (it was really hell;
the old hell, the one whose doors were opened
by my wild destiny). Clawing at the new world,
its black breast — baby holds on tight, pinky
promise — the grip of a tragic love, hanging onto
my name and address. This is what I know
(apathetic type) : strayed from nowhere, singing
Voodoo Child in the background, flames rising
from the sea, I am learning
to love myself: I will never be happy.

**IN WHICH BILL MURRAY MARRIES MY GRANDMOTHER,
EVEN THOUGH SHE IS DEAD AND HE IS NOT
SARAH HANSON**

There stands my grandmother, a young woman
with raven hair I have seen in pictures but never
with my own eyes. She doesn't recognize me,
but she is proud of me. I can see it in her eyes, blue
like I have never seen because she died with brown

irises like mine. She is marrying Bill Murray, who both is
and is not my grandfather, and we both do and do not repeat
this ceremony every night. It isn't every night, except
for when it is. The crowd is faceless, by which I mean
I can't make out who anyone is, except the hamster I forgot

in the drawer of my nightstand for two months,
which my husband tells me isn't real, we never
had a hamster. But still I woke up panicked, and I am relieved
to see someone has been feeding her because it wasn't
me. Bill Murray is proclaimed my grandmother's

husband, and he both is and is not my grandfather now.
He eats clementines that he pulls from his pocket,
already-peeled, but I decline the slice he offers because my
teeth are too loose in my jaw to chew, and instead I hand him
a feather. He puts it in his back pocket and does a little

shimmy that makes me and my young grandmother laugh.
They will be happy together. Their grandchildren will have straight
teeth. The crow clergy that married them will visit often,
bringing blue button gifts that look like my grandmother's
new eyes, as well as acorns that Grandpa Bill will keep in his

pockets and peel into slices. Bill Murray never raises his
voice to me, not even once, even though he's only sometimes
my grandfather. I remember to feed the hamster.

We all dance with feathers.

Sarah Hanson is an emerging poet with an MA from the University of Chicago. Her work has been featured in Wild Greens, Prosectrics, and The Midnight Fawn Review. The Minnesota native lives in Minneapolis with her husband and three cats. Find her at www.sarahhansonwrites.com and on Instagram at @sarahhansonwrites.

“Archaic Greek artists...sculptor and painter...were presenting...images to be ‘read’...symbols of life or live action, read part by part, figure by figure, as a poem is line by line.” —John Boardman

The fleeing Athenians must’ve known what gives
 with your two-headed Archaic Smile. My visits
 to your hushed new digs, to stand in your eyeless gaze,
 haven’t added up. That look takes in your missing

parts, your being tossed, legless, in a rubble grave
 for a few thousand years, and unearthed, steadfast.
 Stone silent, sure, but...so all alert, yet your smile swears
 nothing’s strange to you that isn’t absence of change?

Returning, they find eyes that were jewels, and the sacrifice
 (pick of the herd), clenched by the ankles, lounging
 on your shoulders, as your full (if shattered) scrotum jingles,
 soundlessly, at the small, lone, scraped-out sac,

flat on your thick deltoid—so that our Pallas Athena
 might take the carved meanings, what, in the ribs?
 Yet, the Persians gone, you are bathed, anointed,
 laid out in the sanctuary, given exequies.

The calf (smelling blood?) has lined up its wider smile,
 deaf ear, level of eyes, and forward slant
 with yours. Still, it shrugs. She being near, the calf is
 now past fear, knowing time for Her is the herd bells chiming.

Constantine Contogenis is one of two finalists for the 2024 Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize. His collection *Ikaros* (Word Press, 2004) won First Prize "Open Voice Poetry Award" from *Writer's Voice*. Co-translated *Songs of the Kisaeng: Courtesan Poetry of the Last Korean Dynasty* (BOA Editions, 1997). He's in *Joining Music with Reason: 34 Poets*, *BritishAmerican: Oxford* 2004-2009, chosen by Christopher Ricks (2011).

SIX NIGHTS
LOUIS FABER

1.

A vulture hovers
 over my sleep
 waiting patiently
 to devour my dreams.

2.

In this dream
 I stare endlessly
 at whitewashed walls
 and pity the spider.

3.

I know the imploding
 sun is highly symbolic
 but when I wake
 it will be forgotten.

4.

Once I dreamt of great cats
 screwing under some front porch
 but now they have
 all grown sterile.

5.

I spoke with generations
 of my ancestors, they said
 death is an end point
 rendering everything moot.

6.

In this dream I am
 wandering in a desert
 but the manna
 tastes like hot sand.

Louis Faber is a poet and writer. His work has appeared in *Cantos*, *The Poet* (U.K.), *Alchemy Spoon*, *New Feathers Anthology*, *Dreich* (Scotland), *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*), *Defenestration*, *Atlanta Review*, *Glimpse*, *Rattle*, *Pearl*, *The South Carolina Review* and *Worcester Review*, among others, and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

1.

Don't put your feet in the bed. You'll get sand everywhere.

There is already sand everywhere,
 Even where we swore sand wouldn't be,
 Even in places we never touched.

Did you do this?

2.

It is a cliché as strong as death:

Children gutting the earth and building moated castles with coquina, mud, salt,
 And oxygen, faith,

And this goddamn sand—

Get it out! Did you put it here?

3.

The tide comes in for six hours. The tide goes out for six hours. It is a cycle; it repeats, breathless.

(That's what cycles do).

The sanderlings do not know how far out to run.

4.

The difference between shattered glass and sea glass (tragedy and treasure) in the ocean is time.

As is everything.

The difference between a wet napkin and a dead jellyfish is, visually, almost nothing.

Somebody left the napkin there when they thought nobody was looking,
 That's the difference.

They both mean we're sick.

As does everything.

The difference between a bruise and religion is roughly thirty,

But there are decimals I am not accounting for.

5.

Chunks of cobblestone from a hurricane years ago still wash up with the foam.

Pulpy, spinach-colored algae clings to them,

Because the algae has nowhere else to go,

Because this cobblestone is a refuge to things that don't know it never held,

That don't know they cannot trust it.

If you listen, you can hear the foam hiss as it pulls away, or sinks.

There are shells here that look like broken wings,

And you can't see it, but your footprints glow with the moisture,

Before they shrink into the sand.

**IF I WERE AN OCEAN ELDER: NINE OBSERVATIONS (AND
NOTES ON CONSERVATION)
SYDNEY GUIDA**

The sand!
Don't put your feet there.

6.

Oh, that would've been a beautiful one,

We croon at the helmet-shaped shell, with half its head missing.

A man beside us is keeled over, scratching CHANT into the sand.

There are spade and plastic rake scars around him;

Empty spaces where buckets choked down the beach;

And now this.

The sea is trying to heal it all,

Running up the shore with an eager liquid suture,

And there are slivers of asphalt, wood, brick in the man's hair.

You would never know it,

But it itches.

Want to know something else?

I take the ocean's currency very seriously.

I am looking for a sand dollar to repay all of my debts,

So I can play my chances at forgiveness

And sleep at night.

I owe a man at the smoke shop on Halifax a quarter and five pennies of my soul.

You would never know it.

7.

You can throw a stone at a seagull and it will run toward the stone, into the stone,

Because it thinks the stone is food. Rotten. Spoiled. Hungry, maybe.

You can throw sand into a crab burrow and the crab will do nothing.

This is your power. And the sand's.

Should we yell about it?

8.

That clam shell is as big as your fist,

But there's a hole in its pink belly.

Is it worth it, to keep something almost beautiful?

You tell me. I am asking you. It was a jaw once, and now it's busted.

The newborn sun shines off the sea so fierce this morning that there are two suns,

One a snarled reflection of the other,

Smearing like a stain down the fetch.

A girl folded to her knees presses the sand with those baby-fat fingers,

And it lights up beneath the touch.

(She will not be able to scrub hard enough; it's in her skin now.)

A wave barrels toward the girl, that foam python-eyed, hissing.

She does not look up.

Should we yell?

**IF I WERE AN OCEAN ELDER: NINE OBSERVATIONS (AND
NOTES ON CONSERVATION)
SYDNEY GUIDA**

9.

I can't sleep on all of these grains.

Sydney Guida (she/her) is a student and writer currently based in Pennsylvania, with plans to become a screenwriter and journalist. Her work has additionally appeared in The Diamond Gazette.

|| bordelessly ||
 sleazing bodies oozing
 mouthfuls of crisp dibutyl phthalate
 we swallow verdant light 'n you know
 it future's brighter in the dark
 tongue-sored and b[l]ack-lit slick
 nails golden-sickled around thighs
 wrists throats fla-flash-fle-fleesh
 [[wish it were {m} {I} {n} {e}]]
 stickynoted
 self-sabotaging revolutions

did ya know now that Saturn
 murdered their moonchild
 added their crusty corpse-partying
 crumbs to their rings
 to be more beautiful????
 curvy~hawt~facecard~worthy
 ||to be aliving||

all velvet and vine
 i am all unspun sugared raw wounds
 unstitched lungful of liverleaf
 feeling inappropriate
 thrumming for [my dear's]
 epilated in the Ur-zome
 i can be put to rest with
 the rest of the party-goers
 air glittery metallic
 horizon's halo shavings
 || ||

cian onus (they/them) hails from the sprawling Balkans, from a mountain village that no longer exists. They are published in various magazines and publications in different languages. After a hiatus and much sheep herding, they are now trying to catch up with all the titles on their to-read list. They can be found on Twitter - @OnixOnux

enter the forest

