the literary forest poetry magazine

issue eight (2026)



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR
ABBIE HART

hi, hello, and welcome back to the forest. thank you for continuing to see it for the trees. this year's issue is a ringer, complete with the winner and runner up of the inaugural poetry competition, named in honor of my late grandmother, Evelyn Hart, or nana, as she was better known. the two poems chosen, Isabelle Wei's "upper room," which won first prize, and M. Benjamin Thorne's "Chemo Ever After," which won runner-up, were both an incredible continuation of the talent that Literary Forest has published since its inception in summer 2019, and reminiscent of my nana's spirit as a lifelong reader and lover of the arts.

Literary Forest remains in dublin, ireland, for another year, as do i. to every dubliner that submitted this year, thank you dearly. you make up the artistic fabric of this beautiful city that we call home.

like i say over and over again, issue 8 is special. issue 8 is weird. issue 8 is hoping that you love it. issue 8 is chasing issue 7 down a dark alleyway and we are letting it.

Layla Al-Sadoon has a rabbit within her (and her sister has a fox). DS Maolalai listens to the sounds of Dublin. Marie Anne Arreola likes being led by people who touch things for a living. Paul Hostovsky reckons with the past. Dan Raphael follows his nose to the dining car. James Grabill glimpses the long dark hair of the mother in Genesis. Grant Vecera returns to our spare tire at the insistence of the stars. For Frederick Pollack, the Absurd has just started. Sean G. Meggeson awaits Lord Zeltrex, the New Light. Evelyn Thurman is still flinching, still fleeing, still field. Isabelle Wei makes a note to self. M. Benjamin Thorne is still beautiful.

please remember that the forest loves you. please remember that the forest is here, waiting. please remember to be good.

cheers, y'all.



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ENTER THE FOREST.

THE FOX

LAYLA AL-SADOON

I:

i know i have a rabbit within me
mine is clawing and restless
i did not know rabbits were so needy

i do incandescently realize
how vivid my end is becoming
and i need my fox to know i am lingering

my sister has a fox within her
i know she pretends it does not harm her

undoubtedly i will still try to calm the beast

wrap my rabid claws around her scaling jaw
shove some heart down her fur-lined arms
talk to her slow and in rhyme
give her a sedative
and remind her i am on her side

upon night, in the wilderness
while i dig up my faith i'll see her from afar
just across the riverbed

and with my hands still covered in red mud and rouge
i'll bury my horrors back down to face her with the truth

II:

dearest fox,
the rabbit in me is greedy and anxious
so i do not say this from any pitied goodness
i am crawling to you, unearthed by drought to say

please listen to the wind at night when it calls you
and remember give room to those who love you
your memory stands with them and it cannot be kind on its own

so don't let the animal in you become your savior
don't wait for rotting fruit to tell you who to become
and most of all don't hate me because you look just like me

OPEN WINDOWS

DS MAOLALAI

in a light wind the trees
play like hanging maracas
against the brush percussion
of wind through the buildings
in town and the start-stopping motion
of bar pick-up taxis. the occasional treble:
unremarkable sirens, laughs. downstairs
you are watching a reality show. you don't like
windows open, but I like a breeze and these sounds
which ring out of the softly-half time between
christmas and past new years
eve. dead christmas trees shedding
their needles on storm drains, leaning their trunks
against cardboard and street-corner trash.

In the stories I return to
when the world tilts toward spectacle
instead of truth—
there is always a glimmer.
A signal slipped through the seams.
You've felt it:
where the air thins in higher altitudes,
and thought stammers, but faith quickens—

and in the valleys,
the world gathers itself back,
nearly within reach.
The air more forgiving,
the shadows on summer afternoons
taking on that strange pink tint,
the kind that never falls right
on the concrete back home.
Too holy for the city.
Too sincere for asphalt.

As if the word miracle still held
a trace of dust in its folds.
Like it had been kept in
someone's pocket too long,
then pulled out again just in time.
Down there, no tour guides wait
for new arrivals.
No pamphlets. No rules.
But the caretakers still work,
quietly, with conviction,

pruning the trees,
lifting their limbs toward light,
pausing often to study shape,
to see what's still growing.
And it's them, the ones who
work the orchards of memory,
who know the story best.
They've lived in its echo
long enough to feel where it fades.
I like being led like that.
By people who touch things for a living.
By morning light coming in unannounced
through the blinds;

not knowing the rules,
but breaking them gently anyway
by landing across your chest
and staying. I guess what I'm saying
is: that moment is vaulted in me now.

Filed away next to the other shapes
that light can take when it decides
to resemble someone you love.
Because sometimes
what saves us
isn't the miracle,
but how we notice
the miracle's shape.
An you were there, in a halo,
sleeping under the morning light.

I COULD GOOGLE IT BUT I'D RATHER WONDER

PAUL HOSTOVSKY

The age of my counselor in bunk #12
at Camp Mah-Kee-Nac for Boys when I was
ten and he was old. Older. Already balding,
though prematurely. He might have been
in his twenties. Or thirties. His name was Don.
You can google him if you want to. Don
Comstock. I'm not changing the names
to protect the innocent. He wasn't innocent.
He would often sit at the edge of my bed
while telling me and my bunkmates a bedtime
story. And as the story unfolded, his hand—
you know how this story unfolds—
folded the satin hem of my blanket up and over—
this is where I add the trigger warning—
and diddled me. There, I've said it.
He did it many nights that summer, and one time
I remember him kissing me on the lips.
I don't remember anything else. Except
that I never told anyone about it. I wonder
if there was more and I buried it. I wonder
if that fucked me up, you know, sexually,
as an adult. I could probably google it—
Does sexual molestation as a young child
fuck you up sexually for the rest of your life?
Does a diddle and a kiss constitute sexual
molestation? Is there a pederast named Don
Comstock listed in the registry of sex offenders?
I could google it if I wanted. But I'm in my late
sixties, and he's probably dead or dying or
demented. He asked for my mailing address
on the last day of camp. To write letters.
He wrote to me and I wrote back. We were
friends. I had a stamp collection. He lived
in Australia. Tasmania. His postage stamps
were exotic—finely detailed, engraved pictures
of Mt. Wellington, a platypus, a Tasmanian Devil.

“DISCIPLINED BY FRIENDSHIP THEY GRILLED THE SIDE BEEF”

DAN RAPHAEL

(mark sargent)

there are no apartments above slaughterhouses
but when the bacon of dawn starts frying two stories below
and I’m more scrambled than sunnyside up or over easy

all night my knee was under construction
and one lane of awareness is still closed

the diesel is me, I used up my ration of sunshine a week ago.
every wall is a forgery while the floor and ceiling are still
working out their relationship. call this what you will,
until the lights and vents are waist high, until I’m rinsing in
familiar flavor

my legs are on strike, my wings are in the shop
my parachute only works in reverse—lifting me
to where a cliff or plane once was.
this rapidly approaching bright light above the cloud tops
could be the sun or an inter-era train
where all the tickets are one way

it doesn’t need to stop cause I’m already on
following my nose to the dining car
where we can eat food we’ve only read about
or something we haven’t had since 8th grade
the napkins are mirrors, my cup is bubbling seismically

my plate will soon be full enough to appear:
if I had a globe I could trace where each ingredient
was manufactured--the periodic table is my bingo card
and I want to fill as many squares as safe

(quote-sparks from doug marx)

"My face has a wave interference problem."

if I get far enough into the ocean for it to be a mirror
where and when will I come back to shore
like a concert where the choir encircles the audience
no room for conductors, inductance or double-sided tape
my clothes are the only record of where I've been
but hold too much information to wear before washing

II:
"About the time my mandala
turns into the roulette wheel of my dartboard heart"

my number's been removed from the wheel
what are the odds of a prime number,
something that can't be divided only shattered

self-digging holes clean fill used parachutes
it was my turn to bring the illumination—
I brought doughnuts but forgot the batteries

am I receiver or transmitter, target or non-playable character
my heart is round with a corn maze inside it

III:
"The fingerprint found at the scene was the moon's."

do I need an alibi. will my shadow be compelled to lie
tomorrow's being held hostage, yesterday's on parole
no one's coming here but there won't let me in
if I erase my street. if my address is a bitcoin password
I'm writing my memoir on an old calculator that can't decide
which functions apply—the square root of an accident,
logarithmic hungers, the cosine of friendship

leaf bones, sidewalk songs, all emotions 20% off,
looked through so many times only opinions are left,
optional frequencies in the key of west, somewhere between
sharp and flat, natural and spontaneous, halfway to the last floor

as a library is the opposite of a dam, dna reversed to and

it's neither ether or a nebulous half-hour—you cut and I'll choose
aces mild, a 7-10 split, balling bowls
you can hear the breaths bouncing like a basket without a handle
a net in the planning stage,

I keep the door open so no one comes in

"I sing of the compass needle that spins and trembles, paralyzed
with indecision."

For the underground's never done
erupting with exotic risks
and rustlings of Andromeda far from the hurricane eye,

the silk wick in capillary draw where sun steps down into kernels of corn,
the ocean's stone rounding off in sinuous slews of the undersea carve,

with mothers and fathers on back who knew
their waking and sleep,
their classical circulation and territorial tributaries,
their swings of pendulum and muscle memory

for the likes of
Roosevelt National Forests where the fur of raccoons pours out in rays
that reach ground-dwelling bees before a freezing hot whole range
of slight shifts in anonymity ringing lead bells in camera-flash
comprehensions of mysterious mitosis far from the end of anything,

given the devotional waters of the sea already beyond themselves,
the neocortex running for Congress in the beauty of Earth,
the brawls of drunken encounters of brainstems
one with another over the heights of contemplation
that live in Appalachian valleys

in "living" that includes not losing capacity or foundational wherewithal
for those places where animals trek through sub-dimensional spreading trees

the magnetized sense of skin
and glimpse of long dark hair of the mother in Genesis,
the hand-drumming that protects from the burning stars
with summer night in the Holy Land
refracted through the latest whale-eye winds.

The shimmering scat of the next touch of a fingertip
linked to pituitary clarity while crankshafts are turning
on the powers of evaporation

have transient coronal tributaries going
translucent, filled with matter, for what matters
in the keep of classical origin

around exquisite pitches in the sky where principles are tabled

in the blink of the spectrum carrying on talk of ancestors
as vector intensities sweep into current.

For the next lightning still lives on the cliff's edge
of an infant's eye in every cell of the eye,
where guttural telecommunications must study their thrills
and home-spun fears, their eyeballs
in the missionary position of forebears
in the ultraviolet medulla oblongata
at dusk, where the plants of camaraderie are

sinking root, pondering planetary halves, squared off,
where all war must end.

Tendered as we've been around it
though the moon still displays its idea of terrestrial
endlessness
becoming what was finally
before those who may have, who knowing well enough,
have had purple-blue bursts of seed
into sudden redemption, while blood swims out, attending cells.

The people we know may be safe
as the aspen leaves are
when they've already gone rouge, reddened yellow
once they've built up steam
and then fallen without needing to be more exact

in the pressure put on plants which evolved
to always help plow the recompressed emptiness.

For breathing cells float in the willingness to sacrifice
vulnerability from being bone-spun
to fit the grain and not flown in from another location.

For late August must find it's dark by the streetlights
after breaking through conditions in a more than hundred-year rain
hauled over as a river tracked by console radios
gleaming with canyon dust that once filled the papers
and strong blue in the sky,

in the glowing unseen future
that undergoes shapes of the hand or paw the symbiotic projects
of cells hinged not only on tools,
but beauty and art breeding in light chained to the wheel
with chanting winds
undertaking mountainous turns
in the elder beauty of stone
around forgotten exhalations no one used,

with honeybee externalizations
and scarlet-blue cries of electrical squid.

So parrots have been flying in with their tropospheric rain
of the eye's iris's ever and ever
cardinal as moves of a range of mountainous large
pre-atomic consumptions called out
when rightly named for the probable future
and impossibly flooded unconscious
cities of bearing

given the problem of an ant's look into the universe
while the Kandinsky planet exhales coal-fired centuries
from ground down up-hatchings stunned by their own incomplete
immensity reddening near impulse,

comforted perhaps by the average mathematically bolting out
recombinants with transient arrays of bacterial suns,
gravity-spun turbines, and the hold unlatched
on a little taste of medieval impregnation,
the first skin when we were born
in the photosynthetic day with night transmutations the summer wheels
as core-spun seedlings sound
resounding smooth as skin, magnetized in sense
that gives and receives in waves.

When what happens next
may not be the least
attending their tender consequences

for so much transpires under the heavy sky
ants must be holding close to the ground
that happens to be nearly impossible
to see in perspective around exploitation of the exquisite
renaissance instrument
flowers in a native bee's register

that not many must know the way aphids give them additional ideas
while they face greater needs than for philosophic doors
to the last train of blanket action on the prairie

with bioluminescent sea level in long-term overflow of the genome
into mornings gone luminous as the meanings of hours
that mushroom unfathomable out of cranking
and ratcheting of the elaborate labors of parts
of machinery discardable if broken, wealth cushioning
public streets that are lined with the residue of belief
and shacks by the long-haul roar leaving at night

as neon glows through windows of small groceries
masking loads of untested proprietary chemistry
along with any burst-horse coal-burning
decoration of the out-of-reach oceanic floors

the way angels depicted with faces resembling ours seemed to know
how to stay here longer where gamblers have been
able to confuse the joker for the king.

For only scientists can detect the best of times
falling on hard roads that darken the common good
while roots of the trees hold the ground in place
for the current replacing fire
and adequate scientific equipment shows we're so alike
our differences dissolve in presence.
And then we go,
we go disappearing over the steel bridge.

COWS

GRANT VECERA

i am a parachute
my cucina
my grey spot
on the left hind leg
of your
favorite
cat
gilles
always singing
e ven after the stars
insisted
we return
to our spare tire
our red light
really just a haze
as geese
form a p
and continue over the black
shoe
who
promised
we would
feel better
after
the gauze
drank the trees

TANKS RUMBLE PAST

FREDERICK POLLACK

The front wall of her flat
has fallen two stories. It blocks the entrance, the steps,
but no one's thinking of leaving
or entering just now. Wearing
an apron and a kind of turban,
she has swept debris from the table, is sweeping the floor,
and will soon set down plates.
The ceiling, the flat above
are whole. Let's be clear:
if they weren't she wouldn't be here,
opening a hoarded can.
The Absurd has just started,
Postmodernity's not yet thought of.
Nor is she mad (though she may lay a tablecloth);
she's making do.
Images, however, have already begun
to escape heavy cameras, unwieldy print
and control. This, from a classic war,
approaches a coming moment
when such apartments will excite no comment.

Earlier, pre-Visigoth
iteration of tech; donated
to Bill, even Hillary … I knew him
at school. He clearly
came from, and would go to,
money. Didn't
experiment, like others of that niche, with
varieties of obnoxiousness;
pontifically, rather, explained
inequality, the heroism
of firms, the stress-free future.
Ideal as a roommate, mostly at
unspecified suit-and-tie meetings.
I saw his name later; then, today,

a photo of the place
(one of his places) where he was found.
Imagined him addressing the poor
in a podcast from there,
advising them to be happy
with rooms too small
for twilight to enter.

IDEAS AHEAD OF THEIR TIME MORE RELEVANT NOW THAN EVER BEFORE

SEAN G. MEGGESON

help no one with anything. This planet
takes place in a field full of naïve
bodies and sound loops of negation.

Takes half a brain to know the body
messages music like cruel jazz, acid
to paper so as disease breaks a fast,

schizophrenia chores a debt. Abraham
hides his gooseneck behind a beard.
Isaac can't make rent again.

Vinegar outweighs wine.
Just look at Shakyamuni
and the Nazarene at Walmart.

They hug out co-regulation
and point to the receivers
sunk into their frontal lobes, put

there by intergalactic Others, angry
and soon-arriving. Their spaceship
is armed. The window of hope

is closed for good, they say. We don't
even deserve a quiet end. But just
maybe…Lord Zeltrex, the New Light!

ESTROGEN

EVELYN THURMAN

e is not medicine.
e is life.
e is the field
through which the fugitive runs
thus,
e is hope.

a stranger offers me e
& it is faith running now,
my vein the field.

a stranger puts her sex
into my mouth &
I become a woman.

e is the running.
the wind is my hair.

I am not in danger here
but still flinching,
still fleeing,
still field.

will start writing in pencil
real wood and grip
right and some warm brass
toned dinner jazz, all that
forreal. can't wait
to post

card this in the snail mail
book club script bag list cut
drawings from your old
common
place book—note

to self: pick up
laundry, shave clean, write
send parent thesis to-do check
list hey sis (do I leave
spaces — in between—

the dashes)
and where do I full
stop. I forget

after all
even the capital of that
common place
on your rasp
berryplump tongue
as also I forget
the scraper. I will never
theless take notes—I

will start writing in pencil
soon practicing curly
qs faqs questions for you
when you get back.

I forgot the question
mark there? do
you re mi fa so
last week, when

we caught the trout
then played some slow

moving schubert. so

have you received
my letter yet—sent
from home

phone living
room next to the dry maple
shelf with the plants
and jam. rasp

on the door
when I sleep and dream wide
golden gates all oystersurreally
wetgleamy above this
space—where
are you—where you
are laughing

sun spots at these speckled
letters, sent by post.
not to worry, I will write angrily
to the snails in pencil
too. xoxo so

when you receive this, tell
ephone me—tell me
how to reach you, send down cats
and dogs with drizzle rain
misty, or bread and wine
swish slosh. my number
has not changed

but please dial
quicksilver. leave a message
pencil me in. parenthetically
(hey sis) country code
(H34V3N) capital
(Stamp Here).

CHEMO EVER AFTER

M. BENJAMIN THORNE

Trapped, captive kept in tower glass
and steel. Looking out the window
car lots and gardens Lot's wife
looked back, saw her garden salt-crusted
and then she too Cracked lips part
I lick under my nose salt-sweet miscible
mess of snot and tears Tired. White gown,
white sheets Maybe I'm like her
but have a name still. Outside, asters
goldenrod ironweed lift up their heads
refreshed in breeze Inside me, golden rods
an urge to vomit I let my long hair down
down in golden waves to the white tiles
where it stayed until being swept away
my husband tells me I'm still beautiful
he's the one looking back, double-blind

Layla Al-Sadoon (she/her) is from Antioch, TN. She lives there with her two cats and an overflowing bookshelf. She is an English Education senior at Lipscomb University. As an aspiring poet, Layla draws inspiration from her family's Middle Eastern roots and her journey as a first-generation American. Through poetry, she has fallen in love with intercultural identities and how exploration creates humanity.

DS Maolalai has been described by one editor as "a cosmopolitan poet" and another as "prolific, bordering on incontinent". His work has been nominated fourteen times for BOTN, ten for the Pushcart and once for the Forward Prize, and 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).

Marie Anne Arreola is a cultural journalist, editor, and writer from Sonora, Mexico, and the founding editor of PROYECTO VOCES, a digital magazine showcasing emerging voices in art and literature across the Américas. Her work—appearing in Latina Media Co., Hypermedia Magazine, Lucky Jefferson, and other outlets—examines identity, memory, and community-based cultural practices. She is the author of the forthcoming novel *Sparks of the Liberating Spirit Who Trapped Us Back in Woodstock* (Foreshore Publishing, 2025). Working across genres, she focuses on transnational narratives that honor collective histories and evolving cultural expression.

Paul Hostovsky's poems appear and disappear simultaneously (ta-da!). He has no life and spends it with his poems, trying to perfect their perfect disappearances. His website is paulhostovsky.com

dan raphael's poetry collection, *How'd This Tree Get In?*, will be published this summer by Ravenna Press. More recent poems appear in BlazeVox, Unlikely Stories, Egophobia, Indefinite Space, Broken Teacup and Mad Swirl. Most Wednesdays dan writes and records a current events poem for The KBOO Evening News.

James Grabill's poems have appeared widely in periodicals: Caliban, Harvard Review, Weber, Unlikely Stories, Stand, Terrain, & many others. His books include *Poem Rising Out of the Earth* (Lynx House P – Oregon Book Award, 1995), and recently *Eye of the Spiral* (Uncollected P, 2022) and *Stray Dogs & Irreversible Cars* (Atmosphere P, 2024). Over the years, he taught many kinds of writing and for nearly a decade a course sequence in global issues relative to sustainability.

Grant Vecera teaches writing, literature, and thinking at Butler University and at Indiana University Indianapolis. His work has been appearing in illustrious literary periodicals for the past 30 years, most recently in Samjoko Magazine, Aethlon, Reverie Literary Magazine, and Merion West.

Frederick Pollack is the of two book-length narrative poems, *THE ADVENTURE* and *HAPPINESS* (Story Line Press; the former reissued 2022 by Red Hen Press), and four collections, *A POVERTY OF WORDS* (Prolific Press, 2015), *LANDSCAPE WITH MUTANT* (Smokestack Books, UK, 2018), *THE BEAUTIFUL LOSSES* (Better Than Starbucks Books, 2023), and *THE LIBERATOR* (Survision Books, Ireland, 2024). Many other poems in print and online journals (Literary Forest 2025). Website: www.frederickpollack.com.

Sean G. Meggeson is a poet and audio/spoken word artist based in Toronto. His poetry has been published in a range of journals and magazines. Sean received the League of Canadian Poets Spoken Word Award in 2024 and is a finalist for the 2026 Montreal International Poetry Prize. His spoken word & soundscape work has been featured on the Ears Have Eyes podcast, NAISA radio and Radiophrenia 2026, Glasgow. https://seangmeggesonpoetry.blogspot.com/

Evelyn Thurman is a poet writing from Brooklyn, New York. She is the recipient of the Jake Seliger Fellowship for upcoming writers. Her work has been previously published in Soul Poetry, Anemone Magazine, Laurel Moon, & Metonym.

Isabelle Wei is a writer and artist. Her work has been shortlisted for the Bridport Prize and nominated for Best of the Net. She received the Life Story Prize and Spirit of Canada Award from the Consulate General of Canada in Hong Kong & Macao, and studies English dually at Trinity College Dublin and Columbia University.

Nominated for the Pushcart and Best of the Net, **M. Benjamin Thorne** is an Associate Professor of Modern European History at Wingate University. His poems appear or are forthcoming in Sontag Mag, Halfway Down the Stairs, SWING, Maudlin House, and Belmont Story Review. In 2026 he won the Rough Diamond Poetry Award and Lazuli Literary Prize, and in 2025 his poem “Odesa” was shortlisted for the Alpine Poetry Fellowship. He lives and sometimes sleeps in Charlotte, NC.

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