In our fourth issue "Revenant," follow our poets through memories of times past, shadows of nostalgia, and reveries with ghosts.

This month's featured poet is Jeni De La O.

Issue 4 includes work by Jeni De La O, Rachel Egly, James Croal Jackson, Lucas Jacob, J. I. Kleinberg, Kathy Mak, Brandon Noel, Holly Salvatore, Lexi Vranick, Lindsey Warren, Brian Wiora, and Mathew Yates. And Jason B. Crawford is featured in "Lore" to make it a baker's dozen.

Featured Artist

This month's featured artist is Fabrice Poussin, who teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in Kestrel, Symposium, The Chimes, and dozens of other magazines. His photography has been published in The Front Porch Review, the San Pedro River Review as well as other publications.

“The Weight of Lemons” by Jeni De La O

Citrus and fresh wood, summer at seven; mmm, the smell of them. Lemons that cut through the heaviest, that bring the brightest, that will cut you--sting you, and also lift you on the right winter evening, when you’re seven inches of snow away from your tropical home. Blizzards are deafeningly silent and

I miss the rustling palms of home, sometimes. Always lemons, the weight of lemons—on a silver scale, against a replica of a replica of a gleaming metal disc in France—the last uncalculated measure of love. The weight of lemons is

the distance between the end of abuela’s cigarette and my cashmere lined gloves; between
your front porch jungle of jasmine and the salted
hem of my wool trousers; the two of us, who call
(or don’t) each day, despite the pithiness. The two of us,
who love so brightly.

Jeni on "The Weight of Lemons":

I grew up in South Florida and my backyard was home to mango, avocado, bitter orange, lime and lemon trees. Citrus like lemons and limes are a staple in Floridian and Caribbean cuisine, they’re so much a part of our culture it’s easy to forget that they’re not native to the region; they were brought over and cultivated by the Spaniards who conquered those territories in the 13th century and have since thrived, becoming part of the local landscape. I wanted to write a piece that conveyed two simultaneous experiences: the sense of existing outside where you’re from and the physically heavy sensation of homesickness that can exist alongside the brightness of thriving elsewhere. To convey a sense of the physical weight of homesickness I brought in the reference to le grand k. Literally every other type of measurement in the world is mathematically calculated except for the Kilogram, which is still calculated against a physical disc of metal. I love the tangibility of this measure, and the contrast it provides against the maddeningly intangible sense of loving across great distance. Lemons, having become part of the fabric of South Florida, are the perfect metaphor for acclimation. “The Weight of Lemons” is a sort of sad love song for my mom, who will forever ask me to move back to Florida, despite how proud she is of me for making it “up north.”

EIC Christine Taylor on "The Weight of Lemons":

I spent the first half of my adult life living overseas in Hong Kong, so the homesickness that Jeni illuminates in her poem spoke to me. Having lived my entire childhood in the same house in Plainfield, New Jersey, I thought I would be happier being away, and although I valued experiencing another part of the world, I longed for home. The "weight" of being the only black American at my job and in my village wore on me over time. I came home after my mother passed away, and now I’m back in the same house in Plainfield, a reconciliation I never expected.

“On dead fish” by Rachel Egly

the eyes are the first to go, honest as they are
   then soft cheeks rubbed down to moonbeam bone
   finally belly, stretched tight around swollen organs.

the sun completes the process, takes back
all the water the creature has borrowed from the river.
   but if you look closely, you can still see scales shining like constellations
   and in the background
   the sound
of rushing
water
persistence.

“Another Drunken Summer” by James Croal Jackson

Last summer, clunks of glass, grapefruit juice across the veiled table. We tried to stay drunk through sweltering June, to cool off with Bella Sera pinot grigio, Tostitos, queso. How much is too much pleasure? These half-empty days of water we are not eager to drink. Sit in shade til sundown, table umbrella up to block the cancer sun we know. We know.

“Defense” by Lucas Jacob

“...[Y]ou know what [Saddam Hussein] did well? He killed terrorists. He did that so good.”

--Donald J. Trump, July 4, 2016

No one attends the weather-warped display counter of what was a newsstand on the corner. The wares arrayed there—a paperweight cityscape from before the fall, an ivoried Madonna cradling the space emptied of the child, and four volumes thick with moisture-bloated pages ever expanding—can be purchased at any time by anyone credulous enough to slap his fear down like currency on the wood.

Yes, it is a he, nearly every time. The furtive approach, after many passings-by as if by chance. The sidelong glance. A watcher at any of the grimy windows
that moan in the winds of this place
will sense the shudder not quite buried
by the shabby overcoat. The frisson
of feeling himself in danger. A grainy
black-and-white projection of the limited
imagination of the confidence man.

“hospital of darkness” by J. I. Kleinberg (Note: this is the text of a visual poem)

hospital

of darkness
faith
surgeon,

take the

ruin of

the sun
and
imperfection of pain,

Band-aid
The
need
dispense
light.

“To Moulton” by Kathy Mak

there was a cobalt blue rubbermaid box
sitting by the cloakroom walls
a clipart label plastered on the exterior
library
a creamy haven of warmth

the polished ancient rocking chair
creaks back and forth the grainy carpet
as you read a rich maple syrup ring
you introduce to us your pet –
a ceramic bookworm or caterpillar
nestled within the ledge of the miniature chart stand
asleep
every friday afternoon school ended at twelve
I found my way to home our home
the soft hymn of fluorescent lights reflect
as you paused over each rigid spine
fingers poised picking out treasures
for me to delve into

wherever you were you sent me a postcard
emails updating me on your latest hallmark
geocaching around the globe
leaving your mark embracing
life

how do you say good bye
when they are no longer here
and you are still here
when you reached out

nine months later
you find out

all this time you could have
guessed predicted assumed forecasted
but you could not have
known

and now you are looking back

scrolling through email after email

“Breakfast on the Weekends” by Brandon Noel

In the kitchen. In my element.
I can feel the whole state
roll back over me, the five days gone,
the coal dust in the creek,
the ankle bone offering of my labor,
and the Appalachia tea leaves—
never read them right:

When I come back,
I will, with all the noise
of morning with me,
come back
bright as the sun

A rumble shuddered through the house,
steps came quicker and louder until
my four-year-old Abigail jumped around the corner,
a proud lopsided grin shining at me.

“I saw a big black ant in you-and-mommie’s room,
but don’t worry cause I smashed it
with the book that has God’s words in it.”

I thanked her.
Children start to read without letters,
and the stories they tell are better for it.
She said, “You’re welcome!”, already out the doorway.

A lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path,
sharper than any two-edged sword,
a holy rollin bug swattin machine,
ancient of days, the red rock of ages,
come back to me.
“St. Vrain Pantoum” by Holly Salvatore

i like the smell of dirt
i cannot hear “song”
without seeing bird
i cannot see bird

i cannot hear “song”
without smelling Juniper
i cannot see bird
without a pebble in my mouth

without smelling Juniper
in her boughs I twine my hair
without a pebble in my mouth
the St. Vrain tugs at me

in her boughs I twine my hair
anchored in the sandy clay
the St. Vrain tugs at me
i cannot speak

“last times.” by Lexi Vranick

There was a last time:

we held hands crossing a busy street and your warn, rough palm swallowed mine whole;
we got sea salt in our hair and on our skin and in our bagel shop coffee cups, sitting on
worn wood benches and watching seagulls fight for clam shells and all the treasures
trapped inside -

alphabet letters cluttered your fridge,
   numbers in elementary arithmetic, and you taught me how to build them up
   to add to two and three and four and five - to ten, to twenty - to multiply

   and swept back in cardboard box for the night,
   and then the week -
       and then a decade, and a second, and maybe they’re in the back
       shed now, artifacts of all those snowy afternoons

   bowls of soup and saltine crackers and hot chocolate piled with
       marshmallows
       and whipped cream
And maybe there’s a poetry in all these lasts that we didn’t know were lasts because we were just living in moments and moments and making memories we didn’t know would become memories
and if I dug up all those fossils of all those times we laughed rib-aching
laughs in the leather breakfast nook of your yellow tiled kitchen, would I find ghosts I didn’t know we’d left behind?

Ghosts of all the last times that we said there’d be a next time.
Ghosts of you in glass chess boards and a king with his cracked crown -
in the rusted bones of a broken swing set,
in the mossy plastic playhouse - the purple slide
the toy lawn mower -

all rushing up to make something
that looks like the you I remember
from the last time

we talked.

“Sentence, Forest” by Lindsey Warren

There are places I want
to leave. Places where I
am not dreamed of.
Places in my dream that

are just entrance
and loosely there, places
where the thoughts don’t sit
well on my skin.

I could know everyone:
the hidden woman with the hot
cheeks and the stone
house, the chairs in the

fluorescent lights but I
know this is underground, 
and I have a leaf 
from me, I have to

keep going. Going from one 
basement to another 
part dream, part plant, part 
green pressed on in a mind

in love with but unaware of 
its feet, and places become 
words that only know how 
to speak to each other

with absence: grace:
out. I give myself 
to the air and receive myself 
in return, a feeling goes there,

right there, I had it but 
gave that up, too. Once 
I made a TV show 
for my neighbors to watch –

one full of cocktail parties 
and news from under 
my bed – while I went off 
to look for the other

parts of me that were 
most likely dream and did 
not find them, I only 
made a place: a pond
I call an e for blue
and a b for fire pink
and an ave for when I
float over the water before
moving toward the green. And
the forest: I haven’t been
there in years. A year
is a century in this place
I might not have created
but dreamed, like I
was dreamed, an ocean
of trees my birthright and all
my steps, steps that
one by one go
out like lights, or like
me when I green,
go out.

“Séance” by Brian Wiora

The gospel man outside my window
has a voice like an airplane hangar, mid-echo.
The kids on the street have voices
that lift themselves like slow balloons.
The streets have different voices
in the morning and at night.
The radio coughs up voices.
I walk around with my fingers in my ears.
I close my throat with my scarf when it snows.
Last night, I was tired of hearing my voice
sit at the table. I said nothing important.
I kissed someone with a voice 
that tasted like dust. It was dreadful

after that, when I found the gospel man. 
He said I looked nothing like God 
and gave me psalms to recite.

I’ve lost my voice. I’ll find it. 
I’ll drink to it. I’ll drink until 
I hear your voice. I remember it

in the bedroom, where our bed 
was dressed with sheets 
white with noise. Those nights of covers 

and uncovers. Those vows. 
And how tomorrow always came 
with its inevitable voice, the distant name 
of church bells, never ours.

“heliotrope” by Mathew Yates

is a thing with wings 
always an angel? 
i have my doubts 
& none of them are right

the way the midday light catches 
the birch out front & bleaches it 
whiter than moonsoaked snow 
is proof enough the sun 
is god 
    i don’t need to be 
an ant under a lens 
to understand this

all of life is lent 
& is retaken 
in a way that even 
shadows know
fate is a thing
with a past tense

& though the sun feels
still in the way we follow it,
really it is falling too

“Lore”

From EIC Christine Taylor: At some point, we must grieve the loss of those who have touched our lives in loving ways. Memories of them often become the nourishment we need as we continue living. In his poem "tell the ghost," Jason B. Crawford explores the loss of a friend and the road he has taken to find peace

“tell the ghost” by Jason B. Crawford

tell the ghost, there’s nothing haunting about being dead anymore. in a city where the maggots lick the acid off

our bones, there’s nothing here to fear that’s not a bronzed woman with a switch and a hair wrap. when the

dirt took the last as good as kin from me, i opened the only bottle of communion you and i ever shared to take
to your gravesite and toasted every single tombstone there. i refuse to mourn a life built on celebration.

instead, i make laugh track of your bones and play it when I swear the dust kicks up the sound of you. your

moms keeps reminding me how we rode our dirt bikes up the hill on west street when she told us not to. you

remember? you lost control of your bike. a stick lodged into your spoke or something. I just remember you

catapulting head first into a tree and laughing. walked into the door, 3 teeth in hand, smiling. your moms keeps

saying it was hard that day to punish you because she then knew there was nothing that could break her baby
boy. she kept those teeth, you know? they are in a jar in
the kitchen. they keep smiling like you.

Jason’s Commentary on “tell the ghost”:

The poem “tell the ghost” is a story of me reconciling the death of a good friend of mine, as well as my grandfather. During my day to day work, I have become numb to death, and this was a way for me to feel for the loss in a way that allowed me to be at peace. During this process, I wanted to tell stories of loss, friends, and loved ones through the eyes of someone failing to cope, so the only way is to sedate and find joy at the same time. Sometimes we find the most joy in memories, even the bad ones, so we hold on to them for long as we can.

Poet Biographies

Jason B. Crawford is black, bi-poly-queer, and a damn force of nature. In addition to being published in online literary magazines, such as Royal Rose, High Shelf Press, BeLightFilled, and The Knight’s Library, Jason is a recurring host poet for Ann Arbor Pride. He is currently working on publishing his second volume of poetry.

Website: JasonBCrawford.com
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Jeni De La O is an Afro-Cuban poet and storyteller living in Detroit. She is the author of Lady Parts, forthcoming from Grey Borders Books in April 2019. Her work has appeared in Obsidian, Tinderbox, Rigorous Magazine, Fifth Wednesday, Gigantic Sequins and others. Jeni edits poetry for Rockvale Review and organizes Poems in the Park, an acoustic reading series based in Detroit.

Rachel Egly (she/her/hers) is a bi poet, engineer, and ecologist in love with all things water. Her work has previously appeared in Vagabond City, The Rising Phoenix Review, and Ghost City Review, and is forthcoming in Bone & Ink Literary Magazine and Tiny Flames. She currently lives in Chicago with her partner and cat, where she catches crayfish, naps as much as possible, and spends most of her money on good food. You can find her @SPF_6 on Twitter or at rachelegly.wordpress.com.

James Croal Jackson (he/him) has a chapbook, The Frayed Edge of Memory (Writing Knights Press, 2017), and poems in Columbia Journal, Rattle, and Reservoir. He edits The Mantle. Currently, he works in the film industry in Pittsburgh, PA. jimjakk.com

Lucas Jacob’s poetry and prose have appeared in more than 50 journals, including Southwest Review, Barrow Street, and Hopkins Review. He has work forthcoming in RHINO and Cherry
Tree, among others. His first full-length poetry collection, a finalist for Eyewear Publishing’s Beverly Prize, is forthcoming in 2019. In 2015 his chapbook A Hole in the Light was published by Anchor & Plume Press.

Artist, poet, and freelance writer, J.I. Kleinberg is a Best of the Net and Pushcart nominee. Her found poems have appeared in Diagram, Heavy Feather Review, Rise Up Review, The Tishman Review, Hedgerow, Otoliths, and elsewhere. She lives in Bellingham, Washington, and posts most days at thepoetrydepartment.wordpress.com and occasionally @jikleinberg.

Kathy Mak is an emerging writer based in Vancouver, British Columbia. Her poetry and creative nonfiction have appeared/are forthcoming in The /Ɛmz/Review, Marías at Sampaguitas, and Kissing Dynamite. She writes to reflect on her experiences, and to explore the unbounded. Visit her website: http://kathymak.weebly.com/

Brandon Noel (he/him), lives in Northeastern Ohio and has worked as a machinist for the last ten years while writing on his breaks and brief moments of down time. Poetry is this struggle he can’t seem to quit. Sometimes he wins and other times a poem stumble out. He facilitates a local monthly writers group called, “The Makeshift Poets”. Brandon turned 33 last December and has two daughters, ages 10 and 5, whom he raises with their mother.

Follow him on Twitter: @The_Mongrel. He has self-published two poetry collections: Mongrel (2015) and Infinite Halves (2017), which are available at http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/BrandonLNoel

Holly Salvatore is a farmer in Boulder, CO. They tweet @Queen_Compost and are excellent at naming chickens. Find them outside.

Lexi Vranick is an independent poet and fiction author residing on Long Island, New York. She holds a B.A. in Literature from Excelsior College, where she completed her undergraduate thesis on cultural perceptions of mental illness in literature. She is the author of three self-published titles in poetry and short form fiction. Her work has been published in the Fly on the Wall Poetry Press anthology Please Hear What I’m Not Saying, Cagibi, Peculiars Magazine, and Soft Cartel. She is the founding editor of Little Lion Literary. When she is not writing, Lexi enjoys fiddling with cameras, advocating for mental health awareness, and trying to find the legs in a glass of merlot.

Lindsey Warren is a recent graduate of Cornell University’s MFA program. She has been published in Rubbertop Review, Marathon Review, GASHER Journal, Josephine Quarterly, American Literary Review and Hobart, among others. Lindsey is the recipient of a Delaware Division of the Arts Fellowship and has been a finalist for the Delaware Literary Connection Prize and the Joy Harjo Prize. A poem of hers is in the anthology What Keeps Us Here: Songs from the Other Side of Trauma. She splits her time between Ithaca, New York and Newark, Delaware.
Brian Wiora is an MFA candidate in Poetry at Columbia University, where he serves as the Online Poetry Editor for Columbia Journal. His poems have appeared in Rattle, Gulf Stream Magazine, Alexandria Quarterly, and other places. Besides Poetry, he enjoys listening to classic rock music, performing standup comedy, and traveling.

Mathew Yates is a queer, disabled poet and artist from Kentucky. His work can be found in Barren Magazine, Epigraph Magazine, Human/Kind Journal, Rhythm & Bones Lit, awkward mermaid lit mag, and Memoir Mixtapes.

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