

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE #50 FEBRUARY 2023: "PASSING"

Welcome to Issue 50 "Passing," in which our contributing poets explore death and transition.

Issue 50 includes work by Marina Hope Wilson (this month's featured poet), Stephanie Holden, Tyler Michael Jacobs, and Kiran Park. Please read The Gallery below!

Featured Artist—Nadia Arioli

Nadia Arioli's drawings and assemblages have been featured in The Grackle Gallery. Her photocopy collage was the cover of *Permafrost Literary Journal*. She illustrated James Rodehaver's chapbooks, published by Cringe Worthy Poetry Collective. She has work forthcoming in *Strawberry Moon*, *Wrongdoing Magazine*, and *Feral*.

Poetry Gallery

"Buying the Farm" by Marina Hope Wilson, February's Featured Poet

They're shooting early in the holler this morning. A stray bullet
could be the end of me. Or it could be carbon monoxide

poison from the wood burning stove in my cabin.
It could be a semi barreling down highway 40—

the driver drinking a coke with roasted peanuts
floating in the bottleneck, and me in the blind spot.

It could be the end of me. Tennessee could be my last state.
Today at the farm they will slaughter the small brown lamb.

I hope it will be swift. It will be the end of him.
I bless the sheep each time I walk by their pasture.

I bless the white dog, Inara, too. In the morning and at night,
especially at night, I reach through the metal rectangles and pet

the dog, her soft shaggy coat. Careful not to touch the electric line—
it could be the end of me. In the news it would say, “middle aged woman

found dead on a private road outside of Knoxville, near a field of sheep.”
Or maybe it wouldn’t say anything at all, but I would want it known

I was stroking a beautiful creature in the dark when I died.
Later today, I will bless the sheep, minus one. No, I will bless him too.

He who did not know this frigid morning, the winter slant of light he woke
into would be his last. He who bleated and munched hay from a giant stack,

and pushed his body against the other sheep bodies, unaware the curve of
his life would end here. Perhaps unaware of any curve at all. Bless him too.

Marina’s Commentary on “Buying the Farm”:

I wrote “Buying the Farm” while at the Sundress Academy for the Arts, a working farm and writing residency in Knoxville, Tennessee. I spent my days intermittently walking the trails in the woods or sitting at a giant table in the communal kitchen, drinking coffee and writing. Evenings, I would take a short walk to my cabin, and make a fire to keep me warm through the night. I looked forward to visiting the sheep in their pasture, the chickens clucking away in their coop. A few days into my time there, I learned one of the sheep I’d been communing with would be slaughtered, and I had a visceral reaction to the news. I grew up on a small family farm in northern California and witnessed various animals being killed, or simply disappearing, only to show up unannounced in that night’s stew. I’ve lived most of my life as a vegetarian thanks to this childhood history. Some people are at peace with the agrarian cycle of life and death – but I’ve always rooted for the creature in question to live. I think “Buying the Farm” is my attempt to sit with the cycle. To hold my life and death and the sheep’s life and death with equal honesty and tenderness. And, for a moment, to hold every creature with this loving regard. Of course, I count people as creatures too.

In terms of form, I use the repetition, “it could be the end of me,” as a sort of frame to explore the various ways one can leave this life, as well as the seemingly endless moments one *could have* died, but instead moved carelessly through the day. The repetition provides a scaffold for this meditation on mortality. I wrote in long lines (somewhat unusual for me) because the long lines feel generous, and full of time and breath, and I hope for these sensations to exist in this poem.

Assistant Editor Matt Hsu’s Commentary on “Buying the Farm”:

In “Buying the Farm,” Marina Hope Wilson provides a numbing, yet oddly comforting perspective on a heavy topic. Immediately, the poem establishes a strong sense of setting, describing to the reader the rural town that this scene takes place in. The simplicity of the imagery is what makes it so effective; the “coke with roasted peanuts” and “wood burning stove” create a sense of silence that makes the subject matter of the poem all the more haunting. The speaker starts the poem by contemplating their own death, pondering all the ways their life could come to a sudden end. They later transition into considering the death of a baby sheep that is about to be slaughtered, thinking about how he might feel in his final moments. There are two main refrains in the poem, which are “it could be the end of me” and “bless [...] too”. These anaphoras not only allow for seamless shifts between the speaker’s various trains of thought, but they also mirror the narrative of this piece. Death can happen any time, a stunning, violent ending to even the most innocent of creatures. But that’s why it’s important to care and express affection towards those we love. This poem is in equal parts cynical and uplifting; cynical in that it draws our attention to the cruelty of the world around us, but uplifting in that it reminds us that there is much to enjoy while we’re still here.

“trptych for the water” by Stephanie Holden

i.

the thunderstorm inside me travels dangerously. in the beginning it was in the rhythmic sway of my hips, that constant pitter patter of my feet against the concrete in my hometown. it was a lazy summer rain, the lap of the warm breeze against the puddle in my stomach. it was softness and cicadas and there was no fear there, no sadness, only the lullaby of my mother making enchiladas in the next room.

ii.

on the second day, the rain came from my shoulders, strong and heavy, and it betrayed me. drops hard like bullets tore from my hands and soles and soul and nothing was left of me but the flood. there is a hole in the kitchen ceiling that was never fixed. we left it as a reminder of the day the water sloshed and overflowed and drowned and left my mother stranded in the next room.

iii.

on the seventh day there was only the stillness,
so complete, an ocean of what used to be, calm
like the eye of the hurricane that once raged
inside my skull. it was only the emptiness, the
nothingness that the water left behind, the
quietude of a neighborhood not yet rebuilt.
there is a sogginess that cannot be removed, a
mildew, the ghost of my mother's enchiladas in
the next room.

["Self-Portrait as Purple Flowers Wilting in Vases"](#) by Tyler Michael Jacobs

The room I once loved full of flowers spilling everywhere—
There are so many other stories to tell:

When you complained about the onset of cold and the gravestones kept singing
The virginity of the dead, one became of the other.

My feet still try to find yours in the middle of the night to fall
Back to sleep. Fingers once braided together as if to say, I'm here,

Blossoming rosebuds in palms. It's that cold emptiness
Of morning in which I wake. A moth tapping the screen

And the smell of the last cut grass wafts through the open window
In my apartment. I look at my feet wondering where they too might one day come

To rest. God, could I be any more transparent?
The shapes of trees are sweeping the sky today. It's that line

Between birth and violation. O, trees in stale light, forgive me
For not noticing it's the shadows that move—still, nowhere to rest a head.

["tithonus vs. the streetlight outside my window"](#) by Kiran Park

tithonus was cursed to live, but i know how it ends all the way through
and i have decided it is enough to be a soul in a forgiving body
and nothing more. i only mean to say that i am no longer trying to write my life
into something astonishing, and there is no astonishing way to say so.
i've nearly run out of things to romanticize besides the hoping. and
the feeling of the rain, of course. and the waking in the mornings
and the sleeping in the evenings and the eating of ripe fruit and the

kissing of the sky and the knowing how it ends all the way through,
of course. these are the softest of days, when a streetlight in the snow
makes me want to write poems about love and i am content with all the living
laid out in a glistening array between here and that quiet limit of the world.
if there was some great enduring secret this would be it. i would take back
everything i have ever whispered just to tell it to you. my lips to your ear
and all the living laid out between. i only mean to say that i am not really
some river or prayer but instead just some flesh and clumsy bone
and a mouth that is not really full of words or something equally immortal
but instead just some space that i want you to find. there is no pretty way to say that
i know how it ends all the way through or to recognize that old ache of want
when even a streetlight in the snow can find its way into a love poem.
there is still something sacred about bathing in the glow of these ordinary things,
i think. tithonus was the worst of the world. this streetlight could be the best.
hold me between these soft bows of light, to the low hum of life
and the spin of the earth. i only mean to say
that we could make it so.

Poet Biographies

Stephanie Holden (she/they) is a Halloween-loving queer living in New Orleans, Louisiana. She writes about love, trauma, gore, and the self. Her interests are fantasy books, body modification, and the South. Find her work at or forthcoming in *Ghost City Press*, *Cloves*, *Voidspace*, *The B’K*, *Bullshit Lit*, *Soft Star Magazine*, *Martello Journal*, and elsewhere, or her narcissistic tweets at @smhxlden.

Tyler Michael Jacobs (He/Him) is the author of *Building Brownville* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press, 2022). His words have appeared in *Pidgeonholes*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Thin Air Magazine*, *White Wall Review*, *Funicular Magazine*, and elsewhere. His poems have also been featured on Nebraska Public Media’s *Friday LIVE!* He is a first-year poetry MFA candidate at Bowling Green State University. He also serves as an assistant editor for *Mid-American Review*.

Kiran Park (she/her) is a junior in high school and a Korean-American poet with work in *Interstellar Literary Review* and *Pollux Journal*. You can find her on Instagram at @kiran.lpark.

Marina Hope Wilson’s poems have appeared or are forthcoming in journals such as *The Massachusetts Review*, *Horse Less Review*, *Mulberry Literary*, *The Racket*, and *\$*. Her chapbook, *Nighttime*, was a finalist in the Black Lawrence Press Spring 2022 Black River Chapbook Competition. Marina lives in San Francisco with her partner, stepdaughter, and two cats, and makes her living as a speech-language therapist.

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