

dwelling
literary



DWELLING 4:
FARMHOUSE

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A New DAWN, A New Day

By **Jason de Koff**

Jason de Koff is an associate professor of agronomy and soil science at Tennessee State University. He lives in Nashville, TN with his wife, Jaclyn, and his two daughters, Tegan and Maizie. He has published in a number of scientific journals, and has over 60 poems published or forthcoming in literary journals over the last year.

With a belly warmed by the yellow syrup of eggs raised across the yard, and still crunching the bacon strips from last year's harvest, the farmer opened the thick old farmhouse door that had been hewn from the surrounding forest. The early morning threw rosy hues that just barely showed over the mountaintops and the hurried crunching on the frosty grasses kept time with the swinging weather vane. The great barn door was heaved aside on squeaking hinges as the sweet smell of hay competed with a warmth that flooded the senses. This had all been done and felt many times before, but as she looked down at the newborn foal, recently delivered early that morning, she knew it was one that would be remembered for many years to come.



The Frontier of Love and BUTTER

By **Helen Bowie**

Helen Bowie is a writer, performer and charity worker based in London. Her work has featured in 4:33, Dust Poetry Magazine and Beir Bua Journal, among others. Helen is a city girl who loves a vicarious fix of country living in the form of The Food Network's Pioneer Woman.

A "Pioneer Woman" found poem, taken from Season 17 Episode 3 'Double Care Package', first aired April 2019, Food Network USA

I'm making care packages
with love from the ranch
I'm gonna make a pie crust,
that perfectly sums up the world.

Decisions, decisions.
You're just barely golden.
Sprinkle on some rainbow
And move forward.

As if that isn't enough sweetness,
the butter melts, the sugar dissolves,
now comes this little sparkle
from the salt.

I don't know how else
to describe love.

Welcome to my frontier.



Have a Little FARMHOUSE in Your Soul

By **Mike Hickman**

Mike Hickman (@MikeHicWriter) is a writer from York, England. He has written for Off the Rock Productions (stage and audio), including 2018's "Not So Funny Now" about Groucho Marx and Erin Fleming. He has recently been published in EllipsisZine, The Daily Drunk, Bandit Fiction, Nymphs, Flash Fiction Magazine, Brown Bag, and Safe and Sound Press. His co-written, completed six-part BBC radio sit com remains unproduced but available to interested producers!

The fingers paused in their rhythmic swaying. Tom's eyes, aching from the repetitive tick-tock movement, fixed as best as they could on the woman's nails – unpainted, chipped, unselfconscious. He didn't dare blink, although he had nothing to fear from Eileen. Where those fingers of those could take him, however, was quite a different matter.

"And now we need a safe place," she said. "Somewhere to go when things get...difficult."

Tom had downloaded the EMDR handbook from the internet. He'd wanted to know what he was getting into with this Eye Movement Desensitisation thing. So he'd been expecting something of this kind; he'd thought about where he might go. Seville, for example. He could feel at peace there. Blue skies and oranges. And – whatever else you might expect to find if you truly believed you could escape.

"Somewhere you can return to," Eileen said, and Tom focused back in on her fingers. There had been something about the side-to-side swish-swiping that had him thinking back to a time – perhaps the first time in his life – when he'd been able to lift his eyes up, out, away from himself and his problems. Fields, he thought. Wheat, he thought. And there were no more visions of oranges.

Once, Tom had been trusted to thresh and sort. Peter had driven him out to the barn in the *Mule* – the same *Mule* Tom had managed to reverse back through the a hedgerow the previous day whilst it was carrying the water butts back from the poo pots experiment. Peter had shown him the pedal-powered threshing machine and the grain sorter and he'd said, "I'll be back somewhen around four. You fill the bags over there and then, when you're done, you sort them. Capiche?" Peter's favourite word was coupled with his usual snaggle-toothed smile.

And that was even after Tom had driven the *Mule* back through a hedge. "Never driven, huh?" Peter had said, not surprised, not asking the question that others would have asked, and definitely not judging. "Well, I can't see you doing much damage out here. No roundabouts, for starters." And then three fully-laden water butts had tussled with the laws of physics, emptying themselves over the man who had so kindly let Tom take the wheel.

But here he was, still with the "capiche?" and the snaggle-toothed smile. And now he was letting Tom thresh and sort. On his own. Unsupervised, with only the dust motes catching in the sunlight and the birds in the rafters above him as witness to his endeavours. Peter wasn't

to know that Tom didn't have words for most of this. Damn it, Tom hadn't given any thought to where wheat even came from before this job. The bread at home on the estate came from the corner shop, reduced to clear, and was always, *always* stale.

"Have you got somewhere," Eileen asked, her fingers still at the three o'clock position. Tom's eyes were watering and yet he didn't blink.

"Yes," he said.

"Somewhere you feel safe?" she asked.

"Yes."

And he had always known this, hadn't he?

Even that was Peter's doing.

The job itself had come about because of snaggle-toothed Peter. "At a loose end?" he'd asked that night Tom had been babysitting for him and his wife. "I might be able to wangle something you on the farm, if you're interested?" He hadn't said that Tom didn't look the type to get his hands dirty, even to be out in the great outdoors. He hadn't commented on Tom's essential laziness. Or uselessness. Or anything of the usual kind.

Peter had trusted him, even as Tom had known that he'd realise soon enough. He would quickly come to understand the kind of person he was dealing with. And then it would be as it always was; as he'd been told at home it would always be. His kind of help would never be needed by anyone.

"What can you see?" Eileen asked. A faint scent lingered around her. Something floral. Not remotely like the farm but still, somehow, helping to take him back there. He hadn't expected the sour milk of the dairy or the pungent whiff of the silage. He hadn't expected the down and dirty of the poo pots experiment – and hadn't Peter grinned when he'd explained that one?

And more than any of that, he hadn't expected that he could manage six hours at the threshing machine. With break for lunch, of course. Peter had seen the processed cheese sandwich Tom had brought with him in the re-used *Tesco* deli bag and, without even a word, he'd supplemented the meagre pack-up with a pork pie from his own lunchbox.

"What can you see? Tell me," Eileen said and she moved her fingers and he tracked his eyes back onto her eyes. But he didn't see her. He saw Peter. The man who'd clapped him on the shoulder when he'd seen the fruits of his day's work, like that was a thing people did. The man Tom had lost touch with when he'd gone off to Uni with his rucksack and his reduced provisions from the corner shop and the promise ringing in his ears that he'd be back home

on the estate as soon as he was rumbled for his laziness and ineptitude. There would be no more thoughts of him getting above himself. Of trying to get away.

"I see the reason I'm still sitting here," he told Eileen, "even with everything else that's happened."

And, when Tom closed his eyes later in the session, when he had to retreat to his safe place and centre himself, he saw the *Mule* sitting there outside the barn at finishing time. And he heard Peter offer him the opportunity to take the wheel all the way back to the farm.

"Capiche," Tom said to himself with a smile. Because he had.



GARDENING

By **Matthew Miller**

Matthew Miller teaches social studies, swings tennis rackets, and writes poetry - all hoping to create home. He and his wife live beside a dilapidating orchard in Indiana, where he tries to shape dead trees into playhouses for his four boys. His poetry has been featured in River Mouth Review, Club Plum Journal, Whale Road Review and Ekstasis Magazine.

We know nothing is planted. This tired spring
we scroll pictures of peppers and cucumbers,
swing our feet down to stop our sons hollering.
We tend to this work as if we're newcomers.
Why sow zucchinis when each morning ragweed
chokes the seeds? When strawberries are groundhog feed?
Sure, we try to protect shoots with heaving lungs,
but when we've pulled the last weed, tomorrow comes.



Winter WORK

By **Kelli Lage & Ryan Lage**

Kelli and Ryan Lage live in the Midwest with their dog, Cedar. Ryan enjoys farming. He farms corn, soybeans, and raises cattle and chickens. Kelli is currently earning her degree in English Education. Kelli states she is here to give readers words that resonate. Kelli received the Special Award for First-time Entrant from Lyrical Iowa in 2020.

The January winds wisp around the foxes' abode,
built on the hill of our barren ground.
The fence line straight as an arrow,
fraught with trees and weeds,
collects snow and cattle.
Stakes planted by farmers of generations passed.
Together we tend to the earth,
frozen and frigid from winter's strong grasp.
This task is the first of many
that will bring rising hums of life.
Sturdy the plants will grow,
with stories to tell of farmers passing by.
Stretching as the season passes,
eventually creating hymns for the countryside
that pour down the golden horizon.
By and by the daily quietness
transforms into pure stillness,
as the nickel moon rises.



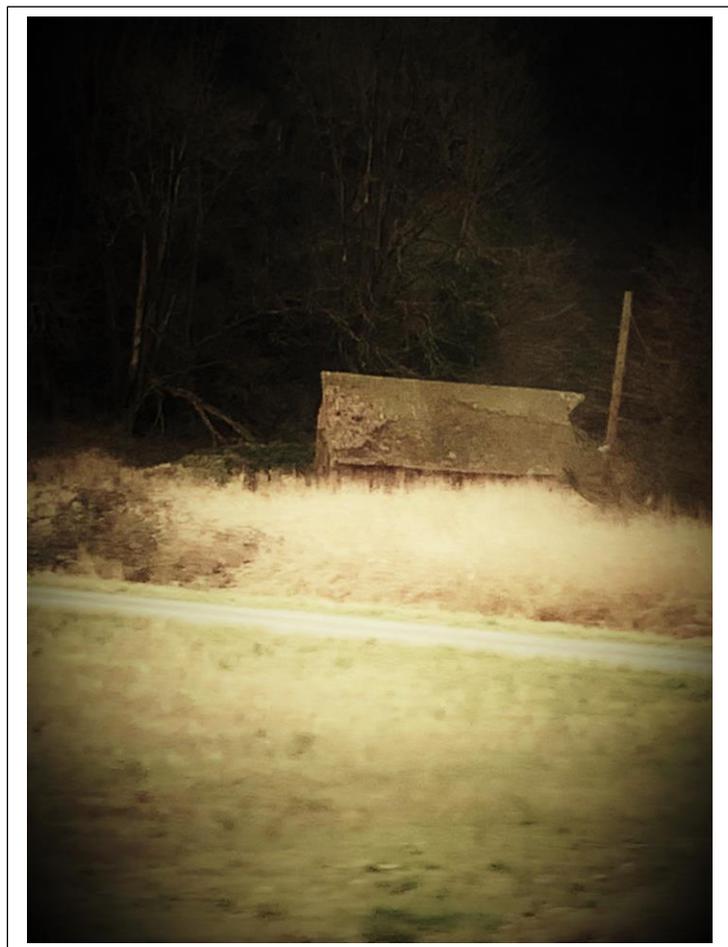
Can You Imagine This As Our HOME? By **Kris Hiles**

Kris Hiles is an autistic lesbian creative living in a blue house with her plants and vinyl records. She enjoys tumbling stones, and the smell of archives. You can find her on Twitter @KrisHiles.

There is only a hum.
The Amish are out in the fields
a few miles away, plows
turning the earth from ash to coffee -
waking the world, again
for grasses and vegetables, orchards
thaw, frost becoming a first drink
at the edge of the desert of winter.

Finches all find their way home,
butter and jam find new tables to flavor.
Here, not far from Lancaster
we sit in the stone house, its body
like a boulder, beyond a small bridge
over a quiet stream. Your dreams float
toward raw meat on butcher block,
and I wish fresh herbs into existence.

We are not alike,
us, the Amish,
but in this place, so close,
the air smells like the past
and we could live quietly,
until we all become the same ground.



COUNTRYSIDE Haiku

By **Samo Kreutz**

tractor noise
awakened together
me and sunshine

leaving the field
still with seedlings
my shadow

flock of sheep
early spring breeze
their herdsman

huge barn
calmly resting on a hay
the moonlight

Samo Kreutz lives in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Besides poetry (which he has been writing since he was eight years old), he writes novels, short stories, and haiku. He has published nine books (three of them were poetry books). His recent work has appeared on international websites (and journals) such as Wales Haiku Journal, Under the Basho, Poetry Pea, Jalmurra: Art & Poetry Journal, Haiku Commentary, Frameless Sky: Art Video Journal, Autumn Moon Haiku Journal, Asahi Haikuist Network, Akita International Haiku Network, and others.



Monuments to BOUNTY

By **Darrell Petska**

Darrell Petska is a writer and retired university editor from Madison, Wisconsin. View his work in *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Nixes Mate Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Loch Raven Review* and elsewhere. (conservancies.wordpress.com)

Wall by wall they're coming down—
the farmers gone, their purpose shorn,
lumber recycled as it can.

Stanchioned cows gave milk within,
horses stabled to the side. In the straw
nested chickens, swallows in the eaves.
Hay slides, rope swings and lookouts
transformed high, sweet-scented lofts
into cushioned year-round playlands.

Landmarks steadfast for generations,
impervious to winds, waves of rain,
lancing winter sleets and snows,
each proclaimed: "Here thrives our farm!"—
though "Farm for Sale" blighted fields
as factory farms cornered markets.

Now ghost barns haunt country roads,
their precious lands passed faceless
into dreary corporate ledgers,
while to and fro crawl driverless tractors
supplanting cherished ways of living
these monuments to bounty mirrored.

Today tugs impatiently at yesterday,
though strains of their sweet requiem
remind the altered land: well they served.



mystical
FARMSTAND
By **Matthew Lovegrove**

Matthew Lovegrove lives in the traditional, unceded territory of the Skwxwú7mesh Nation, works as a Curator in a small-town museum, and has released a series of folk albums under the name woodland telegraph. His poems have been published at Red Alder Review and Train Poetry Journal. Send help, learning to twitter @mwlovegrove

a winding rural road
bends to west coast rain
sunless days
of wilted produce
in the rainforest's
dark green heart

there's a farmstand
a ways off
you know the one
drive up slowly
some night
by mistake
the only way to find it

finds you basking
in the glow
of luminescent lettuce
magnificent foliages of kale
and bunches of carrots

so golden it's blinding

sun-ripened tomatoes

tumble into your basket

on a breeze

of freshly picked strawberries

the smell of lilacs

shimmers the air

bearing harvest for you

on this starlit night

with perfect pocket change

dropped into the worn wooden box

the mystical farmstand

disappears

and you are left grasping

the hot days

of a bountiful summer

that never was



MARVEL

By **Laura Piersol**

Laura Piersol lives on the unceded territory of the Skwxwú7mesh Nation on the west coast of Canada. She teaches masters' degree and graduate diploma programs at Simon Fraser University, with a focus on Nature-based Experiential Education. She has been involved in starting and researching two ecologically focused public elementary schools in Canada and is interested in education as an agent for ecologically conscious cultural change.

his small hands cup
a nasturtium leaf
and he rolls
a raindrop

back and forth
this liquid marble
magnifying veins
just like ours

transfixed, we travel
the miniature world it collects
on its path

time halts
as he holds
the axis of the earth
instead



BLUE Earth County

By **Zach Murphy**

Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories appear in Reed Magazine, Ginosko Literary Journal, The Coachella Review, Mystery Tribune, Yellow Medicine Review, Ellipsis Zine, Drunk Monkeys, Wilderness House Literary Review, and Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine. His forthcoming chapbook "Tiny Universes" (Selcouth Station Press) is due out in Spring 2021. He lives with his wonderful wife Kelly in St. Paul, Minnesota.

In Blue Earth County, the winters are bitter, but the summers that yield bad crops are even harder to reconcile with.

Mary Anne has the broadest shoulders in all of Southern Minnesota. She wakes up and begins work before dawn even has a chance to introduce itself to the sky. After feeding the chickens, milking the cows, and making sure the tractors are ready to go for the day, she comes back with enough time to make breakfast for her son Rudy.

There's still some sticky spots of raspberry jam on the white kitchen cupboards leftover from the same day that Mary Anne's husband Don got swept away in the big tornado. Don leaving jam on the cupboards when having his morning toast was always her biggest pet peeve. Now she just wishes he was here to do it again.

Rudy rushes down the creaky stairs, rubbing the morning out of his eyes. "Hi mom," he says.

Mary Anne sets a frying pan on the stove. "Hey sleepy."

"I want chocolate for breakfast," Rudy says.

"Eggs it is," Mary Anne says.

After scarfing down his eggs, Rudy washes his plate in the sink and attempts to wipe off the jam spots from the cupboard with a wet rag.

"Wait," Mary Anne says. "I'll take care of that."

"I can do it," says Rudy.

"You need to get ready for school," Mary Anne says. "I'm not letting you miss the bus again."

"Fine," Rudy says as he darts up stairs.

Mary Anne and Rudy stroll down the long dirt road toward the bus stop. At the end sits a rusty mailbox where good news doesn't usually arrive.

Mary Anne kisses Rudy on the cheek. "No spitballs or fights today," Mary Anne says.

“Mom?” Rudy asks. “When are you going to clean the kitchen cupboards?”

“I’ll clean them whenever my work is done,” she says.



Iowa CORNFIELD

By **Lisa Ashley**

Lisa Ashley is a poet and spiritual director whose writing is informed by her work with incarcerated youth and her life experiences in the Pacific Northwest, Montana and rural New York. She has been published in *The Tishman Review*, *The BeZine*, and *Poetry Corners*, and has a poem forthcoming in *The Journal of Undiscovered Poets*. She studies poetry with Michele Bombardier, MFA, author of *What We Do* and founder of www.fishplatepoetry.com and John Willson, poet, author of *Call This Room a Station*. She completed her BA in journalism at the University of Montana and her MDiv at Seattle University.

They walked the fallow railroad tracks
between tall corn rows under the moon
to recapture what they never had.

Uninvited, she'd arrived from the North.

In her hubris she knew
he would be glad to see her.

The white cat followed,
silent on a single rail,
the corn not yet tasseled out.

They drank wine on the old porch.
He showed her to the spare bedroom
in his grandfather's house

where she slept then rode the train home.

The next night he played his mandolin
for the cat as they waited for the moon to rise.



In the SANCTUARY

By **Robin McNamara**

Robin McNamara has over 100 poems published worldwide. Poems have been placed in *Saccharine Poetry*, *Pink Plastic House*, *Dreich*, *Full House Literary Magazine*, *Dream Journal*, & *Literary Heist*. Robin's debut chapbook, *Under a Mind's Staircase* is being published with Hedgehog Poetry Press in 2021.

In the sanctuary of spaces
I'd found hidden around,
Inside nooks and crannies
And books and granaries,
In the farmhouse in woods.

In the sanctuary of fields
Of maize and corn,
With haze and thorn
And poems by Frost;
About snowy woods.

With the morning's frost,
Dawning's light was lost.



tomatoes GOSSIP

By **Anuja Ghimire**

Nepal-born **Anuja Ghimire** (Twitter @GhimireAnuja) writes poetry, flash fiction, and creative nonfiction. She is the author of *Kathmandu* (Unsolicited Press, 2020). She's a two-time Best of the Net and Pushcart nominee. She works as a senior publisher in an online learning company. She reads poetry for *Up the Staircase Quarterly*. She enjoys teaching poetry to children in summer camps. Her work found home in print and online journals and anthologies in Nepal, U.S., the U.K., Scotland, India, Australia, and Bangladesh. She lives near Dallas, Texas with her husband and two children.

I waited for my mother to run home to me
first she went to the vegetable garden
pumpkins hung their heads loose
under her beaded necklace

in a book they made of his sayings,
King Prithvi Narayan said *farm in Kathmandu soil*
but we also built a house in the valley
near someone's paddy field and playground

one year I flew back to my mother
yard too small for squash
pots in the veranda
marigolds, strawberries, and peppers
sun shielded by houses
patched light on her salt pepper curls

the year of the virus I buy seeds
and lie that I understand my mother

the first nightmare of plants,
tomato plants nod from bucket to bucket
leaves discuss me in electronic signals

the sun is more than I could hold
burns the blossoms, edges first

I worry the roots of coriander won't hold
sometimes insects eat a seedling whole

I cannot save anyone



Diaries of a Country GIRL

By **Lisa May Armstrong**

I. **My Boo Hugh**

His name was Hugh
My flame haired boo
I'd watch him frolic
In pastures new
A bit of beefcake
A dream come true
He's not a boy
He's a highland coo

Lisa Mary Armstrong is a Scottish poet and law tutor researching women and children's experiences of the criminal justice system. In her spare time she likes writing poetry and fiction, playing the piano and drinking tea. She can be found @earlgrey79_lisa tweeting about poetry, criminal justice and the law.

II. **Country Bumpkin**

The other girls were seduced
By the bright city lights
The razzmatazz
And all that jazz

Not I

I longed to dip my tippy toes
In a cool clear stream
Lose myself in
A Midsummer Night's Dream

Warm apple pie
Rambling roses
A beautiful bird song
Nature under our noses

I watch the ink pool
Around the milk of the moon
Dreaming that this country girl
Will be back home real
soon



The STILLNESS of Time

By **Jason de Koff**

Jason de Koff is an associate professor of agronomy and soil science at Tennessee State University. He lives in Nashville, TN with his wife, Jaclyn, and his two daughters, Tegan and Maizie. He has published in a number of scientific journals, and has over 60 poems published or forthcoming in literary journals over the last year.

Repeated refrains of street noise,
fade as I view the vast countryside.
Its sweeping stillness
bleeds into the soul,
rendering all cells quiet
and creating soft spaces within
to cradle the most sacred thoughts.
Moving down open roads
of gravel and dust,
kicking up clouds of clay
where each one is a microcosm
of our earthen stone.
The stone that wears down slowly
along the well-tread path,
the evidence of years gone by,
and the time lived before.
The first people mixed
with those of today
to make a porridge of dreams,
realized or forgotten,
under the palette
of forever reeling stars.



My Grandmother's HODGEPODGE

By **AJ Buckle**

AJ Buckle is a poet and teacher living in and writing from his apartment in Ottawa, Canada. He holds an Honours BA in Literature and enjoys listening to records and tending to his houseplants when not having an existential crisis. You can find his dumb tweets at @buckle_aj

1 cup fresh green beans, trimmed and snapped
*(picked from a garden under the eaves
of my grandfather's barn)*

1 cup fresh wax beans, trimmed and snapped
*(prepared carefully by my
four year old brother, in a way
only a little boy can do)*

1 cup diced carrots, washed and peeled
*(patiently done by my grandmother
to match a child's speed)*

1 cup diced turnip
*(complained about but secretly
liked by little boys who only
protest to make grandmother laugh)*

2 cups cubed new potatoes
*(lovingly picked by my silent grandfather,
cradled in giant, dirty hands)*

6 tablespoons butter
*(visions of the sun streaming in
through faded yellow curtains)*

1/2 cup heavy cream
(optional, but certainly recommended)

1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
*(powdering sun browned
arthritic hands)*

1/2 pound bacon
*(bought from the farmer
down the road.)*

1/2 cup water

put every delicate thing into a weathered and much loved pot. add enough water to cover.

watch your grandmother carefully salt the water and bring to a boil.

after cooking for 1/2 hour, add the potatoes and cook for another 1/2 hour while the house fills with the scent of childhood. stir in butter and heavy cream
(churned with the love only a mother's hand could offer.)

mix the flour and water into the soup to thicken. the magic is in letting it cook a few more minutes (flavours are better if forgotten about, and then suddenly remembered) remove

from heat and garnish with cooked, finely chopped bacon. let sit for three days, reheat and serve.
it's better that way.



ampalaya and other FRUITS

By **Simon Alderwick**

Simon Alderwick is a poet from London, UK. He lived in the Philippines for five years where among other things he was a backyard farmer. His writing has recently featured in Green Ink Poetry, Dust, Quince and The Daily Drunk. He is on Twitter @SimonAlderwick

tear open Ramgo packet
pour seeds into hand
some blue some brown
some perfectly round
drop them on the table and they roll
they might get lost between
your hungry fingers
eager to plant
rubber boots
dirty shorts
trusty bolo knife
you stick those seeds in mud
carefully nurtured
working with the rain
and the sun
away from the drama of peoplekind
you become earthkind
sensing a lizard or snake move
in the undergrowth
admiring the way seedlings dance upwards
fruit ripens
you attack with love
chopping to mulch
killing to feed
until that fruit is ripe
and you gather
your t-shirt a basket
run home like a child
emptying fruits onto the table
watch them roll
and not just the fruit
you take the flower
the leaves
cuttings
all of it
everything about it is good



In the country, we collect WORDS for winter

By **Rachel Small**

Rachel Small is based outside of Ottawa, and is exactly one half of Splintered Disorder Press. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in magazines including Thorn Literary Magazine, blood orange, The Hellebore, Anti-Heroic Chic, The Shore, bywords, and other places. She was the recipient of honourable mention for the John Newlove Poetry Award for her poem "garbage moon and feminist day". You can find her on twitter @rahel_taller.

In Montague it has grown cold.
We have scraped together our
knives, keeping watch of ice
from overhead. The oaks
and ash trees all dance,
accustomed to snapping
winds that break and demand.
We hold tight to our breath
as we pass their covered
arms, daring to not disrupt
their embrace of the elements.

Months ago, we kept the
door wide open. Greeted
the sunset and rise, the swaying
motion of dragonflies coming
up out of creek beds. We made
an ocean from hay fields, in
those days. Now, we only collect
many words for winter. Understand
that the ocean has gone to sleep,
hibernating beneath a wasteland
of pale blue, untouched beneath
so much frost. We watch and wait,
holding the door firmly shut, only
reaching out to find the warmth of
another hand.



If You Lie on the GROUND

By **Vera Hadzic**

Vera Hadzic is a writer from Ontario, Canada, currently studying English literature at the University of Ottawa. In the past, her writing has appeared in *Lanke Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, and elsewhere. She reads for *Wrongdoing Magazine* and *Farside Review*, and can be found on Twitter @HadzicVera.

On days when the traffic is so bad there's not a hope of making it to class, my roommate and I have tea by our cramped window and send our gazes ricocheting across the concrete alley outside, and I tell her about my great-uncle's farmhouse. Even as the horns screech through the grey city mist, it all falls away in layers, until I can feel the sunlight gathering in the creases of my eyelids and forming beads of golden sweat on my forehead. And then, all I hear is the bending of trees, carried by the breeze through an open door, and my great-uncle rummaging through the kitchen. His wide, callous-rutted hands are nimble as he cooks me an omelette, and he mutters the way he always does when he's busy. I'm almost sure that if I open my eyes, I'll see the great peeling beams over my head, and that the floorboards under my feet will creak and groan with the softening of so many years. There'll be old things all around us – plates with blue milkmaids spinning along the edges, spirals of lace that wind along the windowsill like silver spiderwebs. A clock whose tick sounds deep and low in my gut, and a crystal flower vase that he always forgets to dust. Through the window, the fields are so wide and yellow and twisted with summer wind, so that I can't even see the straggling fence trying to contain the property. There are horses whose shoulders gleam in the sun, and cows whose eyes drink in the sky. And there's one goat and a couple chickens that never shut up.

My roommate has heard all this before, so much so that I'm almost afraid the thought of small-town Ontario will make her vomit one day. I always expect her to say something, something about her family or growing up in Toronto, but she never does. I take a creative writing workshop at the university and whenever the professor asks if anyone would like to read their work, my classmates sink their eyes low and suck their lips under their teeth. But I'm used to sharing, and I share and share and share until you need a little fence to lock the words under my tongue.

I've written about the farmhouse in the workshop, too. From what I remember, it was just a few hours away from our town. I dream of it often, and when I mention it to my brother on the phone, his soft, sympathetic smile leaks through the connection. When I feel lonely, or claustrophobic, I try to draw it – try to put its white gabled roof to paper, sketch its ivy-strangled windows. But it's hard to draw something from memory, and weirdly enough, I have no pictures.

It's been years since I visited the farmhouse – I haven't seen it since I was a kid, since my great-uncle died. As I head home for the summer, I think I might go and see it, find out what it looks like now. Like on the farm, the sky back home is enormous and enduring. Not cut up into little pieces, little landing strips of blue.

“Emily,” says my mother, after I’ve told her I want to drop by the farm. “What are you talking about?”

I describe the farmhouse, the same way I tell it to my roommate, the same way I’ve written in the workshop. When my brother comes in from the store, I ask if he remembers anything else, if he has anything to add. He doesn’t say a word as he takes my hand, leads me into the backyard. In it is our old tool-shed, where we keep the lawnmower. It’s cramped and in some places, the dust hangs like a curtain from the roof. Nobody’s been to the very back in a long time. Here, I find all our old things – the plates, the lace doilies, the clock, the vase. A tiny kitchen with plastic pans and fake eggs, put together by a child, and a stool where my great-uncle used to squat and pretend to cook omelettes. If you lie on the ground and peer through a slit in the wall, the sun-browned grass in our backyard looks huge, swaying like an endless wheat field in the wind.

It’s not easy to figure out when I convinced myself the farmhouse was real. My mother thinks it was after my great-uncle died. My brother believes that leaving home, growing up, had something to do with it. But you know, I still figure the farmhouse exists, somewhere. All it takes is closing my eyes, and it’s like I never left.



Countryside TRANQUILITY

By **Christina Ciufu**

Christina Ciufu is a passionate writer in poetry, short stories, flash fictions, fables, and completing her first novel. At a very young age, she always had a passion for writing stories and poems, specifically in fairytales, folklore, supernatural, and horror. She has numerous appearances in literary magazines including *Spillwords*, *Ovunque Siamo*, *Nymphs*, *Truly Review*, *Mookychick*, *Moonchild Magazine*, *Crêpe & Penn*, *Cauldron Anthology*, *dream walking*, *Selcouth Station Magazine*, *The Wild Literary Magazine*, *Speculate This Magazine*, *Poetically Magazine*, *Analogies & Allegories Literary Magazine*, and *The Clay Literary Magazine*.
<https://twitter.com/ChristinaCiufu>

Roosters crow at the sun,

with the countryside skies becoming orange-rosy,

touching the red barn house's roof.

Sheep huddle.

Australian Shepherd dog chases and circles around in the field.

Grey field mice scurry.

Murder of crows perched on the fence.

Geese squawk at the pond.

Ducklings waddle in a row, behind their mother.

Pigs roll in the mud, snorting.

Hay rolls.

Cows graze and stand, like statues,

with their mouths slowly chewing grass.

Baby goats frolic and collide.

Calves lift their back hooves in the air.

Pitchfork stands beside a wooden wheelbarrow.

Horse hooves, like thunder, pound against the soil.

Stacks of corn sway.

Apple plummet from the tree.

Farmers sit around the bonfire,
with its scarlet-golden flames rising,
and the crickets strumming their legs
to the countryside tranquility.



Reconstructing a CHILDHOOD Home

By **Shelly Jones**

Shelly Jones, PhD (she/her/hers) is an Associate Professor of English at SUNY Delhi, where she teaches classes in mythology, folklore, and writing. Her speculative work has previously appeared in *Podcastle*, *New Myths*, *The Future Fire*, and elsewhere. Find her on Twitter @shellyjansen.

Crockery full of utensils line
kitchen counters, fight for space
among the misfit harvest: vegetables
too oddly shaped to sell at market.

Seed catalogs: Harris, Jung,
Michigan Bulb, and Burpee -
all coffee-stained, dog-eared
scatter across the dining room table.

Root cellar with a broken window
where stray cats, long ago named,
climb in, escaping cold, raccoons
scavenging cans that litter the porch:

left for the ones who cannot feed themselves
by those who feed the whole community.



Barn STORM

By **Jeanine Skowronski**

Jeanine Skowronski is a writer and journalist based in New Jersey. She was a finalist in NYC Midnight's 2019 Short Story Challenge. You can follow her on Twitter [@JeanineSko](https://twitter.com/JeanineSko).

I calm my twin's tornadoes by slipping out of her rain boots and into my dancing shoes. Come kick hay, I always say, because she won't play along if we can't destroy something. I sway with the cornstalk soldiers weathering her wind. She stomps, but spins, eyeing our shadows on the wooden walls: Two good little girls, one twists, one twirls until the rust-red vane no longer swirls and we clap to make music, not lightning.



The Very MOMENTS

By **Sophie Kearing**

Sophie Kearing is a writer of long tweets and short fiction. Her work has been featured by Popshot Quarterly, Lumiere Review, Ellipsis Zine, New Pop Lit, Lunatic Literary Journal, Litro UK, and other publications. She was nominated for a 2019 Pushcart Prize and is an avid member of the #WritingCommunity. Connect with her at <https://twitter.com/SophieKearing>.

I love my parents. Of course I do. But growing up in a farmhouse was hard. Weirdly, it wasn't the farm work I hated. Helping Daddy milk cows before school and after dinner wasn't so bad. He always hoped I'd go into the family business, that's all. And anyway, I loved working with the animals, just he and I, with no Mama nagging us. You see, tasks like milking the cows and cleaning the stalls had defined beginnings and endings. Once you finished, you had a huge chunk of time—or at least it had felt huge when I was a girl—before you had to do it again. So, trust me, it wasn't the farm work that burdened me so.

It was helping my mother with the house that had felt like a life sentence. Weekends, summer breaks, and pretty much every second of spare time we had were an endless flurry of hanging the wash, taking it down and folding it, weeding the garden, rinsing and pickling vegetables, cleaning the floors (which were always covered with the muck we all dragged in from outside), scrubbing the sinks and tub, sweeping the porch, you name it. Autumn didn't mean jack-o-lanterns and trick-or-treating for me and my sister, Harriet. No sirree. It meant raking leaves, carrying in firewood, and keeping the hearth free of soot and log remnants. My mother was constantly telling me and Harriet to tend to this or see about that. For years, I lived with a silent rage inside me.

It wasn't until I was much older that I realized the truth: Mama didn't hate me and Harriet, nor did she simply despise anything in life that wasn't pure toil. No. You see, Mama asked so much of me and my sister because there was more daily work to be done than she had hands. Mama needed our help just to keep her head above water, and she probably hated herself for it. Once I came to understand all this, I felt terrible for her. Because even at night, when my sister and I finally got to relax and watch T.V., there my mother was, glasses perched on her tiny nose, darning socks or knitting winter clothes. After Harriet and I crawled into bed, my mother would massage my father's feet or read the Bible to him until he drifted off.

Now I, too, am a hardworking housewife, and I, too, spend the majority of my waking hours taking care of my home and family. And it's a scary feeling to know that the buck stops with me. As a girl, if for some reason I didn't finish a task, I knew that Harriet would take care of it. Well, my adult life is a completely different ballgame. I can just imagine what would happen if I were to commit a petty act of negligence. If I forgot to clean the toilets, black mold would slowly proliferate up the white porcelain bowls and over their oval rims until the entire bathroom was covered in decay. If I put off doing the laundry, dirty clothes would overflow from our hampers in great, malodorous heaps that would attract burrowing rodents and bugs. If I didn't go to the grocery store, tummies would grumble loudly until there was no life left in my children's bodies to sustain the noise.

But these things—the toilet-scrubbing, the laundry, the grocery shopping—they're my responsibility, so don't think I'm complaining. I do my chores with gusto, because although I'm aware that every god forsaken week will bring me the same slew of banal drudgery, I, unlike my mother, have brilliantly installed mandatory break times into my schedule. These are precious moments of reprieve that she never had. Each weekday, after I've done all my household tasks and before I pick up the kids, I allow myself 45 blessedly idle minutes.

Sometimes I eat the European wafers that I keep hidden from the kids in my nightstand.

Sometimes I flip through catalogues and use Post-It notes to mark the things I'd like my husband to buy me once he gets a raise.

Sometimes I take a long bubble bath, silence and pure physical comfort being the absolute height of luxury according to me.

Anyway, in addition to my afternoon break, I also have a rule about how the evenings must be spent. After I've washed the dinner dishes, the rule goes into effect. The kids and I watch our programs and eat our dessert and cuddle in the living room—no chores or homework allowed. Whenever Cassie wants to play with my hair, I always let her. I sit on the carpet and she stands behind me, her tiny fingers working my dark locks nonsensically. I don't care if she uses the nice comb and brush from my vanity or festoons my head with a thousand bobby pins. It just feels so nice to be pampered.

I won't give up the leisure time that I've made a daily tradition for me and the kids. I won't forfeit the very moments that make our lives good just so I can live in a big house that would bring with it hours of clearing the gutters and roto-rooting the sewer line and shoveling snow and mowing the lawn and retiling the roof. I will keep my apartment, thank you very much. I am *not* the woman my mother was.



The PIG

By **Rosalie Beith**

Rosalie Beith has been writing for several years. Her poems have been published in *Hemetera* and *Dwelling Literary Magazine*. She lives outside of Boston and when not writing, makes pots from clay. She is @RosalieBWriting on Twitter.

I don't know much about farm animals. We used to visit a milk farm with Guernsey cows not too far from my house when I was little. Mostly we looked at the cows, bought some milk out of a vending machine and then had turkey sandwiches in the little restaurant. I've visited small working farms and seen farm animals, all kept in appropriate fenced-in areas. I am a city person, though. I grew up in a city, and as an adult, I live in a city. I have a cat, and that's about all I'm up for in terms of animals in my life. At least, up until recently, that is.

One evening last winter, I was on my couch reading, covered by a warm blanket with my cat on my feet, when I heard a strange thumping on my door. I dismissed it immediately. I was too cozy to get up. A few seconds later, though, it happened again. I told myself it was just the wind, but then it started again, somehow more urgently.

I couldn't ignore it any longer. "Ugh!" I cried as I got up. I looked out the peephole on the door. I saw nothing but snow swirling in the porch light. The storm was starting. I took a step away from the door, but the thumping turned into insistent pounding.

I turned back and pulled the door open. There was no one even in sight on this wicked night. Then I felt something nudge my thigh, and I jumped back before I even knew what I was doing.

I looked down. A pig was standing on my porch looking up at me—a big, pink pig with black spots—a real pig. I am sure I screamed, but I just remember asking, "Who the heck are you?"

I jumped again when the pig replied. "I'm Muffin, the Pig."

Oh, I thought. *I suppose "the Pig" part is like her last name or something.* Funny how you grasp onto the craziest things in a crisis. I came to my senses quickly, though, and said, "You're talking!"

"Sometimes," is all she said.

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"I'm lost. I was on my usual afternoon walk, but it turned dark, and I couldn't find my way home."

"Where do you live?"

"I'm from the Spot On Farm in Wellington."

“Wow! That’s about 30 miles away! You must be a good walker. But why are you here, at my front door. What is it exactly that you want?”

“Can you give me a lift back home?”

I looked at Muffin. She was really huge. “You won’t fit in my car. Besides, the storm has started, and it’s supposed to be really bad. Driving anywhere tonight isn’t a good idea.”

Have you ever seen a pig look rejected? Well, I’ll tell you, it’s a sorrowful sight, one of the most sorrowful sights you’ll ever see.

“It’s so cold, and I have no place to go.”

“But I don’t have a garage or anything like that.” I wondered why I was talking so rationally to a pig, but then she answered, and quite rationally at that.

“Can’t you let me come in?”

Part of me was thinking, *you have to be kidding me*, but the compassionate part of me spoke up before I could control it. “Well, I guess so.” I opened the door wider to let Muffin in, but then said, “Wait!” Muffin stopped and looked up at me with such imploring eyes. I never knew pigs were so expressive. “You have to go outside to do your business, you know, go to the bathroom.”

“OK,” was Muffin’s reply. “I’ll let myself out the back door when I need to.”

Her expression was so sincere, I believed her. I let her in. The cat started hissing and backing up. Once Muffin was fully in the house (it took a while for her to clear the tight hallway) and I had closed the door, the cat fled to hide under the couch.

Muffin walked over to the sofa. “Oh, no you don’t,” I said. “Not on the furniture.” She turned, walked a few steps away, lay down on her side in the middle of the room and closed her eyes. I wasn’t sure I would be able to navigate around her, but there wasn’t any other place big enough for her in the entire house. I sat back down on the couch and pulled the blanket up. I couldn’t really read, though. My mind was too busy processing what had just happened. The cat slinked out from her hiding place and cautiously made her way over to Muffin’s face. Muffin lifted her head and opened her eyes. Then her head plopped back down, and she was asleep again. The cat curled up against Muffin’s massive belly.

I fell asleep, too, and woke to the sparkling light of the sun reflected off a new covering of snow. The cat was asleep on my legs.

I sat up and looked over to where Muffin had been. She wasn’t there. In her place, and you have to believe me on this, was a note written in magic marker on a piece of paper torn from my notebook. I got up and walked over to pick the note up. It read:

Thank you so much for your hospitality. The roads are clear now, so I will be off. I think I will keep on walking. You know what will happen to me if I go back to the farm. Besides, I may run into some more people who are as nice as you were to take me in.

Muffin

As I am sure you can imagine, I don't tell this story to just anyone. It's very special, and it takes a special person to appreciate it. Anyway, that is the story of my encounter with Muffin, the Pig. It's also the story of how I became vegan.



Farming ESCAPISM By **David Salazar**

David Salazar (he/xe/she) is a teenage writer from Chile. He is nonbinary, bisexual and autistic. Xe can be most often found rambling about xir latest obsession or writing self-indulgent nonsense. You can find him on Twitter at @smallredboy.

My great-uncle charms chickens like they're snakes. I watched him, fascinated, as they let him move them around, press them against the ground, clucking happily. I wanted to stay in that farm forever, with the cats I named him after (*Tata Ñau*), the chickens, the blind dog and the horses. A place away from the strain of city-dwelling was where I wanted to be, ten and overstimulated with the bright lights. I wanted him to charm me like a chicken and make me stay there for the rest of my days, feeding the animals and tending the garden. I would have complained about the lack of Internet, but I would've gotten used to it—I would've gotten used to anything if it meant dwelling in that farm.



ALPACAS

By **Zhihui Zou**

Zhihui Zou lives in Southern California. He has published a sports novel, and his work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in Short Fiction Break, Heavy Feather Review, San Antonio Review, and elsewhere. During weekends, he likes to play tennis with his friends and read history books.

When traveling to Verdane, we stayed at an Airbnb that had a farm that occupied a hill. It was the host's friend, Fredrick, who received us, for the host was away. We got a shack on the hill's slope. The shack was small for a family, but my parents liked it because we could see five or six alpacas wandering right outside our window. I expected a farm to have more animals beside some sad-looking alpacas. "Most are on the other side of the hill," Fredrick explained. The alpacas came near our shack while we were inside, but they ran away when we stepped out, as if we were smelly monkeys in a zoo and an alarm would blast whenever one got out its cage. Fredrick said he could show me the other animals, but I said no.



Room to BREATHE

By **Lisa Lerma Weber**

Lisa Lerma Weber lives in San Diego, CA. Her words have recently appeared in (mac)ro(mic), Serotonin, TunaFish Journal, X-R-A-Y, and others. She is an editor for Versification. Follow her on Twitter @LisaLermaWeber

I left a small town because I didn't fit
and had no room to breathe or grow,
but sometimes I tire of the pressing in
of so many strange bodies and brusque buildings,
and long for a simple house with a kitchen window
that looks out at fields of graceful, dancing grass,
or a forest of sashaying trees, or generous mountains
silently offering their freedom at my restless feet.
I want air free of exhaust and exhaustion.
Air fragrant with wood, wildflowers, and primordial breath.
I want to lie under an open sky, let the stars sing me to sleep,
or sit in front of a fire as the rain whispers through open windows.
I left a small town because I didn't fit
but sometimes this big city has no room for my soul.



Morning's MELODY

By **Deana Lisenby**

Deana Lisenby is a graduate from Texas A&M University with a degree in Kinesiology. She currently works as a wellness manager at a high-end retirement community in Dallas, TX. She is a certified yoga teacher, personal trainer, and group fitness instructor. In her free time, Deana enjoys reading, writing, and spending time outdoors with her husband, son, and two dogs. You may follow her writing journey on Twitter @deana_kay_2013.

The old swing creaks on the front porch
as leaves rustle in the humid breeze.
I embrace the morning's melody.
Grandpa's goats and cows
tread through pastures.
Chickens and guineas
scurry and scratch,
free range.
Vegetables glisten
with diamond dewdrops,
gleaming amidst golden rays.
I inhale my surroundings and pause,
listening, as wooden beams whisper and groan,
slowly shifting, settling, merging into ready earth.



In TASSELING Season

By **Taylor Brunson**

Taylor Brunson is a poet living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where she graduated from UNC with highest honors for a manuscript of original poetry. Her work has recently been featured in *Non.Plus Lit*, *The Daily Drunk Mag*, and *The Minison Project*. She serves as an assistant poetry editor for *Four Way Review* and an assistant nonfiction editor for *Nashville Review*. Taylor can be found on Twitter, @taylor_thefox.

Graze of soft sloping
leaves against cheekbones,
of cattle roving

the fields, my love

for their distant lowing
radiates warm between
my shoulder blades

like the last touch

of sun at my back, reaching
between the stalks
and pulling me back.



One Week a Year at Grandma's, Up NORTH

By **Zebulon Huset**

Zebulon Huset is a teacher, writer and photographer living in San Diego. He won the Gulf Stream 2020 Summer Poetry Contest and his writing has appeared in Meridian, The Southern Review, Fence, Atlanta Review & Texas Review among others. He publishes the writing blog Notebooking Daily, edits the journals Coastal Shelf and Sparked, and recommends literary journals at TheSubmissionWizard.com.

Drive north a couple hours then turn off the paved road and you'd seen concrete for the last time until leaving at the end of the week. You could taste a passing car's dust wake for an hour if the wind had taken a cat nap as so many things there did during the height of day—far from the bustle of noon on Lake Street, St. Paul's southside. At home we'd walk to Central Park sometimes, it had the extra-long steel slide under trees that made you feel like flying through the litter, but usually mom kept us inside. At grandma's farm we were shooed outside early and only allowed back for feeding times—like farm animals ourselves. At first it felt insulting, then freeing—being out without a watch or another person for a couple miles if you wandered in the right direction. Snake Creek wound through the stand of Aspen behind the barn and most years there was enough flow to catch at least crawdads and tadpoles. During dry years we played 'bullfighter' with the goats before we knew they hurt the bulls. Or cartoons never showed us swords or even blood—instead it was something halfway between freeze tag and an older brother holding your forehead as your small arms swung ineffectually no matter how tightly you balled your fists. 'Keep away' didn't have the same ring to it, especially when we knew that was what we were really playing these days as our mom and her mom alternatively reminisced and shouted. The goats loved baby carrots and we brought them bags and bags from the store—grandma said we spoiled them and that's why they liked us which was fine with me. I could always find more carrots. Weekend farm dinners were the best of the year—so many cheesy or buttery sides they had their own card table— afterward they'd move it outside and we'd all sit on lawn chairs

with sweet tea and iced biscuits and watch the sun set playing dice or dominoes or cribbage. Listening to the chorus of cicadas, bug zapper and laughter with the dust finally washed from our lips, our muscles screaming for us to melt into our chairs like butter until we finally acquiesce, too tired to feel the arms lifting us from plastic chairs and laying us in bed.



