

the literary forest poetry magazine  
*issue six (2024)*



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR  
ABBIE HART

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

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

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

sincerely,

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

abbie hart, editor-in-chief

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ENTER THE FOREST.

— YOU LEARN TO SEE THE BODY IN SECTIONS  
LIZ IRVIN

The CT takes a slice  
but leaves the pieces  
intact.

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

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

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

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

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

The student and silent teacher  
in tacit prayer.

You always thought  
being there  
would make you  
sea-sick

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

**YOU LEARN TO SEE THE BODY IN SECTIONS**  
**LIZ IRVIN**

but truth be told,

it made you into something

bright &  
 impervious

and you jumped off the bow

and got reeled back in

with a fishing net,

your skin mottled from the cold.

And when you come home,  
 there's always

the wild cottontail.

She burrows under the porch

but ventures out past dark

for bark & frost-matted  
 clover.

Fixed in your high-beam glare,

she stares past you

and you stare past her

until you're

both looking

at some point

far enough

in the distance

that the two

points converge

**YOU LEARN TO SEE THE BODY IN SECTIONS**  
**LIZ IRVIN**

and you're both seeing  
the same thing.

Like a wave  
blasting  
against  
another  
wave.

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

**UNDERGROUND LOVER  
PLEASANT NNEOMA STEPHEN**

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

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

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

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

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

**SAM**  
**FRANK FREEMAN**

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

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



**A LIFE WITH OLD GIRLFRIENDS**  
**D.S. MAOLALAI**

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

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

**I GOT DRUNK ONCE**  
**RON RIEKKI**

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

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

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

**I GOT DRUNK ONCE**  
**RON RIEKKI**

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

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

**I GOT DRUNK ONCE**  
**RON RIEKKI**

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

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

When a crow finds another crow  
dead on the ground, wings spread  
  
like a silk cloak, with a ruby flower  
on its chest bleeding silently, it caws  
  
an alarm to call other crows to see  
the corpse, then at once a murder  
  
of crows gather around together,  
still and mute to witness their own  
  
death. That was what happened  
when I found you on the crisp bed  
  
of the lake, with your soft flower  
on your heart, long after you left  
  
the shelter to find potable water.  
That was how I screamed an alarm  
  
for others to witness that the pain  
had no wings, it lied stiff on the dry  
  
earth in the form of a hunt thing,  
innocent and radiant like a daughter.

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

**WAR AND GRIEF**  
**SAHIL MEHTA**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**WAR AND GRIEF**  
**SAHIL MEHTA**

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

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

**CINDY SHERMAN IS A BIRD**  
**JACK DEBOYACE**

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

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

**CENTO ON ILLNESS**  
**IAN PARKER**

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

*These things are complicated* says the Health Department.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

husband, and he both is and is not my grandfather now.

He eats clementines that he pulls from his pocket,  
already-peeled, but I decline the slice he offers because my  
teeth are too loose in my jaw to chew, and instead I hand him  
a feather. He puts it in his back pocket and does a little

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

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

We all dance with feathers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**SIX NIGHTS**  
**LOUIS FABER**

1.

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

2.

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

3.

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

4.

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

5.

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

6.

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

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



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

The sand!  
 Don't put your feet there.

6.

*Oh, that would've been a beautiful one,*

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

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

There are spade and plastic rake scars around him;

Empty spaces where buckets choked down the beach;

And now this.

The sea is trying to heal it all,

Running up the shore with an eager liquid suture,

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

You would never know it,

But it itches.

Want to know something else?

I take the ocean's currency very seriously.

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

So I can play my chances at forgiveness

And sleep at night.

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

You would never know it.

7.

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

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

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

This is your power. And the sand's.

Should we yell about it?

8.

That clam shell is as big as your fist,

But there's a hole in its pink belly.

Is it worth it, to keep something almost beautiful?

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

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

One a snarled reflection of the other,

Smearing like a stain down the fetch.

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

And it lights up beneath the touch.

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

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

She does not look up.

Should we yell?

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

9.

I can't sleep on all of these grains.

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

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

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

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

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

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*enter the forest*

