

# *RED ALDER REVIEW*

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## FRANCES BOYLE

### Hollow Promises

*Rap rap rap*, seek soft spot on trunk, *tap tap thunk*,  
the drilling can begin when you find a way  
through the anxiety breath held till eyes  
spangle with red waiting for the inhale  
to flow cool rush of know of have of receive.

A stitch in rhyme keeps time tangled  
web deceives. A nose knows roses. Wastrels want  
knot. Ambient sound rasp on wood *sippa zibba*  
*sippa zibba, sup!* self-satisfied a memory-flake:  
follow the cookie-crumbs trail.

A promise field days to come three-legged  
races behind the flower bed power  
head. Raving wolves slaving jaws slathered  
with lather. Awful offal treats of tripe liver heart  
and tongue guts spilled beyond the circle.

Greedy guts wants more grasping as the drill  
pierces toward the heart of the tree twisted  
core softens promises hollowness an echo (echo  
echo), is eco hope hollow? All over but for  
faint hope faint whisper faint shadow?



## AARON SANDBERG

### This Nest

In what condition  
on the street  
below an oak.

I take it back,  
place it on  
day-old news,  
or not news at all,  
on my living room floor,  
or not living—

this home within a home.

A ring of dirt collars the edge.  
Every twig tucked beneath the last.  
No seams.  
No sign of its beginning,  
or end—

just balance  
and  
calibration.

All that toil  
and preternatural care  
to fall to earth  
once what was there  
flew from it.

And now  
here—

this home within a home.

My cabinets cluttered.  
The dishes stacked high in brackish water.  
The shoe massacre in the corner.

And my mattress,  
full of fledgling feathers,  
seeping through the seams—

bursting, really—

and the occasional cry from  
broken  
beaks.

*Keep quiet  
and die with grace,*  
I tell them,  
if I could speak.

Sometimes,  
when the world is still,  
I can feel their claws kick inside me.

And sometimes,  
if the world is still,  
I'll cough up a feather.

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**Aaron Sandberg** resides in Illinois where he teaches. His recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *English Journal*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Writers Resist*, *Yes Poetry*, *Unbroken*, *One Sentence Poems*, *Vita Brevis Press*, *Literary Yard*, and elsewhere. You might find him on Instagram @aaronsandberg.

## MARIA PICONE

### Stormings

We live in a climate-touched zone//ghosted houses flooding Craigslist  
in our paper dollhouse apartment walls//trembling in a thunderclap

fleeing before Florence to Florida//lived the haze of hurricane decision-making  
buckling down for Dorian//stocking Beefaroni in our emergency kit

pressure driving the cockroaches out of their refuges//blackening the walls  
bookmarked [nhc.noaa.gov](http://nhc.noaa.gov)//check it every day for new spinnerets

Myrtle summer oozes down//tourists raving as they feed on sticky candy  
locals feast on this amusement economy after a long//dry season

a temporary respite//not fit for eternity or advancement  
let alone climate change//a clock ticking down from

nowhere//countdown

## To the ugly duckling, newly hatched

As you crack your seedling body into the world  
the warmth abandons you. A subjunctive fog  
covers the image of the mother. Growing  
inward, there are many waters to fear/swim in;  
keep your hands close to your chest.

Flap your broad duck feet until you can't  
see the size of your difference. Smash  
those bones against the ground in your haste  
to fly. Question—look beyond the face.  
If you can't, who will?

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**Maria S. Picone** has an MFA from Goddard College. She's interested in hybrid and experimental forms as well as free verse. Her hobbies are learning languages, looking at cats on the internet, and painting. Her poetry appears in *Mineral Lit Mag*, *Ariel Chart*, and *Eleventh Transmission: 45 Poems of Protest*. Her Twitter is @mispicone, and her website is [mariaspicone.com](http://mariaspicone.com).

## NATASHA KING

### out of the wetlands

far south | where in seas of grass and water | dwells the snail kite which eats |  
only one innocent breed of snail | your fate is gathering its strength to |  
sweep you up the shoreline |

where your teeth have | worn flat from the endless |  
diamond dust of snail shells, there is | space for you to fit the future |  
between your jaws | and hold | and hold |

the alligator holds her offspring | cradled safely on her tongue |  
the mangrove trees hold crabs and porous sponges | cradled in their tessellating roots |  
and where you are going | has wrapped its anabatic arms | about you |

you gulp and swallow down | the sweet snail flesh of what your loins | have made |  
your thighs through air are rooting | your thighs are |  
the white mangrove | the black mangrove | the red mangrove rampant |

like an alligator you let gravity pull your fate down your throat |  
like a kite you let the tang of blue smoke on the air pull you |  
northerly | easterly | westerly |

swept pole-wise up the brackish coast |  
you keep pace with the seabirds and their cries of |  
prophesy | prophesy | prophesy |

if you can only eat snails or salt or your young | maybe you are doomed | but  
if you can envision a life carved into | barrier islands | or strange coasts | and  
traced like the kinetic echo of | breaths here and gone | then |

maybe you only need to follow | the earth's spiral shell | maybe you do not need to |  
guess what lies ahead | only rise | on gathered wings | on faith | on the fire | of the  
mollusk | in your belly burning | and burning | and burning |

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**Natasha King** is a Vietnamese American writer and nature enthusiast currently living in North Carolina. Her poetry has appeared in *Constellate Magazine*, *Oyster River Pages*, *Okay Donkey*, *Ghost City Review*, and others. She spends her spare time writing, prowling, and thinking about the ocean; she can be found on Twitter as [@pelagic\\_natasha](#).

## ZACH MURPHY

### Jasper & Ruby

“These guys have been around longer than us!” Jasper says to Ruby as they admire the Galapagos tortoises at the Como Zoo.

“I bet they’re wiser than us too!” says Ruby.

Jasper chuckles and coughs violently. “They definitely look wiser!”

Jasper and Ruby are a pair of inseparable sweethearts who ceremoniously retired from their Post Office jobs on the same exact day, though it ended up being a few years later than originally planned. To enrich their free time, they started a new tradition by going to the zoo together once a week, and they haven’t missed a single visit.

One of their favorite zoo animals is an Orangutan named Amanda, who loves to paint on canvases. Every time they see her, Amanda sends them big smooches.

“She really likes us,” says Jasper.

Ruby’s eyes light up and she smiles as bright as the sun. “I’d much rather put up Amanda’s art on the wall, instead of some of that strange stuff I see on the television.”

“Ain’t that the truth,” says Jasper as he coughs again.

Jasper and Ruby lovingly hold hands and make their way toward the Hoofed Creatures.

The two gaze up at a trio of magnificent Giraffes and their towering necks and their long blue tongues and their gentle eyes.

“They look like they can see into your soul,” says Ruby.

“They look like they know something that we don’t,” says Jasper.

“We’ll never know what that is,” says Ruby.

Jasper and Ruby continue on the path toward the Aquatic Animals. Ruby slows down and begins to breathe heavier. “I just need to sit down for a second,” she says.

Jasper holds Ruby steadily and sits her down on one of the benches near the food patio. “I’ll go get you some water,” he says.

Ruby looks over at a bin that reads: *“Help keep the environment safe and recycle your old cell phone!”*

Jasper comes back with a bottle of water. “Here you go sweetheart,” he says.

Ruby takes a small sip of water. “I wouldn’t know how to work a cell phone if I tried,” she says.

Jasper sits down next to Ruby. “Now they got those smartphones,” he says. “I heard they can make people do stupid things.”

Ruby attempts to stand up. “I’m ready to go see the Polar Bears,” she says.

“Are you sure you don’t need some more rest?” asks Jasper.

“They’re calling me!” says Ruby.

“Okay,” says Jasper as he helps Ruby up from the bench.

Jasper and Ruby head inside to the Polar Bear exhibit. They stare through the glass in awe as the formidably sized mammals with the thick, white fur glide through the cold water like they don’t have a single care in the world.

“It’s amazing how their coats keep them so warm,” says Jasper.

“If things keep going the way they are I’m afraid they might be *too* warm,” says Ruby.

Jasper sighs.

The couple takes one final stroll through the zoo.

“It’s so sad to think that a lot of these animals might not exist in a decade from now,” says Ruby.

“Tell me about it,” says Jasper. “Future generations will have to learn about them in school in the way we learned about dinosaurs.”

Ruby sighs. “What a world.”

“They always say that elephants never forget,” says Jasper. “So we should never forget them!”

“You’re so good with the sayings,” says Ruby.

The two walk speechless for a few minutes.

“You know,” says Ruby. “There will come a day when one of us won’t be around to go to the zoo.”

“I don’t think I’d be able to come here without my sweetheart,” says Jasper.

“I would still want you to go,” says Ruby.

“Do you promise to do the same?” asks Jasper

“Mm-hmm.”

Ruby leans her head on Jasper’s shoulder as they listen to the rainforest birds sing.

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**Zach Murphy** is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories have appeared in *Peculiars Magazine*, *Ellipsis Zine*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *The Bitchin’ Kitsch*, *Ghost City Review*, *Lotus-eater*, *Crêpe & Penn*, *WINK*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and *Fat Cat Magazine*, and *Yellow Medicine Review*. He lives with his wonderful wife Kelly in St. Paul, Minnesota.

## JOEL ROBERT FERGUSON

### Thinning

The smell is strange at first in this  
the third orchard we come to

strongest from atop the ladder—  
the coffee roaster on Joy Avenue.

We all get used to it,

move through June  
through rows of apple trees

spare two from each cluster  
toss the rest groundward to rot

enrich this good-growing earth.  
Metal wires bind the trees taut

in sequence, a bundle                    a living fence  
aimed for open sky.

Here by the precipice  
while at the top of an eight-footer

one can see out across Lake Okanagan  
to where the bald-ash mound

at lake's bend remains  
charred stumps,

barren            (that conflagration  
just south of Kelowna ten years ago)

If you ignore this                    then

we are as in a painting, gleaning  
in reverse.                    We'll return in autumn

take down the ripe apples, bin them  
for processing and the market

in the frost-fall air  
the roaster's scent becoming ever the sweeter.

## Ardent

Stand-to in the Assiniboine Forest.  
Old snow's crust and pee bottles,  
planes constrained on landing paths  
over the footpath, too early for pleasure  
just theology. Enough of man-children  
using big numbers to prove  
objective beauty. Thrill on the way  
to the edge of wood, prairie silence,  
blood-orange eye, overalled ghosts  
in cumulus. Time cannot stand here.

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**Joel Robert Ferguson** is the author of *The Lost Cafeteria* (2020, Signature Editions) and holds a Masters in Creative Writing from Concordia University in Montreal. His poetry has appeared in numerous publications including *Arc*, *The Columbia Review*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Malabat Review*, *Orbis*, and *Southword Journal*. He lives in Winnipeg, Treaty 1 territory, with his partner and their three cats.

## LILY KLINEK

### PLANKTONIC

It is always a choice about hiding — namely, how much. Which to show and which to bury — the answer, to either, could never be everything. I think this choice is spurred by newness, and by fear. At one point, these two were equal to me. I have learned their inequality now, but I cannot stop myself from floating into that choice. Something else carries me, moves me as rip-current, or upwelling. I have all this hate in me I don't understand. For example. I // love // my body, but only when it gives me things. Only when it provides, which feels rarer and rarer now. This strange parasitism is not condoned, a toxin running through me all the time, always. If the line of me — forehead to shoulder to elbow to fingertip — belonged to another girl I would certainly fall in love with her. Our form is indistinguishable, similar if not the same. Maybe it is the insides of me, strange, gelatinous, spurred to movement, that differ so harshly as to inspire hatred. Not the gentle, parallel slopes of our bodies. How hypocritical. I will not let my own lines live easy, unbroken. It would kill me to do so, even though it is killing me to break them. Even though it is giving me life to love them, as they exist in someone else. A jellyfish is a type of plankton, just like the tiny krill and tinier protists it swims with. Who decided this? This undulating beast of a creature. These pinpricks of pure life. The floating, not the form, is their definition. They are rendered same. I cannot decide which to feel more sympathy for.

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**Lily Klinek** is a student at UC Berkeley, and is currently Editor in Chief of *Berkeley Poetry Review*. Her writing explores the ways we carry emotion, inhabit our own bodies in illness and health, and find ourselves pulled towards or away from expression. She studies environmental science, but makes room in her heart for poetry and language, always.