

A painting of a woman with brown hair tied back, wearing a light blue dress with a white collar and a small yellow flower in her hair. She is looking out a window with a view of green foliage. The background is a dark, textured blue-green.

These Fragile Lilacs
Poetry Journal

Volume I, Issue II
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These Fragile Lilacs Poetry Journal

A journal dedicated to poetic excellence

The main goal of *These Fragile Lilacs* is to find strong poetry that illuminates whatever is true, whatever is beautiful, whatever is revelatory, and whatever goes otherwise unnoticed about the world in which we live. Poetry allows us to articulate what it means to live and die. Poetry is also one of the most significant mediums through which to document our lived experiences.

These Fragile Lilacs Poetry Journal

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These Fragile Lilacs is a poetry journal released biannually in January and July. We look for poetry that's tightly constructed and for sharp poetry with strong metaphors, similes, and imagery. We also gladly accept artwork and photographs. Issues are released at thesefragilelilacspetry.com. The cover art of this edition of *Lilacs* is a painting by Clinton Van Inman titled *Theme in Blue #2*. Inman's poetry is also in this edition of the journal.

Submissions: Send poetry and art submissions to thesefragilelilacs@gmail.com. Please do not include any attachments for poems; instead, paste the poems you would like to be submitted directly into your email. You may submit up to five poems per submission cycle. Please do not send previously published work. If your work is accepted for publication elsewhere, please let us know as soon as possible. If you would like to submit artwork or photography, you may submit attachments of images via email to the email address above.

Contents

Runes	David Anthony Sam	5
Home	Riley Leight	6
Venus	Riley Leight	6
Generations	Riley Leight	6
Feeding Time	Peycho Kanev	7
Spring	Peycho Kanev	7
Deviled Eggs	Macy French	8
Fear of Falling	Mary M. Salibrici	9
I'm Not Your Best Friend	Laryssa Wirstiuk	9
The Drowning Heart	Elias England	10
Graceful Sweep	Clinton Van Inman	11
The Trees Are Talking October	Robert Knox	12
Spring Greens	Robert Knox	12
Emergences	Robert Knox	13
unholy tracks	Farah Ghafoor	14
Borderlands	Irene Vazquez	14
The Master, the Weather	William Doreski	15
February Birthday, Remembered	Susanne Braham	16
Song to Scare Meredith	Zack Rearick	16
Waiting	Lana Bella	17
That Age	Allison Albino	18
Crabs, Love Letters	Allison Albino	19
Leaving Tip	Allison Albino	20
It Dawns	Nicole McKeon	21
Chytrids	Peter Huggins	22
Small Mercies	Peter Huggins	23
Genghis Khan's Funeral Escort	Peter Huggins	23
How You Were Before	Lynne Viti	24
Take Me with You When You Go	James Diaz	25
Themselves Baffled	James Diaz	25
Biographies		27

Runes

--David Anthony Sam

Old wind blows
Sanskrit wisdom
scratching the stones
of our questions

The dry streambed
is cluttered in
meaning and memory
stones as words

Memory has carved
this gulley—
has carved me
this way

My breath hovers
with the mist—
ghost of waters
that once flowed

How narrow this
channel to contain
so much time
and so much wanting

The mountain wind
descends, blows
through me
through the mist

I am made
of my beginnings
and endings
gathered in stones

Home

--Riley Leight

I looked,
and the cabinet,
the one with the thin glass pane
that rattled when it shut
and glued veneer of white laminate
peeling off
was gone
and I was left with nothing except
wet porcelain in my hands
awake

Venus

--Riley Leight

I see you
on pink sand
glowing seafoam skin
chest rising,
waves
hot sun, grey eyes
blue veins
crashing
shoulders bent,
human

we met in harsh waters

Generations

--Riley Leight

they stripped you dry
took your skin,
then clothed you
in sweet apples
and tobacco leaves

they painted you in warm beige,
with rough clay
that cracked in your wrinkles
like callous grains
in soft wood

now your spirit rests on hills
as spring snow

and you speak
through the manzanita
as it burns

Feeding Time

--Psycho Kanev

The cage is always shut

The wolf inside
remained silent
and just walked back and forth
between the bars

And this continued until
it was feeding time

The zookeeper came
and he cut a piece of meat from
his thigh and threw it
to the wolf

If only you could hear
the lovely growling while the beast
devoured this food

Spring

--Psycho Kanev

The snow slowly melts
and the light falls from
the center of the sky.
The mountain cries with her new
streams.
All is in motion, catching up for
a long stupor.

The birds fly again, dreaming of
Icarus and Daedalus.
Each pebble remembers the warmth
of their eternal seasons. Now—

Time kneels before all this.

The girls rise from the green land.

Deviled Eggs

--Macy French

My cousin's pregnant belly
turns the corner, a convex skin
submarine, strained and rippled,
one foot Alaska, the other Texas.
I smell her fine films of sweat,
sticky and sweet on the table cloth.

Grandma serves burnt coffee, fidgets
with mugs bought at the church
craft sale, humming to herself
Jesus saves, Jesus saves. She does not
look the young mother in the eye,
serves her tea instead.

Drawn lips, my cousin toys
with a bare ring finger, asks Grandma
if there is anything she can do, asks
for coupons, crinkly newsprint
in a dresser drawer, a small envelope
of two for ones. Eggshells float
in my cup.

Grandpa starts drinking at 10 am
sharp, cracks open a Milwaukee's,
pungent fizz pervades the kitchen, he
fiddles with carburetors,
grease under his nose.

Grandma takes my hand as well as my
cousin's. Knuckles rugged,
used, warped by *ol' Arthur*,
she whispers, hushed syllables.

Jesus saves, Jesus saves.

A wadded up Abraham finds its way
into my palm, cotton blend worn
soft, washed in pants pockets. I sing hurried
goodbyes, screen-door whistles,
the heat dissolves, hard-boiled.

Fear of Falling

--Mary M. Salibrici

I try to sleep
something firm behind me
a tree a headboard
someone's body.
I need to keep my bearings,
create protection in the night.
In dreams I fail to feel
the strength of such support.
In dreams I fall
away from what's behind me.

I'm Not Your Best Friend

--Laryssa Wirstiuk

What happened to the girl who once celebrated
needing a larger size, and where's my best friend
now that I've lost twenty-five pounds? Shared
fitting rooms are for secrets: *I'm too fat*. Then what
am I? Unable to pull the jeans she tried over my hips.
Inspired, I've died, made excuses, spit out fries
so that I could remain the same, never become
a woman. Let me tell you the secret to happiness:
be lonely. Be more sad than you've ever been.
Worry. Let your tears fulfill your recommended
daily allowance of salt. Tap your foot. Pity yourself
into girlhood. Shrink to a size that doesn't exist. Be
grateful you can slip through the cracks of anything.
After fifteen years of this, you'll realize you're not
doing it for anyone but yourself: for the feeling
that you can always disappear, that you can live
with efficiency. While they're consuming fistfuls
for energy, for pleasure, you'll pop one blueberry
into your mouth and savor the way it bursts
all over your hunger. You'll coat your innards
with cerulean and find within you a calming color.

The Drowning Heart

-- Elias England

Upon the black and angry sea
a sunken ship doth sail,
its tattered cloths hang motionless
despite the stormy gale.
The vessel creaks from bow to stern,
its rotted wood too frail,
in endless driven agony
with every rusted nail,
and floating from its flooded hull,
a melancholy wail
to cease the moaning of the Damned
who in their torments pale.
And over ship and sea and storm
thick fog doth cast its veil.

In life, a most vivacious girl
in affluence was pent,
her heart was wracked with loneliness
until there came a gent
who showed her what it was to love,
then off to war was sent,
and when the man did not return
the maiden's will was bent:
to cross the sea to find her love
and there she bravely went,
but soon came news her hapless brig
was by a tempest rent,
now over ship and sea and storm
goes drifting her lament.

Alone aboard her phantom ship,
this maiden of the deep,
her dulcet aching sorrow-song
for evermore to keep,
its dissonance inspiring dread
in souls long laid to sleep.
With thunder, Heaven stops its ears,
and blessed Seraphs weep,
which choke the sky with blackened clouds
from which their tears doth seep
to be imbibed by hungry waves,
and threshing sea to reap.
And over ship and sea and storm
the lady's dirge doth creep.

By temporal restraints unbound,
yet chained atop the sea:
the ship some call The Drowning Heart,
a weary ghost it be,
possessed by a possessor of
such perfect love as she
who now has long since gone to rot
save for her love for he
who gave a promise with a ring,
now worn with misery,
until she finds that man for whom
she cries eternally;
and over ship sea and storm,
she searches endlessly.

Graceful Sweep

--Clinton Van Inman

The river curves with graceful sweep
Along its banks the willows weep
The slender boughs are bending low
To gaze the sun's reflection far below
That yields its mystery to the stream
Carried away by some boundless dream
Perhaps the pulse or lasting splendor
Will express some secret or oft desire
Beyond all rule or mindless measure
My words too will press even higher
Without poetry our world will perish
Leaving not a plank or rack behind
To show one royal act that cherish
Some idea that history is not really blind.

The Trees Are Talking October

--Robert Knox

Deadheads in the garden
(not the stoned kind)
I've snipped spent pansies by the hundreds
beheaded scores of faded blossoms,
the blown candles of two weeks in July
from a golden-topped fully crowned Coreopsis Heliopsis
Caught up in drought patrol,
I spare the Shasta daisies my sharp intentions
They slump and fade from original sin,
merely born to bloom and droop
tired sinners stranded on the beach of time
(the waters rising, too late for them)
and turn my cruel exhortations
to the hardy mums of another season
Asters, my love, my darlings, be garden stars
Outlast my tired resolutions
shine, and shine again,
in the face of the blood-thirsty glittering frost

Spring Greens Are the Earth's Wild Songs

--Robert Knox

Spring greens are the wild earth's songs
They are time's ammunition against the dying of the light
They are leaves of grass, another fresh collection, line and meter obscured by the pure
multitude of all they are
The green scatter-shot, the bullets of the universal urge
Nothing dies, nothing is lost, so long as the sun tilts on its celestial shoulder to look back at
us, turns a face warm and scented with blossom, pollen, pheromone, insect hum and squawk
of the sparrow
The fire in the senses, the song in the tree
The girls bickering in their play, the steady drum-bounce eternal of the basketball
The rise and surge of the tiny nations underfoot, violets overblooming their allotted sphere
Speedwell, Forget-me-not, Myrtle -- names on the lips of ages
Somewhere Sweet William hides in the weeds
The held-high heads of tulips have fallen in the hurdle of time
And flowery hands of pansies, over-extended in the friendship of air, wait for the clipper
What god looks over their shoulders, blowing hot and cold? --
For what do we live, if not for such days?
To watch the mayfly of understanding
Flicker in the green light of fresh intimation
The fountain that fills when it overflows
From which we drink our thirst for the living

Emergences

--Robert Knox

Backyard traffic picking up
Big brown white-footed cat sniffing the exposed
branch of the arborvitae
as if snow had a smell
Does it smell like February, that aging catastrophe?
Like the day the hawk played tag with the cardinal?

First emergences:
people in puffy white coats
struck dumb in the shining air,
whiter than white, will they do for crocuses?
everything else smoothes out slowly,
a stiff icy grain stuck to the world's surface
like a beauty treatment gone wrong
people you love still standing (back from vacay)
leaves still on the shelf,
new buds coming, a flash of red flails
by the roadside, the stripped digits of the woodland
red with the new blood, hungry for green

Surface scrapes hint of
what's been where
the squirrel highway links fence to trunk-ways
the dark shell island rises beneath the feeder,
a naked atoll in a starved white ocean
those by-blows of Florida still in the mind
the return of the cardinals from a few desperate weeks
in the parking lots of Long Island

Wings of the blackbird coveting the feeder pole
like a dragon on his hoard
its blue flash of florescence a screaming headline in the air
waves of rippled flight roll across the snowfields,
a cross-chop in a busy surf

unholy tracks

--Farah Ghafoor

somewhere along my spine, a train
derails and a child with a voice spilling
of rickety heartbeats is ridged between vertebrae.
he wonders if he is going to Hell for surviving
because nobody seems to see him. I pluck him out
and nest him in my hair and he wonders
if I am God. my voice doesn't reach him
because his stomach growls too loudly
for justice, or bread pockmarked with revenge.
he is looking for love or love or love
by digging holes but it doesn't work because
I am the world, the world, and the world
doesn't give love, it only rewards
Heaven with the heavenly.

Borderlands

--Irene Vazquez

Speaking love
never made it across
the border, if it was ever there to begin with.

Dust burns the eyes
hands never left
Love stays where it must, in the heart

My mother called three times
today, all before noon.
She claims to have a key for each
and every locked door.

Dust burns the eyes
Hands beat the door frame
Love overflows, how it must, from the heart

un-lockable:

a word nonexistent, both able to be unlocked, and unable to be shackled

The Master, the Weather

--William Doreski

A solid mass of rain deploys
in giant footfall. Thunder chokes
on its ironies. We huddle
with the cats, hoping the weight
of water won't collapse the forest
onto our house and ruffle
the skins we've saved all our lives.

On the radio the BSO
plays Mahler's eighth symphony,
every note a nail in a coffin
so large I could swim in it.
You nod over Henry James
calmly as if the master himself
had deployed this storm to embody
psychological states too wry
and complex for anyone else
to understand. Maybe he has.

A photo in the living room
by Coburn depicts balding James
in profile. He stares east,
away from the source of the storm
toward its bruise-colored nadir,
a slop of grizzled runoff.
I also would like to honor him
by reading *The Turn of the Screw*
while the storm thumbscrews the sky.

But I lack focus and motive,
and suffer fear the color of stone,
the bluestone of our driveway,
which the hard rain is rutting
deeply enough to swallow me
with precisely the grave intentions
of James' iridescent prose.

February Birthday, Remembered

--Susanne Braham

Will it hurt forever,
this date that doesn't fit:
a too-wide foot jammed
into winter boot?
No comfy space for it
within my lonely year.
Would there were no calendars.

What silken sock
might soften the abrasion;
shoehorn my widowed life
past Valentine's Day
and into warmer, lighter times?
Each year, with great cheer,
my Robert would remind me
on the day of his birthday,
"From February ninth
the days grow noticeably longer."

And so today, alone, I struggle.
Seconds, minutes, hours
limp slowly by.

Hard Februarys come and go,
each one perhaps
a bissel softer.

And yet I blister, still.

Song to Scare Meredith

--Zack Rearick

Oh, doors will swing and so will I.
The branches of this tree
are dreaming I will stretch with them.
Alone they dream of me.

Oh, cups will fill and empty out.
The jackets will keep breathing.
The halls will ring with dead-talk, but
the echoes soon will even.

Oh, parts of me will slither off,
my soul will be expanded,
my teeth will rattle in my head,

and I will be abandoned.

Waiting

--Lana Bella

A woman was alone with the piano.
Her fingers collapsed onto black
and white skeleton keys, emptying
out what remained of the day. The
notes drifted apart, some traveled
across the flick of her hand, others
dove down where the wetness of
winter slept.

It was an early evening for hot
bath and bourbon on the rocks.
Her dead husband's music sheets,
light and illegible as they drifted
slowly toward the sliver of space
above the bubbles, inked stems
and tails reeled in their fall on her
hard knee-caps poking through
the effervescent water. Paper skin
clung to these knobby organs like
fresh snow in November.

This pocked landscape held her in
a catatonic order, any memory was
accidental, and bitterness laughed
with an audience of one. So there
she was, something nearing certi-
fably mad, living in a constant fear
when she would wake from long
stretch of dark, each breath and
step she took felt pitiless as if she
was being led by the hand of the
blind, while the outside world
burned red.

That Age

--Allison Albino

What is the age when you give up,
your house built of maybes
and stucco, when it's no longer
worth it to love higher

nor be a full body in the lake
spilling, where you
spill into someone else,
over the riverbank,

the boat, the cup, the spill
you can't pull back,
but gushes loud, currents
overturned. That age when you

no longer want to reach
for that extra rung
lick of cloud,
when you are too spent

to chase the cool gardenias
wafting down that hallway,
be lured into that faint music,
a wide-eyed faun in the trees

rustle born into leap?
That age when a kiwi
becomes too exotic,
when slumping in a chair

in front of a flickering screen
is enough to live, your desire
dulled to dry crackers covered

in dust like the grandfather
clock at the end of the hallway.
Then, there's that young girl
her face red, raw with heat,

running because she feels
the lightning in her legs,
she who would say
with a god's confidence

go, tempt it,
you, you whose lightning

is not yet dead

Crabs, Love Letters

--Allison Albino

My mother was too much of a lady
for all the bludgeoning,
ten minutes of cracking shells, yanking
out what must have been
righteous claws pistoled at sky.
Too much effort for a pinch full of flesh.

My dad, crab juice on his face, didn't care
a glass of Coke and backwash donned
the greasy imprints of his feasting
ready to devour all
that is white and good.

Walking by the kitchen,
two dozen boiled crabs between them
in a large metal terrine,
I could hear the gnash, slurp, sighs,
the *ay lami!* exclaimed in delicious joy
while flesh flew like fireworks over the table.
I watched him, starving, as he would always
crack her crabs first
so that her fingers wouldn't have to smell
too fishy. She would hold
the empty shell while he placed
the neat pieces on her plate, a small mountain
of lump crab grew, carcasses piled high.

If she managed to extract
a piece on her own,
she would put it on his plate too
call it a love letter
and I now think
These are the best kinds of love letters
delicious without verse,
reason or decoration
but there, sent without doubt
to be tasted, swallowed.

Leaving Tip

--Allison Albino

Adelmo cut his 2 o'clock potatoes,
hand trembling as he pierced the skin.
Eating was work, his Italian accent
heavy like the rare steak on his plate.
He peered up and said,
"You are as a beautiful as a heart."

He spent his lifetime charming women,
a hat and gloves charm
that lets the mademoiselle pass.
The kind that places kisses
on foreheads.

*"My wife was as beautiful
as a heart. Life afterwards
was just leftover steam
rising from ocean."*

*Reach over to me? Break the bottle
of perfume that still sits, half full?
Break all the mirrors in the house.
I'll know it's you.
My heart can only yell so much.*

On the other side of the window,
women push strollers
while monologuing on cell phones
young men walk with destinations
teenagers kiss without looking
and old women clutch their purses
as if their entire life's savings were inside
next to violet candies.

While I gazed, his head dipped down
into a dream as if he had gone to meet
her, young, in front of a fountain
or back at home with a table full of pasta,
wine, chattering children.

*Those young people always in a hurry.
So many times running into walls
Dizzy flies who can't see the glass of the window.
All they want to do is go outside
without planning how to get there.
This is how it must feel
when you want*

to die.

He startled himself into waking,
"Meet me for lunch tomorrow.
Same time."

I couldn't refuse
even though I had tasks
like there are always tasks. I returned
to the café
to watch the clock hands move
from 2 o'clock to 5,
doors open to the passing *rendez-vous*,
menus folded
then flattened,
plates filled
then sauced up
with torn pieces of baguette,
cigarettes butts bent
into ashtrays like cracked knuckles.

So many coins tossed on tables, waiting.

It Dawns

(an alba)

--Nicole McKeon

It dawns on me that this
might be the last
time I see you
it dawns on you
pale orange light
your fingers pierce
the thickest armor
and I wish life
were as simple
as the rising
and setting of the sun

we rise and set each night
to the sound of our sentry's
birdcall
and yet we give
nothing to the moon
except for our bodies
entwined
we soak up moonlight

and spit it back
in the morning
the sun is our feared god
and I want to tear it down
for you

Chytrids

--Peter Huggins

They aren't picky:
They'll eat plants, insects,

Amphibians, other fungi.
Pollen and cellulose present

No problem. They are
Happy to parasitize

Mosquito larvae and reduce
Their number. They are

Pleased to decimate
The frogs. They are

No friend to potatoes:
Black warts.

Amazing these
Progenitors of toadstools,

Less than half the diameter
Of a human hair.

I'll never look
At mushrooms the same.

Small Mercies

--Peter Huggins

Blueberries from bushes in my backyard,
Herbs from my own garden.

The smell of lavender when I walk
Around the corner and down the path.

The crunch of gravel, the call of geese,
The fall of water, the horn at noon.

Red birds in the flowering cherries,
Barn swallows against a darkening sky.

The brush of memory: the girl I thought
I had to marry, the woman I did.

Genghis Khan's Funeral Escort

--Peter Huggins

Left no one alive who saw
The Khan being carted
To his tomb on sacred mountain

The Khan's death a state secret
Nine hundred miles of dead
Like a section of the Great Wall

No one must know the location
South facing open to the sun
The Khan must be served

Horsemen rode over
The Khan's tomb
No one must know

No one must find
The eye of the nomad
The sound of the horse

How You Were Before

--Lynne Viti

Stage 4, primary site lungs,
in late photos, in a wig or with wisps of your own hair—
Not the frizzy mass around your small face when
I first met you, a sunny day, East Cambridge,
Houses compressed against each other, backyards
Of pavement or patch of grass.

Always lean, you grew thinner—
ungrew—your brown eyes
More piercing than ever.
Everyone said how brave—used
The lexicon of Caesar subduing the Gauls—
Struggle, valiant, fight, survivor, beat back—
Thank God the children are all grown up,
Someone emailed, what a comfort but
If this is comfort I couldn't feel it.
I am not brave, the evidence is incontrovertible,
I shrink from the struggle, beat back nothing of substance—
cannot yet dial the phone to talk to your husband

If I could talk with you now I would ask what it's like—
are you conscious of consciousness
If the dark's kinder than the cold light
or the morphine rush that eases pain but slows the heart

We sat on a stoop and joked while
Everyone else carried out moving boxes,
pushed them into the rental truck.
Your long legs in shorts were so graceful,
Brown from the sun, strong enough to carry you
Through your thousands of days ahead.

Take Me with You When You Go

--James Diaz

Let me put it past you,
I have always lived this way.
Laughter was another country
I had no shoes for travel,
thought if I did I may be
burdened to the ground.

I knew where water ran
I may very well
have been water myself
rushing like a wound
reopened

gathered in
a tiny stone pulse
muscle and moss
stitched into frame
far, near, untouched

these days I wonder
what kind of man
I was

no mother, only road
which turned until it was
shadowed by the idea of itself

bread so body can sleep
and I...

Themselves Baffled by What They Saw

--James Diaz

Where the muscle gave out
another memory walked in its dark swarm,
as tall pine was cut
the rains kept diminishing
until contingent losses lit up
in the back pockets of profit-
the city can be put elsewhere,
depth is all surface to them, the landscape
cannot see itself,
so we assign the contour and the memory,
the direct circle where light will
or will not go.

The ground is swollen with new ideas-
there is rhythm in a wind map,
dry bunk where mammals beat back
into burrowed seclusion,
that's the story you'll tell yourself,
but stone will eventually bruise
and rot will lock you in,
imbricated with abstraction
unfolded by line.
By devastation-
or its close cousin.

Biographies

Allison Albino studied creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College and has a Master of Arts in French Literature from New York University. She has participated in workshops with Mark Doty at the 92nd Street Y and has attended the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference for the past two summers. She teaches French at the Dalton School and has poems forthcoming in the *Apeiron Review*.

A Pushcart nominee, **Lana Bella** has a diverse work of poetry and fiction published and forthcoming with over 170 journals, including a chapbook with *Crisis Chronicles Press* (Winter 2016), *Abyss & Apex*, *Chiron Review*, *Coe Review*, *Columbia Journal*, *Foundling Review*, *Fourth & Sycamore*, *Galway Review*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Literary Orphans*, *Pinyon Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Roanoke Review*, *William Jessup University*, and *elsewhere*, among others. She can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/niaallanpoe>

Susanne Braham began writing poetry as catharsis, following the sudden death of her 56-year-old husband, a professor of medicine. Five of her poems have been published in two different anthologies about widowhood, the most recent being *The Widows' Handbook: Poetic Reflections on Grief and Survival*.

James Diaz is a writer and activist living in upstate New York. He is the founding editor of the literary arts magazine *Anti-Heroin Chic*. His poems and stories have appeared in *Chronogram*, *Foliage Oak*, *Cheap Pop Lit*, *Ditch*, *Pismire*, *My Favorite Bullet* and *Your One Phone Call*.

William Doreski teaches writing and literature at Keene State College in New Hampshire. His poetry, fiction, and criticism have appeared in many journals.

Elias England is a writer from Regina, Saskatchewan. He writes fiction and poetry, with a focus in the horror and fantasy genres. He also has co-written a number of short films.

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Robert Knox is a husband, father, freelance writer for *The Boston Globe*, and rabid backyard gardener. His poems have been published recently by *Verse-Vitua!*, *The Poetry Superhighway*, *Bombay Review*, *Earl of Plaid*, *Rain, Party, & Disaster Society*, and *Semaphore Journal*. A collection of poems (*Gardeners Do It with Their Hands Dirty*) will be published in 2016 by Coda Crab Books. His novel "Suosso's Lane" is available at <https://www.web-e-books.com/index.php#load?type=book&product=suosso>.

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These Fragile Lilacs Poetry Journal

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