

LITERARY ANTHOLOGY • ISSUE NO. 1-4 • 2024

LIT SHARK

magazine



THE
BEST
OF 2023
ANTHOLOGY



CONTENT

Dear readers, we always want to support you and give you the information you need to have the best reading experience possible. Please note that Lit Shark's Best Of 2023 Anthology contains content pertaining to mental health, child loss, cancer diagnoses and treatments, animal death, broken hearts, and tremendous examples of grief. There are also multiple illusions to sexual activity and some use of expletives. Thank you again for your support. We hope you will enjoy our inaugural anthology!

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Book Cover and Interior Design: McKenzie Lynn Tozan

Works By: Various Writers (credited)

Cover Image By: Open Source, Anonymous

Cover Spine Image By: Slaveika Aladjova

First Edition 2024

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LIT SHARK *magazine*

THE BEST OF 2023 ANTHOLOGY

EDITED BY MCKENZIE LYNN TOZAN

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW
SOMETHING TO SINK YOUR TEETH INTO

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hi readers, writers, and shark fans!

True to every new year, I feel like January and February flew by, and I'm still reeling from all that happened in 2023 while I'm trying to find my footing in the new year. But at least this year, I'm saying that in a good way.

Though I first thought of Lit Shark Magazine and what I hoped it could be clear back in 2015, 2023 was the year of its actual launch—and it's already been so much more than I originally expected it would be. The response has been lovely, supportive, and the excitement has been contagious. I'm so grateful.

I've been so pleased throughout 2023 and the earliest parts of 2024 to see how writers broach and make new common subjects like love, family, and identity, and I've been especially interested in seeing how nature interweaves with those themes, especially marine life, birds, coral, and echolocation. I've always loved nature writing, particularly nonfiction and ecopoetics, and the work that has come through Lit Shark has made these subjects feel like living, breathing entities to me—because in so many ways, they are.

To celebrate, I wanted to do something that would offer a shoutout to all of the wonderful people I worked with this year, all they contributed, and what they've gone on to do beyond Lit Shark, as well. Enter: Lit Shark's *Best Of 2023 Anthology*.

Lit Shark received over 1,200 unique submissions in 2023, and just under 300 of those pieces were accepted in Issues 1 through 4. That doesn't include the submissions we received for our Poem of the Month contest in October, November, and December, either! Submissions have already started to come in for 2024, and I can't wait to see how big we can go this year.

For our inaugural Best Of anthology, we revisited all of our issues—Issue One, Issue Two: The SHARK WEEK Edition, Issue Three: The Spooky (TEETH) Edition, and Issue Four—and selected our 50 favorite pieces by 50 writers. We then invited each of those 50 writers to submit something new that we could include in the anthology, resulting in a “something old and something new, something to sink your teeth into” collection that we love. It was fascinating to see how these “old and new” pieces spoke to each other, even when they were observing different themes!

The anthology is organized into three sections—Poetry, Prose (fiction and nonfiction), and the Poem of the Month winners and honorable mentions for the year—and you'll see the writer's “old” piece positioned first, followed by their “new” piece. In a few cases, you'll see a piece “out of genre,” because the writer previously published a poem and submitted a story as their “new” piece, or vice versa.

Looking back over this anthology, these pieces carry with them an irrevocable focus on love, loss, and grief. Before reading this collection in its entirety, I never realized how beautifully, perfectly, bittersweetly, and heartbreakingly the metaphor of drowning, water, and the murky depths are to the grieving process, and how endless and impossible that phase of life can be. Perhaps it's a reflection of things going on in my own life, why I chose these

pieces and how they fit so wonderfully together, but I hope this collection proves to not just be a beautiful example of poetry and story for you, but also an object of comfort like it's turning out to be for me.

I really hope you enjoy this collection and give yourself the time to simply sit back and relax in it. Maybe it's because I've been so close to these pieces all year long, but when I read this collection, I can feel Lit Shark's growth in it; I can feel the swell of excitement and anticipation; and I can feel this urgency for what is to come. Maybe it's just me, but I hope you will feel it, too.

Thank you again for all of the support you've shown Lit Shark in the past year. I cannot wait to see what is to come in 2024, and I'm honored to have you along for the ride with me.

In Celebration,
McKenzie
Editor-in-Chief and Fellow Shark Fan
March 2024

CONTENTS

Letter from the Editor: A Time to Celebrate 05

POETRY

Glen Armstrong –Shark Week	17
Further Predictions	18
KB Ballentine –Blue Persistence	19
Hope	20
Janet Bowdan –Landbank, Nantucket	21
Places We Are Never Going	22
Catherine Broadwall –Appraisal	23
Villanelle with Anxiety as Banshee	25
Lorraine Caputo –Meditation: Galápagos Seas	26
Washed	27
Alan Cohen –Visit	28
Aftermath	29
Mark Connors –Force	30
Looking Up	31
Dale E. Cottingham –Stop Light	32
Quibble	33
Patrick Druggan –Shearwater	35
Smiddy	37
Carol Edwards –Driftwood Dryad	38
Tell Me the Story of the Sleeping Beauties	
Waked by Torrents of Tears:	39
Michael Flanagan –“sunlight / on old snow”	40
“left to right” and “a good deed”	41
Annette Gagliardi –Suspension	42
Deep Sighs	43
J.D. Gevry –All That Can’t Be Said	44
Tension in the Stitch	45
GTimothy Gordon –L’Aube Song	46
Fogged	47
Shannon Frost Greenstein –Heavy Spot	48

Alyssa Harmon –52 Blue	50
the kind of blue	51
Matt Henry –Opponent Process Theory	52
CaneLab	54
Michael Lee Johnson –Willow Tree Poem	56
Crows	57
Victoria M. Johnson –100 Ways to Cook Chicken During a Pandemic	58
Emily Kerlin –Two Months Out	61
Laundry	63
Deborah Kerner –Turtle Song	64
Under Waters	65
Helga Kidder –The Wishbone	66
Time Is a Hungry Bird	67
Craig R. Kirchner –Joke’s On Jonah	68
Oracle	69
Ashley Knowlton –From a Plane High Above California	70
Humpback Stacks	71
H.K.G. Lowery –Pathos for a Bee	72
Beth Marquez –Home	73
Jennifer MacBain-Stephens –Ten of Swords	74
Meet	75
Carolyn Martin –Whale Watching Spoken Here	76
Resilience	78
Ursula McCabe –Tidal Mouth of the Shore	79
fortunate	81
Lauren K. Nixon –Ovis	82
Storm Sonnet	83
Shilo Niziolek –When the Katydid’s Stop Singing	84
When Katydid’s Sing	85
Sandra Noel –I Am the Wanting Blue	86
Finning the Sweep of the Bay	87
Jess L. Parker –Poem for My Unborn Daughter	88
Gap-tooth Smiles	90
Joel Savishinsky –Extremities	91
The Un-named	93
Mandy Schiffrin –The Starfish	94
Uropygial	95

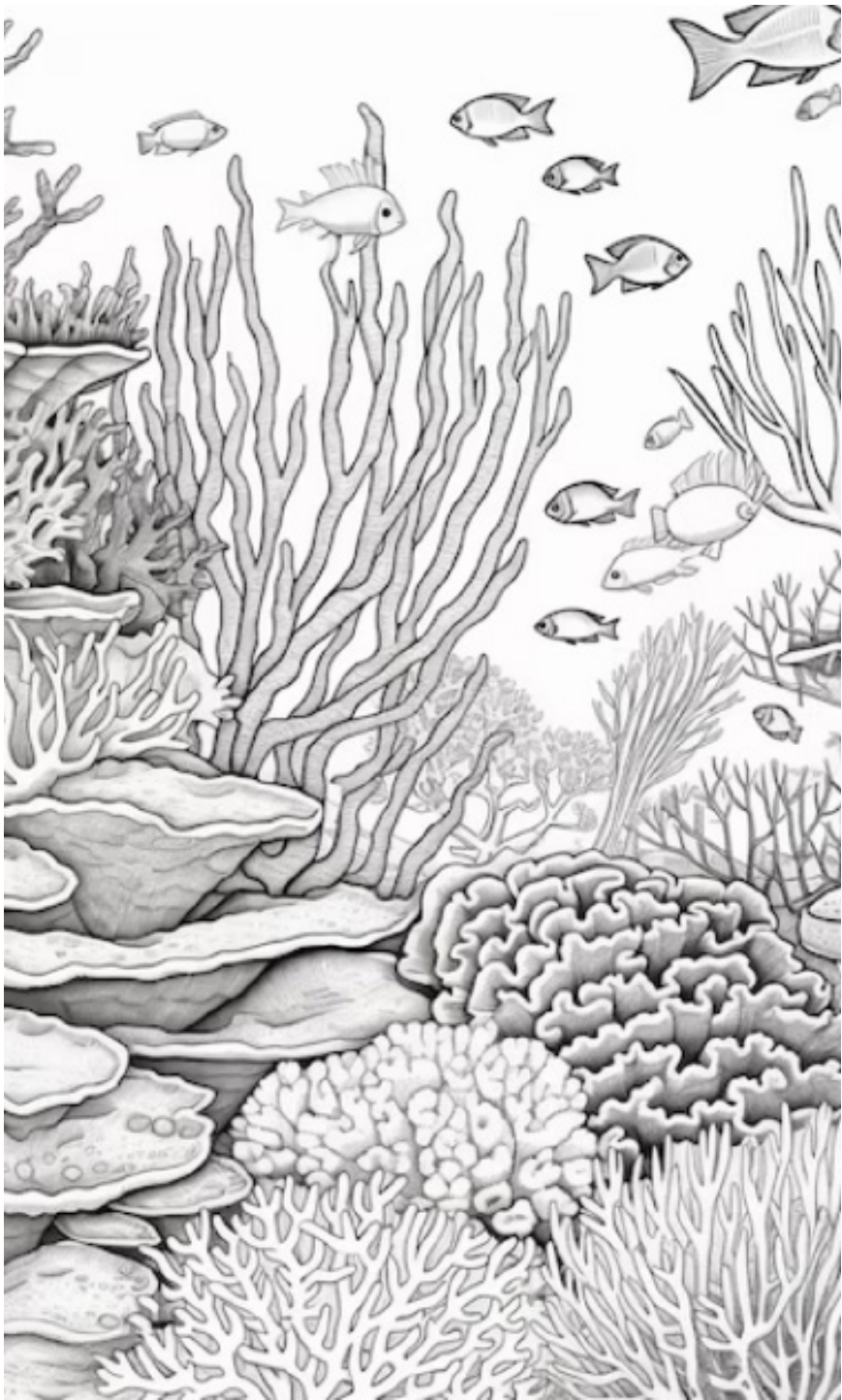
Larry Schug –I’m Toast	96
Moonlight in a Coyote’s Eye	97
Nolo Segundo –On Finding a Dead Deer in My Backyard	98
Transfiguration	100
Carol Lynn Stevenson Grellas –Gamble at a Ramble	101
When Yellow Was Golden	102
Annie Sullivan –Shark Tooth Hunting	104
A Shark Tooth Search	105
Marianne Tefft –Cephalopod Love	106
Rose-Colored Glasses	107
Doug Van Hooser –Ruby-Throated	108
Autumn Scherzo	109

PROSE

Edward Ahern –The Dogfisherman	113
Transcendence	120
Maggie Bayne –The Return	124
The Walk	137
Tricia Casey –A Shark Tale	148
The Gift	155
Keith Hoerner –Swimming through Shadowlands	160
Swimming Back to Shore–With No Sign of Your	
Footsteps in the Sand or Sight of You on	
the Horizon	161
Beth Mathison –Swimming with the Shadow	164
“Spring Haiku”	165
Nancy Machlis Rechtman –Keep, Donate, Throw Away	166
Purple and Azure	177
Russell Richardson –A Goon Squad in the Restroom	178
Agree to Disagree (With Feathers)	183
Rie Sheridan Rose –I Will Bury My Love in Topaz	188
Walking with Hades by Moonlight	192
Cassandra O’Sullivan Sachar –Trapped in a Studio Apartment	
for Eternity	193
Upon Loss	204
Steve Zisson –Bruce	208

2023 POEM OF THE MONTH

<i>Winners and Honorable Mentions for Lit Shark's Poem of the Month</i>	225
Catherine Broadwall –Ecology	227
Shannon Frost Greenstein –Just Another Poem about the Moon	229
Beth Marquez –From Lightning to the Earth	231
Shilo Niziolek –Ekphrasis for the Salmon	232
Emily Kerlin –My Dentist Diagnosed Geographic Tongue and I Don't Know What That Is But I Think It Means It Wants To Talk About How We Used To Travel The World	234
Sandra Noel –Bioluminescence Flashes in the Pull	236
Victoria M. Johnson –How to Buy a Toilet	237
Doug Van Hooser –An Octopus Hug	239
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	243
<i>Contributor Bios & Photos</i>	247



POEM OF THE MONTH

WINNERS AND HONORABLE MENTIONS OF
LIT SHARK'S 2023 POEM OF THE MONTH CONTESTS

October 2023

Winner: Catherine Broadwall, "Ecology"

Honorable Mention: Shannon Frost Greenstein, "Just Another
Poem about the Moon"

Honorable Mention: Beth Marquez, "From Lightning to the Earth"

November 2023

Winner: Shilo Niziolek, "Ekphrasis for the Salmon"

Honorable Mention: Emily Kerlin, "My Dentist Diagnosed
Geographic Tongue and I Don't Know What That Is But I Think It
Means It Wants to Talk about How We Used to Travel the World"

December 2023-January 2024

Winner: Sandra Noel, "Bioluminescence Flashes in the Pull"

Honorable Mention: Victoria M. Johnson, "How to Buy a Toilet"

Honorable Mention: Doug Van Hooser, "An Octopus Hug"

CATHERINE BROADWALL

ECOLOGY

Having trained myself on poison,
the melon tastes especially sweet,

pinned with bright tines to the
good dishes. Soft fruit oozing

its creamsicle juice. Sky that
reflects in its puddle.

Everything sugared and miracle
light. Wind hardly rattling

the table. I want to be a wife.
I want to be an artist. I hope

these impulses
are not a contradiction,

will not quarrel like
territorial foxes

chancing an encounter
in a wood.

To wife: to comb out
the snarls of life (?). To write:

to roll down a grass hill (?).
I want to be smooth. I want

SHANNON FROST GREENSTEIN

JUST ANOTHER POEM ABOUT THE MOON

to be rough. I want to be
moonlight and shelter.

And what is the natural enemy of
the woman who wants to do both?

My heart pumps blood into
my seesaw head

until all of my hair
is fire-red.

I wanted to write a happy poem,
but is that an oxymoron?
After all, I don't really have much to say
about things like the moon.

*A glimmering orb, brimming with radiance, pregnant with
sunlight, leading me through the darkness like a prophet just
descended from some heavenly heights, its beauty imbuing me
with hope for the future of humanity and I smile, grateful I am
alive for another night to bear witness.*

I have a lot to say about trauma
and the injustice of mental illness;
but this is a happy poem
and I'm guessing there needs to be
flowers or something.

*A spectrum, a rainbow, a palette of Crayola-infused shades,
splashes of color in neon and matte, hues of magenta and
chartreuse and indigo and green, wildflowers dotting the rolling
fields as far as the eye can see, and I lay in the grass among the
blossoms, glad for the sun on my face.*

I wanted to write a happy poem
because life is actually a gift.
But I had a rough go of it
for quite some time
and I'm more accustomed to writing about pain.

Happiness like a promise, like a present, like a dream; happiness

BETH MARQUEZ

FROM LIGHTNING TO THE EARTH

like something elusive, happiness like something reserved for everyone else. Decades of struggle to build a life worth living, bare hands constructing a new self from the ruins of CPTSD, and now that I've found happiness, is it any wonder I don't fully trust it to stay?

Now I have a family
and a temperamental cat;
Now I know the value of contentment
because I have endured life without it.
My children, my light, my redemption, my worth, compelling me like a quest to seek out light in this damaged world, rousing me to provide for them a childhood of value, playing on the floor as the cat, an asshole, a reason to smile, purrs from the depths of my lap, and I take a moment to reflect on evolution and joy; I take a moment to reflect on gratitude.

I wanted to write a happy poem
that has nothing to do with the moon;
but when I finally found serenity—
among the moon and the flowers and the children and the cat,
among the remnants and the struggle and the progress and
the growth—
I was just unabashedly gleeful
to have even discovered happiness at all.
*So I guess this did turn out to be just another poem about
the moon, after all.*

My magnetic other, veins to the blood
of me. Heart I am honored to beat,
I am the light stretched thin around
you. I find you 44 times a second,

our far-flung speed our wild communion,
a rhythm that none but perhaps some gods
can follow. I seek you in a kind of madness,
as though there is some part of me buried

in you that I always, always fail to find and yet
I still thrill in the seeking. My thunder calling
my percussive 'yes'—the air my throat, your
throat. I reach into your soft thighs of sand,

your shoulders and knees of rock
and you sometimes fuse my image there, holding
the photograph of my finger in crystal. You—fulsome
bride, shameless queen of my white fire.

Let us go to the lake again.
Let us blind the blushing world.

SHILO NIZIOLEK

EKPHRASIS FOR THE SALMON

*"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here
together today to look into the face
of the river."*

—Mary Ruefle

Whenever a friend goes walking, she stumbles, eyes wide, upon the uninhabited body of a wild thing. She wrote a story, never love a wild thing, and when I told her I wrote an essay that said, "I've always loved a wild thing," she said "Of course you did." And I am still trying to puzzle out what that means, but never mind that here, all you need to know is yes, I was jealous of her finding the dead, yes, I am a unwild thing and I need love. Yes, I went into the drenched-gray of the woods hoping to see the dead, ghost or holy being, it didn't matter to me. The hush that fell over me when I spotted her, tuckered out from that long and arduous swim upstream, like a body in illness. The constant hum-thrum-pushing up off the couch, body sidling between the rocks. And didn't I know, shouldn't I have known how sharp the teeth would be on a creature like that who has to spend her last moments fighting? I couldn't touch teeth, the mouth agape, barely there in the river, her face the face of the river, her eyes held no terror only purity of purpose, such singularity in her form, nearly as long as my leg. And didn't I imagine how earlier this summer, my body floated, dived, divested of the earth for a few moments to feel fluid like the salmon in the beating sun? How I shivered now, out here in the rain, looking into the face of the river like Mary Ruefle told me to, my pants getting soaked the longer I crouched toward her face in wonder, the more I imagine the brush of her

body against my leg, my legs salmon-finned and thrashing. I left her to decay, to be eaten by the crows as we all end up, but here is her love letter; I wrote it just for me. You know how it is, when you are all salmon, the hunger in you shark-toothed hang-nailed effervescent. You're all smoke now, all mist hanging over the river in late November. Your scales sludge off, become part of the silt. Dear Salmon, we are gathered here together today. Dear Salmon, this is the pacific northwest, where you used to thrive, you are the moss and the ferns and the bark of the trees. Dear Salmon, I am sorry for the hunger in us. I am sorry for the take and take and take with no stand still, no long and grateful pause. I am sorry Salmon, for what is lost, that we no longer see our faces in you, the river.

EMILY KERLIN

**MY DENTIST DIAGNOSED GEOGRAPHIC
TONGUE AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT
THAT IS BUT I THINK IT MEANS
IT WANTS TO TALK ABOUT HOW WE
USED TO TRAVEL THE WORLD.**

my tongue licks
white icing off
Dover's cliffs
washes it down with
Black Sea
cold brew

my tongue disembarks in
Prague then complains in
perfect Czech of a chatterbox
seatmate to no one in
particular

my tongue prefers
fufu hot, follows a
chef to Kinshasa, sits
alone in a small cafe

my tongue traipses
Appalachian trails,
wears through lug
soles, knows to drink

the water from the
source

my tongue takes
pickaxe to rock in the
Kalymnos applies
chalk for friction,
bags another peak

my tongue tells about the
mangrove in Honiara that
sat like a meditating monk
ankle deep in
dark water

my tongue pulls at my
sleeve, leads us to the last
plank of a long dock,
halyards slapping under
Southern Cross

look, tongue hisses, is there
anything more important than
where we have been, what we
have seen, all we have tasted?

SANDRA NOEL

BIOLUMINESCENCE FLASHES IN THE PULL

where blackened sea sleeps.
We wait at low water's lace
for the fullness of moon
to release its tide hold.

Racing the hurrying hairline
we swag up the bay in shadow-light.
Liquid silver licks into corners,
quickens over night-white sand.

Salten spray spins its witchery.
I swim under the cellophane skin,
a trail of clothes left in silk dark.
The sea raises all boats.

VICTORIA M. JOHNSON

HOW TO BUY A TOILET

A soft-close seat means the lid is silent when it closes.
The neighbors hear banging doors and crashing dishes,
why put them through slamming toilet seats, too?

Comfort height means the toilet is taller than standard.
All your life you bent over,
why crouch every time you use the head?

Elongated front means there's more space to sit.
You're already crammed into a waste of a marriage,
why feel wedged-in when you relieve yourself?

Self-cleaning means shit has no place to hide
and the toilet cleans itself at the push of a button.
Unlike your spouse who has excrement hidden everywhere
and every scant utterance from you pushes his buttons.

Disposal included means the plumber takes your old toilet
for no additional fee.

Aren't you hanging onto enough useless things?
Let someone take a chunk of crap off your hands.

Eco-flush means you conserve the planet's water supply
and help keep the oceans toxic free.

DOUG VAN HOOSER

AN OCTOPUS HUG

You know all about toxic.
Press 1 if you pee
Press 2 if you poop
Press 3 if you want out of this shitshow

Warranty and Return Policy means you're not stuck
with something that doesn't work.
If only, if only.

I am empty.
It's four-thirty in the afternoon,
My thoughts are cut out paper dolls
that unfold accordion style.
Why am I thinking
of you? Every day I commute
over the same tracks, in the same seat,
no one next me.
I should move on.
Board a train in the opposite direction.
Spin a cocoon, pupate, emerge, gather
the breeze under new wings,
sally through the air.
But no. Water spreads a gas fueled fire.
A ravenous appetite steers me.
Ineffable. Ridiculous.
Addictive.
I chew on you like a wad of gum,
but you never lose taste.
I sink in the moat
I've dug around you.
Drown in limerence.



THANK YOU FOR READING THIS SAMPLE!

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HARDBACK: <https://amzn.to/4ahwEoc>

**SOMETHING OLD,
SOMETHING NEW...**

**SOMETHING TO SINK
YOUR TEETH INTO**



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