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Editor’s Note for Spring 2019

“The kinds of poems I write—mostly short and requiring endless tinkering—often recall for me games of chess. They depend for their success on word and image being placed in proper order and their endings must have the inevitability and surprise of an elegantly executed checkmate.”

- Charles Simic, Why I Still Write Poetry, New York Review of Books

Unlike many journals, T.W. doesn’t ask for cover letters or author bios because we don’t print them. Thankfully, that doesn’t prevent some contributors from sending them, so I often read them (after our editorial decision has been made). While most of them aren’t as interesting as the Charles Simic quote above, which describes exactly what we’re looking for, they’re still good reading. You can find a few of them posted on our website, a sampling of poets from reliable old beaters to shiny new poets fresh off the showroom floor.

This issue includes the winners and honorable mentions from our annual poetry contest. We are pleased with the selections made by our judge for this year’s contest, Robert Fanning. In addition to the monumental task of reading and evaluating nearly 450 poems from the contest, Mr. Fanning also curated a special feature of student poems from Central Michigan University where he teaches. This is the latest in a series of student features we have published. We’re excited to give this opportunity to young writers, many of whom are seeing their work in print for the first time.

Our summer issue will include poems from our third “One Sentence Poetry Contest”. Submissions are open until April 15th for this popular event. In the past year, some of the best poetry we’ve published have been poems of a single sentence.
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The Tides

My father left us
for the intoxicating Crystal.
She worked her magic,
dazzling him with euphoric
potions, and he was
overcome by the world
she showed him,
the one without us in it.
His affair began long ago
and I only recently noticed
the way he’d get chills in July,
surging shudders,
clattering teeth and
a limited vocabulary,
reserved for repetition.
What do you call a relationship that
keeps you up for days,
pacing the house
practicing conversations
with clients years after
quitting your job?
Crystal controlled the tides
of my father’s life and we
were the sand weathered
by his crashing waves
of highs and lows.

Airea Johnson
St. Augustine, Florida
His Words Are Lost In Noise

Hair in dreadlocks, a Garifuna cleans snapper on the dock in noon sun.

His words are a ruckus—
Wuguri wuri weyu watu

Black frigates cry, bent elongated wings, swoop for the remains.

Kate McNairy
Ballston Spa, New York

Board Meeting

To hell with polar bears,
their cubs in dugout dens.
To hell with satanic fires.
We are businessmen.

Fuel brewing beneath this frost,
we pipe up to the top.
Regardless of the cost,
oil’s our cash crop,

our roof, our daily bread,
our road, our bottom line.
Some dolphins may be dead but God’s elect are fine.
More than fine, we’re proud
to resist, to stand alone.
To hell with the science crowd.
We rule our spinning stone.

Larry Levy
Midland, Michigan

Lucky Bullets

I have skills I don’t know I have. An imitation of a lab experiment, I’m wide asleep. Jade says I look like a search party, lost. I tell her I’m crawling closer and closer toward the target. She says my clothes may be an asylum, but my dreams are a bull’s eye. Often, I wonder why I am the way I am, but what good is it answering a question with a question? I may be an unknown quantity, but I’m familiar with strangers. Jade says she’s been trained to recognize the signs of counter-intelligence. I remind her that there’s something about secrets that forces me to confess. The radio reports that when police officers are involved in a killing, frequently they’re merely acting in self-defense. It’s not the notes you play that matter, it’s the notes you leave out. Life’s a gamble, but what are the odds? Tonight, only the snipers are lucky.

Brad Rose
Wellesley, Massachusetts
It's Just Chips

Stay in the action, my uncle said, it's just chips
scared money always loses, don't get out too soon
he drove a flashy Packard he called The Yellow Peril
my grandmother in the trunk in a bronze urn sealed
so if it rolled she stayed put until she could get to
Kansas City a few years later. Meanwhile she
toured San Diego and Tijuana as always, to the
race track, to the bars, to the impound lot one
night when Reno Pete had a little run-in with the
law. He said in Tijuana you just slipped the cop a
sawbuck, rarely more back then, this was the fat
fifties, and things were looser, not so serious no
big deal like now when everything outrages and
offends but undercurrents ran beneath the surface
smoothness and chickens did come home to roost.
JFK and RFK and MLK and Malcolm X and the
freedom marchers and Vietnam all exposed the
skull and crossbones of the upper class elite and
when asked, "It's just chips," said Reno Pete.

Guinotte Wise
La Cygne, Kansas

Why I Remember Apollo I

I used to think
Sister Robert was mean.
But she was a woman
who locked things in.
There was precision
in the way she walked,
how she held
her shoulders and head,
and the same sharp edge
showed every day
in her penmanship.

Friends still talk
about the day Sister
broke down in class,
slapping a hardback
down on her desk
then ranting how the class
could behave so bad
since our brothers
hadn’t burned in a fire,
one quick flash
leaving them nothing
but white bones scorched
in a bucket of ash.

We were too stunned
to really understand
what she’d said,
but we felt a force,
a white heat speeding
up from the floor,
and as Sister started sobbing
into her hands
we saw a flash and
rocketing streams
of red and white light
flowering the air now
igniting around us.

Mark Madigan
Springfield, Virginia
Robert
Photograph
David Jibson
Ann Arbor, Michigan
Or Have You Ever Wondered Why She is Looking Back?
After Charles Edward Perugini’s *A Backward Glance*

Hoping to make sense of the artist’s strokes, the model sees the nape of her neck turn into an unexpected dawn rising between her gathered tresses and the low-cut black velvet dress.

Was he aware of the time spent applying the right amount of eye shadow, a slight outline of kohl and a touch of mascara? She even barely brushed some blush over her lips, a natural look he favors.

And yet, her face is left offstage as the brushstrokes add light to her naked back above the ruffled décolleté. She watches the grain of skin sparkle like sand dunes under midday sun, and drowns her sight within the shaded area where so much is left unsaid.

Hedy Habra
Kalamazoo, Michigan

The Forest After Rain

Every step on the path is sculpted in mud as the forest appears through a drop of rain, clung for a heartbeat or two, on a yellow loosestrife petal.

Hazy trees, more dreamlike than dreams, unravel in the light:
the scarlet oak,  
a century old,  
a black tupelo sapling,  
straight as a handshake,  
answering to its name.

The woods as cathedral  
is a description I’ve heard  
over and over.  
And now, the altar  
glistens gray.  
Crosses gleam in the canopy.  
So concentrated the religion,  
prayers are spoken,  
answered, simultaneously.

John Grey  
Johnston, Rhode Island

Access

Making moot the barbed-wire they mantle,  
disheveled thickets of blackberry  
fend the river-side shoulder of the road  
where I pause, above the gated rentals.  
The unpicked fruit at hand is shriveled,  
but deep in thorn a couple of beauties,  
out of anyone’s reach, gladden  
my heart with their open teasing. One more mile to the public beach. I continue,  
listening to the current breathe.

Michael Jones  
Oakland, California
Waiting for a Train

I’m waiting at the station for a train that will carry me away.
I wait, and read signs posted above the tracks.
They whisper to me about how to become beautiful and rich.
They show me how to tend my eyes.
They speak to me in languages made of light.
They pulse and they burn and they sing in my ears like drums.
Because the train is late, I feel an emptiness in my chest.
I am waiting for night.
I am waiting for berries to ripen on the yellow bush beside my door.
I will pick them slowly, eat them in the morning with sugar and cream.
I am waiting for a dream to come.
I hope it will gather me into a realm of cloud and rain.
When it rains, the mountains disappear.
I walk through a curtain of rain and I am content.
My feet soak through, my hair knots and curls as the wind blows.
Sometimes I feel as though I were made of rain, liquid and clear as glass.

Steve Klepetar
Dalton, Massachusetts

Boyhood Lesson

The older ladies in their fifties said boys come in different fruits.
That there are some boys who are like apples
with red or yellow skin & firm white flesh.
They are naive & meant to be tended to,
& eaten until the flesh wilts— & no more!

Some boys are mangoes, sticky & messy,
Meant to be eaten for fun in chutneys; boys who
catch the wind wild ‘til they deem themselves
fit in clothes of their fathers to meet girls like them.
And oh, how they wear and ride them loose until
they are napkins, serviettes for dust & mud.
Some boys come with pines on their skins,
all flesh and muscles, factitious physique,
seem ready for war in bludgeoning mass.
But no, they don't know their body is an arsenal:
a stride of their legs an artillery, a thorn of their breasts,
a club of their fingers... . They are an inbuilt weapon.
The last boy they sent to heaven never came to earth.

Sometimes they can be water. Like when they pluck
the oranges from their still, suck up the juices
& stir the rind in the middle. They let it dry itself
because too much water floods. They let it empty
into bliss. This fruit comes in flavours: there is
the sweet & the sour; each for its own design.

They said these boys do not know a woman
is the beginning of earth. That Adam was hacked
in the throat by Eve. That a boy can be locked
in a body, fed to skin, never to be heard again.

Aremu Adams
Ketu, Nigeria

Keeping Time

Saying it’s too loud, my daughter hands
me a dead battery alarm purchased for
those workday mornings without power.

I unscrew the round, vintage-style
bedside model’s back to replace a AA.
No wheels, cogs, or wound-up spring

inside, just a Made in China stamp.
I close it up, switch the buzzer off,
and stand it on a bookcase shelf
light as a beer can in faux tarnished brass and factory faded face, leaning back like a turtle tipping on two legs with Crosley, an old American brand, scrolled across the belly. I step away, then TICK and TOCK resonate, one thousand ONE, one thousand TWO... So that’s what she meant, but the noise strikes me as more comforting than loud.

That night I listen to the second hand advance and later dream of napping near a tall, carved-walnut headboard, smelling sweet tobacco and charred bowls from Grandpa Clarence’s pipe rack on the white marble dresser top nearby and hearing from behind wooden wall-clock glass a timeless pendulum beat, steady and authentic as Grandma Mary’s voice.

Raymond Byrnes
Leesburg, Virginia

Ghosting on the Side of the Bed

After getting up each night around 2am he would return and sit on the side of the bed for an hour or more or less just sitting there I would ask if anything’s wrong everything’s right he would say I’m just listening to the sounds
I take for granted
What sounds, I’d ask and he’d reply
the sounds of a vigilant house
in the middle of the night
as it watches over you
Go to bed you silly old man I’d say
still say
at 2am
as I alone listen to the sounds of a vigilant house

Alan Harris
East Lansing, Michigan

A Loving Rain

Because sometimes the rain is a loving rain. An imagine-yourself-waist-deep-in-a-field-of-phlox rain. The kind of rain which supposes no one late & the day long. The dog not entirely wet. A rain that debrides a rare earth. That gentles the body into discovery of the softer brinks of its flesh. It’s possible I may come to believe in such a rain. For now, I say: I am trying. Afternoons, I listen to old records & practice, feverishly, the so-called maxim of good faith. More so, I practice hope. Which is to say I wish the rain an infinitely well-mannered thing. Still, I am desperate. Too hard-edged. Which is also to say our best ideas need convincing in order to be. Because sometimes the rain is just rain. All ebb & flow. As if it were cut & pasteable water. I hate to say there should be more tumult. That I have become good with inconvenience if it means I can prove myself cursed. So let today’s rain be a barbaric rain. A rogue piece of atmosphere with evidence the world is absorbed in its own desires. Funny, as people get older, they develop a liking for the rain. Say they can sense in their bones the first measure of a far-off rain. Meaning a clever rain that idles. This could be the calm before the storm. Could be doves playing dead or a pair of lungs shorn from the wings of God. The sky a purpled torment or single swath of gold. So, I keep my options open. Because every rain is a sudden rain & what is love if not the surprise of one’s interest in the earth?

Susan Leary
Coral Gables, Florida
The Lighthouse

Photograph

Tracey Ranauro

Las Vegas, Nevada
If Only The Heads Stayed On

Dan’s Lego-people need a hospital  
because he drops them, and their heads fall off.  
Or else they're sitting on their vehicles  
and hit a bump, and then they're down to stumps  
in bright-red pants, a stubborn bottom half  
perched, resolute as always. Kathryn says  
that hospitals can put the heads back on,  
but first you have to find them – and Dan tries,  

but Joshua gets bored and wanders. If  
the pegs fit better, or we found the girl  
before the radiator melted her,  
we wouldn't be so short of people. We  
have legs left, and a pair of overalls.  
But somebody should teach them how to fall –  

Kathryn Jacobs  
Commerce, Texas

Daughter

If I never tell you anything else  
I tell you this.  
I will hold you up  
until your unsteady  
legs carry you out.  
I will remind you who you are.  
Know your eyes  
are whole worlds worth  
exploring.  
Boundless.  
Beautiful.  
Daughter
Listen.
Some will lie to you
about your worth,
your beauty.
Some will forget you.
Forget them.
I know who you are.

Tucker Lux
Toledo, Ohio

Night

After you left, I listened
for the night sounds
we’d heard for years from
the hollow walls and crawl spaces
of our old Victorian house.
Flutter of bats, scratch of mice,
and once a small flock
of spring birds winging through a corridor
of dormers. But the house went silent
without you like moonlight gone to fog
and the silence settled within me
weakened me as illness might
and I began to believe that the loss of hope
the humiliation of betrayal
had cracked the bones of my soul
because I couldn’t breathe
or speak without pain,
Spring came and then summer,
perennials opened in border beds
beneath the sun--
single-budded tulips, white as boutonnieres,
pink peonies, dense with double buds
and heavy with nectar-loving ants.
The earth lifted its leaves and needles
and I saw that it would all continue—
the arousal and desire of returning
the colors and scents, the lovely touching.
Whether or not I cared again
Whether or not I wanted to.

Elizabeth Whittington
Hopkinton, New Hampshire

To Heaven
(For Pittsburgh)

You can’t get there from here.
So go toward the Cathedral
Of Learning to Liberty Avenue.

Turn right past the Seven-11
the adult bookstore
and the Hollywood Theatre

where Predator, Love and Death
and The Little Buddha
are playing. Turn left

at the Salvation Army
addictions treatment
and homeless shelter.

Keep walking, past Wal-Mart,
Barnes and Noble,
and the Heinz ketchup plant.
When you get to the Merton Center
    you’re close.
There’s a small street—

it might be Hamlet,
    maybe not
— that dead ends in an alley.

Keep going until you
    can’t go any further.
Climb over the wooden fence

with your initials in a heart.
    The bar is right there: Heaven.
Go up a flight. Tell Jesús,

the bouncer, I said ‘Peace’.
    Have a Two Hearted Ale and just
listen: The band there is to die for.

Richard Solomon
Ann Arbor, Michigan

The Sound Return

The tide has turned its face
from the shore, once more
the herring-gulls feed and quarrel
on the luminous mud
where lonely boats, abandoned and still,
wait, listening for the sound
return of the sea that will come
like the end of a journey.

Upright figures that stand on rocks,
the stranger who digs
for bait or for something he has detected,  
the hopes and fears which are his alone.  
The rose-blush of air enters  
the bay on this invigorating day,  
sand-ribbed and rubbed grains  
peel away time, a flight of sky  
seen before the rolling mist returns  
again to listen for the marooned and mysterious cry.

Byron Beynon  
Swansea, Wales

Devotion

At the age of seven,  
beneath the deck outside  
the kitchen door,  
I found my mother’s  
favorite dog  
who we’d thought lost  
the previous winter,  
and I knew from the way  
the sagittal crest  
fit in the palm of my hand  
in a muddy pat  
that it must have been her  
with the beagle bark  
and the soft soil eyes,  
but I could not tell  
my mother,  
the one who loved her best,  
of my discovery  
for fear that  
the soft gray bones  
would go away,  
be pulled from the slatted light
beneath the stained deck
and there would be
a loss of love
or the memory of it,
a lack of protection
or the spirit of it
by the kitchen door
in the hour I first knew
that such love
will not endure.

Heather Mydosh
Independence, Kansas

Inside Of Me As Once Inside Of Her

Lovers from decades ago, I can’t
conjure their faces with accuracy.
But my mother who died thirty
years past, her voice is still
captured in my ears like a fish
in a weir. Her face
young, middle aged, old hangs
in my brain as if in a gallery

in a museum, her permanent
exhibit. Our mothers are part
of our flesh, our bones. We
carry them like a blessing

or curse all our days. I hear
myself shouting her profanity
exactly when I drop some object
on my foot or a zipper’s stuck.
My life was as alien to her as if I were a giraffe or a dolphin. I’ve carried her into lands she couldn’t imagine, a love she dreamed of till death closed that door. My choices scared her. My sex exploits shocked her. Yet still she lives in my life.

Marge Piercy
Wellfleet, Massachusetts

Time Capsule

The twenty-gallon glass water jug stood in a corner of the bedroom closet, its shoulders coated in dust.

Hefty with coins, it was hard to move into the light. When we wiped it off, it sparkled with copper and silver.

How many years did it take him to save all this, a handful of change scooped from work pants at day's end?

Pennies, nickels and dimes left over from buying sand or cement or bricks or gas held in his lime-chapped palms, an unexpected bequest not mentioned in the will, so heavy we couldn't pick it up, so we tipped it so it wouldn't shatter
and poured out a treasure tide tinkling
like the chimes of an old alarm clock.
There's a 1918 Wheat penny, a grimy
Mercury dime, a Standing Liberty quarter
date worn off by decades of fingers,
a Buffalo nickel in the same decline.
Even a chip of mortar. Years of frugality,
saving what he could without a word,
a time capsule of more than small change.

Eric Chiles
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Crossing The Pennines

So this is the famous pea-soup fog,
more like dirty clotted cream
with the occasional red bug
of a taillight swimming through.

Foot on the brake, utterly terrified,
my wife mutters imprecations
against all things English.

Our GPS babbles on, to no avail,
when I notice a roadside rail, broken.

Bradley Strahan
Gamer, North Carolina
Narcissus

Echo texts again and again with no reply. Decides not to call. She is sick of repeating herself anyway. She is unhappy with all of her selfies. Takes them over and over to find just the right one for her story. Can’t decide between the crown of daffodils, the funhouse look, or the face swap. And even though she always seems to end up alone in this Glen, she is pleased with the cool filter on this pic of her by a fountain with an egg-white, rhubarb bitters martini until she remembers -- he is not following her.

Victoria Nordlund
South Glastonbury, Connecticut

Collected Works

As if he held another body of himself in his hands and turned it over and looked at it and wondered where to set it down.

Dan Gerber
Santa Ynez, California
Your Obituary Said You Were Dead

I did not write it, having known an able actress of 22
in a time of moonstruck ambiguity when everyone
22 was a starry-eyed prophet, and actress, too.

It said you died unexpectedly, a code perhaps for
what the psychiatrist once said: emotionally labile.
He meant you were neither all fragile nor wholly stable.

If I wrote your obituary, it would have said you lived
unexpectedly and expectantly, eyeing your next betrayal
so that no one beat you to it this time, this one last time.

If I wrote it, it would be an advice column, a pablum,
telling us to unstudy indecision, be done with the thing.
If I wrote it, it would ring with the poetry of daily murders.

It would curdle tears to icicles for later use, a gloss
for martinis, clinking the lecture that all losses, all losses
ring in conjecture, and echo, echo just past us in passing us.

Pamela Sumners
St. Louis, Missouri

Vacancy

Our ski trail stretches across white space, the lake gone deep below—we
kick-and-glide to the point and back, our summer swimming route.

Along the shore, snow-piled cabins stand abandoned. A lime-green
bass lure hangs from a monochrome dock parked among bare trees.
Two silver rowboats, belly-up, a tilting charcoal grill. Behind a blank-eyed row of windows, deep cold sinking into thick joists.

The mice have moved from their snow tunnels to the empty drawers. Chairs stand stiffly around a table, almost remembering an old song.

I think of visiting my cousin Susan on our way north—how she turned her beaming face to us in the sunny room,

her thin frame limp beneath the nursing-home bedclothes like some flubbed magic trick: oops, she's not quite disappeared!

Since last time, her Parkinson's has been at work serving evictions: muscle going, nerves going, bones packing their bags. She needs to think hard to swallow now, needs help sitting up, yet still hungry for our news from the old normal: travel plans and kids. I had to lean in close to hear sharp steel and heart's flame, insistent in her whisper,

and together we ticked through the family names, mostly gone, reminding ourselves as we smiled and smiled how good it is to be here still: this give-and-take, this life, sailing merrily along its surface though we know which way these tracks must lead, how much we'll toss aside, how little we'll leave as we tuck the spare key under the mat, hear the lock click behind us, and turn toward the white lake.

Scott Lowery
Rollingstone, Minnesota
Lest You Forget Who I Am

I carry salt in my pocket.
For poems, glass and cinder,
toss matches over my shoulder
when the train comes too late

for poems, flint and tinder.
In case the tide tires and stars slip,
in case the train comes too late
through a hole in the fabric -

In case the tide tires and stars slip -
(are you taking this down in writing?)
through a hole in the fabric -
For protection against the Rapture.

You are taking this down in writing
you crazy and unrepentant uncles!
For protection against the Rapture
I declare the endangerment of all

crazy and unrepentant uncles,
Elvis records, my seventy eights,
I declare the endangerment of all.
Place each bluesy box beneath the bed,

my Elvis records, my seventy eights.
Toss matches over my shoulder.
Place each bluesy box beneath the bed.
I carry salt in my pocket.

Ronda Broatch
Kingston, Washington
2019 Third Wednesday Poetry Contest

Our thanks to this year’s contest judge, Robert Fanning. Mr. Fanning is the author of four full-length collections of poetry: Severance (Salmon Poetry, Ireland, 2019), Our Sudden Museum, (Salmon Poetry, Ireland, 2017), American Prophet (Marick Press, 2009), and The Seed Thieves (Marick Press, 2006), as well as two chapbooks. His poems have appeared in many literary journals. He is a Professor of English at Central Michigan University, and lives in Mt. Pleasant with his wife, artist Denise Whitebread.

“Having read, for months, dozens upon dozens of excellent submissions, and after poring over my pared-down but far-too-long list of finalists, it was brutal picking a winner for this contest. Though any of my list of finalists could have been Honorable Mentions or Winners, what made these winning poems shine was a line or an image that astonished me, diction that flickered with deeper meaning, and an ear tuned to the extraordinary music of language. Congratulations to this handful of glinting poems that caught my ear and eye, from a river thriving with bright poems.”

- Robert Fanning

[Editor’s note: Mr. Fanning chose the following poems from nearly 450 poems that were entered.]
On the Birth of an Unlucky Child

A child of the nerve in your one bad tooth, hooded with gray amalgam. Child floated among marrows so thick they ossify his lovely skin into little more than gauze, his heart like a button on someone’s sleeve.

A cut of thorns you wear for no one but him, the veins he swims as sure as shouting in any other room, any other ear. Perhaps there’s a sound that isn’t the grinding of omens, but he isn’t it.

Wailing like wind-braille and tree bark. Once, he was a marsh of body, water tickling boulder-backs in twitchy runnels, baby in a limbo when limbo took babies and shelved them high, same as the unbaptized who were just and the unjust who tried and tried. He was born undone by the same rules and chords as your own discontent, broken cross of dogwood flower,
budded new and the wind somewhere
already stirring as it
will do with a late and careless frost.

John Blair
San Marcos, Texas

Forgetting the Color of Hansel’s Hair

if my brother had left a breadtrail instead
of leaving me
I wouldn’t have met my unbirth mother
whose hands are blacked
with licorice roots & whose eyes are beaded
with coal candy tar
who taught me to change my body
when I could change nothing else
in this house I am
the daughter who reaches elbow deep in boiling
stew to pluck out the bones
the daughter who gathers
deathcap from the forest & nurtures
it within her brother’s chest
this mother has never grinned
so widely as when I matched her arthritic hands
stitching my brother’s lips closed
poultice of rosemary & thyme inside his teeth
this mother knows I won’t be here forever
I will grow taller I will sprout antlers
twine magic that transforms me
I will be more than breadcrumbs
more than the smell of Hansel’s hair
soft & brown & burning

Hannah V. Warren
Lawrence, Kansas

With An Army At Our Gates

Even up to the final moment
when the walls of the city
collapse, there are people
going about their usual
business: A man
washes out his socks in the sink;
someone runs to catch the subway;
a girl in a café orders salad
while thinking about the argument
she just had with her lover;
two professional rivals
meet on the street and
nod politely; it looks like rain;
a mother opens the back door
to call her children in for lunch;
an old man coughs
waiting in line for a matinée;
the phone rings and
it is a wrong number.
All, as if the day
were no different
from any other: As if
an army of men without faces
were not at our gates.
A lone honeybee pollinates
a red, red flower;
a little girl starts singing
and refuses to stop; she sings
even up to the final moment.
Even after it.

W. Luther Jett
Washington Grove, Maryland

Two Poems of Honorable Mention

Estuary

In the trash on the shore
of the island I found
my first dried seahorse.

He was completely intact—
the unmistakable curve
of the neck and distended belly,

dead eyes of a prehistoric fossil.
_A Roman soldier with his trumpet_,
I say to myself, and I don’t think twice

as I swaddle up his spikey
little corpse. Never mind the smell.
I clean his waffle skin with

a toothbrush, wonder which species
he is related to, has he evolved much.
It’s hard to envision this minute dragon
bobbing upright in the gloom
of a seagrass bed, his jaundiced eyes
illuminated by the sun.

It’s hard to imagine
he was ever alive, to begin with.
Dead dreams of an estuary.

I prop him up in the bathroom
for a day. After a fit of nightmares
I return to the shorefront,

bury him quietly in the dark.

Ana Pugatch
Fairfax, Virginia

So I Gave It

Always, I'll recall
the night your question
shadowed me:
a rabble of cicadas beat
on inbuilt tambourines;
the air a four-cornered curtain--
smell of wet velvet, of wet dog, of glue;
the set of your face--
eyes open-caved,
your lips made of sunset--
awaiting an absolution
I alone
could give.

Jessica McEntee
Westport, Connecticut
LawNorder

Photograph

J. Ray Paradiso
Chicago, Illinois
Solo

She sits cross-legged on the bed,
a slip of a girl.
Elbows bent, lips pursed,
she holds up a flute
and marks time
to the steady rhythm
of the stately metronome
standing straight and proud
on her nightstand.
She whispers a secret to the flute,
and its first notes
float in the air,
mystical gaslight in the fog.
Though measured and metered,
captured and welded
to dark bars of five lines,
they are, at the same time,
free to wander.
They drift into the ears
of those who listen for them,
then they drift away again.
The notes are,
and will always be,
vagabonds, loose in the world,
their travels mapped
by the will of a secret.

Cynthia Pitman
Orlando, Florida
Torch Song

Look at him! Just look
at what the years have done.

The hostess leads me through the dining room
toward him. I refuse
to see myself
an hour ago
before the hotel bathroom mirror. Fluorescent light.
Cringing at the sight of me —
gray strands threading through
what once was chestnut hair, liver spots
on backs of hands, belly lipping over
waistband. Eczema! — that little island
of decay between my brows. O Death,
you stake a foothold on my flesh.

But look at him. Just look!
He can barely reach the table for his girth
as he levers scrambled eggs from plate to mouth.

Seated now before him, I will make my point.
I order coffee.
Black.

Forty years. The dorms. A floor apart,
reclining on his roommate’s bed,
smoking pot,
plotting revolution,
laughing at the National Lampoon.

Toward the end of freshman year he fell in love
and I was out. Sitting with his roommate
on the hallway floor, those noisy thumps inside,
the laughter and the moans,
with her.

He friended me on Facebook several months ago.
Thrilled to see my post about a conference in Houston —
Hey! I live there! Let me take you out for breakfast,
he had written, at the hotel’s restaurant.
They married after college. I had transferred to another school.

Three kids. *We’re blessed,* he says as he pushes one last strip of bacon in his mouth.

We try rehashing skits from SNL — Belushi, Ackroyd, alas! poor Gilda Radner — until a silence, then a longer silence stretches out between us, heavy as the sweet roll he devours in three bites.

*It’s so good to see you* — now he shakes his head, and… tears!

*It’s a shame we never got together sooner. Sure you don’t have time to come to dinner at our place?*

Yes. I know I’m sure. Where’s the waiter? Where’s the need to try to challenge as he offers, *Let me get the check.*

Leland Seese
Seattle, Washington

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**The Soon of Spring**

On a clear night we’re told the human eye can spot a single flickering candle at a distance of thirty miles or more but it’s only the landscape we see our coats billowing, breath taken by the wind.

William Reed
Cedarburg, Wisconsin
What Is Chartreuse Anyway?

put the drink down you said quietly
they have 14 gins and
nine scotches here I said
the glow of my cigarette was optimistic
you're so pretty when you're mad I said
I'm sorry but I love you I said
your clenched fists stared at me
I'm leaving now you said
what an awful mess you've made
but the bar has all my favorite things I said
into the big emptiness of your leaving
I've had worse days in my life I said

Debbie Collins
Richmond, Virginia

Get Us through This, Houston

Lock my black-eyed blues in John Glenn's capsule
and let all emotion be guided
by Mission Control.
Let our words be level, be measuring tools.
Let the vision of earth steadying its orbit
run through my sucker-punched hours
as we ride this spectacular torment in our awkward suits,
our bodies focused on navigation.
Let's stage-jettison our empty tanks and shrouds,
and let lift-off be where we thrust
the payload in our hearts,
riding through plank-walked moments
with flatline jargon on our lips.
Let's embrace the vacuum, the zero-gravity, with levity,
and if systems run amok, let us be
unmoved machines, the Dr. Spocks.
Let's look out from this cramped module into the unfathomable,
keeping loose screws from flying mid-air.
Let our chill-down maintain an ordinary ambience
where we breathe a kind of peace
too practical to be destroyed.

Siham Karami
Orlando, Florida

The Fold
“The corners of death fold us into ourselves.”
- Loretta Diane Walker

Mother and I are sniping. This visit has been that way. The farm is rundown as she is now, at 94, bent over her walker, bare-knuckled in her independence. She says I mumble. I say she never listens. We know this game. I’m packing to go home, and she calls, “Do you want breakfast?” I mutter yes, knowing she won’t hear. It starts again.

I’m her favorite and visit least. I’ll look back on this weekend, feel guilt. She will win another round. This time when we hug goodbye,
there are no tears. As I drive away I glance back to make sure she’s still in the doorway, watching.

Sarah Russell
State College, Pennsylvania

The Last Days of Sam Snead

He stepped up to the first tee, the old master of the Masters, tipped that classy straw hat, wagged his faithful driver, took that easy back swing, the one that had taken him cleanly down every trip to the green, and hooked his drive smack into the gallery of acolytes sending their awe into the horror of disbelief. Everything stilled: the azaleas gaudy in their pinks, the caddies cleaning the clubs of the next in line, the prim protectorate of Old Augusta. Sam stood stunned for no longer than a follow through, apologized to the worshipper who had taken the hit, shyly took a drop, and hit a three iron out onto the sloping grass, shuffled down the fairway, eye fixed on the flag. This should have been the last drive of a god, a slam from Olympus, the ball starting out low, then rising into the sweet southern air, lingering at its apogee against the impossible Georgia sky, then landing with a twitch of suspense just past the dreaded edge of a yawning bunker, rolling another thirty yards to a quiet stop in the center of the clean cut roll of the grass. No one knew this would be Sam’s last drive off a number one tee. It’s embarrassment that drives us out even
for a master who carried his clubs with grace, 
always styling the perfect swing. Maybe 
it came as a sigh of relief for all who had 
stepped up to the tee, three foursomes waiting 
to hit, all those who had taken a dozen practice 
swings, shifted their weight until everything 
felt just right, adjusted their grip one last time 
and coming down into the ball had topped it 
sending it off like some buckshot riddled rabbit 
hopping down the fairway fifty yards at best.

Jack Ridl
Douglas, Michigan

Inheritance

when I die, I will leave you the collection 
of books I never read but meant to, the ones 
I did read but kept because I meant to 
read them again, the collection of dust 
I left behind the chair I wanted to keep 
even though we couldn't sit in it because 
it was broken but I couldn't let it go

I will leave you the collection of things 
I left unsaid but planned to say and never 
got around to, the dirty socks in the laundry 
and shirts in the dryer that needed ironing

I always meant to get around to that too 
but you always got there first

I will leave you the argument about the color 
of the walls when we got the house repainted 
or where to put the couch, the gold pocket watch 
I inherited from the grandfather I never knew
the watch I meant to get appraised but never got around to either, the hope it will be worth enough to let you take that trip we will never take to Nova Scotia or maybe Idaho or Madagascar to see the lemurs before they are all gone

you can keep your memories of me if you want to, and I will leave you the part of my heart that really belongs to you anyway and that feather of regret that rests at the far side of the pock-marked shelf in the living room

I will leave you jars of pickles, cherry conserve and bottles of mustard at the back of the fridge and the wedge of cheese that wasn't meant to be moldy but probably will be by the time you find it hiding under the mandarin oranges perched on slices of smoked turkey breast

and I will leave you the smell of my sleep and my waking up every morning

James K. Zimmerman
Pleasantville, New York

Red Stilts

Seventy years ago I made a pair of stilts from six-foot two-by-twos, with blocks to stand on nailed a foot from the bottom.

If I was to learn to walk on stilts I wanted them red and I had to wait almost forever for the paint to dry, laid over the arms
of a saggy, ancient Adirondack chair
no longer good for much but holding hoes
and rakes and stakes rolled up in twine,

and at last I couldn’t wait a minute longer
and took them into my hands and stepped
between them, stepped up and stepped out,

tilted far forward, clopping fast and away
down the walk, a foot above my neighborhood,
the summer in my hair, my new red stilts

stuck to my fingers, not knowing how far
I’d be able to get, and now, in what seems
just a few yards down the block, I’m there.

Ted Kooser
Garland, Nebraska

Oranges and Anniversaries

Beside us, silence breathes.
Beside us, silence breathes.
The sound sits, stuck
on our lips.

We pet the cats,
put on coffee,
slice oranges,
never sensing the same wind.

Our hours bear
an unkind calmness
that hovers,
fracturing thoughts unsaid.
Even so –
I want your still arm
to rise from its side
and brush the top of my shoulder
with fingers
in a way that needs no words.

Cynthia Ventresca
Wilmington, Delaware

Home is Just One More Piece of White Plastic

My father didn’t use metaphors
to make meaning in the world,
so when he tried to make me
a better baseball player, he taught
techniques I should take literally:
when my frame was too small
to find enough force to return
the ball from the outfield fence,
he showed me how to crow-hop,
not to overcome obstacles I would
encounter later in life, just to
make the ball fly farther; and
when he saw me strike out one too
many times, he turned me to the other
side of the plate, not as a way to see
the world through another’s view,
a way to develop empathy for those
who are different, but out of exasperation
at my lack of connection; but when
he tried to turn me into a pitcher,
when every throw went high or low
or wide, he unknowingly became
my Buddha, gave me a koan for life
after he had left it, for a way to endure all the losses that have and will come—
Don’t aim the ball, he said. Just throw.

Kevin Brown
Harrison, Tennessee

Sam and Saul

The twins were prodigies in math and music.
Saul played cello,
Sam the violin.
By the time they were three experts were measuring the elasticity of their brains and listening to their rendition of Pachelbel’s Canon with tears in their calculating eyes.

We preferred The Stones to Pachelbel and treated the guys as if they were normal. Mostly they were, as long as you didn’t invite them to play poker at stinky B’s after basketball or try to beat them at Scrabble or chess.

Saul sickened and died the year they were to start at the Institute for Advanced Study. Our parents spoke of leukemia—murmuring “blessedly quick,”
as if a mantra to ward off evil.
They buried him on a day in March
so raw, it was a relief
to be in the overcrowded synagogue
listening to sorrow
recited as it should be—
in the ancient language
of Torah.

After the service,
Sam sat all alone
in the bitter cold
outside their apartment building
and played his brother’s cello—
it was the most beautiful thing
I’d ever heard.
He played through the sunset.
He played until
his father gently took his hand
and helped him up
to their half-empty home.

Steven Deutsch
State College, Pennsylvania

June Thunderclouds
à la Tom Hennen

Soiled laundry pushes and shoves the sky,
spray-washed with drizzle
from agitated branches.
There is no end to the world’s laundry.
No end to the exuberance of leaves.

Carol Deering
Riverton, Wyoming
The Time Machine
Collage
Bill Wolak
Chicago, Illinois
Central Michigan University Student Poets Feature:
Curated by Robert Fanning

3 x 3

I was walking past the village of crows
their eyes black, x-ed out
filling rounding sockets.
I wanted to play tic-tac-toe with the mirror –
but she told me to go to bed.
I laughed all night imagining crows
with pens, marking lines with crooked claws.
3 x 3 – one bird wins, and then the rest
devour him in his sleep.

Amanda Olsen

Let’s

Get lost in frosted catacombs,
watch moss grow ‘cross forgotten bones,
sing hymns from old erotic tomes,
like no one else before.

Kiss in silent bathroom stalls
and desecrate cathedral walls,
scat hearts on beau-tiful banal,
like no one else before.
Weave bracelets out of misery
and yellowed nails and smokers’ teeth,
used needles on our Christmas wreath,
like no one else before.

Match outfits with our Lexapro,
use Netflix dates to overdose,
drip smut ‘cross sick sardonic notes,
like no one else before.

Duncan Tierney

My Sister Went to Vienna and Never Came Back

We are born from the shelves of a Meijer, you and I,
from Crayola corner suns and Ovaltine with every meal.

Sharing a bed until I am eight and you are twelve
because I am afraid of the dark. You roll on my hand in sleep.

It goes numb, a distant satellite.

At eighteen you are skinny dipping in a neighbor’s hot tub
in October, bare feet on dead leaves, with your boyfriend

who wears you like an old T-shirt. I hear your laughter
float up like steam over the fence and condense on my window.

Down the hall, dad fucks my math teacher.

That night, for the first time in years, you climb into my bed.
Your wet hair on my pillow, we sip whiskey

from our parents’ wedding china. Mom’s headlights outside
illuminate your face, tears falling into the teacup in your lap.
When we grow up, our fears grow up with us.

Dad’s face folds in sorrow standing at the airport terminal, pulling your suitcase you’ve had packed under your bed since you were 15.

I want to ask you to stay, and what your tattoos mean, and if they hurt more or less than when our dog died.

Two years later, I want you to come home. 
_We are like turtles_, my mother responds, sitting on a folding chair in her new apartment blowing cigarette smoke out the window, _we take our homes with us._

I wonder if she knows her voice is still on dad’s answering machine.

I like to imagine you, then, finding mom’s sister in Austria, eating veal and sauerkraut and maybe drinking chocolate milk.

Anna Shapland

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_Rummaging Through Your Room_

Here’s to the way your neck snapped up from your Gameboy whenever your mom’d barge into your room.

Here’s to how you’d lose yourself in that handheld landscape the same way I did as a kid. Your death
is a cartridge
I wish I could remove
from my system,
my hollowed electronics.
An experience to pull,
to lose on the floor like all things
I’ve learned to discard.

Here’s to the process
of unplugging things.
The shutting off, the powering
down. Remind me, again,
what’s the cheat code

I need to forget you, or at least
remember you differently? $\times x a b$
left right left, up up down.

All the moves we think we have
to make.

Benjamin J. Kuzava

Sibling

My mother has a second set of eyes
on the spot that Dad kisses her neck
watching me through the ceiling while I shower,
or clip my toenails. It sees the things Mom
imagines probably happen under this rented roof.
Her cancer knows what position I sleep in,
catches our incontinent dog finding relief at 3 am.
It’s witnessed me climb school bus stairs,
turn keys in cars and dorm room doors.
This humid mass under layers sucking and colicky.
This spongy bulge soiling arteries and rolling.
This pregnancy grasping spine in Mom’s throat womb.

Mom’s had tumors removed three instances in my life,
but each time this abnormality clung with parasitic gums.
Doctors swaddled it with used needles
in a bio-hazard bin but left a pinky toe, a right earlobe
nuzzled behind a vein or muscle, a seed to sprout
just when things start to get decent again.
Someday I’ll walk along the mouth of the Two Hearted
where Mom’s ashes are spread, see a thyroid flower,
and know baby sibling is all grown up.

Elizabeth O’Donnell

Ghosts Revisit

Some trauma there is no recovering from
by loving men who were only violent somewhat.
What has been done unto us is who we become.

He left months ago, yet here he is telling me how he’s newly numb
from a party with a drunken man and a slick crew cut–
Some trauma there is no recovering from.

I hold his hand, brush knuckles that once beat me dumb
and listen to his violent heaves, my lips pursed shut.
What has been done unto us is who we become.

A heart in anguish so ineffable I hear it as a drum
as he screams about how he felt it rip through his gut.
This trauma there is no recovering from.

We weep together for both our broken selves, one solemn hum
My empathy exceeds anger and I try not to remember but
some trauma there is no recovering from–
what has been done unto us is who we become.

Elizabeth Waitkus
Like a Butterfly

Summer night in Benton Harbor, 1998, Muhammad Ali kissed my pregnant mother’s belly. I was born easily, quietly. Made all my pleases, pretty; Made all my punches, taps. Preserving energy for the good fight—compassion takes a slow, persistent way of life. Came out like a butterfly; product of patience. Preferably peaceful, preferably a lover with no need of sting, but hit me and I assure you, I can hit back.

Hannah Stark

Considering Emily

I have never loved someone so much that I didn’t want to kiss. I want to kiss strangers on the street, women with waterfall eyes and tanned skin like an apple picker in mid-July who pets birds with only their fingertips fingertips that graze mine when they hand me the book I dropped.

I don’t want to kiss you, though. You who everyone wants to kiss. You who I have shared secrets with that I’ve told no one else, certainly no one I’ve kissed. Secrets like my dream about a giant orangutan with laser eyes who destroyed my childhood home. Secrets like what porn I watch, or don’t, or how more than anything, I just want someone to kiss my hand.
Never so closely have I held the image of someone to my heart. Like the image of your crooked glasses and gray hoodie you fell asleep in after reading too late into sunrise. Of you sending me greasy haired selfies to match the double chins I sent you. Or of you cooking spaghetti for me while watching those Korean dramas you love so much.

I remember you calling me about the boy you met in Korea and how he broke your heart. I’ve always stumbled in things like comforting people never skilled with words outside my head. Still, you laughed when I offered to punch him in the face. Or the dick. Or both.

My birthday present was going to the zoo with you, with the penguins and the kangaroos. We ate nitrogen frozen ice cream from bowls covered in cartoon animals. I drove two hours to see you for three.

Never have I loved someone so much I would call them over my mother to talk me through a panic attack because a character on a show committed suicide. When I hug you, I feel the warmth of every mother humming goodnight tunes of babies falling from trees.

Gene Agee
The List Series: (an ongoing collective)

a small list of things i wish i could encounter
upon being romantically rejected by you:

- whichever whale swallowed Noah
- the milky way galaxy’s super massive back hole
- a spaceship recruiting untrained, civilian astronauts
- a paper bag boutique
- the Bermuda Triangle
- all of the quicksand used on cartoon network in the 90’s
- an impossibly large vacuum sweeper
- an uncharted, solitary island
- a reformation camp for the shameless
- the disappearing place of everyone’s second sock
- a convention for “mom friends” trying to be taken care of
- a man who doesn’t think I’d make a cool second source
  of attention and notices my bare skin
- you, still, be it hopeless or not

List of Things I’ve Done in the Kitchen (1998)

- Been washed warm in the sink by the dryer rack
- Received free haircuts from underneath a glass bowl
- Scarred my skin for the first time, accidentally
- Pulled down window shades mom said to keep up
- Fed myself
- Starved myself
- Laid with limbs stretched like a star ready to shoot itself
- Left my best knife in the drawer on nights it felt most like a weapon

List of Moving Essentials for the Sentimental and Emotional

- Pack the bottle opener on top
- Listen: “Till it Shines” by Bob Seger
- Read: “Moving Day” by Neil Hilborn
- Exercise needs for expression
- Fresh air and fresh water
- Half open blinds (at least)
- Half open heart (at least)
- Calming color schemes
- Plants to grow with you
- Text your mom “I’m okay.”
- Tell your nerves “I’m okay—
even if change does come
harder to me than most.”

Hannah Stark

Parentheses of a Deep Breath

Once I went to
a Santeria ceremony
where a woman
handed me a goat skull
and an egg with red spots
in the yolk.
She told me I am already dying,
said my eyes have been saying
a slow goodbye for a while now.

I have been drinking, feverishly,
earth’s milk from a bowl,
finding, and staying in, every place
I’m not supposed to be:

The graveyard on an island
where no one I know is buried
(I like the name Aphranius
and the way the cool imprint
of letters on a headstone sink
into my palm).
The edge of the highway where
I saw a deer hit by a truck writhe
through streaks of its own blood
(I still watch its broken back heave until
night rises like fog in my rearview mirror).

The neighborhood haunted house,
just a lot now. I imagine
the way a mother’s sigh felt like rain
as she watched it go up in flames
(she never saw it, but I’m sure she dreams
she did every night: her 14 year old son,
accidentally shooting
himself with his father’s pistol).

On my knees
on your bed,
again
(faith is one form of death).

Sometimes I’m sure I am a balloon,
tied here by some elephant anchor
I’ve never learned the name of.

Sometimes I lie
in the woods
and think about how a boy
accidentally put a pistol
against his teeth,
how maybe he wanted
to know the feeling of thunder,
how maybe, when we go,
the whole universe
exhales in the color of smoke.

Isabella Barriklow
A Reckoning

A twirling rearrangement of the stars
aligning into something flawless.
The heavens have raised the bar.
It feels like there should be a law—

against this repositioning of blue
and green. The everything in-between.
A constellation of chemicals, a breakthrough
of atoms so few have ever seen.

The swirling of the navy rivers
and the rustling of strawed grass,
even the desert cannot help but shiver.
Or the air crack as if it is glass.

The universe gives a sort of bow
at the blessing we’ve been allowed.

Kaitlyn Weisdorfer

An Overweight Sestina

Every time you see online advertisements for jeans,
remember your body will never look exactly like that
model. Graphics like that could never be perfect.
Imaginary body-type labels don’t really matter;
there’s nothing wrong with having a little extra fat,
until you’re told you’re not a real woman.

Compare each curve of your body to the woman
next to you. Look at the way her jeans
cling to just the right areas but avoid the fat
on her thighs and wonder why you can’t look like that. Looking like everyone else shouldn’t matter, except it does. If you don’t, you’ll never be perfect.

Remember all of your skinny friends always look perfect, regardless of what they wear. But even those women struggle and feel like their bodies do not matter, because fitting in size zero jeans does not equate to “healthy.” That mindset hurts all of us, not the fat.

Why do we even hate the word “fat”? It’s an overused adjective, just like “perfect.” People throw it around like an insult but that shouldn’t affect your self-worth as a woman. Why not let your beautiful body hang over your jeans (as if it’s only the jeans that matter)!

Regardless of size, we’re all just made of matter. Why does that matter not matter when it’s fat? Why do we forget our bodies are influenced by genes, too? We all know no one is perfect. Your body shape is not what makes you a woman, and yes, you’re allowed to look like that.

Society says, “Fuck that.” Of course the size of your body matters. It’s what designates you as a real, desirable woman. Real women have curves, but real women don’t have fat. No one will want to be your partner unless you’re perfect, which means you need to wear the right sized jeans.

Only the numbers on your jeans and on that scale can determine if you’ll ever be perfect or ever truly matter. That is what it’s like to be a fat woman in America.

Jade Driscoll
Poem 1

Wind bitten from fall stumbles through frost-sieged windows tinted dark,
The glass is strewn with fractured promise, and in cold hands he holds a rescinded spark. *Could sunlight ever cut through something so stubborn?*
The grease streaked boots on his feet weigh heavy, and smudge something so free of mark. *How could something so fragile not meet its maker eventually?*
The sight outside screams of death, bereavement, with fallen leaves against snow sitting stark, *How could two things so different belong together, anyway?* He wonders if bad fortune was just of the timing, or if fate had simply found its mark.

Kelli Cywka

Feathers

I carry this bag
   A canvas casket about to spill
       It overflows with pricking cores
           Light at first, determined to fill

They flit as the fall from the air
   Such sweetened fuzzies kiss my skin
       You must think they are harmless
           You have yet to understand what is hidden within.

Let them deceive you
   I know looks can do such a thing
       But these feathers are a nuisance
           What is their purpose to a creature with no wing?

They let go when ready
   Like all dead things do
       But they do not leave
           They come back again, like grass and it’s dew.
Yes, it’s a burden
  Why wouldn’t it be?
  My bag of molted feathers
       Holds every broken part of me.

Lainey Williams

The Botfly

Phoresy
What are mothers for, but to swaddle
and contain. I was delivered by the blood
hungry stork, looking for a capillary bed
to deliver me into, a place to gorge herself
on foreign blood. She has her own children to feed.

Myiasis: First Instar
It was your warmth that attracted me, always.
mothers are cold-blooded by nature, they are called on
to breed, not to care. Chitin cannot replace flesh,
and yours was so soft: a perfect womb. I emerge
and enter your body, speak your name, Mother.

Second and Third Instar
Your body is swelling around me, we move
in tandem: perfect symbiosis, this amniotic sac
its rich pus-like milk. I grow and grow again, peeling
away my fetal skin, turning over; I wonder
if you know what you are capable of, Mother.

Pupation
Have you felt me moving these last weeks?
I am full now, satiate and pulsing
crown and slip from your body, I am falling,
Mother.

Maturation
I have found a mate; she has been called on to breed
The blood hungry stork is coming.

Lexie Morgan
Trauma

You bags of trick and witchery,
You hollowed-bone cacophony
You wicked—waking me from peace
To beat my bloody soul.

You aching, midnight retching
Whiskey-tasting lips.
You whispering whip,
You silent, striking bits
Of who I was before.

You clock thunder, constant ticking
You desiccating lungs and faith
You winning cage,
You blunt blade
Still burning.

Liza Gutierrez

Bird

dead apple red it had
a twisted neck with
swollen belly
protective

the only thing not
sticky from grease on
papa’s workbench

I missed his cracked
hands with dirty
fingernails every
so often
bird was one more
thing he chose
to leave behind
that day

I like to think
he left it for me

It comes with me now
I think it brings me
luck

he will come looking for
it one day and
find me instead, smile
or take back what was his and
walk away

Marisa Stroebe

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**Thanksgiving Shot**

My father swayed in his last year’s Christmas slippers and shot it on Thanksgiving morning. The buck staggered away from the muddy river bank into the dense wood.

My father leaned in his burgundy bathrobe against the maple that used to hold my tree-house. I twiddled with my fork, a sausage link stabbed on the prongs. He walked into the kitchen with the gun in his hand and sat down at the table. He scooped scrambled yellow eggs past his wiry beard. It danced on his face as he chewed.
I let the sausage fall.
It rolled across my plate.
My mother wiped her hands on her apron
and shoved the round turkey into the oven.

Marisa Stroebe

Jesus Whispers the Secret Name

Jesus touched the hem of a woman who was really a man.
with blood never ceasing, she didn't need
any more shame.

by day he was Martha, but each night
he would return to his husband, bind
his chest with the tight cotton
tube he'd sewn, put on the secret
shorter tunic with a man's tzitzit,
replace his belt with one less
femininely adorned. he'd crush
cochineals, smear carmine
over his peach fuzz. he laid
extra cloth on the ground, let
his husband enter from behind —

it was a kind of pride. secret
neither would utter, locked door
only they could enter, a kind
of stained glass chamber. *Mark*,
that sacred name none knew.

no one else would let him touch them.
that holy cloth of Jesus was all
he could get his hands on. yet Jesus,
He still called it touch — *Wbo*
touched Me? Who touched Me?
still Jesus hailed the faith
of the perpetually unclean, all sinners
Pharisees & Sadducees declared
obscene, said “go and be freed
from your suffering” and leaned
that godly face, mouth grazed
against Mark’s ear. the crowd
silenced before the whisper:
“Mark, I know.
Go. Be free.”

Jesus paused, furrowed His brow —
eyes only seeing the other’s —
then kissed the untouchable forehead

as if to say
he knew
one night,
He too would bleed.

Rob Linsley

Tumor

Golden white hair
but we called it yellow

One day we saw you
tilted and turning
in the silk-soft grass
in the candy-colored sunlight

We wanted to know how you felt
but you couldn’t tell us
One week later
your breathing stopped
on the examination table

My father who had known death
sat with me
his hand on my shoulder
as I cried in his car
after baseball practice

Mark Ryan

Concrete Stains

Concrete carries stains so deep rain cannot wash them away. Contact with liquid creates a portal of coagulated blood. Look in and you see the marionette murderer.

The legislative puppet master controls from the veil of Capitol Hill. As his strings move, the marionette sways like a phantom haunting those with marked skin.

Their skin is a homing beacon, nothing else exists. They were arguing about sports, a neighbor with cat-like ears made the call.

The marionette appears in all blue—tool in hand. Now their stains are stories. The world moves on, but their parents never will. Families now carry those stains.

Sidney Williams
In The Natural World I Feel Fake

in the natural world, I feel fake,
wrap vines around my stomach, thorns
cressing chest, blood like kisses down
shadowed curve of ribs that jut
from flesh, ivory bone thick with heaves
that shift like moon-tugged waves.

Orion’s belt in bruises up my spine,
weight of shattered stars and fallen
leaves, mark my body with foreign
memory. I pluck pubic hairs like petals
and wish for different stems.

Summer LaPointe

East and 7 Mile

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”
—Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

The mortar in the hottest mug
for my mind. A check-up every quarter
‘cause that silver spoon can’t fix me.
Mixing the herbal essence of nerves congested,
my nervous presence.
Mama ain’t raise no fighter.

Snot-nosed babies in diapers clinging to me,
they all sick. No money for medicine, they congested.
The bad one’s got a temper, say he a fighter,
won’t get him past 3rd so his brother teach him to sell a quarter.
His mom anointed, but he not covered by even God’s presence.
All he’s got is unlearned lessons and money under his mama’s favorite mug.
Sprinkled with teenage girls and fear, the corners congested, ‘cause her brother’s in jail. She’s shaken down for a quarter, that’s all she’s got. The girls don’t like her, they say they wanna fight her, and she ain’t scared. She been ready for it, when the time presents itself. All she wants is a hug, tired of being tired, but all she gets is a mug. She breathing, but her prayers consist of wishing to “not be alive, I can’t be me.”

I’m not from here. A check-up for a quarter don’t work ’cause that’s not where it hurts me. My heart be broken, my people like pack mules congested in jails ’cause ain’t no work but selling work. Their presence is a disgrace. But oppression’s sweating ’cause they some fighters, ain’t going down without justice. Say “we busting out of this mug.”

She’s a suburban girl. The only people trying to fight her are her friends’ parents. They can’t stand to see her shine, and hate her presence in school. The only drug she knows is Robitussin, and has never seen a quarter. She’s a well-off child, so she calls her PCP when she’s congested. He tells her she isn’t affected, although her cup is filled with depression. She questions, “Am I black if there’s no ‘hood in me?”

Mama ain’t raise no fighter. Mixing the herbal essence of my nerves congested, and my nervous presence. With the hottest mortar in my mama’s mug, and a check-up every quarter, even silver spoon money can’t fix me.

To make your presence known, you have to be a fighter. My heart is congested with pain and fear so I fight oppression. Because that could be me asking you to put a quarter in my mug.

Taylor Perry

Mamma’s Rhythm and Blues

Mamma could never stop dancing. When she danced, she colored the room with her hips. Wide and curvaceous—they swung
left to right.
Painting our kitchen’s peeled wallpaper into marble.
Her coils bounced in the air, flinging and intertwining with the notes she sang through her pursed lips.

Her song encased me.

And her cocoa skin reflected the rays from the windowsill. She shimmered. Like her hooped earrings and eye-shadow, golden like the honey I licked off my fingers. I sat on the counter, beads jingling in my hair, and beating a fork to a frying pan to layer rhythm.

Our pockets often lay limp. Lint and crumbs instead of penny cents, but our home swelled when harmony permeated.

When Christmas was only a Charlie Brown tree hovering over a naked doll and coloring books, I was happy. I thought Mamma was too, and she would still dance with me, dollar store cookies in our tummy. But Mamma pulled me close, rocked me back and forth, and I inhaled her cheap perfume as we swayed.
She didn’t know how beautiful she was when tears flooded her cheeks. Her face sparkled like dark brown sugar, but her eyes fell dull when the music ceased that night.

Tiffany Mitchell

California Dreaming

Photograph

Fabrice Poussin

Rome, Georgia
Forgiveness

My father was a silence fallen
at my beginning, a trace of memory
uncertain as a midnight ghost.

In time, he wrote sparse notes,
masterpieces of self-justification,
excuses well past lies.

In middle age came cards with fantasies,
wishful thinking, here and there
hints of regret.

In old age, long past
a time in which such things are due,
he wrote, I‘m sorry.

I could have written back to say
it was all right, I turned out fine,
but it didn’t matter any more.

Sharon Scholl
Atlantic Beach, Florida

The List

After the search of names—last, first—
attached to the dead, the dying, the “only”
wounded, the always scarred, we fear

in our mouths, the sounds articulated,
the nicknames donned by mothers,
fathers, siblings, friends before
the killer became the killer,  
before—or while—the becoming  
already began in a word or a glance,  

in a name called without thinking,  
a syllable stressed unnecessarily,  
the bad joke tossed off as jest,  

by someone we know, or don’t know  
well, or met in passing, fear in that  
everyday uncomfortable undercurrent  
of conversation off just enough  
to make us look twice and then again  
over our already burdened shoulders  

into the face of him or her or you or me  
or my student who, twenty years ago,  
crept, while I slept at 3:00 am,  

up to my small house on a hill  
to leave in my rusted mailbox  
hand-scrawled poems, pages of them,  

unattached to any name,  
his authorship anonymous until,  
semesters later in a class, I recognized  

the rage, the rush of wound,  
the tight urgency of words,  
the half-broken letters in a name  

which is half the name of the former  
marine who, last night at 11:20 pm,  
stormed into Borderline Bar & Grill  

and murdered someone else’s students,  
friends, daughters, sons. All morning,  
irrationally, I search old emails
for the names—last, first—
and calculate ages, not of the dead,
but of the killers, of the students

gone, I don’t know where,
taking with them the pain
they hoarded, or spat at others,

but also their jagged and
transcendent images that named
the wounded and wounding

whose names I try now to speak—
last, first—into this dangerous air,
into this world of constant weeping.

Marjorie Maddox
Williamsport, Pennsylvania

Shore Affair

He feels her tides,
Her liquid
Indifference.
Her aquiline tresses
Caress him and,
In them,
Warm him.
Betimes.
Betides.
He marries the sea.

Fred Yannantuono
Bronxville, NY
Elegy (After the Death of My Student)

Late one night last summer, I saw you in my dream, Cristina, with your long raven hair and deep brown eyes.

You had your head partly back, showing off a young woman’s brilliant confidence, talking about going to medical school.

I remember the particular eager curve of your smile, the brush of freckles across your cheeks, and the very delicate frame of your body.

You had no fear, as far as anything was concerned.
Then, without any point of reference, everything stopped.

I saw a photo of your charred car in the newspaper;
it reminded me of an old tortoise shell that I once found as a child.

The hexagonal patterns created a complex equation:
it begged the question how to solve for X, find the unknown integer of life’s mysteries.

Dorsia Smith Silva
Carolina, Puerto Rico

Fish and Chips
Fremantle, Australia, 2017

Along the seawall, the time is now.
I know, because I checked my watch.
Yup, now. Checked again.
In five minutes it will still be now,
and tomorrow the day filled
with salted fish. The sun heats us
to boiling as the sea churns.
We’re eating fish and chips
with vinegar and salt, drinking
a local lager, lemony and cold.
Waves crash against the pier.
A girl sits on a bench nearby, singing,
her voice salty and sweet
as a lake of ketchup on a white plate.
She sings a sad song about bullets and bread.
The woman in the song keeps her head down
as bombs rip up the ground all around her.
Trees explode and fall.
There is a boat and a helicopter
and fire and wind. I can’t finish my food,
I’ve already eaten too much,
and if I could go back, I would slip
into the water, swim beneath the waves
until my belly scraped against pebbles on the gray sand.

Steve Klepetar
Dalton, Massachusetts

Djembefola, Song of the Mandinka

While beneath his iron hands the goblet-like Djembe,
the Mandinkan breaks as a millet stalk breaks,
plays his ancestors into wind, spirit of the woodcarver
invoked, spirit of the drumming gods, spirit of his mother.

He stretches above the rising gale, without a body, without a shape,
lets the rhythm pound his throat with erratic music
as he finds his pantheon and sings. He sings and drums
and drums and sings. He drums and twirls and twirls and sings,
standing between the temperate forest and the green river.

With the Djembe hung around his neck with a tunic rope,
he talks in the incoherence of a bird about a hundred drums
he has thrilled, the Sabar drum of the Serer People, the Gudugudu
with skins made from breathing wood, the three-incisioned
Kiringi and its intoxicating sound.

He sings of shredded ears at the mere listening of his hands,
and feet taking different forms, daring grounds to dust.
He sings of a lonely widow in a distant land of Khassonké
with face creased with time and tide,
shoulders drooping under the weight of memories.

She'll be by the window now, the wrinkled blind mother
of a drummer's son, the widow will be by the window,
searching for tongues, and she will know he is here
when his rhythm travels down a hundred miles.

With the flick of his wrist and the speed of his hands,
he picks his voice again and sings of the void of a lifetime,
of a fair lady who has declined to marry a peasant's son,
of stillborn brothers, fortunes consumed by silent smoke.

The Mandinkan works his hands into a rifle, shoots his past
with each sound of his beat. He pounds into flames till his
sweats and blood are submerged by the streams of emotions.

He drums into a frenzy, at the sea of nonchalant faces, and
when he drops his contoured fingers by his sides, the world
becomes still again, the forest is quiet, and the fishes make
a solemn dash into their niche. He stares at the red sunset,
dips both his tired feet from the riverbank into the river,
watched the seawaters slosh and recede into their chests.

Aremu Adams
Ketu, Nigeria

Editors Note: Djembe is a rope-tuned skin-covered goblet drum from West Africa. The name derives from the phrase "Anke djé, anke bé", "everyone gather together in peace" and defines the drum's purpose. A Djembefola is an expert player.
Foul Down the Right Field Line

God shells peanuts
in the cheap seats
along the first base side
taking names
of those who chose to chase down
to covet
the sliced-foul
instead of making way
for the child
to find it first
to hold it close
to discover what it’s like
to create a memory

Alan Harris
East Lansing, Michigan

On Wisdom Teeth

They creep up from behind
To use their intimidating size
And advantageous position
For the most possible impact
Flanking the other molars
To misalign and shift them
With the steady strength
Of miniature tectonic plates

But there’s not enough space
On this side of the velvet rope
They shouldn’t be allowed in
Until others have left the club
Maximum capacity regulations
Are honored for fire safety codes
But of course disobeyed by the
Rebellious mouths of teenagers

But offense is the best defense
Both in sports and in dentistry
So they’re physically removed
Leaving four gruesome holes
That feel like fleshy caverns
To the anxious tips of tongues
That are magnetically drawn
To spelunk against their will

You’ll be confined to your bed
Until you despise its every coil
To drink broth and eat gelatin
Until your least favorite solid
Would be happily welcomed
Only narcotics and ice packs
Can help battle against your
Chipmunk metamorphosis

All because you haven’t evolved
Far enough yet to rid yourself
Of all the superfluous enamel
That’s appended to your youth
And when it’s over you are left
With the certain kind of wisdom
That one can only attain from
Experiencing deep pain and loss

Marcus Benjamin Ray Bradley
Versailles, Kentucky
An Anniversary

Your husband is bothered by the photograph on the brochure that shows the helicopter hovering above the bay and about to land on the cruise ship. It’s a great shot, he says, fantastic, except that each of the helicopter’s rotors looks blurry. He says that for the money you’re paying to this company they could have at least found a better camera or a better photographer or someone should have done a little bit more research about shutter speeds and apertures and the angle and intensity of the light in the bay at the time of day they were shooting. You think maybe your husband has been secretly taking photography courses in the little bit of free time he has, but then you remember that aperture is a word you know, too, but like him probably never have a chance to use. He goes on and on about it. He wants to write to them, one of the properly formatted letters he types up on the computer and then prints on heavy 100% cotton paper. Some of them he makes two copies of, like the letters to the editor he writes. Four of them have been printed in the Saturday edition of the paper. So in addition to the newspaper copy you also have the duplicate in the second drawer in the family desk. He wants to write the company and request a discount, but you know even more than the discount he wants them to write back and say thank you for your concern, you’re right, absolutely, it was an oversight, definitely, an embarrassment, and we have the best people on our team looking into it. He wants to be able to smile when the letter comes back on official letterhead and signed in blue ink, real ink, by a real hand, Donovan Fincher’s, maybe, according to the information on the website. He wants to be able to take the letter, which he will point out is not printed on 100% cotton paper, and clip it to his copy of the original, which from now on he will call the original. He will keep it in a file, probably even make a new file, and label it ANNIVERSARY in his favorite red pen. In this new ANNIVERSARY folder he will keep the two papers, pressed flat against each other in the too-crowded-already file cabinet in the dark in the office, never forgotten about, exactly, talked about sometimes, but only ever read again, alone, by you, in a likewise crowded dark.

Brendan Todt
Sioux City, Iowa
Signs

Photograph

Gary Wadley
Louisville, Kentucky
Calling All Lemmings

You'll stampede over it most likely. And that's just as well, since frankly most of us are ill-prepared for anything but noise;

the silence scares us. If life goes as planned however, and if nothing interrupts, you'll stumble on it someday, juxtaposed

between your usual agenda and the final drop-off: call it breathing space. By all means fill it up with doctors' scripts and surgical procedures if you wish, if that convinces you there is no cliff.

But when that doesn't work, a few of us relax, breathe deeply, clear our calendars,

and just enjoy the view --

Kathryn Jacobs
Commerce, Texas

Living in the Tropics

You were like the first time I tried mango: a different kind of sweet, so I wasn’t pleased; not at first.

However, sugar is hard to refuse, especially arrived fresh and dressed to impress, even for not-so-special occasions.
First, I put mango in my smoothies with the other fruit.  
Next, I found it in my salsa, so I bought more salsa.  
Finally, I picked it from the tree itself; remembering nothing more delicious.

Caroline Wright  
Rochester, Michigan

Heaven’s Gate  
"If this had not perished, I would have."  
—Anaxagoras

Precisely  
at the end  
of your  
portfolio

there is this gate

that swings  
between Emptiness  
and Form

Emptiness  
the dissolution  
of all that arises  
All that arises  
Form

As in  
you  
are as empty  
as a bucket  
of tears

When the gate creaks open  
every bird calls your name

Once through  
you  
are back in front
and your little dog
recognizes
you

Richard Solomon
Ann Arbor, Michigan

A Feast for Robins

There are many ways a worm can die
in these spring months of warm rain
and straight-line prairie winds:

in the culvert pipe, there, just beyond
the metal mouth, one turns slowly gray
bloating out, a collapsing fleshy straw;

strung out in shallow puddles, in jointures
between paths, mixed in with shed twigs
and leaf carnage, a thin seasonal soup;

others are stretched or curled in little loops
where water had run and now the sun, hot,
bakes them into firmness, a beakful, a glut.

How thin the line between worm-life
and this water-logged worm-death—
as thick as a worm, maybe, viewed from above?

The robins hop, caper, pop their songs
out into the stirred air, their bellies round
with segments unraveling inside them

until they can swallow down no more.
Robin-songs come broader, louder, full
of plenty, belligerent in full fortune.

Heather Mydosh
Independence, Kansas
My Father At Ninety

He still tends his garden
to the natural call of light
that each season brings.
Once a week drives his car,
steering a familiar route
to replenish the required need.
He eats less now,
but undimmed he remembers
seeing Haile Selassie in Penllergaer,
and the destructive fires
caused by the Swansea blitz.
The year he was born
a total solar eclipse
rested over Wales.
His steps are strong,
he lives on with the changing tides,
walks in a world that races
onwards in the afterglow of a lingering day.

Byron Beynon
Swansea, Wales

Good Company

Forgive me as I grow old,
not so bold or quick, or sharp
of mind. You see,
it’s the underground
river of time that has eroded the earth
beneath my feet, a miracle to me
as I sense my body sink and seep,
my toes wettened
in the boggy springs
of subsurface memory–
a geological survey of lands
trod upon, planted in,
climbed and fallen over,
and now,
as if earth is rising through me,
this familiar parcel of land
where I settle down
in good company
with gravity–
soundlessly reminding me
that whether rogue or disciple,
like the moon and the seas,
I have always been held,
always been desired,
free to exist,
upright or horizontal,
dead or alive.

Guy Thorvaldsen
Madison, Wisconsin

Mysteries of the Turners’ Guild

A squirrel turning,
turning a nut,
tail unfurled behind
like a swirl of paisley,
calligraphy scriven
against the rugged bark of pine.

Splintering shell flies
from his perch,
small gray machine turning
the nut, intent on his work,  
but alert, every hair  
an antenna wire,  

eyes, dark  
with the mystery  
of the turners’ guild—  
parting, planing, bead and cove—  
hollow gut filled  
from secret trove,  

hidden those months  
ago, his craft inscribed  
in eons of cunning instinct  
or passed down  
from master to apprentice,  
from mother to flash-tailed son.  

Jamie Keith  
Knoxville, Tennessee

Shadow Walking

Was that your shadow walking by,  
piece of dream chipped off my morning?  
It had your hair, your determined stride  
and all that day my thoughts ran after.  

All that day the sky was shattered:  
leaf fragments, cloud shadows.  
And the sun (What else is love?)  
taking a dive for the horizon.  

Bradley Strahan  
Gamer, North Carolina
Butterflies

Like the wings of butterflies that couldn’t fly, Neruda wrote,

of poppies as he
saw them as child, as I

saw them in the meadow above the house, something

bright orange and moving in the breeze against a field

of starry filaree, for a moment not sub-

tracted from my life, half-

expecting them to rise

in search of other flowers.

Dan Gerber
Santa Ynez, California

Nine Questions Answered

• Only when I circle my head. My right ankle, turned counter-
clockwise would say something similar.
• Entirely possible. My father once bit all the way through his, having fallen asleep while driving.
• Of course. In high school. Lipstick on the mirrors, boys in the bathroom.
Rays of Grace Have Failed to Catch Them  
*after the poetry of James Tate*

Sometime in early May,  
we noticed our family photos  
had stopped breathing.  
All that we had wished for.  
Even so, we ran  
from room to room calling,  
Aunt Mae? Uncle George?  
flinging our wet clothes  
behind the armoire and the chiffonier.  

But by now we needed  
to break for lunch.  
Whisking out our napkins,  
and daubing our small but feral chins,  
some of us were gripped  
by a brave and terrifying frivolity,  
amazed as we were shaken  
from our overly brilliant cocoons,
to find our drama had melted
and was spreading
in its buttery way across the floor.

What old recipe
could save us, now?
And why were we shivering
at a bus stop south of Toledo?
All we could do,
was to settle ourselves,
hold hands, and smooth
each other’s hair.
Already, by the look of it,
there would be nothing
but savory crumbs
on our uncommonly beautiful fingers.

Barbara Blatt
Santa Monica, California

Life or Death at 1B, 11:36

We stake out seats in the long
twilit basement, tether our gaze
to the digital boards that cue
our entrances for treatment. We are

a stooped old black woman beside
her son in wing-tipped shoes, a brusque
blond in heels and cleavage with better
places to be, a skinny grizzled
white man with a dirty backpack
who I take for homeless till he rises
for his turn. We flip
through magazines, the lists
of our days; the boards flash our names
and station numbers, Blake and Lim
at 1B before me.

We march down the hall to Apollo,
Megatron or Superrad,
where they lay us down in the dark
under bisecting green rays
that snake across the room, tug us
by the gown into just the right spot
to stave off doom.

We work in millimeters here
the tall rad tech says as he maps
the war zone of my chest
with a red Sharpie. Three pairs of eyes
hover over my breast, compute
then depart as Apollo whines
into action, its huge arm
passing over me like a satellite
till it grinds and clicks to a stop.

And in less than four minutes, before
I can contemplate life or death,
lights flash on, hands reach out
to pull me up. Happy Wednesday!
the short smiley one chirps.

They work in minutes, these subterranean
techs and their lumbering machines.
And in minutes, we 11:36ers
emerge, ready to float back up
to the surface.

Susan Auerbach
Altadena, California
Birth
Photograph
Fabrice Poussin
Rome, Georgia
Dick and Jane

Did anybody really live like this
in a perfect house with a perfect lawn
cut by Father, in dress pants, on weekends,
with a push mower that never needed gas,
as Mother watched from the kitchen
while baking a birthday cake for
Baby Sally who didn’t wear diapers
or even cry for that matter? Yet, somehow
we swallowed the whole kaboodle.
No one ever asked why Spot never chewed
shoes or soiled the carpet, like other dogs.
No one seemed to think it strange that Puff
didn’t claw drapes, or massacre robins,
and never once hawked a furball.
Brother and sister walked to school,
smiling, spit-polished, eager to learn,
ready for monosyllabic discussions
with caucasian pals or Zeke the janitor,
who was kind, not creepy in the least.
“Look,” they said. “Oh. See.”
We sat at short desks consumed with envy,
at the same time completely charmed
by this vision just beyond our grasp.
We swung scabby legs back and forth,
the untied laces from our grubby sneakers
dangling on the floor under our teeny chairs.
When Teacher looked away, we punched
our neighbor, wiped our noses on our sleeves,
pasted chewed gum under the seat, stuck out
our tongues stained red from hot cinnamon
jawbreakers cadged from the Five-and-Dime.
When the bell rang we rocketed through
the schoolhouse door, relieved to be free,
living in an actual world we understood,
full of noise, clutter, dirt and eloquent profanity
that could not be contained by single syllables.

Jeanie Mortensen
Ludington, Michigan
Survival of the Fittest

Consider the hawk, said the magpie.
Consider the turkey vulture.
They swooped and soared, and still you said
So what.

Consider the raven, said the mockingbird.
We picked our own feathers to line the nest.
We watched you walking out of doors intent
On being somewhere else oh quickly
Because you have no wings.
We ripped the food apart on your abandoned table and fed our young.
So what, you say, ignoring us.

Consider the robin, said the wren.
Our eyes see more beauty than yours, more thankful than yours
For the warm bodies of children.
Our hearts beat faster than yours
Even as you pour smoke from your metal housings
Wheeling down concrete and asphalt.
Encased, you can't catch us when we fly away,
Or see what butterflies see or even know their taste.
Do you know one word, one single word
A dragonfly knows?
He looks you in the eye.
So what.

In your pockets, pieces of plastic, a measure of your poverty.
All the stars at night are yours to see.
Consider the owl, said the hawk.
Who knows the moon and the angles of the sun, how they transform—
Who knows the killing art of food, who knows the hunting sounds, their rhyme and weight—
Who knows the weightlessness of life, a kind of light you almost feel—
Consider the light, said the dark.
Consider the dream, said sleep.
Consider the forest and its ghost,
Said the dawn.
What are you hearing? What are you seeing?
Your boxes and packages clogging us all.
Why plug your ears? Just stop the noise.
Consider the heat, said the cold.
You shrink, you expand, we have names for you.
Incantations to shrink you down.
The little bird who sings your words.

Siham Karami
Orlando, Florida

The Plump White Rat That Paul and Margie
Left Behind for Back Rent

in the middle of the night
taught me about tenants
slipping out, I guess.
I did not affix their faces to the rat,
though subconsciously I must have tried
after the rat bubbled up
like veneer over a cupboard drawer,
freezing its pose

and Paul and Margie’s blushing
features floated over it.
Or, perhaps, due to its human
connection, thought of itself
as rat above all others.
Whichever the case,
before my wife could uncrook
her elbow to hurl a shoe,

the rat had scrambled over
the drawer and cajoled
its lumpy form down where pipes
trombone beneath a sink,
and our hearts sank to meet it
in the wet rain forest
where a pipe had sprung a leak.

Later, the rat ran its tail along the baseboard,
to stress, we thought, its domestication,
and still our dreams painted it
into a corner, but how then
to catch it? A steel-jaw trap
seemed cruel for one
who’d furred in us fuzzy feelings,
even if we’d not claim them.

We settled for a cheesy cone trap
that, once inside, the rat
would become entangled,
but checking it later,
we learned the rat had wrestled
out of it, the device now
a fat fur slipper with enough fur
on the floor to make a pair.

Then from around the bathroom
it showed itself stripped down
to its skin, up on two legs,
leaning front arms against
the woodwork in a shiny bid to be human,
the plump white rat seeking
a soft eye, not taking things
personally, just trying to fit in.

Rodney Torreson
Grand Rapids, Michigan
Hospice

In the house that has Abandon Hope
written over the doors,
we find other ways of coping.
We can learn to long for oblivion.
To love the darkness itself
is another kind of hoping.

And sometimes in the dark
the door to that unused room
in back of the heart swings open
and all kinds of things walk in:
angels, your first puppy dog,
visions of Venice – this
could be faith, another alternative
to hopeless hoping.

It is also a good idea,
when you see your useless relatives
at your bedside,
laden with duty and virtue,
to summon your fading mind
to bless them and all living things:
this gives you credit for love
and it goes with you.

Gail White
Breaux Bridge, Louisiana
The Harbor, Finally

My sisters wheeled
my father’s bed into the living room so
he could feel the sun, look out, watch the seaside golfers
drive long balls into the blue and drop
into the fairway of mounding jade waves.

Bit by bit he was slipping,
releasing the grip on his anger at all of us
and my mother, who seized the wheel years ago
steering to a swell of monthly worries,
aging hospital bills, holy books,
and canceled tee times. He accepted
how his course was mapped by rhythmic tides
and sermons from the unknowing.

Now my mother rested by his bed,
her constant hand lying on his,
holding the pulsing ache of the years, gazing
past his fading eyes, out to the green sea.

He finally understood
these accidental adults in this worn out house,
our whispered laughs echoing summer swims,
here by choice, thanking him, controlling our goodbyes,
plunging into the necessary, as we
swabbed our family vessel, filling the hull with reconciliation,
sweeping over the bow decades of
dredged-up golf balls and counterweights.

Jack Mackey
Rehoboth Beach, Delaware
Ode to Zingerman’s Pulled Pork Sandwich

Ah the Joys of Pork, circumcision notwithstanding;
Our inheritance of dread from Adam notwithstanding;
I sit alone in post-prandial bliss in Zingerman’s Roadhouse.
(Whoever is not guilty—complicit in his or her comfort
Of daily immoral acts in these end times—cast the first stone.
Even Nestle’s (“. . . the very best chaw-clate”) beans
Are harvested by child slaves in Ivory Coast.) But,
Postmodern in its social responsibility toward fine eating (accept killing)
12-dollar-mac-and-cheese-Zingerman’s Roadhouse with their philosophy
Of excellence at any cost has won me over—
At some expense. Öy! They roast the whole pig slowly, slowly,
Slowly on a spit, on site in a big roaster. Then, do they soak it (no one knows)
In special juices of papaya, peppers, cardamom and clove
Such as to make the un-embodied angels weep from jealousy?
The west wind’s aroma wafts among the strip malls
Up and down Stadium, past the Yoga Center and
The Castle beer, wine, and cigar store and Nicola’s bookstore
Pulled muscle, I say, stripped from the bone
Of some smart oinker raised to die for our double chins.
And in full awareness of my sins I confess
(With two Coont Ales having passed through the splanchnics
Now soaking my frontal brain with froth)
This is the best foinkin’ pulled pork sandwich
In the best big-assed pork-soaked sesame seed Kaiser roll
With the best ministered-with-mayo-anointed-in-apple-cider-vinegar-
&-shrived-in-yellow-mustard coleslaw
Exactly matched to the savory tang of pulled pork such that
If the Buddha ate meat, he’d eat Zingerman’s pulled pork sandwich.

How much of our day is spent in longing
Expecting, anticipating, measuring, waiting for
Our desire to match our expectations? Better even than
the first drag on a Camel after months of failed abstinence
This sandwich fit sire in sow. More than just a met desire,
This alchemy was like some Gnostic recipe for seeing God and
I dwelled in Thy House as I savored and sucked swine
With my eyes closed meditating; and chewed it to an essence
And pouched it in my cheek like the strike of a slow curve ball
In the catcher’s mitt that ends the World Series
Played over and over again and again in slow motion
And recorded at home on DVD for posterity forever and ever.

Richard Soloman
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Memoir In Field Grass
for our mother

As wind touches contours of a weathered barn
and brown-pink tips of grass heads breathe
in the sun, I almost see how our mother’s life
shone through her skin of rice-paper and leather.

She could watch a black cat in its window
across the street for hours. I don’t have that much
to look at, she said. No, not the surface
of this field, the blue of an abstruse mountain.

When grasses turn brown and when they’re green
and fluent, I picture our mother on her front porch,
wearing her baseball hat, near the blue lobelia.
Near death, she could laugh. Her DNA in my sister,
in me. The sun in its sleep, sleeves of wind,
combers blowing. Like one of the noble gases,
our mother stayed herself. Like a soldier,
she kept her eyes open. She fell like grass.

Richard Widerkehr
Bellingham, Washington
Aubade: High School Restroom

You reach in your book bag and I wonder if it’s a weapon, but it’s only a bar of soap that you wrapped in a dishrag and packed last night knowing the cracked dispensers are empty, haven’t been filled in a month. You lean over the sink, push the hot and cold silver knobs that stay on for five seconds then turn off automatically. You push again, hands flashing like you’re running a shell game, prodigious dexterity, cupping water and lathering soap, all the while on off on off on off with the water, you’ve got the rhythm now, rubbing behind your ears and the back of your neck, your face bearded with bubbles. That’s when you glance up. It’s so early, you didn’t think anyone else was here. I’ve caught you, haven’t I. But don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone.

Barry Peters
Durham, North Carolina

Waiting For Men

Summers I would try to fold the pants the way my grandmother and her sisters did, lining up the cuffs, pulling at the waist, listening for the slap of creased legs on the denim pile. My great-grandfather’s store sold dry goods – those stacks of dungarees, striped suspenders and V-neck sweaters made of U.S. wool, slim pink packets filled with stockings, sheer and nude.
I watched my grandmother wait on men,
buying their gear for rain and snow in the August heat,
growling in hunting jackets and thick socks,
stomping until their heels were deep in new rubber shoes
and their feet filled the mirrors.

I shrank away, went behind the cash register and back in time
to arrange ladies’ fine handkerchiefs and girls’ flannel nightgowns,
then put aside my paper dolls
to look through the stack of records and lower the needle
on Hot-Diggity Dog and Sixteen Tons,
while red hot cinnamon drops melted on my tongue
and colored my lips.

But then it was another summer.
I made a tower of men’s pants, Levis and Lees,
and went to the back of the store to wait for men.

And while I studied shelves of cardboard cartons,
I watched the tall shadow march down the middle aisle,
a burly man with hunting on his mind and fishing in his plans.
He lowered the creaking seat of a folded wooden chair,
and sat, hands clasped, as if he were in church,
waiting to be helped.
He wanted hip boots for wading in streams or fording rivers,
for large feet, wide and spread like paddles.

Though I was small with young hands,
I found the box, displayed the sole,
for I knew what he needed,
so stroked the boot, from toe to calf,
to show its smoothness and its sheen,
and then from calf to thigh.
And he awoke from reverie
of plaid wool coats and hats with brims,
and his sons striding through the autumn air,
with guns and rods and boots of their own.
“I’ll take them,” he said softly,
and never tried them on.

Jan Grossman
New York, New York
Poem in Which I Try, Very Hard, to Do My Own Bidding

for W.B. Yeats

I find a hollow tree
with a hidden opening
under a greening branch,
like a cave in the side
of grass-covered hill.

Rhyme and meter
are the small boat
and dependable motor
that have brought me
clean across the blue lake.

Now I stand at the place
where the tree’s black trunk
enters the earth below my feet,
where its textured bark rises
like a rigid fountain,

and new leaves pool
overhead. I see the hollow.
I think I will climb
to a new home.
Yet even as I yearn,

for its high, clear view
I hear lake water
churning, the slip-slap
of my ill-moored boat,
feel its cadenced pull.

I am both ways tempted.
I reach forward, trace
the runic-grooved bark
even as I turn to renew
a horizontal voyage.

Leslie Schultz
Northfield, Minnesota
The Visitor

The Hobblebush’s white flowers blur in the rain. Cardinal flickers to a branch, *misko-bineshiinh*, always alert and watchful, he nods toward me. When I move closer to the window, he senses my presence and flies away.

I think about my sister who loved birds, how they often came to the sill and sang for her. The rooms of her house were always alive with song.

Once I remember sleeping there, my baby daughter curled against my side as the dawn chorus awakened us.

My sister has been gone for two years now.

I never used to feed birds, but each day I put out seed and suet, mix sugar water for hummingbirds, search for lost blue jay feathers, but never find any.

“*Errr-in, errr-in,*” calls the Gray Catbird, then the robin, the black-capped chickadee, and sparrow joins in. Even the mourning dove coos sweetly at my back door.

It’s June, everything is green and bountiful and the cardinal has returned to its leafy perch in my garden.

When winter comes, I dislike the silence, when it is too cold to go outside. When sheet ice freezes the birdhouse’s wooden roof, even their feathers stiffen during the Great Spirit Moon.

But, I will not think of that.

**Rosalie Petrouske**
**Grand Ledge, Michigan**

[Note: *misko-bineshiinh* is a word for Northern Cardinal in Ojibwe]
Smaller Spectacles
   —for Jamaal May

Outside sheets are pulling back together into bodies.

The wind confuses sway with dance, asks the dresses

there’s no one left to wear for one more go before

the music ends. We wait for the well out back to

illuminate its drowned coins, all the gods overrun by prayers
to choose just this one to answer. We beat the rain from hanging

undershirts & sing like nothing the sky can do can rust the birds
from our mouths. We promise our children the world

is forever, that this time the wolves won’t show.

The fields are smoke & through the smoke
figures materialize. Deer that might be
mothers or sisters, gutshot, looking for a slice of shadow
to die in. So many hanging trees we confuse with men.

John Sibley Williams
Milwaukie, Oregon
Singing Bird
after Joan Miro’s *The Singing Fish*

Drain your teapot, a future will
be your emptiness throughout. As smooth
as a feather, you will be deemed
smooth at its branch. Soft what you are,
you see that altogether—

even though will you fly—
from outcry,

too sweet a trait,
your mind’s outreach momentarily.

Then loveliest your nest thrusts,
then will you from me
receive death?

Ann Huang
Newport Beach, California

Not Explaining

the bark on the locust tree
creates a song

the yellow-gray
dusk

the pale blue sky
the last days of winter

I think of friends who have died

It's like waiting in an elevator
alone

last night I dreamed
of a man and a woman

they were the size of dolls
and they made their living as musicians
at one point in the dream
I knew what their secret was
the man doll begged me not to tell
they were performing on a ship
crossing the Atlantic
the man played guitar
the woman sang
she wore roses of silver
today I feel like my body is made of water

Rustin Larson
Fairfield, Iowa

Considering the Peace-Be-Still Bath
Trauma healing is what I’m selling,
Gary Copeland Lilley

I need to drive away the Disturbs, Gary.
Only a moon scrap of my husband left
after his bones turn to knives
cutting him from the inside out.
I need to steep myself in the scent of pears
ripe with bees, oregano, lavender, marigolds
and water, the ultimate blessing.
I need to baptize myself, like you say,
Gary, and send those shoulder-riding spirits
off to a dried-up creek bed to die.

Susan Landgraf
Aubum, Washington
Gen Y Love Poem

When I text you,  
Platonic kissy face, rest  
assured I do not  
mean, *I love you*, so much  
as I love the halfhearted  
ironic gesture, rest  
assured I am still  

lean-faced as any  
dust devil, still  
will ing to devour  
you, still ready to  
drag you up  
a long flight  
of Chicago high  
-rise steps, club or  
cocktail in hand. Rest  

assured I still mean  
I love listening to you  
talk of Tartars and  
Saladin and how  
Mehmed II compares  
favorably with  
Erdogan. Trust me,  
my love  
is still trying  

to glimpse  
the titles of others’  
books around wrought  
-iron chairs and sunny  
dry-eyed ficus  
on any veranda  
under any tricolor  
awning in Wicker Park  
with you—  

which is to say  
I am still in it
Saturday Morning, Heat Advisory

Like an anxious heart running ahead of what chases it, the frenzied lawn sprinkler pulsates hard, throwing its work ethic around the ornamental grasses and purple cat mint, already suffering from lack of rain. Today it’s a certain kind of heat that is expected. The kind that gets inside you early, as the negligee moon drifts sultry in the cloudless morning sky then disappears. I pull the hose around like a sailor hoisting rope anxious to get this done before the day becomes an opaque balloon of heat. The arbor-vitae prefer loam and lots of water. They have grown tall along the edge of the property. Healthy enough – despite not all their needs getting met. We spaced them naturally so as not to look like a line of soldiers. They’ve grown into one another – the way we have. Whatever their desires, they are not going anywhere. They block the neighbor who loves fire – the air still thick with the smell of last night’s sacrifice. They say plants communicate through their roots using an internet of fungi. They warn one another of drought, offer sources for food, sabotage unwelcome plants by releasing toxic chemicals. We do this too—our tribal instincts—our lovers. While getting water to the herbs growing in a pot on the back porch I think of how when something as dangerous as heat threatens, surrender seems unavoidable. Grass stores it energy, shuts down, goes dormant. I too give in to what I can’t control. The neighbor with department store lighting surrounding his front porch and circular driveway—he believes light will protect his family. He’s up early too, watering his potted plants, trying, I suppose, to stay ahead of danger.

Joy Gaines-Friedler
Farmington Hills, Michigan
Salvation

Photograph

Rana Williams
Hayesville, North Carolina
INSIDE/OUT LITERARY ARTS PROJECT FEATURE

By immersing students in the joy and power of poetry and literary self-expression, InsideOut inspires them to think broadly, create bravely and share their voices with the wider world. Guided by professional writers and celebrated by publications and performances, youth learn that their stories and ideas matter and that their pens can launch off the page into extraordinary lives.

You can help give Detroit’s children the joys of reading, writing and bringing their creative spirit into the world by supporting InsideOut, a 501(c)(3) corporation.

Visit InsideOut online at: www.insideoutdetroit.org

The Project is supported by gifts of corporations and people who hope to light the creative spark in our youth. Readers of Third Wednesday who see the fire burning in these young poets can help with donations sent to:

    InsideOut Literary Arts Project
    5143 Cass Ave., Room #225
    WSU — State Hall
    Detroit, MI  48202

InsideOut places professional writers and poets in Detroit schools to help children give voice to their often turbulent lives through poetry and writing. Since 1995, the organization has served tens of thousands of Detroit students grades K-12 in over 100 different schools. This year they are serving 27 different schools.

InsideOut works with a variety of schools, partner organizations, and artists to help inner-city schoolchildren find their inner voices with which to express themselves and share their stories, which they then do at performances and events presented by InsideOut.
People Think

People think my name is Bianca but I am a sky of bike riders.
I am a diamond princess.
I am a flying caramel dancing chocolate.
I am a disappearing walrus.

Bianca Sands-Williams

What Fear Is

Fear is like the world trying to wake from the dead.
Fear is like the world crawling out of darkness.
Fear tastes like the world gasping.

Brailyn Dickerson

Beautiful Stars

My sister has caramel skin and is tall for a baby. Nala is a star just like the sun. She can shine so bright because she's beautiful. Everyday I come home, I hear her voice saying Nasia! Nasia! and everytime I hear her voice I see beautiful stars.

Antanasia Talley
Powerful

I was on a bumpy road until I found the end. Now I'm on a flat road and that is where the journey begins.

Joiriana Threat

My Voice

Today my voice sings like the stars in the darkness sing music all night to the moon sleeping tight and the planets circling around the sun and grey clouds with rain pouring out till the morning comes.

Kaiya Ingram

Heart Tree

I have a tree inside my heart It grows each time I make it sprout But when it grows Too big For me
It finds another place to be
And then I grow another one
In the place that
Used to be!

Kaiya Ingram

I Feel

I feel happy like a baby goose learning how to fly.
I feel mad like a computer about to die.
I feel sad like a box with only one piece of candy in it.
I feel lonely like the only person from 1921.
I feel afraid like a falling butterfly.
I feel furious like a screaming cow.

Laila-Ali Withers

I Am a Poem

I am a poem about
a fluffy cloud roaming
around the sky. I am a
shooting star that lights up in the dark. I am
a blue car that moves
a little slow in the sky.

Breniya h Watkins
Ancient Black Cottonwood

Photograph

Jude Dippold
Concrete, Washington
Third Wednesday Magazine
Annual Poetry Contest
Judged by Robert Fanning

Low $5.00 Entry Fee

Three Prizes of $100.00 and publication in Third Wednesday’s Spring Contest issue.

Entry open now through February 15, 2019

As a thank you for your participation, each entrant will receive a PDF copy of the poetry contest issue (a $5.00 value), so the net cost of your entry is $Zero. Winning poets and honorable mentions will receive a print copy of the contest issue.

Non winning entries may be considered for publication as a regular submission with the permission of the author.

See our website for details and the link to our portal at Submittable.
https://thirdwednesdaymagazine.org/