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Editors Note:

We’re excited about this, the annual poetry contest issue of Third Wednesday. We’ve been running this contest for many years, but this time there are some changes. For one thing, the prize money was doubled. We are very pleased about that. We’re also pleased that we were able to have Phillip Sterling judge this year’s contest. You can learn more about him at our T.W. website.

This contest saw nearly 200 entries, meaning that Mr. Sterling had to read close to 600 poems, from which he had to select just 3 winners. It was a daunting task and we are pleased with the results. Much of the other poetry in this issue also came from the contest, as most non-winning entries were also read by our regular poetry editors as they were eliminated from competition.

This issue’s feature is a suite of poems by undergraduate poets from Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida. The feature was curated by teacher, Lauren Tivey, who was our featured poet in last summer’s Volume X, Number 3. For most of these young poets, this is a first-time publication.

Looking forward, we’re running another contest for the summer issue. We’re looking for poems that consist of a single sentence. How much can you pack into the basic building block of literature? Entries are open until April 30th. See the link at our website for details.

Happy reading all.

David Jibson, Co-editor
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Last Mirror In The House

Death comes, sometimes,  
like a merry-go-round,  
turning with just the drum  
thrumming one-one-one,  
with a single lonely rider  
round and round, on the same  
hysterical horse winding round,  
the same lonely rider staring  
at you, only you, with  
one finger pressed to his lips.  
But more often than not  
there’s free admission,  
and death is only  
that stupid bald guy  
with the scales and  
a face like a closed fist,  
trying like all sweaty hell  
to guess your weight  
as it goes down and down  
like cotton candy.  
But always there is the funhouse,  
that is never any fun, riddled  
with mirrors and minotaurs,  
as you watch yourself turning  
into stranger after stranger,  
head on the ceiling, hands on the floor,  
and you cannot make yourself believe  
the whispers behind that last mirror  
that reflects what it cannot see.

Sean Lause  
Bluffton, Ohio
Recovering a Natural Disaster

Postcard Row looms on Hayes and Steiner Street, fawn-tinted by the streetlamps’ glow. Transamerica Pyramid glimmers crushed white quartz against the lavender rose civil twilight, and in the second to last house of the Painted Ladies —ploss blue—on the top floor is a tiny museum loaded with trinkets: a preserved ticket from Golden Gate Bridge’s Pedestrian Day, 100-year-old wedding cake tops, a photo of Alamo Square during the 1906 earthquake, the people then dressed in their black wardrobes. They watched their Victorian city burn, great daguerreotype smoke pluming above the choking troposphere.

A century later this picture has been altered many times over—generations after generations have found each other, lounging on the grass as dusk transitions into sleepy astronomical phosphorescence. Locals send out love, embracing as they gaze at the restored landscape. Families catch the last sight of summer about to be split back into their personal lives. You’ve got tree bark stretch marks carved into the right hemisphere of your brain—an intense desire to find your own family, someone who will watch the destruction of your beloved city, someone who will archive your soul in their museum waxed in parchments of words you’ve never sentimentally said aloud but somehow they know. All your love is in a photograph, bound to last an epoch against gray skies swollen with bolts of rain.

Emily Townsend
Nacogdoches, Texas
In Egypt  (for Caine)

an alphabet of black birds
writes your name

across pink skin of sky

east to west
ink colored wings

open, close,
repeat-

-Arabic erasing itself.

Stephanie Bradbury
Acworth, Georgia

Scissors
(Caelum Constellation – Engraver’s Chisel)

forget the cutting
of hair because
it does not bleed
and knives keep
no memory
of love cuts
in tree bark,
hieroglyphics
of a civilization
that ended before
the children arrived.
Since I was halved
we’ve put the horses
back in their stalls.
They will only be liberated under supervision. From here on we will use statistics and Consumer Reports for all decisions. No more drawing straws, guessing at numbers or throwing gum into the wind. Instead, we’ll curl close to the ground and endeavor to block blue lightening with our feet.

Amy Strauss Friedman
Denver, Colorado

Every Jewel in Its Place

I wonder why you wanted me to have your cross. Rose, with red and white beaded rosaries, palms placed in corners of mirrors. You kept finches caged near the kitchen. I remember you reaching to grab cereal from a step stool. One of the younger great-
grandchildren called you sexy
in the casket. The misuse
of a word. I missed
a party to be here. I tell myself

your necklace can’t be lost
like the opal ring (I imagine it
under a seat in my car
or picked up by a stranger

in a parking lot). I tell myself the gold won’t
be twisted around my neck
at night if it never leaves
this box.

Taylor Fedorchak
Easton Maryland

Succarath
When hunted it is said to take its young on its back.

Take me, mother, to the safe place
beyond the glade, the temporal lobe
where I may remember a time
like this

in one whole piece, the dogs drumming
after allegro con brio and the crashing
of men in the over brush in the
under

world where we may be safe andante
and I can climb down little cadenza
that I am with my sharp teeth my eyes
many
scales both up and down and the hunting horns moan hollow echoes lost in the melody remembered entirely in fact

and we can stop together as if a cadence and root in the deep cerebellum having heard everything heard and about to be heard

at once in the presence of the present which will not fall away but through which, beyond the glade, we always fall.

Charles Wyatt
Nashville, Tennessee

---

The 1000? Piece Puzzle

The puzzle spent the summer on a card table in the corner of the cabin's porch.

We worked slowly in the heat. Fall came before we knew if all the pieces were there.

Robert Halleck
Del Mar, California
The Race

Every morning, they rise early to execute their ritual. They attempt to fulfill their self-destructive desires, but specific genetics and wealth are required to attain the ideal. Plucking. Burning. Starving. But their finish line is a figment of an insecure imagination. I have to wonder, why do they keep running?

Alice Tiemey Prindiville-Porto
Peoria, Illinois

These People You See On The Beach

Their towels are spread out on the sand.
Their heads sink into cushions.
Every radio is tuned to lite rock.
Torsos, shoulders, faces, glisten with oil.
Dark glasses remove the eyes from the scenario.
No more than three pages of a book are read.
No water bottle is less than half drunk.
They turn slowly like bodies on spits,
so ultra-violet rays don't miss a thing.
Agreed, they don't sound so exciting when described like this.
But, keep in mind, it's my friends and I I'm talking about.

John Grey
Johnston, Rhode Island
Sand

flowers tingle
my fingers
leaves crunch a bunch crinkly
under bare feet
a giant camper van in a driveway
doors locked
pebbles and bricks never get sick
caw caw crows
sand between toes
where does sand come from?

plaster statue a unicorn white with red corn horn
statues of geese, poop on lawns
pumpkins on front steps faces like mean people
big black fuzzy spider on a fence
I’m not scared
they eat bad bugs
carpenters banging on a house
giant camper van in a driveway
doors locked

here’s the library which has
headphones to put over ears
color books to pull off shelves
checkout machine needs a card
a stool to climb on
yes I’ll go now

listen it’s a leaf blower not a lawnmower
in this garden a little tower of bells
you can ring with your fingers ting ting
a yard full of rocks some broken some whole
this stone is perfect so smooth I’ll keep in my pocket
just a stone not stealing only just one
the giant camper van in a driveway
doors locked
once I had a driveway
sunset so many colors
smell of rain
pardon my cough
where does sand come from?

Joe Cottonwood
La Honda, California

A Girl in the Library

At a long table, his history text open, he copied what he had already highlighted in yellow. He wanted to remember what he didn’t care if he later forgot. Usually he found a carrel by a window, close to the stacks. But that afternoon, a Saturday gray and cold, he saw a girl at a table in front of him, also by herself. Straight blond hair fell past her shoulders, and as she read her head bowed as if she were kneeling in prayer. She wore a green sweater with a pale blue collar pulled out. When she took a break, she sat back and closed her eyes. He knew he could spend the rest of his life with her. Her slender hand turned each page. He tried not to stare, but every few minutes he looked up. He imagined walking with her on campus, holding hands, sitting on a bench under an immense oak, her face turning to kiss him. Then she stood—and he saw that her right forearm was missing from her elbow. He watched as she managed to pull on her coat, her sleeve hollow. She held her book and walked away. He wanted to run after her, introduce himself, and tell her how completely lovely she was.

William Palmer
Traverse City, Michigan
Peaches
Kristin DeKam
Photograph
1961 Lincoln Continental

The 61’ Continental held the president’s sloped body, while the first lady, sprawled over him, shielded him from more harm. Does the spirit require a container, for the death of the body? If so, this car, rectangular and full of authority, provides.

Beyond – the Dallas heat pulsed. Throngs of people, alarmed, scattered and ran.

On the radio, at a diner, the song, *I Will Follow Him*, by Little Peggy March, played.

Police spread out, searched for the assailant. Inside the car, the wordless confession of the body, passing into white light, ensued, while the wife, dressed in pink, blood-stained, held what was left of his body to her soul – like a pink finch, in heavenward prayer.

Ken Meisel  
Dearborn, Michigan

Words in the Mouth of the One Who Refuses to Speak

According to that cynical little French emperor with the congenital itch on his chest, religion keeps the poor from murdering the rich. But times change and, today, in the Year of My Son and Your Lord 2017,
there’s no reason to discriminate between
the haves and have-nots on the killing fields
of the righteous. Witness those earnest little guys and gals
with a death wish strapped to their bellies hell bent
to explode through the pearly gates.
Reading a little too much Joshua, anyone?
As if I, the Omniscient One,
haven’t considered My own homeland security.
And those eschatological morons delivering in exegetic frenzy
what they wrote and say I said—
they make Me yawn.
I’ve tried to make it clear that Me and He
arrived at Our compromises centuries ago.
That wild Russian got it right: My Son offered
radical freedom (though I must say, given your Old
Testament behaviors, with a measure of parental trepidation
on My part) and the Crafty One smiled craftily
and said, Yes, I’ll give them that.
Forgive My Son, He was young and a bit naïve;
He believed in you, called it modeling behavior
though no one was paying attention.
Sure, that Trickster took advantage of the situation
what with My Son in the depths of depression, enjoining Him
go ahead, step off into the abyss and be saved.
But My Son refused the bait, said,
No I am the Son of Man,
traded his Immaculate Birthright
to preserve the reputation of His Father,
and freedom of humankind.
Oh, that wily Son of a Bitch—
that’s why I threw Him out of paradise
way back when: He understood Adam
better than I did. And Eve—
it’s difficult to influence an afterthought.
But Me and Him—We’ve come to terms.
We’ve each got Our talents and agendas.
Besides, you can only stay angry so long,
though those Mideastern dolts may prove Me wrong.
Hear Me:
without that Dark Angel, you verily
would be left to your own self-destructive devices
with no one but yourselves to blame.
As they say, everyone needs someone to hate—
you’re welcome.
Truth is, I’ve run out of tales to tell.
I’m confounded by your answers
to the questions you fail to ask.
I’m tired. One day off a week
seems hardly enough..
Yes, pour me a glass of wine—merci.
Blood of My Son sacrificed for you—de nada.
Oh, before I forget, that little emperor—
those portraits should show him with his hand in his pants
because that’s where it was when no one was looking.

Robert Nordstrom
Mukwonago, Wisconsin

Heading for Home
For Dani

A kid rounds third
past a coach's waving wheel
in anticipation
of the safety
of home.
The thrill
of running full-out
for the pure joy of it
shows in his eyes.

This is how I return to you.

Marcus Benjamin Ray Bradley
Versailles, Kentucky
Coloring Outside the Lines

The sky darkens to the ace of spades.
I drink coffee as thick as tar
while the tires whine on the road,
headlights carve a light
into the cave of a country night.
Tomorrow is the funeral, her bruises will be covered
by the mortician’s powder. I can’t find the flower
of her favorite color, it doesn’t exist. Dark purple roses
will have to grace her coffin. The thunderheads will blossom
and spill rain on the raven sitting on the steeple.

Barbara Brooks
Hillsborough, North Carolina

Lost In The Snow

When the light drains to the bottom of evening,
I wait for revenants your voice
to ease from the corners,
the wisp of silk on your legs,
blessing of lips.
In the cold mornings,
I sit by the wood stove
and listen for the lilt of your song
to drift from the wooden walls,
a flake of a held vowel.
But they’re gone like smoke saved in a box.
You said “nothing is learned by turning away”.
The tilt of the world has shortened the days,
owls call through the early night
and I scavenge in the dark.
In the day, when the empire of branches
scrapes the skin from the light,
sunlight ricochets along the crystals
and I have to shield my eyes.
I walk down the icy ruts listening
for a car’s moan
to float up the forest road.
And when the light grays,
I start back up the hill,
back into the dark by the fire,
smell your pillow,
rummage the bedroom closets again,
the back corners of their high shelves
looking for remains,
a hair-brush, an earring.

Mark Burke
Everette, Washington

Peyton Fahrquhar

I.
Awakened by keen, poignant agonies
He feels the lines of his nerves
An inconceivable periodicity
Streams of heat, motion
In his fantasy of life, in death
In dying, he is conscious of motion
He feels a glowing cloud
He is its heart, aﬂame
He swings in space
A pendulum, a metronome
A slowing pulse

II.
Waking in the Owl Creek of his mind,
he puts it all together
Water all around, the noose still tight
At his throat. Gunmen on the banks
To die of hanging
at the bottom of a river!—
To be hanged and drowned,"
he thinks "that is not so bad;
but I do not wish to be shot.
No; I will not be shot;
that is not fair." Alternating between
Outrage and bemusement
He applauds his hands’ work
Loosening the rope, paddling
Him upwards to the sunlight,
To air and freedom, to a shriek
In gray eyed sight of the snipers
To a newborn breath. Is he still falling?
Has he reached the end of his rope?

III.
In the allegory of his dying,
His fantasies of escape and homecoming
You can make a faith
From the dark woods he walks,
The final blow that ends him at his gate,
With the crack of his neck.
But in Owl Creek, in possession
Of his senses, he sees the world
Surreally clear, the trees, the veining of each leaf —

Locusts, glittering bodied flies,
Gray spiders spinning
Prisms of dew on each blade of grass.
Dying and not knowing it, he listens
Hears A fish slide, the rush
Of its body parting the water.

Cris Harris
Madison, Ohio
The Old Neighborhood

I waited for you sixteen years,
spurned the quiet, easy lover
to crouch low
from gunshots in the park at night,
scratching at the grime
for what I knew was there
but seldom found.
And you, aware my heart
was always one step back,
tensed away from me. Today,
the bodega on the corner
is a bright cafe, its glass
encasing scones, not
deflecting lead, sun
soothing ginkgoes
and gentle sycamores on streets
where, once,
frail facades and boarded windows
had a sound,
a beating, pulsing, thumping riot
of graffiti dissonance,
now muted
into restoration and the wildly surging
interest of those
who see the good bones underneath.
I am a jilted spouse. I stiffen, smile,
glad to see you so serene
at last, thriving, light,
awash in what you found
after I gave up and left.

Carrie Vaccaro Nelkin
Mamaroneck, New York
Leopard

The curtain of spots undulates,
folding back on itself,
rippling in the grass and
rustling tall pale blades
that part from the rub of sinewed leg
and the dangle of a hare
clamped hot and sweet in the mouth,
tasting of another night’s survival
and the tempestuous weight
of freedom.

Carrie Vaccaro Nelkin
Mamaroneck, New York

Transition

and though you breathe
beneath the storm
beneath the drifts
and politics of life

you fear that you will die
here in this haze
of fluctuating margins
broken love

and though the evening sun
holds scarlet promises
that watch you
through the window

like the afterglow of wine
these are ephemeral
and so you study
how to be
and how to do
and fear that you will fail

Dorothy Sjoholm
Barrie, Ontario

Is It Virginia Woolf I’m Thinking Of?

The wisteria branches hang twisted through, over, and out from the pergola and it’s Christmas. They will bend and stay until May. Then we will prune them into some semblance of place. In the kitchen there are cheeses on the Santa plate, the one where he is walking toward his sleigh, sack hung full over his back. I wonder about taking a slice of gouda. I can’t remember if we are going out to someone’s for dinner or if someone is coming here for wine and cheese, crackers, and talk. It’s mid-afternoon. Maybe it’s the neighbors coming here. I know we invited them. I’ll play it safe.

Instead, I’ll water the tree. The cat likes to drink from the stand. The tree is nine feet tall, the tallest tree we have ever had, and I balanced myself on the third step of the three step step stool and placed the star. Outside, the predicted ice storm is falling around us. Where will the birds go? I think of all that’s now gone, that’s taken the I that I was away from home, leaving only something
vague in my synapses and blood. Deep in the tree’s branches I found a nest. The salt trucks will open the roads. Tomorrow we will make soup, likely from what’s left of the vegetables, blend them with a can of chicken stock. Last night I read where astronomers are all but sure there is another planet in our solar system. Stillness lies in the cat asleep on the hearth—a word I love. The stillness may move into the air around us, a quiet poignancy within our own fragile and willing breath. I wonder why I keep at the window, staring at the storm.

Jack Ridl
Douglas, Michigan

On a Day in Mid-January

Clouds cast shadows
that involve whole towns,
each rooftop packed white,
every yard buried,
every window spiked with lonely snow-trails,
every street salted gray,
every sidewalk icy,
everyone holed up inside with loved ones or, even better, warm ones.

John Grey
Johnston, Rhode Island
NO
Mark Bulwinkle

Linocut
Third Wednesday Annual Poetry Contest 2018
Judge’s Results and Remarks

by Phillip Sterling

Any of two dozen or more poems submitted this year might have been selected as “winners,” given a different judge’s sensibilities. There were that many worthy of publication (and many of the poems in this issue were originally entered in the contest). But after extensive reading and re-reading (aloud), I have settled on the following.

The Co-Winners are (we don’t distinguish first, second and third places):

“Darkest Before Dawn” by James Crews: A luminous description of an orchid in its contrary environment and the emotive/cognitive awareness if it on the part of the speaker, this poem is hopeful and promising, a gently rhythmic and subtly rhymed gift.

“Dumping Leaves” by Robert Fillman: For its unity of image, its control in movement and sound (line breaks), and its light-hearted poignancy, this poem stands out from the significant number of very strong narratives submitted to this year’s contest.

“We Sing” by Chaun Ballard: More impressionistic than most of the entries, this poem stood out for use of repetition and line break, its call and response (singing), and the metaphoric punning and nuance; the brief lines and images expand the poem’s implications.

Honorable Mentions (alphabetical):

“Howard’s Mill Burns”: Focused and detailed narrative, in the tradition of Dave Smith, Maxine Kumin, Stanley Plumly, C. D. Wright . . .

“Prayer for Motel 6, Los Angeles”: The details, images, sounds, and methods (anaphora) in this poem—not to mention the very timely content—stand out among a number of entries that addressed the
cultural subjectivity of family.

“Reflections on the Future”: One of the few haiku-like poems submitted (minimalist), and the juxtaposition of the images leaves the reader open to interpretation (and returning).

“We Shall All Be Changed”: The best sonnet—among the submissions. Very tight in meter and rhyme (English form), yet conversational and contemporary.

The Rest of the Short List (alphabetical):

“A Remission”
“End of a Love Story”
“I’m Sorry I’m Not in the Mood” [one of the few humorous poems—and a villanelle to boot]
“In Rome” [attractive form and use of repetition, nice “foreign” details, resistant to making it subjective, until the end . . .]
“Latin” [the best of a number of prose poems submitted—intelligent and clever, with an honestly self-focused yet deprecating voice, in the manner of Albert Goldbarth]
“Light of Spring” [nice use of anaphora and repetition of sound/image]
“Love Song for a Dismembered Country” [metaphorically this could be about any number of countries; strong juxtaposition of images, sensory]
“Shoreline with Decaying Wildlife”
“THE AMERASIAN” [CULTURALLY TIMELY AND LYRICAL, STRONG IMAGES]
Dumping Leaves  (WINNER OF $100)

My Aunt Mimi dumped six barrels of leaves off a cliff by her house because at ninety-one who cares about FINE FOR LITTERING signs or the two-hundred fifty bucks they could never collect from her, stares from neighbors she hardly knew. That day, the alley was her grave, a gray rut of gravel between her backyard and December sky, each trip a testament to her belief that she would never die.

In her mind, the scrape of plastic on pavement was her daughter's voice sharply warning One fall and I will put you in a home. But she just kept hauling, one barrel at a time, listening for the swish of leaves like a breathless sigh, and finally the long, slow silence that rang in her bones when she stopped.

Robert Fillman
Macungie, Pennsylvania
We Sing  (Winner of $100)

and no one dies.
Here we say:

*he put up quite a song—
lovely how he sang it:*

*live:*
*on screen:*

*on radio—
the event was celebrated in song:*

*in the beat of a wing,*
Smooth as a flight of evening sparrows.

Here, when a shot fires
and whistles,

we say:
*he burst into song*

we say:
*in the act of singing*

we say:
*that one there*

*can be bought for a hymn—*
*or a song amount.*

For the rhythm
you hear

*and keep in*
*your head.*
Like that
of blown leaves—

the nearness
of the nameless

buzz
or hum

made by a pair
of hives.

Chaun Ballard
Anchorage, Alaska
Three days into the new year, 
and in spite of the lack of adequate light, 
our white phalaenopsis orchid 
has eased open a third delicate bloom. 
Perhaps coaxed by the warmth 
of the wood-stove a few feet away, 
the orchid thrives in its tiny pot 
shaped like the shell of a snail, 
sending out new stems and glossy leaves, 
its aerial roots—green at the tips— 
reaching upward like tentacles 
to sip the morning air. These blooms 
stir something too long asleep in me, 
proving with stillness and slow growth 
what I haven't wanted to believe 
these past few months—that hope 
and grace still reign in certain sectors 
of the living world, that there are laws 
which can never be overturned 
by hateful words or the wishes 
of power-hungry men. Be patient, 
this orchid seems to say, and reveal 
your deepest self even in the middle 
of winter, even in the darkness 
before the coming dawn.

James Crews
Shaftsbury, Vermont
A Remission
(Contest Finalist)

_Il spiaggio_ is nearly empty, most people gone on the last ferry or to hotel rooms. Only sandpipers gather at the tide line where waves have left shiny rags of kelp. At this hour the sea is indigo. The fringed surf curls and laps over the black rocks of a breakwater, a lone sailboat tacks toward the harbor. Over all seagulls soar, pelicans dive.

Unfettered here, we measure days by tide rhythm, wind drift, cloud shape. Our bodies, rinsed by the Mediterranean, turn golden, flecked with fine sand. Sometimes you place in my hand shells you name _oyster, clam sea snail._

At night when you turn to me, your lips taste of sweat, of salt. For a brief time you and I have no fear of the future, our breaths rising and falling like ocean’s ebb and drag, only sound in early morning, a buoy’s melancholy bell.

Beth Paulson
Ouray, Colorado
In Rome
(Contest Finalist)

In Rome, we ate gelato twice a day, as though it were required in Rome.

In Rome, we walked into restaurants in Trastevere, ten people with no reser-
vation, and waiters leapt from behind sideboards to slide tables together; bring us
chairs, menus, wine lists and pastas – all’amatriciana, all’arrabiata, cacio e pepe,
frutti di mare – and you’d have thought I was His Royal Highness the Prince of
Savoy, dropping by for dinner in Rome.

In Rome, we poured water into a well of semolina, made a rope of dough,
pinched off inches, rolled a pasta from a paddle with our thumbs, and there was
sauce with mushrooms, and that was one of four courses we made in a cooking
school, where the chef flirted with everyone, shouted at everyone, and made us
laugh until we wept into our wine in Rome.

§

In Rome, we giggled at the rooms of male nudes in the Vatican Museums, at
the Swiss Guards in their poufy pantaloons, white ruffs and jaunty black berets,
standing at attention in Rome.

In Rome, boys drove their motos around the piazze, laughing and joking and
hanging all over each other like eels in the fish market, and no one thought it odd
in Rome.

In Rome, we stood under the oculus in the Pantheon dome, marveling at the
squares circling upward in perspective, wondering at its perfection, wondering
what happened when it rained in Rome.

In Rome, we huddled together at Ostia Antica before the ruins of a shop, as our
guide pointed out a threshold stone and the groove in the stone where the shop
was closed by a shutter for centuries in Rome.

§

In Rome, before my birthday dinner began, before the waiters brought a tiramisu
with Happy Birthday in chocolate syrup, before Jeremy made every one describe
me with one adjective and me do the same for them,

before my sister gave me tributes everyone had written, pasted in a scrapbook, before the table demanded I read each one out loud, before I couldn’t control my voice anymore to continue reading,

I stood in our room in the Hotel Residenza on Piazza Farnese in my Zegna suit the color of blue-gray clay, my cufflinks like winter moons, and I held my sixty years in my hands like a stone, weighing the heft of it, tracing its shape, running my thumb along the groove,

watching from the window of our room in the Hotel Residenza on Piazza Farnese as the flower carts left the market in Rome.

    Don Hogle
    New York, New York
I'm Sorry I'm Not in the Mood
(Contest Finalist)

I'm sorry I'm not in the mood.
There's nothing about it abstract.
All I can think of is food.

Please don't consider it rude.
I feel, though you deep down attract,
I need a cuisine interlude.

Oysters voluptuously stewed,
Bouillabaisse—crackers all stacked.
That's how my fancy's imbued.

I'm sorry I haven't yet tacked
The path to fulfillment you've viewed.
I'm sorry you're feeling eschewed.

Consider this, thus, entr'acte.
There's no way I'm coming unglued.
Which doesn't mean I am a prude.

How bland to be hungrily wooed!
Ironic, the sweet tidbit fact.
I'm sorry I'm not in the mood.
All I can think of is food.

Fred Yannantuono
Bronxville, New York
End of a Love Story
(Contest Finalist)

They come to the market together,
his white hair pulled into a ponytail,
her wisps of silver
covered by a blue cloche hat,
brown boots laced over a plastic brace.
Mondays, they shuffle through the aisles.
He pushes the cart along the linoleum
shimmering like an autumn lake.
She reads her list – half gallon of milk,
sardines for his crackers,
bag of split peas. He gripes
about canned tomatoes,
prefers diced to plum,
complains about the ungodly price
of chocolate. She nods,
hands him the marked-down brand,
no use bickering after 71 years.
The neighbor’s poodle died yesterday.
The faucet needs fixing.
Wind tore another plank from the fence.
In a few months, he’ll be wandering
the aisles, hunched over the cart,
fumbling a crumpled list,
searching the shelves
for the goddamn plum tomatoes,
the white floor frozen over.

January Pearson
Orange, California
Love Song for a Dismembered Country
(Contest Finalist)

Whenever you close your eyes
the room opens up.
The sea finds its way to your door.

The snow is melting, soon
we will carry vessels containing
our tears to be buried.

Beside the road, blue flowers
bloom and the sparrows
bathe in the dust.

The house cannot hold
its shadows forever. The wind
bears you up on pale wings.

A voice you have forgotten
may return, wearing
night-colored slippers.

Then these words at last
may roll the way honey does
over your parched tongue.

W. Luther Jett
Washington Grove, Maryland
Shoreline With Decaying Wildlife  
(Contest Finalist)

Dead jellyfish littered the beach,  
their stinging tentacles drawn inward.  
Sand flies congregated on their translucent skins.

Further down, I saw a dead brown duck,  
its head turned up so awkwardly I wondered  
what could have snapped its drawn neck.

In its feathers, I could almost see the veins  
of a crocus leaf. Its eye shimmered with cold,  
luxurious void like anthracite, like prayer.

I thought a lot about forgiveness on that walk,  
I thought a little about my own complicity  
in a world that would just as soon break me.

Seagulls descended, screeching their chorus  
of need, and I strained to smell the ruin  
they must have smelled, its sour ethyl.

I wanted it to enter my nostrils like incense.  
Underfoot, shells crumbled and I felt the sting  
of chitin against skin, but I did not limp.

Ross White  
Durham, North Carolina
Light of Spring  
(Contest Finalist)

Because the magnolia trees are filled with white blossoms,  
I walk under their canopy like a bride.

Because the white linen napkins sit like crushed paper in a heap,  
I smooth them with the palm of my hand  
and think of my grandmother.

Because my grandmother’s white hair twisted into a braid  
like a crown, I walk in circles around her.

Because my steps take me in circles,  
I scatter white stones, like bread crumbs, to mark the distance.

Here - you and I - we have come this far. The sky’s white clouds  
have faded into the blue sky like an old pair of jeans.

Under the magnolia blossoms, under the widening  
blue-white sky, we skirt the puddles from last night’s rain,  
and shield our eyes from the bright white light of spring.

Suzy Harris  
Portland, Oregon
Maybe I should learn Latin, then I could read Cicero or Virgil or Julius Caesar’s *The Conquest of Gaul* the way they were meant to be read and I’d come to understand things like the plural of memorandum is memoranda and I’d know why a male graduate is an alumnus and a female graduate an alumna. Or maybe I could just become a better Catholic. It’s been said that the Devil hates Latin, because it’s the universal language of the church. After all, Pope Benedict announced his resignation in Latin; however, there were a whole lot of cardinals that didn’t know what the hell he was saying. If I were fluent in Latin and I were a Cardinal, I’d be the head of my class. But then again, most cardinals spend at least two years studying at one of the universities in Rome. I don’t think I’m up to learning two languages, even though I’m told that my brain’s neuroplasticity keeps decreasing with age, and so I have to use it or lose it and since I’m not interested in crossword puzzles, Sudoku or Trivial Pursuit, I may have to keep my brain nimble by learning Latin, which would be very helpful if I wanted to become a doctor, although I may not be up to the four years of undergraduate school, four years of medical school and three to seven years of residency training just to keep my brain nimble. But still, with a command of Latin, I’d surely be able to protect myself from demonic forces and maybe, just like Harry Potter and Professor Severus Snape, use difficult spells like *expecto patronum* to protect against Dementors and I’m thinking that if I could do that, I could use Latin spells to fight off psychic vampires, like televangelists or pharmaceutical executives, who feed off the “life force” of other living creatures. Oh well. Never mind. I’m getting tired now. Maybe I could play Trivial Pursuit. I already know that the capital of Delaware is Dover and that the King Cobra is the world’s longest venomous snake.

*Terry Allen*
*Columbia, Missouri*
Sketchbook Page 17
Jon Loree
Drawing
Ravine Lake

Boiling white clouds glow from the depths of lake. White, massed, lucid — entangled with the blue of sky that passes as the blue of water.

Along the further edge, the trees enshadowing the muddy tarn — the true color of the lake, despite the glossy make-believe of this reflection. A lake man-made, a valley dammed and filled as the river fattened to its shape and size, curving through these hills. A lake of many seasons, and beauteous across them. From mossy green of summer, through carmine and russet of fall, then into stark and barren winter where bare trees stand erect in their blackness, allowing visibility to the marvel of an ice-thickened crust — all these seasons times of wonder, but spring might beat them all.

Spring, when flowering trees hold court, when the lake is still and clear, when the river gushes cold pure water from the mountain tops.

Paul Ilechko
Lambertville, New Jersey

Death Comes for my Father-in-law, Softly, Slyly

Now cousin death walks in wearing the old man’s borrowed suits, death winking in the water glass, candy man death selling yesterday’s newspaper

Yesterday he said “Sara, get my suit, my shoes, walk ahead of me, I’ll follow in your footsteps.”
Today father Death hissing in hospital tubes
and the old man, impaled, wired, exposed on his white hospital throne
They have dressed him in a blue flowered gown,
a girl’s gown like the young girls he loved,
and pressed tight (too tight) to his chest

“What day is this”, he opens his eyes
“what day is this, and when I tell him
he asks again “What day is this”

and death comes as Ariel
softly, gently, blows away the question
and the answer.

Sophia Rivkin
Southfield, Michigan

The Problem With Poems

Poems get mixed up with reality
they steal your supper, your boyfriend
who is right here beside you
arm around your shoulders,
sipping another Coors Light
watching Warriors win
except he left right left in your last poem
slamming the front door after finding out
how could he right next to you right now
if he knew where you were last night
frantic fingers, tangled tongues
I sneak past syllables, stumble
through sentences coiled in
betrayal at Sam’s Last Stop
but I was here right here all night last night
wasn’t I?

Claire Rubin
Oakland, California
Howard’s Mill Burns

(Contest Honorable Mention)

Turns out the fire got it all. Not much insurance. Not enough to start over. Howard’s workshop gone, the crowded bench, scattered with wrenches, mismatched parts.

His son-in-law comes, helps him sort through the mess, set aside what might still be of use. In the end Howard knocks it down to keep trespassers out. In the spring he’ll set it on fire again, then bury what’s left. Now half the roof sprawls wide, an upside down V, with shingles crooked and missing. A metal desk with its one drawer closed, squats on its top. Peeking out from underneath—the white door that never hung straight, always caught as you tried to enter. All of it like some giant broken nest, taunting me, a dark scar on the snow. Scraps entangled with the bare arms of bushes. Gossip has it that faulty wiring caused the blaze, some jury-rigged circuitry. Howard was known for that, piecing together odds and ends, making do—sloppy but functional. Now nothing will replace it. He’s taken to standing in the roadway looking at the charred planks. At eighty-five he remembers when it was a working mill. The stringent smell of sawdust, the whir of the blades, like a coat he once wore. Tattered now. Nothing that will keep him warm.

Judy Kaber
Belfast, Maine
Pants of Freedom

No tight pants for me.
Thanks, but I prefer to breathe.
Enjoying freedom,
Over covert compression.
Use your imagination.

Alice Tiemey Prindiville-Porto
Peoria, Illinois

The Most Dangerous Girlfriend I Ever Had

was one I had in 1973 while a student at U.C. Santa Cruz.
I met her in one of my Psychology classes
as she too was majoring in Psychology.
I was sleeping with her for a few weeks before she told me
that she had shot her last boyfriend because he shoved her
during an argument.
Turned out that the bullet just took out a piece of flesh from his side,
so healing back up wasn’t too difficult.
Also turned out that he didn’t press charges, so she got off Scott free,
but the relationship didn’t last much longer after that.
When I heard all this, it put things into perspective
because I could tell early on that she was an angry and volatile person.
I knew that I was putting up with a lot more than I would have other-
wise because I was lonely and enjoyed having sex with her.
Then one day we got into an argument,
and her eyes took on an evil look that made me realize
she could truly do me harm.
Fortunately she broke off our relationship, telling me
she was seeing someone else and that he was a better fit.
Not wanting to part with hard feelings
that potentially could come back to me,
I wished her well, thinking that a second time around
she’d have a much better aim...

Jeffrey Zable
San Francisco, California

First Poem

On an envelope I scrawl *A crimson stripe
ignites the sky.* It’s a gray day in late
March. I sprawl on the steps of our porch

where Libby, my only cousin, tracks me down.
We are twelve. Libby grips my wrist, and catches sight
of *A crimson stripe*…. She glares at the dome

of clouds above the water tower, the salmon
cannery, the Lutheran Home for Orphans.
Her body stiffens, as if she’s been insulted.

Then she pops her bubble gum by my ear,
runs to the kitchen, and gathers my mother
who is peeling turnips for supper.

Mother hates root crops. *At least they are cheap,*
she’s explained. Out my mother comes,
ribbon-thin, sick—perhaps—of quarrelsome kids,

shirts to mend, bills to pay. Jabbing at the envelope,
Libby sputters that *I am acting crazy again.*
I underscore *stripe* twice with my red felt pen.

Mother studies the line I’ve written. She scans
the leaden heavens, sniffs the cannery smoke. Then
she slowly speaks my words. Our eyes meet.

*Well, she says, it’s grand, as far as I’m concerned.*

Richard Merelman
Madison, Wisconsin
The News

is sailing crackling past us at supersonic speed, he said this she said that, this that this that
the polls are swaying the babies are crying the mothers fathers are shushing, the gun
owners shouting the teapot is screaming the slot machines pinging (the house is winning) the storm
is threatening thundering diminishing leaving gone the drought is over (for the time being)
the sparrow is singing (such a beautiful song, this little brown bird) the chainsaw is
screeching, the leaf blower roaring and somewhere all is quiet > quieter > quieter
where is that place?

Marian Shapiro
Lexington, Massachusetts

Angelus

In the quickening dusk of her mother's
death, the daughter deals as she can.
For years, dementia kept the old woman
from housekeeping, and her father
cooked all the meals in a frying pan.

Distracted, the daughter sees how years
of dust and cooking grease have yellowed
lace curtains embroidered with grape vines,
clouding the setting sun as the nurse doses
morphine to ease the dying woman's coughs.

She unhooks curtain rods, slides sheers
into a pile that shrouds the kitchen floor.
If nothing else, at least she can do this.
Silent, her father stares at a half empty plate
then asks her to help him into bed.

All night she washes, irons, and folds,
busy work to push the coughing out of mind.
She trashes venetian blinds beyond redemption.
She holds vigil through the dark, wiping off sills,
Windexing windows, the coughs subsiding

like a tide as she rinses her wash cloth
in the sink. The angelus of dawn birdsong
echoes through the glass as she slides the sheers
into place, brews coffee, holds her cup like
a chalice as day lights the dossal in dead quiet.

Eric Chiles
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Outgrowing the Giant in My Bedroom

When the daylight fades
& the florescent harshness
envelops you both, you see
the steady lines & try to
remember the reasons & how
you were once contented
with cold church steps
& shared cigarettes.

You remember how the heap
of clothing you slithered
out of after lunch resembled
a lost hound in a storm.
But you’re no longer
chasing rain dogs.

The narrow passageways
in your chest have gotten
tighter, leaving less room.
& when night closes in,
you find yourself
remembering how
you felt, but not feeling
how you remember
& all at once
you realize that

sometimes love is average,
a tepid beer on a worn bar top.

Layla Lenhardt
Indianapolis, Indiana

Define

Define shadow: is he a person or
a phantom of the mind? Is he alive
or is he just a dream that won't survive
if he's abandoned on a sunlit shore?
Define closet: is it a metaphor
or something more than that? Define its hive
of honeybees, its spaceships that arrive
from Mars, its looking-glass behind the door.

Define Atlantis and its mermen who
like swimming in your closet's ocean night
by night, who sometimes look like shadows in
your closet's park. Define the language you
prefer to speak. Define the life you might
have lived, define the man you haven't been.

Yakov Azriel
Erfat, Israel
transmutation (noun)
[trans-myoo-tey-shuh n, tranz-]

when you take the last trash bag
out of the trash bag box
and you put the trash bag box
into the trash bag . . .
when the thing that was the outside
becomes the thing inside
and the inside thing
becomes the outside thing . . .
when the thing that was for trash
becomes the thing that is trash . . .
this
is transmutation

Donna Meyer
Berkeley Springs, West Virginia

Headfirst

It was a dark fall, an autumn
blackened by professional and personal
debility. He watched himself consolidate
his selfishness, then retched his misery
into the filthy ditch of borrowed happiness.
O, he was sadly uncompanionable…
but this is too abstract a telling.

One day
with the weather in the 30's and the trees
waving surrender, he climbed the pitched
roof with a tub of mortar to tuck the peeling
brick, which for months had littered
the innocent shingles. Bending low, he applied
the paste of cohesion and repair until, slipping
on a leaf, he fell, headfirst, into the future.

Bill Yarrow
Lincolnwood, Illinois
Marriage, Eastbound by Rail

In a bright diner an hour before boarding, you order from a high school senior, and forgive her everything: cold pie, no refill, crusty fork. You tip her two bucks anyway, bless her long legs, and dark eyes done in raccoon modern.

Cold, in your coach seat, you dream a warmer waitress love, on the bumpy Montana ride: Whitefish, Cut Bank, Wolf Point. Morning is a red-blue big sky, a cranky fare-saver crowd, and a lone Appaloosa in stubble, grazing, butt to the tracks.

In St. Paul, you discover a stop for coffee and fuel. This time steam mists the mirror, you stir with clean stainless, as a tall gal appears, pouring at your elbow. You propose, she accepts. You honeymoon in a tiny berth heading into town.

Chicago at five on a Friday night finds the two of you, almost too sore to move. You hold each other, braving the Michigan Avenue rush. You never touch a laminated menu again.

Bruce Pemberton
Palouse, Washington
Alley Cat N Hat
J. Ray Paradiso

Photograph
THIRD WEDNESDAY POETRY FEATURE

“A special kind of beauty exists which is born in language, of language, and for language.”
— Gaston Bachelard

Our class gathered, in order to explore and stretch the boundaries of language, to play with words and forms, images and metaphors, to dig deep within for psychic ore, purging memory and pain, to craft and hone and polish, and ultimately, to share, in a common spirit of awe for the elegance of language. Our classroom quickly became refuge from the outer world, a cocoon in which to freely express, laugh, cry, and bond (indeed, lifetime friendships were formed), and I watched as this lovely group of human beings, so young, so full of promise and idealism, encouraged and pushed one another to create art. They did not disappoint. Their talent and intensity and sagacity is evident in the following poems; certainly, this is a special kind of beauty. To the editors of Third Wednesday, thank you for including our work, and supporting our efforts.

Lauren Tivey, MFA
Visiting Lecturer of English
Flagler College
St. Augustine, Florida

Space of Our Own

you’re my favorite pattern, a twinkle in time—circle the celestial sphere, dance with me across the wide.

teach me the balancing act, to twirl from each planet—with enough insignificance to leap before we comprehend what’s below.

constellations in your marrow— deliver me across mountains. rocky, rigid, and rough—you’re
the strongest lady I know. 
freedom glistens on our skin, 
blue hues sparkle with divinity.

nothing is in our way. 
circle the earth—then we’ll understand 
the great silence that swallows us whole.

comets with their speckled brilliance 
mold us together, triumphantly. 
you’re beyond me, but beside my aims.

Mercury in his magnificence scrapes by me 
as a Milky Way compass commands. 
in a scintillating stance, you lend me 
the balance to find symmetry. cracks through 
the clouds illuminate our journey. the mystery 
of your layered light taught me about mine.

Katelyn Walsh

paradise lost

narrow streetlights grasp at heaven 
while a wolf’s silent footsteps gently 
pad at cold concrete 
the hunter shines overhead 
only the hunter remains 
meanwhile 
a pod of blue dolphins surfaces for 
breath 
in a bay of rot and spoil 
a starry pink jellyfish bobs among tattered plastic bags 
floating in sewage
seas of sorry and grey foam cups
my home
my longing
a desert road winding among orange boulders
snakes illuminated by high beams
neon casino signs pierce the endless black
copied and pasted colors
push it back
call it progress
we pour our light into the void
and smile upon our dimmed creation
i miss the stars

Stephen Cripps

La Seine (sin)

I long to be La Seine, that twisting river of legend,
whose own namesake has been forgotten in her stead.
For ages, her body idealized, rolling full past cities
where men had once washed their hands in her
and there found inspiration. She takes their waste
in her stride, accepting as more of her own winding skin,
surging as they turn their faces and she purses her lips.

Hear me say her name, and thoughts rush to broad backed
current and wide mouth so soaked in mythos that she weeps
Pegaiai spring. La Seine. Breasts doused in legend that had
artists transcribing her beauty. They steep their tea
in thoughts of her laughter, bleeding from the banks of her teeth.

If Paris is an old whore, then La Seine is her lover—wrapped so
delicately around her as she rolls awake in the morning. La Seine
is the slight woman whose brow is set as she kisses you. She is
hips swelling under skirts as she sways through her home,
made of artist’s graves, cobblestone and stale coffee.

Cheyenne Koth
Not Unlike the Forest

In sleep, we travel to lands true
And of exquisite imagination.
In this instance, I am carefully
Walking through an area of purity;
Stunned by the muted green of firs.

Trudging across the leaf-covered path,
I hear their melodic crunch. I am
But one small blemish in the forest’s beauty.
Birds coast the sky
Insects scutter
And animals cry.

An inner peace finally engulfs me,
Though it is brief, as well as
For an imaginary forest.

Suzannah Sutton

When a Flower Blooms

When a flower blooms
The bees start buzzing and the trees
Begin whispering about her beauty
The streams stop flowing just long enough
For the fish to start dancing
As they listen to her heartbeat grow.
When a flower blooms
The entire forest around her lights up within
From the thousands of fireflies
Mesmerized by her graceful existence.
When a flower blooms
She brings life to everything around her,
But when a flower dies
The skies above her turn darker
Than the smoke from a wildfire
The stars don’t shine as bright
And the forest becomes so silent
That the only thing audible is the sound
Of her petals hitting the forest floor.
Life stops existing for what feels like forever
And what occupies that space is an eternal mourning.
But when a flower dies another must grow in her place
And like the stages in the water cycle,
It begins again.

Lauren Ward

Opalescent

Green is the color inside of me when I think of you--
but green is an understatement since it feels more like blue.
Your deep water love drowns me in sorrow,
a feeling I’ll need moving on to tomorrow.
A future alone would consist of pinks and yellows
but how boring a thought, so simple and mellow.
My life needs a balance of purples and whites,
because these colors could change my world to bright
But a life without blue--though sad, it is true,
one thing would be missing, so I’ll stick with you.

Emily Bloom
Things I Want on a Sunday Morning

To wake up feeling one hundred tiny kisses covering my face like a blanket of your love. For you to make me feel bad for stealing all of the covers, apologizing when you actually make me feel bad. To spend an hour trying to get out of bed, because every time I try to get up you grab my waist and pull me back in. For you to make us coffee while I make us breakfast—eggs, scrambled. For us to accidentally burn the bacon, because we were too busy making out on the counter. To sit in our underwear, eating breakfast on the porch. To splash you with water while doing the dishes. For you to chase me around the couch, and then kiss my knee when I slip and fall (you always told me it was a bad idea to run around in my socks). To crawl back into bed and read you to sleep. To see how many chapters I can read before you wake up. I want to make movies and fill up journals of our adventures, but today, I want our time to be filled with meaningless acts of love.

Alexandria Garrett

nature v. nurture

what if a man eating my genes / finds out i had sewn together / the hole years ago? / i’m tired of walking / through the garden of eden / believing i was born / from a ribcage to bear fruit. / i am an eternal famine, / letting the world / starve for seeds / i refuse to cultivate. / before they can / destroy my entrails, / i will cook my / unfertilized eggs. / poached. / boiled. / scrambled. / season them with saffron / and force men to spend / hundreds to taste my delicacy. / my body is a five-star restaurant / and i will toss my / unwanted leftovers / to
begging women. / when the doctor cuts me open, / i hope monarch butterflies
flutter out / and nature cries two million tears. / if i feel moths rub / against
my gut for one more month, / i’m going to slice my stomach open / with a coat
hanger / and rip each of their wings off. / one by one. / i never asked for my
body / to be the oasis for bugs to grow. / the birds and / the bees and the but-
terflies / are not welcome / in my makeshift temple. / do not walk through my
nursery / and expect to find / new life. //

Phaedra DeJ amette

why I wander

small towns breed ignorance,
taking solemn solace in silence.
the brokenhearted songbirds open
their mouths and for miles we hear lies.
fickle storytellers hold back tears,
while wives shiver in blackened skin.

anchored voices fall, pushed from arms
that promised to embrace them.
young and numb, I mimic the
chaos behind my father’s eyes.
he lives in monotony, where hope
withers in fear of the seasons.
and so do I.

small towns breed loneliness,
in echoes and tireless voices.
the deer revels in his space
amongst the trees who protect him.
at daybreak wolves snatch him,
worn and wavering in madness.

hazy and quiet, I follow my mother’s
scent, worn and raised in drudgery.
she dies in selfless self-destruction,
but speaks only in niceties like I do.
no longer lingering in homemade
walls, I wander in pursuit of new mind.

Marissa Hanson

License to Kill

I lied when I said I loved him less
Gave him a license to hurt me
Begged him to use it against me
Undeserving of his love, I wanted him to use it
Wanted him to cut me down
To give me what I felt I deserved
Now I have bullet wounds
Shot through the heart
In the throat
In the head
He came for my existence
Wanting to rid his world of my presence
I let him do it while I sat in silence
Undeserving of his love, I wanted him to use it
Break my ankles
Bring me down to my knees
I hurt him so now I need to bleed
I left him but now he’s leaving me
Beaten and broken
That’s how I should be
I gave him a license to kill
And still he uses it
Over and over to hurt me

Imani Forester
Sleepy Me
Ann Privateer
Photograph
Southern Live Oak

Sunlight streams
down the bark,
embroiders crevices
on limbs with radiant
swirls and ridges.

Once I sat under
the embrace of such
a tree where branches
reached to the ground
and shaped a low arch.

I found passage there,
and calm, listening
to the hum of traffic
so far removed from
the gold sown about me.

Stella Nesanovich
Lake Charles, Louisiana

In this part of Kansas

so much is flat—prairie giving way to plains—roads rolled level—even
colors pressed to monochrome—flat as the planes of my father’s face
known only to me in photograph. Sorghum and wheat
laid patchwork—acre after acre—hemmed by dusty bales of grain.
Is it any wonder then we stare so long at sky? Clouds like peaks
of mountain ridge; clouds like crests of wave.

Terry Bodine
Lynchburg, Virginia
This Day

Curtains parted,
face to the glass,
I watch pale beads
strung on a wire fence,
dark pennies dancing
on the wet sidewalk.
Branches hold tight,
but here and there leaves
startle and drip. Rain
rinses the street,
weaving light and tree
scent, calling catch me
if you can, touch me
with your tongue. A sparkle
of songs and memories,
a shiver of delight. This day
there is no old.

Carol Deering
Riverton, Wyoming

Cedar, Michigan

My mother cooks from the couch
on a propane stove. Before she taught me

how to sculpt the beef, her belly
spilled over her waistband like dough.

I learned to perfectly season
each patty. Her arms
That Winter in the Desert

I had a bed in a room with a glass door I rolled back to go out and look at the stars. They were cold and large, the stars, clinging to black as if they knew their places: the big dipper upside down over the roof, Orion over the silhouettes of palm trees, Cassiopeia in the north, her skirts washed out by the faint glow of Tucson. I’d go back in, sliding the door

began to sag then. Years later she can’t get off the couch

without me around. She says she needs my shoulders. She lifts with a falcon clench.

She tells me when she’s dead, she’ll need me to bear her weight.

But I have loose hands, and thin calves. I’m not good.

I tell myself, when her grip goes slack at last, I’ll head out to the ice cream shop. I won’t take any napkins. I’ll sit near the lake and toss bits of cone to ducks. I’ll whistle a tune that only the water will hear.

Brian Czyzyk
Cedar, Michigan
shut on the cold and sparkle,
then into bed again, my familiar quilts,
my dog, my book. It was more warmth
and beauty than I deserved, more wealth.
When daylight arrived with its generous colors,
I walked down to the arroyo and entered there,
got to know which bird was talking to me,
maybe the cardinal clicking in the cholla,
maybe the curved bill thrasher’s high note,
or a hummer buzzing in the mesquite,
and sometimes, with luck, the gray hawk
making its noiseless exit from a branch,
opening its wings for a long glide, unflapping,
leaving me looking up, showing me what I never
did master: a swift straight line, meteor-like,
when you know exactly where you are going.

Marjorie Saiser
Green Valley, Arizona

School Bus Blues—The Good Morning Route

Obelisks of the morning, almost
apparitional in the red flashing lights,
slumped beneath packed burdens,
doors swooshing open
and shut behind them.

*Hello...good morning...how ya doin’?*

I listen closely
for the response that seldom comes.
Pedal hits the floor and
our great yellow ship roars into the blue-black morning,
dawning gray now, behind us.

White beard-stubble fields
trim narrow county roads.
In the mirror our eyes meet.
Not friendly. Not aggressive.
Passionless—
wired, stocking-hat heads bouncing
to the rhythms of cracked heaving pavement.

I look away
and the high school appears,
there, on the left,
population 2500 give or take,
melting pot for the region.

The doors open:
*Bye now, see ya later, have a good day…*

I cannot help but say it
and cannot help but wait,
patiently,
like a hunter tracking his prey,
alert for the raised chin,
captured eye,
in the mirror’s scope.

I shut the doors
and in silence idle above
the extravagant sidewalks below,
the lavish gestures
and incomprehensible scripts
   I, too, once scribbled
   I, too, once scribbled

Robert Nordstrom
Mukwonago, Wisconsin
Looking down from high places don’t bother me at all but when I have to look up at things like buildings it makes me nervous cause it feels like some kind of force like a magnet or something is going to pull me up and lift me off the ground which is a lot worse than falling ‘cause if you’re falling down you know you’re falling and that’s that but if you get pulled off the ground and lifted into the air you’re not falling but you could fall at any moment and there’s no end because if you fall you have to land but if you’re lifted up it could go on forever and I hate that.

Gravity Grateful
Mark Blickley and Robert Funaro (photographer)
Text-based art collaboration
Litterisms

The grass beside the sidewalk
is brought to you by Budweiser
Marlboro Lights
are the official cigarette of 4-way stops
Shopping center parking spaces
are sponsored by McDonald’s
Secluded country lane pull-offs
endorse Trojan

Litter is more effective than billboards
when we take in nature
and our subconscious recognizes that
the red outlier it has accepted
as part of the scenery is missing
and reacts with the sensation of thirst
and a flicker of an image of
enjoy Coke

Marcus Benjamin Ray Bradley
Versailles, Kentucky

Sliding on the ice, Iowa City 1995

In the moment of the slide, stomach lifting as the car
Skews, slow somehow at 45 mph, gently veering
To one shoulder and then the other, weaving
In and out of the oncoming traffic under Iowan
January sun in a sky the color of kindergarten finger paint,
The color of birthday icing
My hands spin the wheel clockwise and counter
just for the gesture, though in truth
Traction and torque and acceleration all seem elements
Of driving beyond the control of the driver, and a deep calm settles
In on top of my heart rate, my breathing
—a calm
Like honeyed time, slow and amber and thick,
Where (with the rumble strip
Beating a short tattoo, the rear end fishtailing
Gracefully across the ice) the radio waves
Are still coming clear through the cold air, the radio reading
By the magic of antenna and receiver and amplifier
The steady voices of NPR hosts( like the surf, eternal, unchanging)
telling the story of a country music singer’s recovery
From drug addiction, the perils of too much too fast
Crackling in somber tones through the tiny grilles
Of the tiny speakers in my car doors, and I can see
Cars slowing ahead and in the mirrors behind,
Sliding to a halt to give me room, and in this bubble
Of space to flail, while the car comes straight in what I think
Is the lane, the right lane, the place I’m supposed to be traveling,
I can look out and ahead to a small figure on the roadside in a pink
Snow suit, watching with care the little waltz, the ordered, slow chaos
Of accidents near, collisions averted.

Chris Harris
Madison, Ohio

Doubt

The snow has fallen all day,
flakes like leaves drifting,
burying every scrap and hole.
Found one of the old hens
frozen in the hay chute, brushed the snow
off the square boulder by the stream
and laid her there, offered to the sky,
the black scavengers that will land
when I walk back up the hill.
I will show my children,
when they come to dinner today,
what carried me over the hill of fifty
when I was so tired with all my doubt;
this morning twins, two new apple faces
in the corner of the ewes’ stall
peering through the crowd of legs.

Mark Burke
Everette, Washington

Ice Storm

Here on the couch with my old dog I find
I'm feeling gratitude, an odd gratitude,
an old gratitude, one I thought had gone

for good down a long back road
that led away from the years when
when I felt glad, felt what I believed

was an abiding gratitude: to be,
to be warm, and grateful to be
warm, to have some pillows

and a dozen books and all afternoon.
To be alone without even a sideswipe
of loneliness. To be on page 47,
or 114, or page one and there
was nothing missing. The ice
storm made things warm,
time irrelevant, made the sleeping
dog an Amen to a prayer never
needling to be said.

Jack Ridl
Douglas, Michigan
Return

The ones who return
don’t speak much of
their latest deployment in the desert.
And when it comes to guys they saw die,
that’s more reason for muteness,
even when there’s a scruffy piece of paper
they always carry in their pocket
with a number to call.

And when they get together
with others who served,
they speak of a time
when they were kids,
the fishing, the ballgames,
the everything but.

If the subject does come up,
it leads to a hush,
so long, so intense,
you can hear every clock,
even the watches, tick.
Measured this way,
silence takes on an importance
it doesn’t deserve.

Dreams are another story,
maybe the only one
in which they’re honest with themselves.
In bed with their wives, their husbands,
they fall asleep
in what was once darkness
but is now the absence of so much.

The subconscious wakes them.
It can squeeze tears from stone,
turn flesh and bones
to mud and shattered metal.
Come morning,
it’s as if they haven’t slept.
Come morning,
they make more plans
to forever hold their tongue.

John Grey
Johnston, Rhode Island

The Living Daylights

The mother’s hands, so like the daughter’s—
bony fingers, lethal knuckles, hardened grip—
plunge, scrub, and wring blood
from the bleach-soaked sheet.

All the girl understands
is that the cradle will stand empty,
that somehow
this emptiness will be her undoing.

She crashes through banana leaves,
beogs in damp begonias, ignites
the flap and squawk of roused chickens.
The mother in close pursuit
corners her in the washhouse.

The girl’s hands fail to shield
her bare skin above pants-hobbled ankles
from the two-handed, whip-like sting of yardstick
and bitter words from a face she barely recognizes
but loves all the same because—
because afterwards the mother sobs, 
leans red-faced and spent against the washer’s thump, 
blood-stained sheet bleached of her failure. 
The crying girl hobbles to her. 
Where else should she go?

Burky Achilles
Woodburn, Oregon

Otology

The drive is easy early in the day—
ten minutes tops—ten more to park. I walk 
into the building, find the office well 
before eight-thirty. The reception room 
is far from full. I choose an empty chair, 
fill out too many forms, and wait—all set. 

A nurse soon guides me back to where I set 
aside belongings. Vital signs today 
are excellent. Moved to another chair, 
I answer questions, see the doctor walk 
up, down the hall. He comes into the room, 
asks how I am. I simply say, “Unwell.”

“And why is that?” he counters, then bids, “Well, 
let’s take a look.” I hesitantly set 
myself upon a cushioned slab. The room 
becomes a torture chamber. “Oh, Monday, 
Monday, so good to me,” I mutely walk 
through lyrics till I get back to a chair. 

Next I am moved to yet another chair 
inside a lab designed to test how well 
I hear. The nurse and the computer walk
me through procedure. Earplugs in, headset
and collar on, I click a pen all day
or so it seems—tone / pulse—in that strange room.

At last the nurse comes back into the room,
adjusts something. I must stay in the chair,
touch squares within a grid to show “birthday”
is not “rainbow,” “football” is not “inkwell,”
“toothbrush” is not “mousetrap.” The sound is set
too low: “padlock”? “horseshoe”? maybe “sidewalk”?

The test advances. Rhymes are a cakewalk
compared to spondees. Yes, I own the room
throughout this section. Volume has been set
so I can choose one out of four. The chair
feels almost comfortable as I do well.
Perhaps I might survive this endless day.

Back in the other room, I take a chair,
hear wins have offset losses, say farewell,
rise and walk out into the still-young day.

Jane Blanchard
Augusta, Georgia

Signs

walking to the store from the far end
of the Kroger parking lot

I watched a child skip into the store
beside her mother and thought

I’m no longer young
which was immediately followed by
never will be again which led
inevitably to wondering if I ever was

when I saw an old man
definitely older than me

walking slowly out of the store
pushing a shopping cart

but as soon as he hit
the down-sloping parking lot

he hopped up onto the rail
of the bottom rack of the cart

rode it past a long row of parked cars
gathering speed with each one

and stopped with a graceful
dismount by his own vehicle

doffed his hat and bowed
to the elderly lady

who limped out of it
applauding and then

helped him with the bags
after which he promptly

skate-boarded the cart
back into the store

walking out a few seconds later
humble as Superman

when he’s changed back
to Clark Kent
and I thought to myself
how we sometimes get

significant signs
that seem to confirm

that what we were thinking
at that very moment

was just right and sometimes
that it was dead wrong

and I knew in that moment
which sign it was

Laszlo Slomovits
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Growing Old Without A Face

It's strange how
your face
seems to replace mine
as years go on.
I catching a glimpse
of your eyes as
they look into mine
when I look
into a mirror.
I find it odd
when I hear you
when I open
my mouth to speak.

Jamie Simmons
Sanford, North Carolina
My Nephew Looks Like Kim Jong-un

My nephew looks like Kim Jong-un—
pudgy cheeks, narrow mouth, full lips.  
The resemblance makes me love that dictator  
just a little. His photos make me miss my nephew.

Oh, Christopher, how sweet you were  
as a 10-year-old who climbed into my bed  
at Green Pond that summer when  
some kid called you a sumo wrestler.

You were already getting soft and round  
and, till then you loved to swim. I ran to save you  
when you hid your head behind an inner tube.  
I thought you’d drowned.

I lost you later to video games and adolescence  
and never got you back. Except that one time  
I gave you a joke book for grownups at Christmas  
and made you laugh.

When I see photos of Kim Jong-un laughing,  
I feel a flash of hope. When he’s mocked,  
I want to take him in my arms and tell him  
it will all get better some day.

I wish his sister had adopted a blond boy  
with blue eyes and an O-shaped mouth.  
He might see Trump in that little boy’s face  
and the world might not blow up.

Margaret DeRitter  
Kalamazoo, Michigan
Reflections On The Future
(Contest Honorable Mention)

meetings done
three friends
in silence at low tide
miss the night bird
its white bundle
scattered across the shore

Judith Chalmer
Burlington, Vermont

We Shall All Be Changed
(Contest Honorable Mention)

I could not sleep for thinking of the dump
that lies a healthy distance out of town,
where rubbish gets compacted in a lump
in hope that passing years will break it down;
where things that rot, and things that cannot rot,
and other things which always have been rotten
are churned, and dirt is dumped upon the lot,
and every bag is buried and forgotten;
I could not sleep for thinking of the place
where people slumber after earthly toil
who laughed and lived, were happy for a space,
and died, and lie beneath uncaring soil;
I could not sleep for thinking of the day
when I myself am landfill in the clay.

Marmanel Thuman
Salford, Lancashire United Kingdom
Las Vegas, October 2017

an electric guitar string
rolls beneath a finger
pulled tight
vibrates on its soundboard
quakes hot night air
reverberating
off walls and buildings
a whine of hot sound
plaintive exclamation
that builds to crescendo
broken by snare drum blasts
rapid-fire confusion
firecrackers sputter and spit
we scatter and run
fleeing hot rounds
that zing off asphalt
ricochet off cement
surrounded now
by shattered glass
crushed cell phones
we run from
fear and what pierces
our softness
we are fish in a barrel
and we scream Do Something
while in Washington
the cherry blossoms
drift gently from the trees

Lynn DeTurk
La Quinta, California

At the Red Light

Let’s get the obvious out of the way: did I
leave the iron on, did I pack all my meds,
lock the door, go to the bathroom often enough
for a five-hour drive, will this belt cut into my waist,  
are my side-mirrors adjusted for blind spots,  
did I pay the electric bill, will my clothes wrinkle

the way I’ve got them hanging in the backseat,  
did I bring that CD I wanted to listen to, what’s that
miss I feel in the engine, what’s the temp outside,

what’s the temp where I’m headed, will it snow,  
or rain, do I have an umbrella in the car,  
will I need to buy one there, I hate it when my hair

gets too wet, falls to the side in the back  
and shows my little growing bald spot,  
will I fall asleep at the wheel, will I get a flat,

am I hydrated enough, was I always bad at math  
or did I learn to hate it, am I alcoholic,  
was I concussed that time I got hit so hard

on the field, is that man behind me giving me  
the eye, why does spaghetti give me heartburn,  
will there be a little light within the grave?

Larry Thacker
Johnson City, Tennessee

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Surfing

I have never paddled out  
into the blue-green brine,  
ever huddled over a floating

slab of fiberglass and foam,  
ever placed my naked middle  
against the board’s waxed torso,
flat and hot as a buttered griddle, or tried to rise and plant my feet above the undulating surface of the sea. Those waters cast no spell on me, even on days when the sun burns like a wide-open window, and the gulls wheel and turn, yearning and reeling, against the pull of that distant cloudless ceiling. But on some summer mornings, as my four-door hurtles down Third toward my day’s work, I imagine that the city’s rhythmic din is just the dim roar of another ocean, and the blue-green of the traffic lights is a wave that’s lifting, and I strive to ride it well, shifting my weight, waiting, willing my board to carry me as far as it can, over the salt and the spume, as the cars call out to one another like seabirds, sounding their clear, wild voices beneath the boundless sky.

Joel Showalter
Columbus, Ohio
Visual Haiku: Shadows III (Visual Poem #57)
Roland Buckingham-Hsiao
Photographs (Holga camera)
I Knew A World Once Deeply In Its Wounds

A candle, a sail, a vigil,
I kept the hours gently and well.
Honey bees festooned the breeze
and I was the strength and faith of days.
Then one morning, I blindly waved a wand
of dandelion seeds. They tumbled down a wind,
drunken, each suddenly lost, alone,
and time awoke, wound up the sun.
The air gasped like a smothered candle.
Treetops grasped at fleeing angels.
Something came accusing the rose,
and the afternoon sighed with butterflies.
I plunged deep in the trees and gardens
and pulled out webs and roots of wounds.
Everything bled tears or dreams or words,
and the cricket’s call shivered through the stars.
I followed a child’s cry and found it was my own.
Still, I remember how that final sparrow
sank deep within November winds
with the purity of broken wings.

Sean Lause
Bluffton, Ohio

There are an Endless Number of Words for Loss
(Aquila Constellation – Thunderbolt Eagle)

because it’s woven
into everything.
I’ve seen it balanced
on the celestial equator
like a ballerina,
brITTLE bones atop
an electric collection
of stardust.
So I named my apartment
Grief, Loss’s temporary
placeholder.
I’ll call it Loss
when the leaves of Eden
stop falling at my feet
and thunder
no longer threatens
sunshine. When I can foresee
an absence of absence.
Days lurch
like tightened brakes
as I sail in the halting,
strike glass as birds
collide with crystalline
windows. The windshields
of my eyelids
covet soft mercy.

Amy Strauss Friedman
Denver, Colorado

Dorbel
dorbel—dull-witted pedant

When the dorbel rings
the dunce enters
When the dunce enters
the musicians gather
commence opening cases
assembling tuning
And then the dunce
climbs upon a podium
and waving arms
The dunce ascends
dorbelish dorbellical
dance of the dunce
deep in the dirge of the day
I tell you this I
saw these things
Ascending dunce
Music of tuning wires
and hot air Drops
of spit cooling
on the floor

Charles Wyatt
Nashville, Tennessee
Montana Condolences, Of a Kind

Visit the neighbor next farm over,  
three silos, combines, a section  
of wheat. His wife dying,  
lung cancer, give her eight weeks.  

I hang my head, shuffle,  
see mud, clumped thick, both feet.  

Only know to say, *yep, well,  
hellofa winter, heard futures  
might be headed up*.* Whiskey  
at home if you need a drink.*

Timothy Pilgrim  
Bellingham, Washington

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Lost

We never made it to the bed,  
all those hotel rooms we booked  
for single nights,  
sometimes only evenings,  
even a lunch or two.  

Maybe that's where we went wrong;  
in our eagerness to have skin  
against skin,  
we never once lay together, silently  
looking at a strange ceiling,  
feeling the presence of the other
simply there,
our calm breaths the only sound.

Maybe if we had found time
simply to be
we might have lasted,
we might have realized we loved each other
and left our respective spouses,
embarking upon a life together
that could have lasted
as close to forever
as it is possible to be.

Edward Lee
Coill Fada, Ireland

Jean, fifth grade

was a practical girl
with a bony nose
skinny as a straw, gap in her teeth
dusky brown skin.

Chinese, somebody said.
Mexican, somebody else.
Never asked, now I wonder.
I was a practical boy.

She wore dull clothes
but she was bright,
smart as my dog, maybe smarter
always danced in bare feet.

Those days, maybe still, boys lined
one side, girls the other.
I’d head straight to Jean, offer my hand because we danced good together.

Black hair bunched in a rubber band, no bow or ribbon except her smile. Girls teased, Jean scowled but always took my hand.

Nothing planned, it just happened. Dancing we hardly talked, I was shy. Without music we stayed apart.

Sixth grade she was gone. You don’t know you’re in love first time until you do.

Joe Cottonwood
La Honda, California

When She Found Me on Facebook

my old girlfriend from junior high looked fifty years older but I could still see the girl

inside her face, though I could not smell her Shalimar or touch the cashmere of her pullover or her breasts

budding in the dark of the Mercury Theatre
that Saturday matinee
when we kept kissing.

I tasted the tight swirl
on the corner of her lip
sweet as a jujube
where a pet monkey had bitten her.

An usher tapped my shoulder
with his long flashlight and said
“This is not a motel.” We tried to watch
James Bond in You Only Live Twice.

William Palmer
Traverse City, Michigan

Stuck Inside

No point trying to get out for my bones won't let me.
Nor will my flesh despite all those inviting pores.
Can't force my way. Can't think my way.
Even the process of opening my mouth
merely locks me in that much more securely.
And you - you're one more jailer.
You love me which pretty much
seals me inside what I come with.

Yes. that daily recognition is the real killer.
Not just you. Even strangers.
A nod in my direction is one more bolt being slid.
I'm stuck inside my body, my name, my situation.

It's a bizarre and intractable business.
All I know is that I'd better like it here.

John Grey
Johnston, Rhode Island
Desire

Emily stands surrounded by glitter, typical temptations, silk fabric, color threads, rhinestones, beads, and she wants none of them today. She considers some hand soap enticingly called "unicorn tears." Even that leaves her cold. She doesn't even want to dance tonight. Is this enlightenment? she wonders. If so, she doesn't want it. All she wants is her desire back—that slick hum of yearning.

Beate SigríðdáUGHTER
Silver City, New Mexico

Autumn 2017

There’s coffee and pie with a widow from church. Why do you sit in the back pew? she asks. I’m close enough, I say. Can I sit back there with you? I’ve always sat there, I tell her, with my same two friends, and their clicking oxygen pumps. One sat next to me for years, called herself my church girlfriend, who metastasized, telling me she was tired of waiting to die. Now, there’s just my 88-year-old friend, his pump echoing in the sanctuary,
and there’s that empty
space between us.
I’d like to invite the widow to sit there,
but I miss my dead friend’s laugh,
her loving stories about her husband,
and how we were always
glad to see one another.
I tell the widow all this.
What if I just sat there? she asks.
It’s a free country, I tell her,
and she smiles.

Bruce Pemberton
Palouse, Washington

Sheltered

Knuckles gnarled, she twists the dishrag snatched quick
from the sink, a signal flag flapped in the rising wind—

Eyes shuttered in the dank, ears pricked to the cyclone’s
whistled whine

while damp shirts and bed sheets
strip clean off the line—

She imagines for the first time in fifty years
what it might feel like to fly—

Terry Bodine
Lynchburg, Virginia
From Certain Distances in Space I Still See My Brother

Somewhere mother holds you against her breasts in a Chicago flat
-- the war winding down --
while she warms a bottle and tests the milk on the tender of her wrist;
“you are my sunshine,” she sings.

Somewhere you sit in a quilted coat
upon a tricycle in front of a red house,
and later still your fast ball hisses over
home plate into the strike zone.

Somewhere a man says we all derive from stars,
while a holy person declares we will live forever.

You still succor your fractious babies as you pace a midnight floor.

Only just now a distant planet watches you bend to help a student
or soften your embrace to your wife in the utter dark.

Somehow you glide out of a fifth floor hospital room into a painted twilight;
into streams of cars and trucks and exhaust
as your family holds your emancipated body and rides with you to the edge of life
and somewhere a medical student
peels back what remains of you
to learn the human clockwork

Gary Beaumier
Grafton, Wisconsin

5 pm, Closing Up

Taking the trash out back and seeing,
through the parking lot’s mangy trees,
calm blue fire in the eastern sky:
scatter my ashes anywhere

Michael Jones
Oakland, California
You say there is no better wood than walnut for making violins, and with an iron you bend the ribs for the C bouts and clamp them down. Your powdery hands attach the ribbing, remove the mold. Then we enter the wood room, the simplicity of the shelves, and decide on fragrant spruce, maple for the scroll. Back at your table, you arch the raw materials into shape, cut a channel along the perimeter at the top of what will be my own instrument. You position the purfling, smooth the shape of the body, add a base bar when completion is two breaths away. Carefully, you size the delicate scroll, carve the shape. Now the ebony fingerboard is ready to be shaved, attached, but the glue and clamps delay the swiftly forming music that has already started galloping between my arms.

Maureen Daniels
Lincoln, Nebraska
The Trail Runner

She ran past him
on the steep lower section
of the Evergreen Trail,
all lithe and limber,
climbing without effort,
each foot placement perfect.
For a moment she seemed
like something not human,
almost a creature of the forest.
After she had passed,
he imagined her beautiful,
although he could not say
with any certainty;
for nothing compared
to the beauty of her passing.

Jude Dippold
Concrete, Washington

Epitaph for the Golden Age

So rivers burned, and lungs were full of filth,
but car doors then had so much steel, they slammed
their own applause, and every bottle was glass,
handy for brawls. That thickness: as real as all
we lost, and damned if it didn’t feel like health.

Michael Jones
Oakland, California
Prayer for Motel 6, Los Angeles  
(Contest Honorable Mention)

Bless the motel my abuelos turned country; the homeless  
they turned homeland. Bless abuelo’s unwilted smile, the irises

abuela picked to ornament beige curtains. Bless the threadbare sofa,  
television of telenovela & static. Bless the wheezing engine

of their AC unit, how it’s awful song means shelter, survival; but  
bless, too, their refusal to call this rescued. Abuelo says we are more

than the violence given to us by history. We are no stray dogs  
in stormy weather. we are storm; ocean come to reclaim the coast.

The refuge they cut into the side of the 405 freeway is a revolution  
of asphalt, knees skinned by prayer. They are quick to tell me

the revolving sheets & steady electricity were hard won. A full cabinet means  
a full stomach. it’s a small detail, mijo, but when you’re hungry,

stainless steel pots are as valuable as gold. So bless the absence  
of slack in their belts, the coffee boiling over & abuela’s lust

for its bitter soil. Americano wrecked her bones but try to take it from her  
& lose a hand. Her Spanish curses are sharp cuchillos; though, so too

is her laughter; it splits the ceiling open, reinvents heaven as somewhere  
her grandchildren can visit. Every weekend, I stand at her feet & marvel

at how much light lives in this one room. Bless this kingdom  
of motor & roof, how my abuelos hold all the keys.

Brandon Melendez
Cambridge, Massachusetts
The Walker
Denny Marshall
Drawing
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.
**My Spirit**  
by Jeremiah Porter (6th grade)

I am a spirit that can never be solved.  
I am a planet that will never revolve.  
I am a chemical that scientists can't ever dissolve.

I am a spirit that you can't seek.  
I am 10 and 0 looking to keep this winning streak.  
I am on top never at the bottom.

I am in the spot trying to get hot  
so when you hear this you'll want to stop.  
I am making fish that eat dinosaurs.  
Why you think I write about metaphors.

I am faithful, grateful, shining like a maple.  
I am serious, not curious, you're just too dumb  
to see what I'm made of. I'm furious.

***

**My Song**  
by Jeremiah Porter (6th grade)

My song is like a nightmare I love  
or the moon that doesn't move.

I sing like the stars shining light  
or maybe my song is like a shark.

When you hear my song  
your heart stops beating.

Or maybe you fall  
into a deep sleep.

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Silence
by Paul Sims (8th grade)

Silent like an empty room
waiting to be filled.

Silent like a tire with no air.
Silent like a rock.

Silent like a car not in motion.
Silent like a boy asleep, dreaming about
his favorite book.

Soul
by Teanna Evans (6th grade)

I think the soul is my heart
or even my veins
or maybe my flexibility.
I wonder does the earth have a soul?
Do cities have a soul? Or maybe
a soul is something I can
hear or smell or see.
Maybe it's my dream or maybe
a melody going through me or
maybe God lifting me up.
Will I ever see it? Or my joy inside
trying to rise? Or maybe
the air I breathe from the trees.
Or maybe the song that I sing.
The Greatest Poem Ever
by Orissa Williams-Bey (7th grade)

What if winter was not snow?
What if snow was a poem
made of tiny angels?
Tiny angels that form snowflakes
that form snow.
Poems are magic that can make
snow warm.
What if pencil shavings form words
on their own that creates poems?
What if snowflakes were tiny white letters?
If snowflakes are letters then winter
is one big poem.
Poems themselves are not written by snow,
or angels, or magic, or words.
Poems are made by no one.

My Name Was Once a Pig
by Da’Vaiona Smith (5th grade)

My name was once a pig
rolling in the mud.

At night my name dreams
of the world's biggest mud puddle.

Sometimes my name animal
likes to sing in the sun.

My name can cuddle with her mom.
She always plays with other pigs in the mud.
The Greatest Poem Ever
by Simaree Edwards (7th grade)

What if words
could describe the beauty of
a poem? What if
the music to my ear
could describe it
or the beautiful snow
we see outside?

Words can't
describe all the
beauty in us.
Words can't
describe the
beauty that a poem
shows to us.
Through the Eye of the Feather
by Shardavia Owens (7th grade)

I can see the sky turning dark blue.
I can hear a little girl crying for her mother.

When the feather speaks
it says help the little girl.
The feather knows the little girl needs help.

When the feather dreams it likes to save the girl.
The feather goes to find her.

The feather sings, Come home.
Your parents miss you.
Your little sister is crying.
They are wishing she will come home
for them to see her one
more time.
Snow in the Chair
Rana Williams
Photograph
3rd
Wednesday