3rd Wednesday
Volume XIII, No. 1

Winter 2020
Third Wednesday Magazine
Volume XIII, Number 1
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Third Wednesday is a quarterly journal of literary and visual arts published by Gravity Presses (lest we float away) Inc. Though we manage the magazine from Michigan, we welcome submissions from all over the world. Digital issues of the magazines are completely free to anyone and print issues can be purchased at Amazon.com.

Find us on the web at thirdwednesdaymagazine.org. There you will find the links to our Submittable account where you can submit your work, download digital issues, purchase back issues via credit card or Pay Pal and read many of the fine poems we have published in the past. You can also find and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr.

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Cover Art:

Our cover is by John P. Loree whose skills with line drawing and shape have appeared as black and white drawings in our pages. Another of them appears in this issue. This cover features his talent as a water colorist. John passed away at his Ypsilanti Michigan, home in September.

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Editor’s Note for Winter, 2020

With this, the first issue of Volume XIII, we mark some significant changes with Third Wednesday. You’ll notice right away that the magazine is in a different format, 6 X 9 inches, referred to in publishing as a “trade paperback”. This represents our move to a publish on demand model, which means that print issues of Third Wednesday will be available through Amazon at a substantially reduced price.

Our goal is to increase overall readership, putting more eyes on the work of our contributing writers and artists. Consistent with that goal, we’re announcing that the digital edition of the magazine can now be read and downloaded for free through our website at thirdwednesdaymagazine.org. This doesn’t mean we’re an online magazine. We intend that we will always be a print magazine and contributors will continue to receive print copies from us though the mail.

In this issue you’ll find winning poems and poems of merit from our 4th One Sentence Poetry Contest. This contest has proven to be a popular one, but even more popular, our annual poetry contest opened for entries on November 15th and will remain so until February 15th. We’re happy to announce that our judge this year is Marilyn Taylor, a long-time associate editor at 3W, who is a former poet laureate of The State of Wisconsin.

Our thanks go out to all of the contributors and readers who are now sharing our 13th year of publication.

David Jibson, Co-editor
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Edinburgh / Tiffany Babb

In the fruit cart,
an unexpected gift,
peaches in late December.

This trip has been plagued
with nausea left over
from the long flight.

Still, I pick three pieces of fruit,
let them drop
against the container
of shortbread
at the bottom of my bag,
the promises of a picnic.

On Calton Hill, I sit alone
among half-built monuments.

The sun rises, melting frost into dew,
and I bite into a peach,
a million miles from home.

Tiffany Babb
New York, New York
I feel naked / Eric Blanchard

sitting at Starbucks alone
with my lost thoughts
down around my ankles,

and my dangling
participles, my split
infinitives, and every Oxford
comma twerking away
in my margins
to the dystopian rhythm
of a missing meter.

I've got absolutely nothing on,
save this run-on
composition

pretending to be
a stream of streaming consciousness,
set free from free association,

or a meditation on
virtues and vices—
a series of self-righteous,
random, rambling rants,

mere diatribe and gibberish—
more drivel—than
mental gymnastics.

Eric Blanchard
Houston, Texas
There Is Fire / Eric Blanchard

When the world around us
is exploding

with disbelief
and willful ignorance

while the truth
is on TV

for all the world to see,
smoke rises.

Smoke rises
from the classrooms—

our social media
experts.

Smoke rises
from sidewalk cafés

and picket lines,
engulfs a righteous nation.

Smoke lingers
until there is blood

in the streets.

And, as we know,

where there is smoke…

Eric Blanchard
Houston, Texas
My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy in Bristol / SEIGAR

SEIGAR
Provincia Santa Cruz
Tenerife
I see the waitress cock her head to try to figure out what I just said. Across the booth my husband will not meet my eye until she leaves to place our order. Sauce for goose and gander holds that I will get a turn to laugh (or not) at him. Neither of us can hide where we are from. I let him think his accent less than mine—either of us can drawl a syllable into a sentence. Fine. Most locals here speak plain Midwestern as they welcome others who seek remedies for matters inhumane. How I may talk does not mean one iota when visiting Rochester, Minnesota.

Jane Blanchard
Augusta, Georgia
The last night in freight sleds, under bison robes and straw a weary soldier says he’ll sleep a month when he gets home. A distant wolf howl fades against rhythmic harness chimes. A lantern glints from tall black trees aligned along the banks winding upstream toward a meadow blossoming in stars.

Enlistments up in April, 309 remnants of a regiment will be relieved of dust-mouth marches, broken sleep on open ground beans and hardtack sitting on a rock, constant odors within ranks: boot sweat, tobacco spit, horse lather, drying blood, infected flesh, trench latrines, swelling dead between the lines.

Fear pulses through the moments after cannon thunder when a thousand canteens clank and rushing footfalls thud when a companion torn apart in roaring chaos gasps farewell when wounded souls abandoned in the dark cry for water when sentries shout at shadows stepping into moonlight.

The First Minnesota fought across Maryland and Virginia but the worst was up in Gettysburg; 262 farmers, fishermen lumberjacks, blacksmiths, store clerks made a desperate run in close formation toward a sudden Union gap, mending it with lives and limbs. Only 47 walked away; 17 fell next day.
In darkness far ahead a signal fire flickers while the troops imagine once again soaking in hot water, sleeping under quilts of ham, eggs, biscuits, jam; pie crust with a second cup of coffee. Their mangled comrades rotting in red clay a thousand miles from home or exploded into air, forever marching in the wind.

Raymond Byrnes
Leesburg, Virginia

Derived, with permission, from
The First Minnesota Regiment, Second to None,
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. . . a great pile of art is created and very, very little of it is any good at all. . . The percentage of keepers is minuscule, certainly less than a tenth of one percent, maybe less. . . Well, I've seen their work; I'm tired of seeing their work. . . The genuine article inspires such gratitude in the critic that he may weep at the discovery.

excerpted from a letter by Richard Nilsen of the Arizona Republic

Their works drop ground-ward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me
Robert Browning (Andrea del Sarto)

Spare a thought for the minor master
who saw through second hand eyes,
whose fingers were ants,
who ate leftovers and slept
with another man's wife

but thought he heard God speaking
as he brushed the Virgin's oval face
with the fine hairs of a pig.

David Chorlton
Phoenix, Arizona
A country lies waiting
for its trains to depart:
the ones at rest
in huge terminals
made of glass and steel
and longing
where passengers sip the night
from paper cups as they look
out along the tracks
stretching into moonlight.
They are many,
but bound together
by holding
one collective breath
as the time approaches
for them to leave,
each on a separate journey
one-way through sleep
flying close the ground
until sunrise. How quietly
they stand beside their luggage;
sentries at the gates
of someone else’s life.

David Chorlton
Phoenix, Arizona
The Address / David Chorlton

A speaker stands up at the table to deliver his after dinner address with a list of platitudes and a glass of water ready. He clears his throat with the authority of an expert, with the gravity expected of one who is tall. The tapping of spoons against china tapers to silence as the guests sit up in anticipation. The subject for tonight is medieval warfare. Everyone wants to know how it differs from that of today; whether it is preferable to fight hand to hand or bomb a country into submission; whether the human conscience can bear in a week what once took years to overcome.

David Chorlton
Phoenix, Arizona
Rana Williams, *Photograph*
Hayesville, North Carolina
Feeling Minnesota / Jennifer Christgau-Aquino

You were born of this place
Your bones of corn
husky in July on a flat blue sky

Your voice of an organ arranged
in the field on Sundays
hymns bending orphan walnut trees

Your hands of a splinter sharp scythe
whipping through ears
until they shake pennies into books

Your blood of Rose Creek
cutting awful, pretty
through untillable wasted groves

Your marrow of soy seeds
scattered into rows
soiled by industry and presidents

Your heart of a house,
falling in on itself
clapboard and leaded glass

cases for keeping
your futures

Jennifer Christgau-Aquino
San Mateo, California
Hidden / Holly Day

The little birds crouch in the bare branches of the lilac puffed out and clustered together against the cold, make no attempt to fly away as though they believe that simply by virtue of sitting in a bush even one with no obscuring leaves or flowers I can’t see them, they are completely invisible to me.

I pretend to play their game, move carefully around my snow-covered garden as though I’m completely unaware of the little brazen flock. I make little clucking noises under my breath as I pass as if I believe they are gullible enough to believe that someone like me so completely not a bird, could be communicating with them that we can actually talk to one another.

Holly Day
Minneapolis, Minnesota
Voicemail / Alice Duggan

Grandma Kelly worried all night, something about the garbage can, the slippery ice … A heavy voice says the IRS has issued a warrant for my arrest … new regulations allow this offer, a medical brace for chronic pain … Grandma Kelly is calling for Joe, would he come over; I am not Joe, I have no pain, have always been friends with the IRS … A soft voice flows by, tone on tone, Lao or Hmong, a message I miss, delete, delete … Only one more and it’s Grandma Kelly, a stranger to me and I think she’s afraid.

Alice Duggan
St. Paul, Minnesota
As Criminals Are / Alice Duggan

It’s the time of day with a question mark in it. Something could show up quite unexpected, and what shows up is the wail of a child. You understand he’s the child of a criminal who is detained, as criminals are. You were only shopping for sneakers, on your bright screen. Should your shoes be a shade of indigo or more boldly, a deep jade green; you mull it over as he repeats Papa, Papa, like pendulum inside a sob.

His papa brought him to the border and must be punished: his child must be punished so we must be punished though we try to walk away, in our new shoes. Papa Papa is all the child can say, it’s all that we will remember, all we need to know.

Alice Duggan
St. Paul, Minnesota
One night in a South Broadway backyard,
I flirted with a woman I’d seen for years
but never spoken with, her face impossible
in its healthy symmetry. She was long
coupled up with someone who wouldn’t
come out, and I, after too much gin, imagined
I could change all that, if only for a night.
I was looking for someone to serve as
eraser. I was the girl who brought her mastiff
to cozy house parties, and walking her
to her car, having gained no ground, we ran
into my dog, loose, approaching people
as friends though his height and musculature
sent most of them backing away slowly.
Someone had opened the backyard gate
and he’d slipped out. Forget the rest:
the party’s din, the stars, her teeth bright
in street light. I was more than lucky to have
found him. Luckier still that he loved me
enough to follow me, untethered.

Katherine Fallon
Statesboro, Georgia
3rd Wednesday One Sentence Poetry Contest

Winning One Sentence Poetry Contest Poems

Our judges have selected three winning poems from the many entries in our 4th One Sentence Poetry Contest. These poets were awarded fifty dollars each for these fine efforts. Our thanks to everyone who participated.

Compost / Gloria Heffernan

The file folder bulges
with old drafts of poems
preserved like artifacts
that are neither art nor fact,
as if some wisp of inspiration
might remain in the smoke
after the candle
has been extinguished.

Gloria Heffernan
Syracuse, New York
Driving My Daughter to School / Sarah Russell

Mr. Fields is so mean, like he piles on the homework, then sometimes doesn’t even check it, and Bio is gross anyway, and Liam is all Cool and Dope at stuff under the microscope, and I’m all Yuck, and anyway he hooked up with Jade at the party, so he can have her if he wants a slut, but he totally lost any chance with me, and besides, Jamie gets dibs on him next, ‘cause she’s liked him forever, so Jade actually stole him, and Carly goes up to him and is like Jade’s a bitch, and he shrugs and says Whatever, and I’m like I don’t even care ‘cause we only went out twice, and oh, there’s Carly, so you can drop me here, and Mom, I’m like two weeks overdue, so see you after soccer.

Sarah Russell
State College, Pennsylvania
Remember when you asked me
if I knew how to make coffee
when I emerged from the bedroom
before the sun was up that morning
after I’d driven 480 miles
to be with you when your wife
had died and I found you
pacing outside the door
like an expectant father
who had panicked
when everything you’d
learned in childbirth
education class was gone
at the moment you needed
to be present, to be supportive,
to focus and to take care
of business and I said sure
I can do that, but do you have
a coffee maker in the kitchen
and you looked confused
and we went out there
and sure enough there it was
and I asked you where’s
your coffee and you didn’t
know and so I searched
the cabinets until I found
everything I needed
and while I was making
the coffee I noticed
the post it notes on the
counter and frig
that your wife had left
reminding you to put out
the trash and to take your pills
and then you and I sat
at the table and drank
our morning coffee in a house
that seemed somehow empty.

Terry Allen
Columbia, Missouri

Our judges singled out the following poems as poems of considerable merit.

Getting Through the Night / William Cullen
(for Anne Sexton)

When the church bell tolls
and the fireflies fly dark
with no children's voices
to chase the simple lights
only then does the night
seem to close in
and I have only these words
to push the dark back
for as long as I can write them
or the dawn comes again.

William Cullen
Brooklyn, New York
**Shirt Dad** / Dallas Itzen

At first
his old Hanes XL undershirts
stood in for him after he departed
but now
you have to understand,
each one becomes my Dad,
IS my Dad,
soft, quietly reassuring
and all I got left.

Dallas Itzen
Brooklyn, New York

**Saudade** / Melissa Cannon

In the emptied closet–
memory’s scarlet dress.

Melissa Cannon
Antioch, Tennessee
Indian Creek Trail / Steven Croft

To learn the lessons of rocks
take your shoes off here
under the overhang of trees
feel the cold flow of water
as you reach for a foothold
on a rock in the stream,
every step a concentration
on finding the next one, until,
as you learn to walk them,
the teeth-clench, the fear
of falling fades into calm, until
you look up at the weathered
tree caught on the high edge
of the falls the last time
the sky cracked and water
came like a rumble from
the mountain's throat,
and say, like the quiet
but unflinching rocks,
"Bring me your storms."

Steven Croft
St. Simons Island, Georgia
**Burr Riff / Katherine Edgren**

With teeth and thumbs they hitch and stick,  
these brown burgeoning burrs, these free-loaders  
with prickled bristles, these bearable burdens—  
small envelopes that hook to book,  
tiny travelers that make you their feet—

while here in winter, I am like  
this minute fruit, this stoic seed, this  
patient prevailer: thumbing rides,  
looking for places to cling,  
hanging on for dear life by my teeth.

  Katherine Edgren  
  Dexter, Michigan

**Takase River / John Miller**

Shallow water, stone-  
straightened, you wear night-jasmine  
scents, hills, history.

  John Miller  
  Portland, Oregon

Look for a new contest beginning in mid-February. We’ll something different for you.
Brouwersgracht, Dusk - Amsterdam / Diane Martin

Diane Martin, Photograph
Bangor, Maine
Do I know him? Of course, I do. He moved to town when we were teens. Everyone thought it was a riot that our first and last names were the same. And since he was bigger and older, like by a month, he got to keep the name and I got called something else. I'll tell you, giving someone a nickname should be a crime. You have your identity and then someonekidnaps it and you can't even pay a ransom to get it back. I know, I know. Your name's not really you and a rose by any other name blah blah blah. Well, what worked for roses didn't work for me. When you're fifteen and the head cheerleader is walking around with your name on her tongue, it really hurts to know she's talking about someone else.

Yeah, we went to the same college. Even shared an apartment. I don't know why we wanted to be writers. Maybe we just liked the idea of being miserable. He used to read to sick kids in hospitals and then go write about it and our teacher lost her mind. He was melancholy and sharp and made you think about what it was like to be alone. I don't know how he tapped into that. He was always so damn popular. But I guess that's talent for you - he just saw something and he wrote the hell out of it. All that time, I was planning to get published before him and stake a claim to my real name but then he wrote that story about the toddler with Stage 4 Lymphoblastic Lymphoma and they gave him the Pushcart Prize and that was that. My name would never be mine.

After graduation, he got into the Iowa Writer's Workshop and I didn't and we fell out of touch. I came home and started seeing Nicole - she was pretty and smart and didn't know it, which is the only kind of girl I seem to attract. Right after she moved in, I got an email that looked like it was from myself. I wrote back and connected with myself online and before long I was liking my own posts. Man, I never got tired of seeing those pics from Iowa. There I was drinking beer at the Foxhead. It was like I was there.
Right after he was in the *New Yorker*, the condom broke and Nicole hit me with that pro-life stance I never saw coming. We got married and I took a job doing technical writing – if you ever bought a blender and thought the warranty was surprisingly concise, well, all I can say is you're welcome. We had the kid and, let me tell you, I combed the world to come up with a name no one else had. Nicole went back to waiting tables and I worked from home. One night, who do you think showed up with a stuffed dog and all this know-how about putting kids to sleep? He had a gift for me: an uncorrected proof of his first book. He'd called it *Antumbra* and he spent five minutes explaining the meaning of the word, which wasn't necessary, but try telling him that.

It was real spectacular. Naturally, the critics fell in love and he was buried in awards. I started to wish people knew my real name. I would have liked being mistaken for him. It would have been pretty grand.

As for what happened next, well, what can I say? I was at the Goodwill when I heard and I went into a kind of shock. It's funny. You publish a book and spend all this time thinking about what the Booker Prize people are going to think but you forget about everyone else. That guy who shot Lennon bought *Catcher in the Rye* and wrote "*This* is my statement" on the inside flap. You think Salinger imagined that would happen when he saw his uncorrected proof? You write what you write. You never know what's going to come.

I don't blame him for giving up writing. The media had its field day. *Antumbra*: the book that shot up a school. Go look for it online. First thing you'll see is all those dead kids. And the whole trial, the shooter kept saying how *Antumbra* really "inspired him", how it sort of "woke him up". So if the writing told him what to do, what does that say about the writer? If I had written *Antumbra*, I'd have stopped writing too. Losing your name is bad. Try losing your art.
Last time I saw him? Over Christmas. I was at the welfare office and he was on his way to the cemetery with a bunch of flowers. He looked terrible. Said he was working on grade school textbooks. He asked if I was writing and I told him we'd had another kid and the only time I wrote was when I spelled out words with alphabet soup.

"Shame," he said. "I always liked your stuff."

That kind of floored me. For months, I'd been wondering if I ever really had the knack. But hearing this from him was like getting a message from my younger, cockier self. It was a good, tough shock and it knocked me out of the park. I started writing on my way home. These days, I'm doing it on the bus and early in the morning, when everyone's still asleep. I've filled a whole notebook with clever thoughts. Of course, I'll have to use a pseudonym. And you can bet I'm worried about who might read my stuff. I worry every time my kid breathes. But you can do something in this world or you can do nothing and I've been doing nothing for way too long.

Hey, if you ever find him, let me know. I kind of hate that he's disappeared. I'd like to know where he went.

   Joel Fishbane
   Toronto, Ontario
Wagon / Ann Privateer

Ann Privateer, *Photograph*
Davis, California
Hobgoblins / Brandon French

It is November 1. When I went to sleep three hours ago, it was still Halloween, although the doorbell had finally stopped chiming, the miniature Mounds and Snickers and M&M’s with Peanuts had run out, and Batman and Spiderman and Superman and Princess Fiona had finally retired to Fantasyland for another 364 days.

It is 3 am. and the phone is ringing. Nothing good comes of a phone call at 3 am. I sit bolt upright, reaching around for my glasses on the dresser top next to my bed, in the process knocking over the Trazadone bottle, the ibuprofen bottle and the half-empty Diet Coke can which spills all over my nightgown and into my fleecy bedroom slippers.

“Awww, nuts,” I say, groping for the phone which has now rung twice. Amelia Bedelia, my Doberman, disrupted from sleep by my clumsy acrobatics and the Coke spill, stands up in bed, opens her mouth and yawns with a high pitched squeal that awakens Mitchell my cat, who rolls over on his back too close to the edge of the bed and drops onto the bare wood floor with a thud. My hand is shaking when I finally grasp the phone because I am a mother and 3 am. calls trigger my worst nightmares.

“Hello,” I say, sounding childlike and half-asleep.

“Mom?” It is whispered.

Fully awake and instantly adult, I say, “What’s wrong?”

“I’m with Fritz.”

“What’s wrong?” I ask louder.

“He’s standing in the corner talking to the devil.”

“What?”
“He’s talking to the devil.”

“Are you dressed? Get out of there.”

“I don’t want to upset him.”

“He’s already upset, get out of there.”

“He’s never done this before. I think Halloween got to him.”

Edie has been seeing this hair dresser, Fritz, for the last month, his claim to fame that he trims her bangs perfectly. I picture the scissors and have a horrific vision of him trimming her flesh.

“Who cares if he’s never done it before? He’s doing it now.”

“Don’t get mad at me.”

“I’m not mad at you. I’m scared to death at you.”

“Just don’t yell.”

“I’m not yelling,” I say, lowering my voice. “Listen to me. Get dressed. Are you dressed?”

“No.”

“Get dressed.”

“Can you talk to him?”

“Can I talk to him?”

Before I can answer hell no! she says, “Here,” and hands Fritz the phone.
“Hello, Mrs. Waller,” he says, sounding like Eddie Haskell in *Leave It To Beaver*. I am not Mrs. Waller, that is the name of the woman Edie’s father is currently married to, thank heavens, but I don’t correct him.

“How’s it going?”

“Not so good.”

“Did you take a drug, Fritz? Are you having a bad trip?”

“No.”

*Oh great, he’s having a psychotic break,* I think, because I am in my last year of psychotherapy school, my fifth career, and I know a little about psychotic breaks.

“Edie says you’re talking to the devil, Fritz.”

“Uh-huh.”

“What’s on the devil’s mind?”

“He says I’m a bad person.”

“You are not a bad person, Fritz. Don’t you know the devil lies his ass off about things like that? Remember how he lied to Eve about the apple and got us all kicked out of Eden? He’s lying to you, Fritz.”

“Okay.”

“You’re a very nice person.”

“Thank you.”

“And Edie says you’re a great hair stylist.”

“Thank you.”
“Tell you what, Fritz, I’ll come into your shop tomorrow and you can cut my hair, okay?”

“Okay.”

“But you know what you should do now? You should tell Edie to go home so you can get a good night’s sleep.”

“Okay.” I hear him tell Edie that she has to go home.

“Mom?” Edie takes the phone back.

“You heard him. Go home.”

“Will Fritz be okay?”

For all I know, Fritz will run off and join Cirque du Soleil or climb up on the roof and try to contact Pluto.

“Yes, Fritz will be fine. Did you drive to his house?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Good. Drive home,” I say, relieved that I will not have to go there and get her, trying to sound calm and sweet, even though I want to scream at the top of my lungs, “Get the fuck out of there, you lunatic, before he turns you into human hash browns.”

“Okay,” she says and hangs up.

“Wait –” I shout, wanting to tell her to call me as soon as she gets home. “Shit shit shit,” I say, slamming the phone back in its cradle, which causes it to bounce off and strike me in the forehead. Amelia Bedelia gives me a mournful look and takes off for the tranquility of the sofa in the living room. Mitchell has already gone out the half-open window into the autumn chill of early morning.
I wait five minutes and call Edie’s home phone. Nothing. I begin calling every other minute. By the tenth call, I have already exchanged my pajamas for sweats and am ready to head for Mt. Washington to look for her.

She picks up.

“Hi,” she says casually, as if nothing bizarre had just happened.

“Edie,” I say. “What is it with you? Why are you a magnet for psychotics?”

“Eliot wasn’t psychotic. He was manic depressive.”

“That’s a psychosis,” I say, having received an A+ in my Abnormal Psychology class.

“Oh.”

“You can’t be with Fritz any more. Do you hear me?”

“Uh-huh. What do I do if he calls?”

“Hang up.”

“What if he comes over?”

“Don’t let him in.” I feel like I’m talking to a child rather than a 26-year-old college graduate who was just voted the top designer clothing saleswoman at Bloomingdale’s Century City, and who makes more money than I do.

“I know I’ve been a very bad example, honey,” I say, trying to stick to my family therapy mea culpa script. “I’ve had a lot of crazy boyfriends, starting with your father and I’ve subjected you to more drama than a daytime soap. But I’ve learned my lesson, Edie. Can’t you learn your lesson, too?”
“Okay,” she says, yawning.

“Go to sleep,” I say. “Is your door locked?”

“Uh-huh.”

“I love you,” I say, feeling as if it might have been the last time I got to tell her that.

“Me too,” she says, half asleep.

I climb back under the covers and close my eyes. My heart is beating very fast and I doubt if I’ll be able to get back to sleep. I listen to the tail end of *Natural Born Killers* on HBO and nod off with Robert Downey Jr.’s voice in my ear.

The devil comes to me in a dream. He says, “Ha ha ha,” like we have been playing Hide and Seek and he has just discovered me in the tiny storage closet under the stairs, hidden behind the bicycle pump, the sleeping bags and my dead mother’s hat boxes. “Ha ha ha,” he says again, looking suspiciously like Edie’s father.

“Go away,” I say. “Halloween’s over.”

He narrows his feline yellow eyes, lurches forward on his cloven hooves and says, “Don’t you wish.”

Brandon French
Los Angeles, California
Snake Snooze / Patricia Tompkins

Patricia Tompkins, *Photograph*
Lenexa, Kansas
The day begins
dark,
shouldering
a burden
of rain.

The day pulls
close,
much like
mourners do
at a funeral.

Not the gawkers,
not the proud
wailers
or passersby,
but the true ones.

The ones
who loved so
the spirit
of the soft
body
before them.

The spirit
and not
the body
itself.
The ones 
who loved 
so much, 
they bend now, 
together 
in the dark.

And weep. 
And look. 
And make not 
a sound.

Beth Grindstaff 
Johnson City, Tennessee
Accountability / Jeff Hardin

As for me, I’d be content with a feather, holding it to the wind’s face, doing my best to be senseless—what some call absurd—just a bit gruff in my tenderness but not so much the geese scare away. Let them pass across the road as often as they wish—stop the car, get out and direct if necessary, point or clear a path, wander away with them. To what be accountable if not to whimsy, holding the redbud close and whispering, cheering the sassafras root for its scent hidden in soil, leaping when the fawn leaps, tracing the fern’s outline on the path. And patience, too, for the berries the birds pick over, prayers and gratitude for the one unseen underneath, nostalgia and forgiveness for the one I couldn’t help but taste.

Jeff Hardin
Columbia, Tennessee
The Idea / Jeff Hardin

The idea was the thing. The wondering where it would come from. When it would come. To whom and for what reason. And whether or not it would be beautiful, or useful. The feeling of being aloft, never more certain of what lay below. I read we know just three percent of the universe. I read this. And wonder how, not knowing, someone has determined how much to measure against the measureless. I would be less than the less I already am, if I did not worry about how much I suspect such calculations are, in the end, just one more form of inconclusiveness. We don’t know all the words we almost spoke but didn’t, finding other words instead, yet maybe some of what we say, or think, is traceable to words that almost were and not the ones that came to be, most of which are little more than barely there at all. Understanding may just as likely be a form of stepping to an edge we do not sense, or have no sense of, that wouldn’t make much sense if we could see it. After all, some discoveries began in error: penicillin, for instance, or that time off a path in the middle of woods I came upon a perfect holly tree, unexplainable, surrounded by poplars and maples and a thousand miles of sky. The man who didn’t believe the theory describing it as a big bang and inadvertently providing the metaphor by which we now conceive it. And one person becomes another and another so many times in an hour, a day, a week, a lifetime, that a name is just a familiar sound, and who knows if the one answering is a past or present self or even someone who came to an edge and stopped, as if before a kingdom, and now waits there, with words that have no referent, bound we know not where.

Jeff Hardin
Columbia, Tennessee
We’d gone for a walk but without a stated direction, so that where we ended up seemed blessed with a yellow hue flowing in waves through the shedding trees. What kind of circumstance was this, and if ever we returned, or were returned, would we then be wary of old selves and speak then in winged tones?

No, not us, not estranged, not even though the times were turbulent and mismanaged—more like happy not to be included in any report, unrecognized and thus with no expectations thrust upon us, anticipating only our own namelessness.

Any certainty we’d had about what we deserved or didn’t deserve, about what darkness to lie down to or light to be lifted toward and into grew less and less clear with each shuffling through leaves on the path.

By then, we had almost reached that place, the one where as soon as it’s entered, it’s already been left behind.

Jeff Hardin
Columbia, Tennessee
Summer Clouds Over Lake NeBoShone / Chris Boesel

Chis Boesel, *Photograph*
Toledo, Ohio
First Timer / Alan Harris

Confession —
I’ve never died
first timer
rookie
my actions leading up to
my last breath
are more or less
trial and error
attempts
to look like
I know what I’m doing
holding out hope
that you are paying attention
so that my last chance
my final opportunity
to be a good role model
has not been wasted

Alan Harris
East Lansing, Michigan
Cedar Waxwing in Late Winter / Raphael Kosek

Go ahead, turn your face
to the pillow,
into cold dark. Why
are the bedroom curtains
always so somber?
Nothing but the tree limbs
gathering
in gray dawn.

Yet when the clever
cedar waxwing
takes a holly berry in its beak
and you are allowed to watch
from your window,
an unaccountable pleasure
seizes you, one that
breaks in little waves
like the tide
coming in,
unstopppable and sure,
the way kisses
used to be.

Raphael Kosek
Hopewell Junction, New York
She piled papers under the window, struck a match. Fire whooshed the draperies, and she shivered until the fire engines came. She was used to getting lost on back burners, had suckled on words like *sin* and *glory* and memorized the map of hell. Spiders were a recent visitation, spelling words she couldn't translate.

As for her husband? What intimacy? Her two children claimed alienship, living in their heads like rotten melons.

Yes, God was her preacher, but she couldn't remember how she got naked or soiled herself.

She cowered in the corner, spider words rattling like seeds, then lay pitch still, belted on a gurney speeding Seattle streets on wings. After God visited the ward, she said, she went home and dreamed of flames.

Susan Landgraf
Auburn, Washington
because I had stuck fast in them / Trevor Losh-Johnson

i

When April with its heat
rose under ram’s horns
flies from the trees
flew through open doors

On Monday the hikers went missing
creeks swelling
the peaks in bloom

Up from the village
houses on stilts
water across the roads

On Tuesday the helicopter
circled the peaks
teams in the canyons

ii

On Wednesday a bighorn sheep
perched on the rocks
melting away

A gust blew under doors
and high on the trails hidden ice
slipped beneath the leaves

And north of the dam
a news van beamed its footage
drove away
On Thursday you saw cars
stuffed with luggage
and thought of grief

iii

Friday in the post office
a fly in the sun
against the glass

The ranger’s truck
idling outside
and the trout ponds closed

One step missed as the eyes
hiding and watching in leaves
and shadows
and vantages you passed

On Saturday
the noise of crews
and helicopters stopped

Trevor Losh-Johnson
Mount Baldy, California
Tickle Feet / Gary Wadley

Gary Wadley, Photograph
Louisville, Kentucky
Civil Wars / Susan McLean

In civil wars, you always lose because each side is adamant on what they want, and sure their stance is favored by the laws of God and man, so nobody withdraws. Attempts to parley turn to jab and taunt. In civil wars, you cannot win, because you know their weakness, but they know your flaws. It’s all scorched earth when home’s the battlefront. Their biases, enshrined within their laws;

the changes you would make to every clause—what fool would look for prospects of détente? They’d rather die. They will. They do. Because war isn’t civil: its impassive jaws grind every side to powder. To be blunt, the most immutable of nature’s laws

is that our civil ways are merely straws dispersed by storms we’re helpless to prevent or remedy, although we know the cause. It’s us, united only by our loss.

Susan McLean
Iowa City, Iowa
I am not yet born. My parents sit on the porch of their newly purchased house, watch the fires across the tracks.

They told me the fire’s glow stained the oleander bushes crimson, as if white blossoms burst into flame.

Smoke, sodden and steely in twilight, drifts across the cobalt sky.

Mother thought she could hear voices, crying in the night, but my father thought it was still, crickets all that could be heard in the half-light.
When I imagine the moment,
I hear the crackle of
flame, smell

harsh vapor that
somehow recalls
lapsang souchong.

   My mother said it
was the end of an era,
and
   my father said
nothing changed at all.

Laura McRae
Toronto, Ontario
I have two eyes, she said, her pace slow, her tongue cradling each syllable, turning them around mid-word to fit the keyhole of her memory, inching forward like the current inches a boat. I have two eyes rang again from the slow bell of her mouth.

She looked up from the exercise, peering through me to the projection of the phrase in her mind.

Every Tuesday was the first Tuesday we met, her stroke leaving her unable to remember the phrases on the page.

A net to carry water. I mouthed it slowly, her eyes fixed on my lips, squinting into the dark-red cavern of my mouth.

She shook her head. I saw her say it a week ago and almost cried at her success. The words were locked behind a door in the dark, a black hole of language and phrase, or the rising banks of a lake filling from a swollen stream. Water welled in her eyes, she shut them before looking down to greet the syllables again for the first time. Surfacing, she tried it without looking, but it vanished like water falling through her cupped hands before reaching her lips.

John Moessener
Kansas City, Missouri
I feel good with Theo nearby.
I like the accompaniment of him playing cars
in the family room to my nonstick
pan’s rain-like crackle of power greens.

I try to be flexible and follow
his lead. If he doesn’t want the swing set,
I follow him down the road.

Sometimes the heat lamp of the sky
bakes scorches our scalps, sweaty thighs
swaddled in deep blue jeans. Sometimes breezes lift
in cloud shade, raising the idea of rain.

I like to put the outside dog
in the living room crate and the inside dog
out in the rain. Afternoons

no coffee’s left in the pot, I make tea.

Cameron Morse
Blue Springs, Missouri
A grackle dips
a kernel of pilfered dog
food in the bird
bath. The rock that anchors
the fading copy
of Richard Scarry’s *A Day at the Airport*
to the matted mailbox
flowerbed appears to be a wish
for some one
to reclaim lost pages. It’s not ours,
Theo and I have our own Scarry’s
waiting at home, still
checking to see if it’s there,
still in effect, like an Amber Alert,
has become part of
our routine: We clamber over the storm
drain, check *A Day at the Airport.*
Go home, ring the doorbell.

Cameron Morse
Blue Springs, Missouri
Sand Fortress, St. Petersburg, Russia / Diane Martin

Diane Martin, *Photograph*
Bangor, Maine
Gather your tools. Start with the canvas. Decide what size. I would dare say that it should be at least large enough to paint her life-size. Twenty-four by thirty inches would be big enough to depict the sitter’s head-and-shoulders. Though just the head and shoulders doesn’t seem like nearly enough of her. How about thirty by forty for a half-length portrait so she can be viewed from the waist up. That way we can see the swell of her hips where her form dips inwards and upwards towards her tiny waist, and then begins to expand again at her chest.

Will it be a store-bought canvas? Or hand-stretched? Store-bought is perfectly fine, efficient, often affordable and of good quality, but hand-stretched feels right for this piece. You’ll need to select a roll of canvas. Open it up, run your hands across the tooth of it. Will rough or smooth be what she deserves most? Find a staple gun and staples. You’ll want a staple remover for your inevitable mistakes, and heavy-duty canvas pliers to wrench the stiff fabric tightly into place.

Your canvas will have to be sized first with rabbit skin glue before applying a primer. Sizing fills the pores of the canvas and helps to prevent the paint from leaking through. It also stiffens the fabric, making it easier to paint on. You’ll want to apply several coats. When it’s dry to the touch—yes touch it again—you will need to prime your canvas to get it ready for her. Conveniently, an acrylic primer works for both oil and acrylic paint.

You’ll want a small drawing brush, a small round sable or synthetic is best. Filbert brushes #4, #6, #10, and flat brushes #4, #6, and #10. A palette knife. A fast-drying medium to work quickly. Odorless Turpenoid, so you don’t suffer too much from fumes. A brush cleaning jar and rags. Tear up one of your old t-shirts. Maybe the one she brought home to you as a gift when she took that last girls-trip to Cancun.
Gather oil paints. You’ll need Radiant Turquoise, the color of her eyes, and Cadmium Yellow to represent those golden flecks that only become visible when she puts her face really close to yours. Close enough to kiss you. Alizarin Crimson mixed with a touch of Cadmium Red and a dash of Raw Sienna should work well for her mouth. Add in a tiny dot of Permalba White to give her lips that wet shimmer they always had. Ivory black and Raw Umber for her long thick hair. Dress her in Pthalo Green, or maybe don’t dress her at all. It will be a nude. Lots of Titanium White for her pale stony flesh. Will you paint her outside or indoors? In a field of flowers, at the beach, or where you remember her best, on your bed.

Working from a live model is always preferable. But she doesn’t. She won't come over anymore. From a photograph. You burned all of those last year. It will have to be from memory, then.

Emily Painton
New Orleans, Louisiana
A Killing Frost Suddenly / Marge Piercy

Arctic air roared down from Canada
Yesterday in an avalanche freezing
Vegetables, marigolds, roses.

Walking made me crush tiny
Steeples of frozen mud. Cold
sliced into the remaining greens.

Today the furnace almost shakes
In an effort to heat a chilled house.
Birds frantic with hunger storm

Feeders. The month has fallen off
A cliff from autumn into winter
abrupt as a door slamming.

I’ve had relationships end like that:
you’re bumbling along planning
supper when the ceiling collapses.

Love, even friendship can silently
Collect resentments, fancied slights
That harden all at once to an ax

that lands on my nape and I totter, sink
to my knees. Blood gushes out, then
dries to confusion, regret and pain.

Marge Piercy
Wellfleet Massachusetts
Monday morning staff meeting, 
fiscal year of our Lord, 2019. 
We gather at the table 
favored ones circling a constellation of stars. 
We toast each other with steaming coffee mugs, 
break bread, brush away crumbs 
of day-old croissants, year-end grudges. 
Our purpose is to communicate, 
but not to say much.

Enter our leader, 
imperial in mauve silk. 
We form an aisle of hosannas 
palming off a morning’s greeting. 
We marvel at her parables of teamwork 
while she lauds us for being the corporate 
body and blood. Then her voice drops low, 
addressing escalating inventories, 
downsized sales.

The pointer slams down on the chart. 
Each stroke of its needle 
the lash of a whip, the prick of a thorn, 
the EKG of a dying man’s heart. 
Clear as a prophecy, those charts 
foretell who will rise like Lazarus, 
who will be brought low as Job.
A man in the office next to mine weeps
clutching a severance envelope,
thin as a Communion wafer.
I offer him a beggar’s gift of coffee.
My lips shape vowels and consonants.
I have no words to comfort him.
Everybody’s pain speaks to its own sound.

Marilee Pritchard
Palatine, Illinois
The blue snow runs
everywhere I see—
it tumbles around corners, up solidarities of hills
taming the wastes of my rural home.

I walk and the snow goes, hush hush.
My boots fall in deep. What a satisfying,
sweet crunch. The snow will soon pave over
evidence of my tiny, happy existence.
My gaze rises to the stars that give welcome,
jump from the sky in sharp color.

It’s so deep it’s thick nectar, the sky.
The valley farms dwindle in size
but in this evening’s gusts,
they find themselves draped, dark, warm.

Silent—it’s so silent.
If the blue snows could vibrate aloud in actual harmony,
a harp of spheres,
the valley would hush them, too.

Heather Sager
Mundelein, Illinois
Untitled Sketch / John Loree

John Loree, Ink and Graphite
Ypsilanti, Michigan
Bitten / Leslie Schultz

for Mary Oliver

Outside, new snow.
Someone is clearing the walks.
Listen: scrape & shush,
Scrape & shush and pause—
Scrape & shush and hush.

Inside, I stare
At a glass cherry dipped in
Red paint, gilded by lamplight.
What does it mean that its black
Stem arcs & curves,

Arcs & curves & glistens?
Pump handle? Swan’s neck?
A black half-question mark
Or reared cobra, it
Bedazzles and stuns,

& this frozen moment
Rears up like eternity.

Leslie Schultz
Northfield, Minnesota
You hear the helicopter first, rotors beating humph-humphs of air, of breath, of oxygen, and if you look up—if you are outside, if you are in the street—and if you see the barrel falling, maybe you see the men who have pushed it out, though hopefully, you are not that close. It wobbles and flails as it falls, then disappears among the broken walls and roofs. A pause, a heartbeat, a blink, then a burst and flame, then smoke—gray brown black—all at once, and you watch it drift, and soon you smell the bomb, the dust, the bodies. And later, in a basement room, its door levered shut with twisted rebar, a candle wavers on a box, sleeping matts curl on the floor, a shawl hangs on a nail. And children cry, pull at their mothers’ clothes. Let us out, they say, let us out. Let us play. Please.

You lie between the tracks, the hard, t-shaped steel, feel the sharp, flinty ballast stones and concrete ties against your ribs and hip, know your wife must feel them—you have pulled her from her feet, pulled her down, pulled her by her chest, by the child in her arms.
You have pulled her and she fell, and you fell, and you both look up, and you both cry out. And you wonder, with the riot cop reaching toward your leg, toward your wife—her leg—you wonder about the bombs, about the tracks, about the timetable for the trains you wish you had—its creases folded clean and tight and neat in your pocket—a scheme for all the trains and all the times and all the destinations those trains are bound to in all the world, and you wish for a reservation, for a seat—no, two seats please, if you could be so bold—and children, you hope, might travel free.

William Snyder
Fargo, North Dakota
You say
This time will be different
— and it is.
Each fall a singularity,
and surprising in a new way.
Like your new wrong boss,
on your new wrong job.
Even with your new, old broken down car.
The fresh paint hides the shame,
but the miles don’t lie.
Just something to take you from your last frying pan
into your next fire.
Who knew you had to eat so much dirt
and jump through so many hoops,
just to be to be broke and unemployed.
The cold finds you outside, again.
Looking inside everyone looks so warm.
Do they like each other.
Another painful reminder.
You always start off so well.
Then, just outside the light,
there is always a new or old way to go wrong.
So you do,
with the same inevitable ending.
You never saw it coming.

Dave Somerset
Salem, Massachusetts
Boys of Summer / Lisa Timpf

back in the day, we would
gather at the ball diamond,
summer air heavy with the smell
of french fries tanged with vinegar
but it was flies, not fries, that drew us

home run balls and pitching duels,
sparkling infield plays and
daredevil base-running,
those were the hallmarks
of the local men’s softball league

schoolteachers, mechanics,
factory workers, farm hands,
real estate agents, engineers—
we knew them, yet did not
for they shed their pedestrian identities,
morphing into something more
when they donned those uniforms

the infield chatter, the catcher
pounding fist in glove,
the crack of bat, connecting—
all’s fallen quiet now
even the diamond long gone

but if I stand in the spot
where the pitcher's circle
once marked a kind of boundary
I hear an echo
of those remembered voices
carried on the summer breeze

Lisa Timpf
Simcoe, Ontario
**Editor’s Notes for Fall** / Gary Wadley

They were more interesting to the poet than the reader
The bathroom mirror stares at

They didn’t fit into our vision of the magazine
  me.

They showed a lack of skill or craft
  You didn’t put the seat down.

They didn’t seem fresh or offer anything new
  The brush is full of hair. Is it yours?

They were overwritten or melodramatic
  Egads! I’ve flummoxed the toilet!!!

They weren’t edited carefully
  Flushh?

They were pretty good, but there’s just not room for
  Everyone.

  Gary Wadley
  Louisville, Kentucky
Day / Gary Wadley

The morning sky held such light
That I would step into it

Yet my mud-anchored feet
Bid me stay

Til the evening tide
That breaks all chains
Should carry me away

Gary Wadley
Louisville, Kentucky
At dawn, inside the barn is dark except for the cows’ white faces and brown eyes. Above the gate, their heads line up four across welcoming me. I rub my knuckles down the crest of Sulkie’s face. Her long pink tongue licks my fingers. I tug the chain, turning on the single dangling bulb. Harry is stingy with electricity. Gold sticks of hay spiral around us, lifted in the breeze from the closing of the door.

“Come on, girls.” I open the pole gate and lead the way, each following to their usual stanchion. My boot lands in a cowpie and the smell of fresh grass fills my nose. Good—they are eating well. Their moist breath fills the air, warming me.

I latch the head gates on Bluey, Spot, and Dottie. Sulkie shifts her front hooves. She, as their leader, waits to be the last. I attach the milking machine to the three and they release a collective moo of a moan with the let-down of milk.

My sweet Sulkie with mastitis needs a gentle hand. I guide her into her stanchion, my hand on her flank. She crow-steps, hesitant. Harry was likely too abrupt and maybe hurt her last night. I place the milking stool and pail, and sit, tucking in my creaky knees. I run my hand down her leg, murmuring “coo, coo, coo.”

Three of her teats are pink and full, but the fourth is an angry plum. I begin with the three and she also moans with relief as blue-white milk squirts into the pail. I rest my cheek against her leg to soothe her and to feel for any resistance, any muscle twitch that signals a kick. I roll my fingers around the plum one.
Damn—I feel it—there is a bead, a tiny pea of a blockage. As gently as I would arouse Harry’s member, I guide my fingertips up and down, working to loosen it. I give her sore teat a rest and milk the others.

Sulkie huffs, almost a sigh. Her pelvis sways, her leg tight to my cheek. Her short black fur tickles. I wonder—can a good-natured old cow feel gratitude? I have only a couple of minutes until the other three are drained by the milking machines. Sulkie will not be content to stay behind. I take the plum one again, glide up and down, the pea moving. I must squeeze it out and I pray it doesn’t hurt her too much. She bellows but it is a half-hearted rumble in her gut. The offending bit plops into the pail, splashing the milk.

“You are a good old girl,” I murmur.

Harry appears and unlatches the other three cows. Their streams of urine splash to the floor, a yeasty, healthy odor. Their tails swinging, they wait for me to release Sulkie. Their hooves clop on the concrete ramp as they head out to the pasture.

“She’s getting too old,” Harry says.

“So are you,” I say.

Julie Wakeman-Linn
Shady Side, Maryland
To the Domain / Fabrice Poussin

Fabrice Poussin, *Photograph*
Rome, Georgia
Two New Books by Phillip Sterling

**Amateur Husbandry**
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“Phillip Sterling has filled his February to overflowing with forty twenty-eight-word poems not only of time but of place (fences, sap buckets, horses, wind off lakes) in which, against our expectations, stasis is nowhere. That these are also love poems—to place, to time, to loved ones human and otherwise—adds much to their impact.” —Eric Torgersen