3rd Wednesday

Spring 2022
Third Wednesday Magazine  
Volume XV, Number 2  
Spring 2022  

Third Wednesday is a quarterly journal of literary and visual arts. Though we manage the magazine from Michigan, we welcome submissions from all over the world. Digital issues of the magazine are completely free to anyone and print issues can be purchased at Amazon.com.

Find us on the web at thirdwednesdaymagazine.org. There you can download free digital issues, read the fine poems we have published in the past and find the link to our portal at Submittable where you can submit your work and subscribe to the magazine. You can also find and follow us on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Tumblr.

Masthead

David Jibson, Editor  
Laurence W. Thomas, Editor Emeritus  
Judith Jacobs, Art Editor  
John F. Buckley, Fiction Editor  
Marilyn L. Taylor, Associate  
Lynn Gilbert, Associate  
Carl Fanning, Associate  
Phillip Sterling, Associate  
Joe Ferrari, Consulting Editor

Cover Art:

Idaho Landscape – Painting  
David Chorlton / Phoenix, Arizona
# Table of Contents

**Editor’s Note** ........................................................................................................... 5

**Annual Poetry Contest** .......................................................................................... 6

*Praise Song for Perry Just Before the Season’s End / Virginia Shank* .......................... 7

*When Harvesting the Hog / Matthew Burns* .............................................................. 8

*Story / Adam D. Weeks* ............................................................................................. 9

*The Summer We Saved the World / Lisa Bledsoe* .................................................... 11

*Flames / David Sloan* ............................................................................................... 12

*Beginning / Amanda Hartzell* .................................................................................. 13

*Missing Buddha / Terry Allen* ................................................................................ 14

**Featured Poems by Keith Taylor** ............................................................................ 15

*Out of the Attic* ......................................................................................................... 15

*The Things We Do* .................................................................................................... 16

*Three Springs* .......................................................................................................... 17

*One Day Bloom / Ann Privateer* ............................................................................. 18

*I Dreamt You And Your Hands Were Full of Fire / Mary Carroll-Hackett* ............... 19

*Delivery / Warren Woessner* .................................................................................. 20

*Missing the Last Train / Eric Blanchard* ................................................................. 20

*Dances with Dogs / Eric Blanchard* ....................................................................... 21

*Bird on a Wire / Ann Privateer* ............................................................................... 22

*A Widow on The Empire Builder Looks Out the Window All the Way Through North Dakota / Joan Wiese Johannes* ....................................................... 23

*Away from Water / John Muro* .............................................................................. 24

*Splinter / John Muro* ............................................................................................. 25

*Only Human / Jesse Holwitz* .................................................................................. 26

*Rainfall / Donna Pucciani* ...................................................................................... 27

*Sunset / Maryann Lawrence* .................................................................................. 28

*Black Lives Matter / Lisa Yount* ............................................................................ 29

*Avery Street Notes / Maura Faulise* ....................................................................... 30

*A Common Story / Jeffrey Zable* ........................................................................ 32

*Easy to Say / Jeffrey Zable* .................................................................................... 33

*To My Son On His 23rd Birthday / Susanna Lang* ..................................................... 34

*When You Turn Into Your Mother / Maggie Walcott* ............................................ 35

*Chicago Walkway / Gary Bloom* ........................................................................... 36

*Daybreak / David Mihalyov* .................................................................................. 37

*Centipede in the Kitchen Sink / Joseph Chelius* .................................................... 38

*Market Me / Kyle Heger* ........................................................................................ 39

*Azalea, Dogwood, Maple, Boxwood / Ann Hudson* .............................................. 40

*Homemade (Wood and Clay) / Gary Wadley* ....................................................... 41
All This Time / Carolyn Wilsey..........................42
Dead Man’s Bowling Shoes / Steven M. Smith...........42
Iris / Emily Updegraff.......................................44
Another Exodus / Margaret Ingraham........................45
Falling Down in Five Chapters / Buff Whitman-Bradley..46
The Cage / Andy Roberts.......................................48
1962 Ford Galaxie 500 (Kelly’s Car) / Ken Meisel.....50
Club Mix (Bert’s Warehouse) / Ken Meisel................50
I’m Just Gonna Trim the Bangs / John Jeffire.............52
I Am Not Joan Didion / Brianna Di Monda................53
A Case for Reincarnation / David James..................54
Somedays the Bear / David James..........................55
Shift / Denny Marshall........................................56
When Love’s in the Kitchen / Gary Wadley..............57
Land of Skyscrapers and Palm Trees / Shakiba Hashemi 58
Into The Future / Jude Dippold................................59
Visits / Ed Gold..................................................59
She Was Going By Fancy Deal / Mark James Andrews..60
Shallow Breath / Connie Post..................................61
On the History of Poetry / Iris Dunkle.....................62
The Grave Blooms Upwards and Walks the Road / Iris Dunkle..63
Una Clase de Inglés en el Borde / Rachel Baum........63
Smitty’s / Mark Madigan.......................................65
Here, in April / Robert Claps.................................66
Unpacking the Hours / Katherine Edgren..................67
Before the Guests Arrive / Michael Hanner................69
Aslant / Becky Boling..........................................69
Salt / Susan Landgraf............................................70
Surrealist Composition 12 / Lisa Yount.....................71
Today’s Ghosts / Susan Landgraf.............................72
The Roadrunner / Jerry Kopec..................................73
Jack Soo (born Goro Suziki) / Richard Weaver.........76
Dressing Mother / Stephen Ruffus............................77
Viceroy’s / David Chorlton....................................78
The Search / David Chorlton..................................78
In Which I Consider My Ancestors / Peter Schireson.....79
After The Funeral / Joy Gaines-Friedler....................80
Static Switch Off / Denny Marshall..........................81
Editor’s Note

Here is the annual spring contest issue of 3rd Wednesday.

Our judge this year is poet and writer Keith Taylor who recently retired from the University of Michigan where he taught in the undergraduate and graduate programs in creative writing. Keith is the author of sixteen collections of poetry. The most recent is *Let Them Be Left*, poems from Isle Royale published by Alice Greene & Co.

As always, the winning poems in this contest are “co-winners”. We don’t award 1st, 2nd and 3rd places so the three poems receive the same prize of $100.

Keith has graciously provided three of his own poems for this issue. Those follow the three winning poems and four honorable mentions that he selected from the hundreds of poems that were entered this year.

Some other poems in this issue also came to us via contest entries. They are poems of considerable merit that are published with the permission of the authors who chose to give their poems a “second chance” at publication, by going through our regular editors.

There is plenty of fine art in our pages by some visual artists with whom we have become familiar from past issues. Ann Privateer, Gary Wadley, Denny Marshall, David Chorlton, Lisa Yount and Gary Bloom have all contributed their talents in the past.
Annual Poetry Contest

Judge’s comments on the winning poems and honorable mentions:

Praise Song for Perry… “A big ambitious poem that looks for the sacredness of the world but keeps everything tied to the real, the lived world. And it sings. I felt honored to be one of the first readers of this poem. “

When Harvesting the Hog: “Not unlike the poem above in theme [I realized after I'd made the selection], but does it all very quickly. It is a kind of sacrifice, and honors the beast.”

Story: “A big talky poem that is about the idea of writing, even writing past our inabilities to write. This poet loves his words and wants to spend them.”

Honorable Mentions:

The Summer We Saved the World: “A good story told succinctly and beautifully. I almost believed it at the end -- maybe they did save the world!”

Missing Buddha: “Loved the strong spoken language of this poem. Laughed, and then realized it wasn't just a joke but was so much more.”

Flames: “How could I not like this poem?! I was a teacher and am aging and still understand desire! All of that is here without getting preachy.”

Beginning: “Had to have one very short poem here and this one was able to capture desire and the things of this world, all in vivid suggestions.”

:}
Praise Song for Perry Just Before the Season’s End / Virginia Shank

Saturday is holy in its own way here
peepers cheeping muddrummed hymns
while turkey vultures stitch the sky’s silk robes
every inch dressed in azure—oh mother Mary

bless these buntings weaving the gold grass
gathering seeds, an offering made on the plate
of the loosegraveled road where the garter snake
suns itself, the body elastic ekphrastic epiphany.

How could we move so smooth?
When we turn to the lake, the lilypads lifting
their palms in praise of the sun, the beavers cleaving
the wetlands in v after v, we can’t help but hallow

the heron, statuestill snakenecked and waiting
to pierce the ribs of the fish that rise, tempted
to touch the cloudbroidered sky, silverscaled sacrifice
offered on altars of duckweed and cattails and shale.

What can we give but every last lick of love
for the furrows of farmfields, the long dirt lanes
the oak trees releafing, relieved of the creatures
that culled their spring green, for the streams

cutting gullies and gorge grain by grain
and the willowtrees rustle in taffeta rain,
for the lap of the lake, the arms of the drumlins
linked each to each and all of us singing

holy holy waterskater floating snail
summer’s last strawberry raspberry
days dissolved on the tongue
a sacrament, shifting but safe?

Virginia Shank / Irvine, California
let it be in snow. 
Know the cold

keeps and holds 
everything.

Blood, as blood is 
won't to do,

will flow; it must; 
there is no discussion.

But the cloud of breath 
that escapes your lungs

when you make that first rich cut 
between jowl and blade,

like a hare bursting from a hedge, 
will be a shock, every time.

Pray it is when your hands, 
cold, accept

the emptying body’s warmth 
around them and steam

against the early dark. 
Touch your lips and cheeks

to mark a blessing. 
Look up to the sky that holds your flesh.

Cut with a clean, true stroke.

Matthew Burns / Schenectady, New York
There’s this boy—been swimming out into the ocean every day since June, farther out each time. You’ve been watching, been working from home since *The Times* decided you weren’t writing anything with the world really in it. So yes, you’ve been watching the boy and the waves, the way they crash together. They get so tall this time of year, and sometimes you have to sit up to see his head still bobbing like a log in the water when they overtake him. Each day you say he won’t be coming because of the cold and each day he seems to be there earlier. Swimming out. Being pushed in. Swimming out. Being pushed in. Some days you swear he turns and sees you sitting on the patio, laptop balanced on your leg, hair a perfect picture of your tangled head in the wind, cheeks somehow warm against it. Not sure when you first noticed him, you wonder how long it’s taken, if he started with just his ankles in the icy swash and had to work his way up to his knees. You wonder what he’s swimming for. You walk down one day and sit in the dunes near the fence that separates the beach from the few houses along the strip. Blanket wrapped around you, you wait for anything other than wind, any sign of the boy or what may be singing him out into the crisp whitecaps. You watch the water for any flash of tentacles, any sign of some squid to pull down his body, your body. The boy doesn’t see you when he steps onto the shore and you’re gone by the time he washes in with the tide, but he sees the shape of you in the sand when he leaves. Soon you’re waiting for him. Checking the time more often as it approaches noon. Soon he doesn’t show up and that day you wait by the window for hours. The sun is setting when you swear you see a twisted shape tossed briefly between two waves and step quickly out to the patio railing, voice cracking the evening birdsong into silence, arms flung open in the wind with nothing
but the sky between them. You can’t believe your own body, can’t believe how much some driftwood moved you, some skin you’d never even touched, never really seen. You spend three days sitting through the cold draft of that window. You remember the eastern shore bull shark sightings you’d heard about, the fact that a bull’s bite is worse than a great white. You even remember the lusca you’d once read about, giant octopus with the head of a shark, sharp teeth and a mess of sticky limbs to pull you under. You imagine the boy warm in bed, wanting to spend the day inside watching scary movies rather than in the tide. Finally, you have to walk out to the water. You have to look for any sets of footprints in the sand, see if any have left. After a short time circling the shore, you have to step into the water and feel the draw of the backwash, imagine the way it could hug you, could pull you to bed. By the time you make it up to your waist the whole sea lays in front of you and doesn’t say what you want to hear, just keeps singing its cold chorus. You feel the tug of a single pale hand pulling you down, the light of an alien ship lifting you from the water and flying you away. Then, once the ocean is finally kissing your neck, you look back and see the whole sky staring right at you.

Adam D. Weeks / Baltimore, Maryland
The Summer We Saved the World / Lisa Bledsoe

We lived in a gas station that year. The farmer offered to let us live there free but we paid rent because we had clipped the coupons and taken classes, learning to breathe & push at appropriate times, absolute believers.

People wear instruments of torture as jewelry. Or this, last week: a woman with a large dead & dried seahorse—I mean, jesus! But that summer we were the charms, having successfully memorized the correct lists & passed exams. I bought cotton skirts and white canvas shoes in a Walmart half an hour away, along with an enormous silver bowl for rising bread. The farmer’s wife sent over sourdough starter & half runners, so we sat in lawn chairs on the cracked blacktop out front & snapped beans in the sun, believing absolutely.

Days later the septic system began to fail. We watched backhoes churn the hay field to slop out back, & bought cheap towels to blot the ruined carpet. Our shoes made terrible sticking sounds, walking across. Still. We sang, rested the dead, decried cancers, picked cherries, talked about having children. Soon I took down the sheets I had stapled across the windows & we left.

That may have been the moment, with the hot sun and scent of bread baking. Yes. The world was definitively saved: the parking lot, the fresh beans, the gas station. Six hundred square feet, give or take while the light blazed. Yes.

Lisa Bledsoe / Creston, North Carolina
Today the classroom was a cauldron hissing me towards a dark edge. Teenagers busily fabricated their own precipices and wax wings, preened and pawed each other. They wondered aloud how old people like Hamlet’s mother—relics the age of their teacher—could still feel the compulsion of desire.

It’s not their fault. Blinded by their own beauty, they are like bucket-bearers asked to wade into a clear-bottomed pond, their own footfall stirring up the muck that clouds the water.

Sometimes they cannot bear to look at us, so they build bonfires, admire each other’s glowing faces and tease the flames with their leaping. Above their heads, sprays of sparks wink out against the night sky. They can’t imagine us now lying in candlelight—our best camouflage—unhurried fingers tracing well-worn trails along ridges and riverbeds to a pool in a canyon known only to us, where we still love to bend down, cup our hands and bring water dripping to each other’s lips.

David Sloan / Brunswick, Maine
Beginning / Amanda Hartzell

Birds are pieces cut out of morning
the arch of your body still in my palm

is it really so simple

a windstorm downing power
the crumbs on a knife

the storm
the appetite
a way we revise the beginning

until the soap you leave on the towel
is a fortune and
the toothpaste in the sink
ocean foam
for us, the glowing animals

no one has seen yet
no one has named.

Amanda Hartzell
Hey, I don’t know, man. You know, I just grabbed it on the way out of that place cuz it felt like it was a charm, like it had some juju going on. I didn’t know it was valuable. It’s an eight-inch wood carving of a Buddha. I know that much. But just to rub that piece, it kind of warms up and feels like there’s some power in it. What I really think happened is I didn’t take it, man. No sir. It took me. I mean, it chose me somehow, which I’ve never felt before. I mean, it wanted to go with me, like I was its new master. Maybe it’s like those lamps that have genies in ‘em, that give out some wishes and that kinda shit. You know. I’m keeping it. That’s all there is about. I think it likes me. Look, it’s smiling, man. It’s smiling at me. Hi there, big guy. You got a new home, my man. I’m already feeling it, all that positive energy and good luck, man. Here, I’ll rub your belly. That feels good, don’t it?

Terry Allen / Columbia, Missouri
Out of the Attic

I don’t mind it in the attic,

hearing it scurry above me at night
or seeing it sneak out of the cracks in the roof

when I’m sitting outside,
then watching it fly

like some crazed and jerky swallow
between the oaks.

But this one came out of the attic.
Upstairs! In our house!

Now it’s flying around my study
dipping behind the books on the top shelves—

my boxed Dickinson,
my two volume hardcover Williams Collected—

making its ugly little sounds
like a bald mouse with sharp teeth.

I have no idea how to get it back in.
The Things We Do

We’ve done real work, spent real money to drain

the water away from the foundation
and keep our basement dry.

We send it to the street
or run it underground

so it can filter
down to the aquifer.

We haven’t stopped for years,
decades now, and still

I check almost daily
for thin streams running

across the floor
toward my books

or into the closet
where we keep our winter coats.
Three Springs

Up where forests have pushed back through fences, belief comes more easily, comes sometimes, for us, despite all our learning, even as it comes for that man we both love. Remember the day he took us away from the lake, from the roads, far into a valley, fern-covered and filled with the high calls of warblers ready to mate. Remember and this might help you when, shaking, you stand outlined before our window, drawing from its blank chill what comfort you can against the fear mounting at night. He showed us the stream overgrown in watercress, kept fresh, he assured us, even in the heart of the harshest winter by the three springs he led us to. Water rising, unbidden, always rising, spreading in an arc of green. Remember and this might help you as it helps that man, our friend, who knows more than I know of fear’s hard presence. Remember this: we pushed our hands into them, down through water and sand until we could bury our shoulders in that pulse of cold water.
One Day Bloom / Ann Privateer
Photograph
and what I recognized as my body
burned like light, pinpricks turned
stars, and we stood, still, some sacred
conflagration, transformed, unformed,
like bodies illuminated in a window
at night. Together, just for now, accelerated
and as bright and as dark as space,
as grace, and I swam toward you, in light
as liquid as love, as if nothing had ever
changed, as if you were still here.

When I woke this morning, ten years
from your going, I thought about how
you smiled that hot day when I stumbled
then slid my way down the steep bank, skirt
hiked up in my fist, to stand barefoot
in the warm Suwanee, river dark as
coffee, how you'd found just the right side
road in so I could, how I asked if you minded,
and you laughed, saying, Oh girl, I insist.
I'm swimming still, forward, toward
you, slowly through time and matter, solace
in knowing it's all, in the end, fire and water.

Mary Carroll-Hackett / Rice, Virginia
Delivery / Warren Woessner

The snow has just begun
and each flake is falling straight down
when Achmed calls my name
and hands me a warm shopping bag
of food. And for a moment
I am happy for the snow
for the food and for Achmed
Already vanished into the night

Warren Woessner / Minneapolis, Minnesota

---

Missing the Last Train / Eric Blanchard

The last train came and went,
and I waited for you. I must have
missed your phone call
last night. I waited,
and the human shadows
dispersed. I was sleeping
on the subway bench all night.
The morning air turned cool,
and the damp was like a kiss
to wake me.
The first train came and went,
and your smile is like the sun.

Eric Blanchard / Houston, Texas
**Dances with Dogs** / Eric Blanchard

It is barely six a.m.,
and he dons his coat and boots
in silence. He tries, but
the dogs are not having
the silence.

He’s a sidewalk rhythmic gymnast,
wielding leashes wildly.
Like computer-cable spaghetti,
they intertwine
and twist and tango.

There is no open field,
where a pack can run free.
The lots are edged with curbs.
There are doggy-bag dispensers
in the park.

He dances with dogs,
come rainy day or shine. Neighbors
cross the street,
but smile when they see him,
    hands indisposed.

They give hesitant waves
and, sometimes, a sympathetic
greeting, knowing that he
has himself a handful
    or two.

Eric Blanchard / Houston, Texas
Bird on a Wire / Ann Privateer

Photograph

Ann Privateer / Davis, California
On a day as gray as her hair,
sunflowers with heavy heads
look down at the ground
as far as she can see,
sunflowers with heavy heads
in fields flooded into marsh land.
As far as she can see,
hay bales sunk in pools of water
in fields flooded into marsh land
and hawks always flying alone.
Hay bales sunk in pools of water.
Another sweep of dark birds
and hawks always flying alone,
a small herd of grazing cattle,
another sweep of dark birds.
Cranes stand still as saplings.
A small herd of grazing cattle
look down at the ground.
Cranes stand still as saplings
on a day as gray as her hair.

Joan Wiese Johannes / Port Edwards, Wisconsin
Away from Water / John Muro

Wanting for the flop of tides
Or the guttural cries
Of black-back gulls –

Decibels beyond the fountain’s
Patter and listless rain.
Here, ears can’t bother

To work for sound.
All is latticed shade, rounding
To languor.

Colors scatter then reappear
In brief intervals. Little to fear
Or love

In this curated silence –
Something far less
Whole than the fervor

Of ocean;
There, calm is motion;
The deft erosion of shores

By delirious waves.
Surely her garden wants
For this or something more:

The thrum and sensual wash
Of tides; silt’s bronzed varnish
And arcade-bright allure.

Now, day’s softly drawing
Down, ornamental grasses flowing
Like gowns across an ocean floor.

John Muro / Guilford, Connecticut
Splinter / John Muro

Easy enough to blame the summer storm that blew apart the upper rows of shakes, or the sweet relief of wind and updraft of cedar that lifted me into a second-story musing for the long tooth of wood that bit hard and settled deep within a knoll of muscle. Difficult to tease out, a crude and hasty excavation left it well-embedded, eventually forming a blue-black puddle not unlike the icy glaze one might find at the bottom of an inkwell – my first tattoo, a tiny rosette, that I’ll house for safe-keeping and turn to each time I bend to my work and know, full-stop, that this is a gift from the world of wounds, crooks and edges that I’ve fallen hard against.

John Muro / Guilford, Connecticut
Only Human / Jesse Holwitz

Born a mailman, delivering daisy chains and blossoms in time for spring, delivering plastic ledgers filled with blood, delivering love birds and terrapins, leaving notes, leaving the station step by step, leaving each day as parcel on the doorstep of the next, and today I’ve decided to open your letter again, to read each word in your voice, and no, I am not a mailman, I am not yours anymore, I am not silver, none of this is true — I’m only human, beneath scorching memory, only human, delivering myself the bad news of what we had, delivering myself from abandon, leaving metaphor and simile, leaving all the figurative elements of your body, replacing them with madness, replacing them with the helplessly abstract, meeting patrons of despair, meeting emptiness in dawnlight, meeting myself in the mirror, and no, I am not a mailman, not a forgotten hair on your pillow, not an inkblot in your day, not a fragment of speech in your mouth.

Jesse Holwitz / San Francisco, California
Rainfall / Donna Pucciani

Water from the sky!           
In little pieces!             
A broken-hearted story of love and loss  
blows in from the northeast, 
then back again in the tragic circle  
of desperate weather.

Lamentations for cancelled golf,  
a rain date for picnics,         
the invisible yearning for sunshine  
to warm arthritic bones,         
raise an unfortunate ruckus,      
the response of children needing 
the yellow blanket of earth’s hot star.

Amazing that the heavens  
can cry, shed human-like tears  
scoring the earth’s cheeks,       
creating rivulets of sorrow or joy  
amid dessicated Iowa cornfields.

A hurricane lambasts the Gulf coast  
like a mad wizard raising ghosts  
of magical ruination, spewing  
roof-high floods, tipping cars  
and cattle afloat.

Where is the ark awaiting animals  
two by two? Trolls have come out to play. 
Elves gather berries in a bucket of silver, 
conjuring the sound of raindrops  
smelling of ozone.
A steady drizzle wakes me tonight. The roof doesn’t leak, the flowerpots in the backyard lap up shreds of cloud-borne darkness. I slip back into the small hands of liquid slumber holding me close to a bursting sky.

Donna Pucciani / Wheaton, Illinois

---

Sunset / Maryann Lawrence

a dark-skinned beauty falls beneath the blue sky blood streams through the street, passes through neighborhoods, flows into the sea, blends with the crimson horizon, and washes away like a thousand other sunsets before it.

Maryann Lawrence / South Lyon, Michigan
Black Lives Matter / Lisa Yount
Digital Collage

Lisa Yount / El Cerrito, California
Avery Street Notes / Maura Faulise

I could tell you about growing up there,
the scent of onions caramelized to tissue,
family packs of bone-in pork chops
on cookie sheets, Shake ‘n Bake style,
eaten with forks or fingers, standing
at the stove, greasy hood vent clattering
over our heads,
or how we used a sock
or someone’s dirty shirt from the laundry
for napkins. I might mention
the water balloons, filled and knotted
by my two younger brothers
in their Sears Toughskins at the sink,
held with precision
as they Spiderman-scaled
the thresholds of rooms in bare feet
that suctioned them
high on the wall
where they’d wait
to pummel unsuspecting guests—
like the boy I’d just met
from a “good” family.
Drove all the way from Fall River
to take me out, Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s
Sonnets from the Portuguese cradled
in the tweed elbow
of his blazer.
My father tried speaking to him
in Spanish,
spit out two dirty jokes
while I averted my face,
and the water brigade squealed,
released their gelid surprise
on my date who, dripping in his blazer,
called them animals
who needed the belt.

Or a fist. So I shoved him to the porch,
and my feral kin
pelted his back—errant shoe, frisbee, cluster
of plastic grapes from a chipped bowl
in the living room—and followed him to the street.

You might think it strange
that I’m nostalgic for this life,
given the chaos, the many hours
my older brother spent
not being one, bolted
in his room, Blue Oyster Cult
razing the scratchy stereo speakers,
or the epic New England blizzards of the ‘70s,
how our mother’s good moods
moved in with them,
and out
when our father sat at the kitchen table spilling
Green Beret tales in his “skivvies,”
rum-Coke cubes jangling against the glass
for most of the night.

Sometimes we all got along.
Like that one spring
when it poured and poured,
and the popcorn ceiling sprouted
a constellation of leaks
we tried to catch in scattered pots,
and it wasn’t so horrifying
to witness
the sky pouring in
because we knew our father
would fix it in the morning,

So we put on raincoats
and gathered around the sound
   of water dancing on metal.
That’s what we heard.
It’s what I still hear:
   the tambourine of rain.

Maura Faulise / East Lyme, Connecticut

---

*A Common Story* / Jeffrey Zable

The thing about living is that it’s also about dying.
What you do with the time while you wait.
Whether you can laugh a little, do something you enjoy,
eat your favorite meal without thinking about the fact
that one day you won’t be putting anything into your mouth
for all eternity. And maybe you’ll be one of the fortunate ones
who will find someone you can really love,
and if it’s not another human, maybe it’ll be a cat, a dog,
or a lamb that you saved from the slaughterhouse.
It’s a common story that is all about you.
What you do along the way while you try not to think about it.

Jeffrey Zable / San Francisco, California
Easy to Say / Jeffrey Zable

So I dropped the taco and got in the car, but in seconds the driver was moving so fast that everything became a blur.

“Is the world really like this? I asked, and he replied, “You should know. . . you just came from there!”

“I probably should. . . yet it’s all been confusing for as long as I can remember. . .”

“Then you may as well sit back and enjoy the ride!” he responded.

“Easy to say!” I was going to say…

Jeffrey Zable / San Francisco, California
**To My Son On His 23rd Birthday / Susanna Lang**

*Fly me to the moon!* you called,  
and I tossed you far beyond that first  
white stepping stone till you could play  
catch with an asteroid, crawl  
through the red dust of Mars and swim  
in Europa’s submerged oceans, before  
hopscotching from star to scintillating  
star down the spiral of the Milky Way.  

And from that sky-high vantage point  
look down to where I’m still standing,  
arms outstretched among the long arms  
of the maple, humming an old love song  
and thinking about cake with chocolate icing  
and of course candles for when you return.

Susanna Lang / Chicago, Illinois
it happens bit by bit. You don’t awaken in the night to find your jowl has grown twelve spikey hairs. It started out with one or two – spare thicket of thorns where none should be. Uproot them with tweezers or garden spade, while you think you can. It begins with a child, who casually left five kitchen cupboard doors ajar and said, *when I am a mother they’ll stay that way.* Lo and behold the snick of latch as it kisses pine wood now pleases the senses. A child no more, you walk around with purpose, to grumble each panel in place. It begins with a fight, your spouse crying out, *you sound just like your mother.* It’s true, but you may not concede these points, these words of war to him. Some seeds were sown before the dawn. They’ve taken root and multiplied, each bitter fruit familiar. Now they are yours to share. It begins with a glance in aisle thirteen, among paper box penne, glass jarred Prego. A voice, recognition, piercing the fog, *you look just like your mother.* It’s true, but you had always hoped a better version, perhaps. Now the face that once was yours is tired, tempered. A softened stick of margarine left out for far too long. What begins with a cry in a hospital bed, ends with a phone call at noon. To tell you that she has slipped away. We’re all slipping away – but she more than most. While you remain - a remnant, a scrap. The patch-worked sum of all her parts. The threads that bind you, loosen up, but manage still to hold.

Maggie Walcott / Hersey, Michigan
Chicago Walkway / Gary Bloom
Photograph

Gary Bloom / Pass Christian, Mississippi
There's a stillness looking out over
the hostess station as shortly after 5 am the sun
readies for its daily debut.

I spray oil on the side grill and scrub one more time,
looking for the shine that will disappear
as soon as the first row of sausages start their dance.

I am the only cook, Natalie the lone waitress.
We’re both new enough to have this shift,
good enough to be trusted. I catch myself

watching her compact movements
as she prepares the coffee, straightens the menus,
readies the waitress station for morning.

There’s a lightness, a feeling of making it through
although we don’t speak of it,
this is a time for silent reflection.

A trucker comes in and sits at the counter,
orders rye toast, hash browns, and a western omelet.
For me, he spoils the mood,

but maybe this is his time to ruminate,
a gathering of strength before grinding gears
and diesel fumes fog his dreams.

The morning shift comes in and I punch out,
take off my apron and hair net, a more
industrious mood taking hold in the kitchen.

I walk out with Natalie, think about asking
if she wants to grab breakfast, but she looks tired
in the sunlight, her work personality tucked away,

so we say goodbye, say see you again tonight.
I’ll think of her, of possibilities, as I try to sleep,
my nocturnal self out of cycle with the world.

David Mihalyov / Webster, New York
Because it was our birthday
and I felt kindly toward the world,
I shut off the faucet to save it
from capsizing in its little boat,
the thin oars of its limbs
in rowing away
almost caught in a swirl
down the rapids of the drain
until in my great magnanimity—
a god in a flannel robe—
I gathered it in a paper towel
so I could set it adrift
on the pond of the lawn.
It paused as if to set its course—
uncertain but surely filled with wonder—
before its oars began to stir,
and with tentative strokes
that grew pronounced
it steadied the wobbly freight of itself
and crested the waves of silvery dew.

Joseph Chelius / Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania
Design a jaw-dropping website for my blog. Make people follow me on Facebook and Twitter. Share me on YouTube. I wanna go viral. Dye my hair and cut it just right. Give me drop-dead gorgeous eyeglasses. Dress me for success. Accessorize the hell out of me. Slap on the makeup. Pierce me. Tattoo me. Enlarge my breasts. Suck out some of this fat. Stick me on the right diets and exercise regimens. Sculpt my muscles. Pump me full of steroids and nutritional supplements. Change my voice. Provide me with a vocabulary of buzz words, puns and rhymes. Tell me how to dress and stand and feel, what to say and do and be to get my own fan base. Brand me. Sponsor me. Embed me. I want to be instantly recognizable from coast to coast, my image in every home, on every lap top and cell phone. Wrap me in a corporate identity. Transform me into a meme, a cultural icon. Build an appetite for me. Encourage them to binge. For the love of god, please

Kyle Heger / Albany, California
A week home from the hospital,  
my father stands, stooped and grinning  
in his front yard, an eight-inch-long scab

across his scalp, thirty stitches bristling  
through his thinning hair. My son crouches  
with a jumbo yellow bat, waiting for my father’s pitch.

I’ve made some bad choices in my time  
but this one takes the cake: letting my father,  
with his momentum and the small power

his wiry weight provides, stagger past me  
to play baseball. His hands are bruised from the IVs,  
his eyes are ringed and worn. I try to tell him

he has little strength and lousy balance,  
and my boy doesn’t understand how to be  
cautious. The best I can do is stand out by first,

mute and furious. My father lurches, tosses  
a slow pitch which my son line-drives to left field,  
then runs the bases: azalea, dogwood, maple, boxwood,

throwing his arms up in delight at his run,  
then doubling back to hunt for the ball in the ivy,  
the glossy leaves shirring against his ankles.

Ann Hudson / Evanston, Illinois
**Homemade (Wood and Clay)** / Gary Wadley

Photograph

Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky
All This Time / Carolyn Wilsey

When we wake, birds pulverizing air, the plumes 
of night still purple the sky. Everywhere, these birds voice 
themselves, knowing something we don’t. 
It’s spring, they say. It’s spring.

Cherry blossoms must live on our tongues now, 
and our brows furrow with flowers. We open our mouths 
and sunshine pours out, sepia glass yawns of it.

O, but what has time done to us? This caved life, 
the deep seeping unseen of it, the gnarled banks 
twisting with twigs, the expanse of universe pinned 
to my living room walls, drawn on navy architectural paper.

What if everything is true? That we are becoming birds 
again, 
that our skin shines with whisked gull feathers 
and brightest green seaweed.

Carolyn Wilsey / San Jose, California

Dead Man’s Bowling Shoes / Steven M. Smith

Give us a call if you have junk to haul!

The Scrap Boys: two hungry college students and a van

The lazy phone brought us to work once the summer of 1981. 
A lady’s husband died. When she opened her garage, I tripped 
into an indoor landfill. “All this crap has to go,” she squeaked, 
tears leaking from behind her crystal ball-like bifocals. 
Strands of white hair boiled from her purple turban. 
She brandished a red pencil. Then she waved it—
a fairy godmother’s wand—across the card tables stacked with men’s pants and shirts and vests—baggy costume-style clothing like the Gypsies wear in werewolf movies. I saw travel trailer parts shrouded in greasy tarps and cauldrons of cardboard boxes bubbling over with scrap planks seasoned with plywood splinters and bent nails. I saw dozens of rusty paint cans—their ancient labels streaked with the drool of hypnotic paint colors—stacked in pyramids.

“Keep what you want,” the lady whispered. “Toss the rest.” Then my eyes rolled across the alley of debris to a pair of red, white, and blue bowling shoes. I picked them up. My size! “They’re yours!” the lady called out. “My husband bowled a 300 in those!”

I tied the laces together and hung the bowling shoes from my rearview mirror. Each time I started the engine I tapped their heels together three times—then a moment of silence. When I went over railroad tracks, they thumped the windshield. Strike! When I hit potholes, they pummeled the passengers. Strike! When I slammed on the brakes, they rocked the roof. Strike! My luck started to change: I got a job in the library. I passed math classes. Smart girls asked me out. My old man started talking to me.

Passengers blurted, “Jesus!” “What the hell?” “That’s friggin’ weird!”

Oh, where are you now, bowling shoes? Forty years of tenth frames have passed. And still strike! Strike! Strike!

Steven M. Smith / North Syracuse, New York
The crocus gets a lot of credit for being spring’s vanguard. But I noticed you, iris, your leaves piercing the hard soil before any other green thing. Slowly expanding. It takes time to ready your purple flounces, your offering to high summer. So, an early start. Your muted chevron blades feel for March’s cold light, synthesizing, preparing. You are no daffodil, with its race to turn a bright face skyward. Though I love it for this, I do not kneel to admire its clarion bloom. But for you, iris, when you finally arrive, I will climb inside your indigo chambers and kiss your tender parts like a patient, devoted lover.

Emily Updegraff / Wilmette, Illinois
Another Exodus / Margaret Ingraham

Whether it is the mist rising over the ridges or the clouds settling into the valley’s seam that makes sheer morning as manna spread for me when once again I leave these Tennessee hills, I cannot say. But I do know that while the light plays its way across them, it changes the shape of things, alters what I see and how I see. Even the color of corn stalks holds brighter green in this dawning beside the ochre field—wheat or hay, I guess—already harvested, cut too short and straight to bend in the bluster of any midsummer wind. Yet at this still hour when I turn eastward, I find the Sequatchie River a mirror, its surface a double take of the arch of trees above it, again beckoning me to stay. But just as its undercurrents I must keep on my way, certain that each breaking day will bring fresh manna for me to gather, even if it only falls as small as coriander seed.

Margaret Ingraham / Alexandria, Virginia
**Falling Down in Five Chapters** / Buff Whitman-Bradley

**Chapter 1. Quick recovery**

In the first millisecond
Of your sudden descent
You believe
That you can still right yourself
And carry on as you were,
Making your way down the stream bank
Before your untimely misstep.

**Chapter 2. Calculating options**

When you realize
That a quick recovery of vertical stability
Is not a viable possibility
You consider various alternatives
For effecting a safe landing, e.g.
Curling into a ball,
Covering your head with your arms,
Twisting your body somehow
To re-aim it
At that patch of mud
And away from the large rock
That is glowering at you
From the terminus of your trajectory.

**Chapter 3. Surrendering to reality**

It soon becomes clear to you
That a body in freefall
Has limited options,
“Oh, fuck,”
You explain to yourself
Just before your corpus and the Earth
Encounter each other
In what could not be described
As a tender embrace.
Chapter 4. Assessment

You lie perfectly still
On the wet, stony ground
Noticing that your glasses
Were smart enough
To abandon your face before impact
And are lying in a puddle
Close to your left ear,
Apparently undamaged.
Good for them.
Your wife rushes to your side
And requests a quick self-triage.
Everything hurts a little,
Nothing hurts a lot.
You stand up slowly
And find you are able
To continue on your way
Around the lake,
Limping only slightly,
While you monitor your interior workings
For any malfunctions,
Any new pangs and throbs.

Chapter 5. Aftermath

Back at home
You call the advice nurse
Who reads off a list of symptoms:
Dizziness, severe headache, nausea,
Blood or other fluids
Pouring out of your cranial orifices.
No, no, no, and no, you reply,
Relieved that one more time
You seem to have escaped serious injury
And wondering if this may have been
Your last free pass.
Coda

Next morning
You wake up hurting
In no place in particular
But everywhere in general.
You feel a kind of exhausted aching
Of the soul,
And are deeply pessimistic
About your chances of landing that job
With Cirque du Soleil.

Buff Whitman-Bradley / Fairfax, California

The Cage / Andy Roberts

Someone has mounted a speaker in a wire cage
and attached it to the brick wall
twenty feet above the sidewalk
over the entrance to the downtown YMCA.
The cage is sturdy, though badly dented
from rocks and bottles thrown
in attempts to stop the 24/7
classical music broadcast at high volume
to deter loitering.

I enter the building.
Cigarettes, sweat and urine.
All surfaces smooth:
vinyl and plastic seating to facilitate
easy cleanup of bodily fluids.
I’m buzzed through a series of doors to the elevator. Hit 6 for Sam’s room.

I’m here for my annual follow-up. Sam’s in a good mood. Better than last year, when the only word he uttered was Why?

We both know the routine. I ask the questions and Sam answers. Yes, he’s doing fine. Yes, he’s clean, going to his meetings. I’m out in five minutes, with a promise to return in one year.

Sometimes it gets to me. How do people live this way? Why don’t they shut this place down? Seven floors of eighty rooms. Five hundred sixty Sams.

Outside, a woman is wailing in Italian from the caged speaker. A guy in dreadlocks, dirty white Nikes, claps his hands over his ears, looks for something to throw.

Andy Roberts / Columbus, Ohio
He roams it through the lilies, this scale model that resembles the real 62' Ford, the actual car. The model is beige. It’s perfect. Once we saw a real one, a sedan parked in the church’s lot. We walked up to it together, to run our fingers down the long panel groove where the rear of it rolled and curved into red taillights. Oh, and that song, Day After Day: so ardent and so intense that year. It made me cry while kissing a girl in the side bushes. The song – so fervent – so charged with life. That boy looked into me, his eyes so blue. His eyes made of tears – or like the sky’s perennial soul. I love him in those days like a bird, or like a pet, but he’s my kid brother. So young, so blonde, so innocent as he frees the gerbil to slip away from him through the verdant summer grass. His simple life, so tender, so fragile. On the verge. And he dies in December, while the snows fly forceful, wild; it buries the cars, entombs me there.

Ken Meisel / Dearborn, Michigan

On the turntable, the DJ mixes Unc, by Trombone Shorty, Ring My Bell by Anita Ward, Cupid Shuffle by Cupid, and Freakbeat Hustle by DJ Maestro and he torments things by spinning Last Two Dollars by Johnnie Taylor, and the sweaty crowd, smothering...
the tiny dance floor at Bert’s
pulses together in a tandem line –
doing the Detroit Hustle.
This is club mix, Detroit style
on a humid summer night
while at the ball park, the Tigers
dust and spray the Yankees.
My wife and her friend squeeze
in to add a white corolla
to the pecan mix of women seeding
the floor with their perfume.
Every woman in this place is a
pollination of hothouse beauty,
and the men here, me included,
sawdust the rootstock here by
jumping beside them – wiggling,
dipping – web-worming our way in.
Finally – worn out – I take a break.
Outside, parked alongside the
curb where the summer night’s
horticulture of convertible cars
lines up, I see, parked here,
a 1961 Dodge Polaris, Snow-
colored, its silver grill, open-faced –
so roguish – and its cardinal red
tailights escaping the deep
chrome pocket settings they
were stuffed and rooted in
and, crowding it, in front of a
66’ two-toned Black and Red
Plymouth Fury, I catch a 71’
Cadillac Eldorado – Almond –
as long as the summer night
and as bright, and, inside it –
a pair of lovers, club mixing.

Ken Meisel / Dearborn, Michigan
I’m Just Gonna Trim the Bangs / John Jeffire

Fell for it every time.
A Kool 100 menthol cocked
One way, her head another
As she held the gleaming
Crocodile jaws.

Just take a minute
Was of course
Never a minute.
Swip, swip, swip…
Setting the cigarette
In an ashtray,
Leaning back to survey
Her work, one eye
Winking, the other
Siting the sniper strike,
She tipped her head
Some more as if
That might even out
The over and underbites
Adorning my forehead.
There, there, she said,
Shifting her perspective,
Tilting the globe
Just so to balance out
What so obviously lacked
All sense of balance.
Done, she sent me skewed,
Tilted, lopsided, asymmetrical
Into the skewed, tilted,
Lopsided, asymmetrical world—
Mother now long passed, hair
Shaved, clipped, styled, trimmed,
Parted only to part over the decades,
The bristle of sacrificed clippings
Still scratching at my neck.

John Jeffire / Macomb, Michigan
but when I heard she died I drove the San Diego to the Harbor, the Harbor up to the Hollywood, the Hollywood to the Golden State, the Santa Monica to the Santa Ana, the Ventura. I thought of Maria when I drove those intricate stretches of freeway where successful passage requires a diagonal change across four lanes of traffic. When I merged the Century to the Pasadena, I took the curved on-ramp that stretches miles above the earth. And there it was below me. Los Angeles. A sparkling grey stretch of glitter on rubber. This is it, our country’s Manifest Destiny: a city in denial of its earthquakes, its forest fires, its drought, its full ICU beds. I always thought Joan’s death would mean the city would stop humming, just for a day, stilled by the pause of one collective gasp. But this didn’t happen. Perhaps we forgot about her when she moved to New York. Perhaps she was not enough of a scoundrel for the city to cherish as its own, so we let the east coast claim her. No, the city will only quiet when the Pacific Ocean opens its dark, wide mouth and swallows the basin whole. We may live on stolen water, but one day the water will steal us back. I drive on and wonder if Joan longed for California when she passed in her New York apartment.

Brianna Di Monda / Manhattan Beach, California
I’m thinking of coming back
as a blue jay—arrogant and loud, able to fly

anywhere I damn well please. Or maybe a tree,
marking my place on the earth, yellow leaves, a black

trunk four or five feet in circumference.
Perhaps I’ll be a fish

and explore the depths of Silver Lake,
course up a river or two, find a hidden hot spring.

There’s deer, a fox, a horse, or maybe I should focus on B-list
animals: a mouse or mole, a woodchuck, a gopher.

I glance out the window and catch my lucky break:
I’ll be a squirrel, climbing trees, leaping from branch
to branch. I’ll feast on birds’ eggs, chase my friends
across lawns, hunt and dig and make

a whole life out of playing with my nuts.

   David James / Linden, Michigan
Somedays the Bear / David James
for Preacher Roe

Sometimes you eat the bear and sometimes the bear eats you. Either way, it’s a bloody mess.

The snow’s falling—four inches or more—and there you are, skinning a bear like a crime scene, hacking away at the fur, slicing the carcass, searching for bear sirloin and ribs. Next week, it could be you sprawled on the ground, torn apart, chewed, digested. If only you knew when it was going to be your day.

You could wake up and head out like a Greek god, fearless and beautiful. You could grab the sun, throw a dozen stars in your mouth, climb to the peak of any mountain. There will be bear fillets on the grill tonight. Tomorrow, no one knows. And that’s the point: you win some, lose some, tie some. Then you order dim sum and enjoy the hot mustard and plum sauce, savor the tea, before it all goes away.

David James / Linden, Michigan
Shift / Denny Marshall
Drawing

Denny Marshall / Lincoln, Nebraska
When Love’s in the Kitchen / Gary Wadley

Don’t need no riot
Just peace and quiet
Ain’t nobody bitchin’
When love’s in the kitchen

Postman bring you bills
Doctor give you pills
Politician make you ill
Whiskey make you still

Pot cloud you head
Cocaine make you dead
Computer make you lazy
Cell phone make you crazy

But nobody bitchin’
When love’s in the kitchen

Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky
When I was a kid, I heard of a land
across the ocean where dreams could come true.
Where boys could be girls and girls
could be anything: superhero, Barbie
and everything in between. This world
was my black and white movie,
my Norman Rockwell painting. Somewhere
between “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn”
and “We’ll always have Paris,” this new world shimmered
surrounded by skyscrapers and palm trees.
I pictured it on nights when I couldn’t sleep.
Scared of Iraqi bombs hitting our house,
I imagined myself on the beach, clenching
moist sand in my fists,
next to a guy with Clark Gable’s eyes
and Errol Flynn’s physique.
“Happy Fourth,” he whispered.
“Ignore the sirens and watch the fireworks.”
He wiped away my tears with his blue handkerchief.
Each morning when I couldn’t bear the choking weight of my hijab,
I pretended I was a character in a never-ending Halloween.
I visited my friend in jail before I left Iran.
Omid was a journalist, caged like a dog that barked too much.
He had five more years left on his sentence,
five grueling years of goulash,
haunted holes and cobwebbed ceilings.
It has been years since I crossed the ocean.
Last week I went on a date with a guy
who posted on his Facebook twice during lunch,
and only talked about his hot, reality star crush.
By the end of the date I realized,
sadder than a caged man is a free one
who stops dreaming.

Shakiba Hashemi / Aliso Viejo, California
Into The Future / Jude Dippold

The man moving into the house down the street where Charlie and his family lived is busily erecting a fence to close off his new backyard. The pregnant young woman who works as a barista at the town coffee shack has started keeping a journal for the unborn child she carries. And in the ravaged forests burned by the Goodell Creek Fire, tendrils of green curl around charred remains of cedars.

Jude Dippold / Concrete, Washington

Visits / Ed Gold

The story is that each cardinal is someone you loved who died. They want you to know they will always be with you. Look for them, the story says, and they will appear.

But cardinals visit us every day in the branches of the loquat tree, popcorn tree, live oak, and chinaberry, along the telephone wire, on the red tin roof of the apartment next door—

every day, every day.

Ed Gold / Charleston, South Carolina
I crashed through the rain
to the alley door knocked
the Shave and a Haircut riff
waited for the Two Bits reply
ever heard that one? Sometimes
it goes Match in the Gas Tank
Boom Boom a quick seven beats
a sting to end a jazz improv
so it got me inside again and I told them
Sheik sent me and climbed
the stairs to the red velvet drapery edge
stage right where the strippers
passed through to hit it
stage lit up in the right spots
hardwood saw dusted to perfection
empty orchestra pit below lonesome
ladies dancing to hit records now
I peered out to the front of the house
usual cast of characters scattered
like buck shot but a number of posse
wolves packed together tight
in clutches clear back to the vomitorium
and there was my man Sheik
I slipped him a ten spot, he winked
did his tricks with curtain ropes
my girl passed by ignored me
decked out in a birdcage veil
fish netted prancing on spikes
she was going by Fancy Deal
but I heard her name was Melba
and she started up high stepping
to Stevie Wonder for once
in my life I have someone
someone who needs me.

Mark James Andrews / Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan
Shallow Breath / Connie Post

I am reading about palliative care
on the hospice web site

I study the notes
on the rally before death
also known as
“terminal lucidity”

I think about the earth
the countless flash floods
the fires that burn
all throughout fall and summer

I watch the eye of the hurricane
widen
and destroy a town
like it was nothing

I ponder
how many barrels of oil
it takes
to ruin an ecosystem

I wonder how
all the species of animals
have hung on this long

Who will hold the hand
of a dying planet
when its finally time

how will the universe
know its pulse is gone

who will put a thin cover
over all of the oceans

who will stand there
keep a celestial vigil
after time of death
has been called

Connie Post / Livermore, California
ON THE HISTORY OF POETRY / Iris Dunkle

for Ella

The history of poetry
is heliac; meaning,
it is filled with helium;
meaning, it is weighted
in gold dust measure-hinged
against a child’s small shoe;
meaning, it is ice brought down
from heavens or carried down
from mountains in the heft
of ceramic vessels; meaning,
it is the blur of melt and material
haloed with honey; meaning,
it is ancient words mechanized
from under surface. See their slur
up from the depths? Meaning,
it is the far-off pines and how they tilt
toward indecision. Is it wind or substance
that weighs them down? Under the sea,
the ever-churning sea, is a stone silence.
If you stand on it and look up
you’ll see poetry: the world, refracted.

Iris Dunkle / Sebastopol, California
**The Grave Blooms Upwards and Walks the Road**

IRIS DUNKLE

Here, soil is more telling than a zip code: limestone, sea salt, the rotting of oak leaves.
As a child, I ate handfuls. Sun-baked mudpies on flat rocks at the creek. Dugout my own grave to crawl into. On the other side of our telling (our before): wind carried the topsoil from our first home (dugout) to our next (shack). The net of loss we wrapped ourselves in was gossamer. Somedays I lay my body onto the earth because I’m too tired to carry it, root, be uprooted, to another location.

Iris Dunkle / Sebastopol, California

---

**Una Clase de Inglés en el Borde** / Rachel Baum

(An English lesson on the border)

the word for word is *palabra* the written word
the spoken word my word He is the Word
a word to the wise
don’t say a word
runaway is the word for *huir*
carried away castaway go away fade away far and away
slip away

_agnu_ is water _sed_ thirst the word
for dry mouth dry spell
drywall wash and dry

lips are dry

a well is just a _paso_ step from here
take a step step lively step up
step in time one step at a time

watch your step

wait at the barbed wire _valla_ fence
lie in wait couldn’t wait
wait list wait around

wait your turn

this is a _jaula_ cage call it _casa_ home
home run close to home nobody home
homegrown bring it home come home

_**lejos de casa**_
away from home.

Rachel Baum / Saratoga Springs, New York
Smitty’s / Mark Madigan

It’s just a small family run shop
with maybe a dozen booths by the wall

and a few square tables
with easy to wipe-down Formica tops

but I always feel as if coming home
when, after six hours of highway traffic,

I peel myself free from the seat of my Chevy
wobbling a bit as I stand up

then walk through the doors
of this my favorite barbeque joint,

the scent of pit-cooked chicken and pork
mixing in the air with fresh coleslaw,

cold potato salad and hush puppies fried
in something deep as a Mother’s love.

All this, suddenly, rushing to greet me
like family I haven’t seen for a while

quickly reaching out, hugging me now,
tangled in all their embraceable arms.

Mark Madigan / Springfield, Virginia
Here, in April / Robert Claps

A green haze haloes our hills,
and in the yard, spring’s first
red-wing flies from feeder
to fence post, singing and calling.

Five years have passed; soon,
You will place a lavender wreath
by your oldest daughter’s stone.
What meaning could we assign
to this blackbird refueling on bits
of oat and corn, flashing its shoulder
patch in a month of promise when
the loss of a child seems more out of time?

Green rises in shoots and sharp blades,
wands of forsythia spark yellow,
but you want to wrap yourself
in dull tweeds, coats as drab

as the ones winter finches wear.
The redwing keeps trilling its three-
ote riff our thermal panes cannot
keep out. Days from now,

the nesting will start: if we learn
to sing in voices of pure joy and
pure pain, April might take hold,
and we could unlatch the windows,

leaving ourselves open to the yard
that right now is filling with so much life,
you have to look away.

Robert Claps / East Hampton, Connecticut
Unpacking the Hours / Katherine Edgren

I. Stowing

I pack my hours
till the sides bulge
and the zipper splits.
But an overbooked hour
is a nuisance,
wreaks back pain.

Tempted to squeeze in more,
I winnow to essentials:
singing, laughter,
snapping photographs,
drafty words on paper
rolled up like socks
tucked in the toes of shoes.

In the main compartment
layered around a central core
of kids-grandkids-friends—
I bundle melodies of nature,
movement,
my dog, beside
all my communities.

And within
the zippered compartment,
I’ll stow stillness,
solitude,
rest.
Dark chocolate.
Scotch.
In the front pocket
beside the raincoat
that shelters me from
what’s wet and windswept:
productive work,
freedom to choose
what I want to do.

And gently folded on top,
my favorite possession:
the long silk underwear
of my days—elegant
and immensely useful—
for this trip to the end of the road.

II. Slowing

Careening hours knock me over and trample me.
Their progress in me is toward disorganization and dust.
They flaunt the cruel irony: hours shrink
as energy lessens. Everything takes longer to do.

I’ll slam the brakes on speeding hours,
linger in the hammock of what is left
savoring morning toast the color of wheat fields,
hot tea that’s a bracing thump on the back.

I’ll lie on the floor pressed up to the length of my dog
scratch her ruff and butt, chanting the words good and love.
On ambling walks, I’ll detect places she stops to sniff,
grin when she growls at other dogs: she’s top bitch.

I’ll wrap myself in the blanket of a show about animal lovers,
take small bites of a memoir about growing up in New Orleans,
sip dry martinis with friends, slumber beside my husband,
listen to his breathing, stroke his cool skin.

Katherine Edgren / Dexter, Michigan
Before the Guests Arrive / Michael Hanner

I was trying to remember the woman and the poem I was going to write, but I had to turn off the grill and put the pork I had cut for dinner back into its plastic bag and put it in the refrigerator and now upstairs I have no idea what I was going to say. I was waiting for friends in my back yard. The wind came up and cold passed over me. I wish I could remember what I was going to tell you of this woman. She lived through the bombing of Dresden and now is a retired piano teacher in Ypsilanti or she was my father’s secretary who died of cancer in 1956, could she have been the woman who did my mother’s ironing and smoked Kools on the screen porch? Whoever you were, I’m sorry. I meant to hold you in my arms a little, tell you it was going to be OK.

Michael Hanner / Eugene, Oregon

Aslant / Becky Boling

When you look at me, do it from the side. A quick glance, from the corner of your eye will do, better if you turn perpendicular, your left shoulder pointed in my direction.

This slicing glimpse will catch me as I am, that shimmer of me-ness that exists in secret, slips around the couch edge, over the threshold between rooms, melts into seams of wallpaper, hides in the crack of the door before you lean into it so it clicks shut. I am the there that is not there when you look at me.

Becky Boling / Northfield, Minnesota
In broken English, sometimes using Hungarian when he couldn’t remember the English words, my grandfather told me about the wise king who wanted a wise prince for his daughter–

a father for his grandchildren and heir. I kept my questions to myself: Why couldn’t the princess choose her own husband? Why did every princess or scullery maid or stepdaughter need to be saved by a prince?

And why always the magic three before the happy-ever after? Three wise men. Three days from Christ’s death to his resurrection. Three-ring circus.

In the tale my grandfather told, the king sent out a decree and they came–a prince who brought gold, another carrying a finely tuned saddle and the white horse to put it on.

Last, the stable boy from the king’s own stable who brought a bag of salt.
I’d loved the picture of a girl under an umbrella on a round blue box with an easy-pour spout

not knowing then about the salt trade, people who gave their lives in the mines and on the road, how kingdoms were made and lost over salt–or lack of it. It was all about power.

When I eloped, my stepfather lost his lordship over me. It had nothing to do with salt.

Susan Landgraf / Auburn, Washington
Surrealist Composition 12 / Lisa Yount
Digital Collage

Lisa Yount / El Cerrito, California
Today’s Ghosts / Susan Landgraf

If there’s an invisible side of darkness, is there an invisible side of light?
My desk lamp shines on the calendar boxes of birthdays crossed out and an envelope, its letter lost. The dead cast their shadows far away in a cosmos that grows larger the longer I live, the more powerful telescopes become.

It is two nights past the full moon and orange stones catch fire in the sun. I don’t need a therapist to tell me that open door was not my imagination. That other side is as real as reading a novel on a train, the landscape and its history embedded there, real as it was and is.

On the third night past the full moon I don’t question my needs. Don’t talk with my aunt but remember the cemetery – her in a lawn chair talking to my uncle, my father, my grandmother while I walked on the path under the trees spreading their shadows.

I hear those shadows and the moon moving through its quarters in a cosmos larger than I once had imagined.

Susan Landgraf / Auburn, Washington
Mr. Coffee sputters brown liquid into the carafe as I stare out the kitchen window, my tattered robe hanging off me like the cloak of a ghost, translucent, no longer able to survive another trip through the washing machine.

“When are you going to get rid of that old thing?” My wife grabs two mugs from the drainboard.

I slide my right hand into the robe pocket, my fingers poking through the holes in the bottom. Then, shrugging, I pull it closer, its cloth worn down by years of use, caressing my skin like a security blanket.

“Never,” I mumble as I pour coffee into the mismatched mugs, mine with a brown Denny’s logo that I stole when I was much younger, my wife’s with a faded rainbow across it.

“C’mon, it’s an eyesore, and I’m sure it’s got a rat’s nest.” My wife grabs her mug from the counter.

Rat’s nest? I look in the robe’s left pocket. A wadded-up tissue and some dental floss. Nest-ish, but that was me, not a rat.

My wife peers at me over the rim of her mug as she takes a sip like she thinks I have early-onset Alzheimer’s. “The Dodge Caravan. Weren’t you just staring at it out the window?” There’s a tinge of annoyance in her voice.

It’s been there so long I don’t even notice it anymore.

“It’s such an eyesore.” She gazes out the window and curls her lip at it—the tires cracked and flat, the muffler having long ago succumbed to rust, now lying on the ground wrapped in a grave of weeds, a haven for bugs and vermin.

“Yeah, but that’s Dodge’s fault.” I grin, proud of my ability to joke before I’ve sipped a drop of coffee.

“Did Dodge leave it in the backyard forever, letting the weeds overtake it?” The tinge is now a full-blown undertone.

“No, that would’ve been dear old dad.” I run my finger over the edge of the Denny’s mug, the steam warming my hand.

“Yeah, but he’s been gone for two years now. Time to let it go.”
“Has it been that long?” I look up at the ceiling, the water spot having grown since I last checked.

“Yes. It’s been that long.” She drops the mug onto the countertop, and it rattles, emphasizing her point.

“I’ll deal with it after my coffee.”

“You promise?” She peers at me, her face soft.

I swig a hot sip of coffee as I nod and walk out the back door. A ripping sound alters me as I’m tugged back by my bathrobe hooked on the door handle. The pocket hangs off, a useless square of cloth.

I’m going to miss resting my hand in that pocket.

Tugging my robe free, I step onto the dried-out crabgrass, only to jerk my foot up, annoyed at the pricks of grass. But I have nowhere else to put them, so I just repeat the process until I hop/jerk my way to the faded maroon Caravan—waist-high weeds partially obscuring its faux wooden paneling. I stop short and spill coffee onto the top of my foot. Damn, that hurts.

I shake the hot liquid off and rub the burn mark on my opposite calf, making it sting worse.

Sighing, I walk around to the passenger door, grab the silver door handle, and tug. You’d expect it to be stuck and difficult to budge, but instead, it glides open like it has thousands of times before.

I slide in, relieved to have my feet off the unforgiving ground, and lay the mug on the dashboard, darkened foam visible through its cracks, a tiny plant sprouting from it.

“You’re gonna ruin the dash with that.”

“Give me a second.” I shut the door, grab the mug, and turn to my dad sitting in the driver’s seat. He’s got his right palm resting on the top of the steering wheel, his left arm along the door’s window. He reaches down and adjusts the volume knob as if the radio worked.

“I could use some coffee. You bring your old man some?”

“You can have some of mine.” I push the mug towards him, knowing he can never grab it.

“Maybe when we stop for gas.”
“Dad?”

“Yes, son?”

“Jill wants the car gone. It’s been two years.”

“Gone? Where will I go?”

“I don’t know. Where does one in your condition go?”

“You know your old man. I live for the road. Can’t keep me from it.”

I raise my eyebrow as if I have a chance of convincing him this isn’t the road, and he’s not going anywhere.

He grins at me. “We’ve been doing this since you could sit on your own—our Sunday drive. Why don’t you have Jill hop in?”

Not sure why, but it was the only time it was the two of us, no siblings to fight with, no idea where we were going, the road and the flip of a coin directing us.

I can still smell the Brut aftershave he’d bathe in, not sure if its memory or if it has seeped into the fabric of the driver’s seat, worn and threadbare, surrounding him like a security blanket. Dad and the road. Where he was most at ease with life. With himself. With me.

I flick the plastic roadrunner hanging from the rearview mirror—my dad personified, happier in constant motion.

“Let me explain it to her son. She’ll understand.”

I’m not sure I understand.

Dad furrows his brow. He looks tired. Concerned. “Do you want to stop these drives of ours?”

Never.

Jerry Kopec / Seattle, Washington
You still know me as Nick. Nick Yemana. All my partners liked me, and like me were stereotypes. Each his own running gag. All flawed but not fatally. Episodes after episode we drank. Not the hard stuff. No, we were Caffeines. Java hounds. Perked pigs. Caffeinated Cops. You get the idea. Always a cop with a cup in the precinct scenes, and somehow my coffee was always horrible. The muddy grunge of Greenwich Village. That was the gagging gag. I was always the guilty one. Grounds against humanity. Killer coffee. Each week a new joke, or two: the cop who murdered Mrs. Folger. Who brewed the brew the 3 witches of Macbeth avoided. Fresh or day old, it etched glass and stained Styrofoam cups, took the silver plate off spoons, and removed tooth enamel enough to bankrupt the company dental plan. Good days they were, except for the joke that would not die. Even now, safely dead, but not yet buried. I can hear Captain Miller (he was never Barney to me) quoting me after a hospital visit: “It must have been the coffee.” Sweet creams I say. As a survivor of the American internment camp I can honestly say I have tasted worse. I’d rather be remembered as the Motown singer who recorded *For once in my life* BEFORE Stevie Wonder. My last wish would be they’d release my version of the damn song.

Richard Weaver / Baltimore, Maryland
At one hundred three
this may be her last fitting.

The daughters set about the business
of deciding whether a pink blouse

with lilies on it may be too sheer
or if she would choose that color,

a task that suddenly appears
achingly quotidian, disturbing,

unbearably somber and sweet.
They gently hold up the garments
to the sunlight scanning each one
as she naps in this life
deciding what she should wear
in the next, as though dressing her
for breakfast on any ordinary spring
morning in the middle of Kansas.

Stephen Ruffus / Salt Lake City, Utah
Viceroy/ / David Chorlton

For moments every morning there’s a wave
across the sky: the earth
displays its soul,
the ridgeline crackles and the saguaros
on the upper slopes reach

another inch toward the passing clouds.
The highest peak marks the time
of day until

the minutes burn and the light
returns to the sun. The darkness
in the mountain’s heart
releases a cry so desperate for flight

it turns into a thousand
viceroy, each one of which appears
as a smile that trembles.

The Search/ / David Chorlton

The lost Monarchs have gathered
in an arroyo where
they are the only light
along the path that seeks a way
out from this world.

It is so cold here,
so filled with rancor, with so few
words describing souls. There’s a wind
without a name that searches
for its origins. It blows, but gently, and
turns every pair of wings into
a paper heart that beats
at compassion’s tired pace.

David Chorlton / Phoenix, Arizona
How they bowed their heads to pray,
how they bowed their heads to blend in,
how, robbed of their rings, they sang
and drummed upon their own skin,
until they were robbed of their skin,
how they lived in shelters of bark,
how they lived in buildings with chickens and knife fights,
how they endorsed heaven
and enclosed themselves with a wire \(^2\)
and made with the wire a province of inside,
wheels inside wheels, water in water,
fish inside men, lakes inside women,
how they pulled the wire taut
around all they cherished—babies and medicines,
canes and keys, the laws and their songs—
all saved by the strength of the wire,
all in accord with their god’s scalding judgment.

Peter Schireson / Palm Springs, California
After The Funeral / Joy Gaines-Friedler

No regret for the suitcases
I shoved the past into

or the one a lover took off with
filled with what could be stolen—

not my dignity but my Moody Blues Album
and a biography of Malcom X

The what if’s & could haves
are now the new-moon of the past.

Chain letters? End repeat signs?
There is no return to the beginning.

It’s amazing how quickly sparrows
develop down in the flaming cold,

yet, down-less woodpeckers
stick around all winter.

By what do we measure success?

Soon, all will be covered in the golden
rain of leaves,

the kind that spend the winter
covering the earth’s graves.

Even the periwinkle sky is nothing but reflection.

Joy Gaines-Friedler / Farmington Hills, Michigan
Static Switch Off / Denny Marshall

Denny Marshall / Lincoln, Nebraska