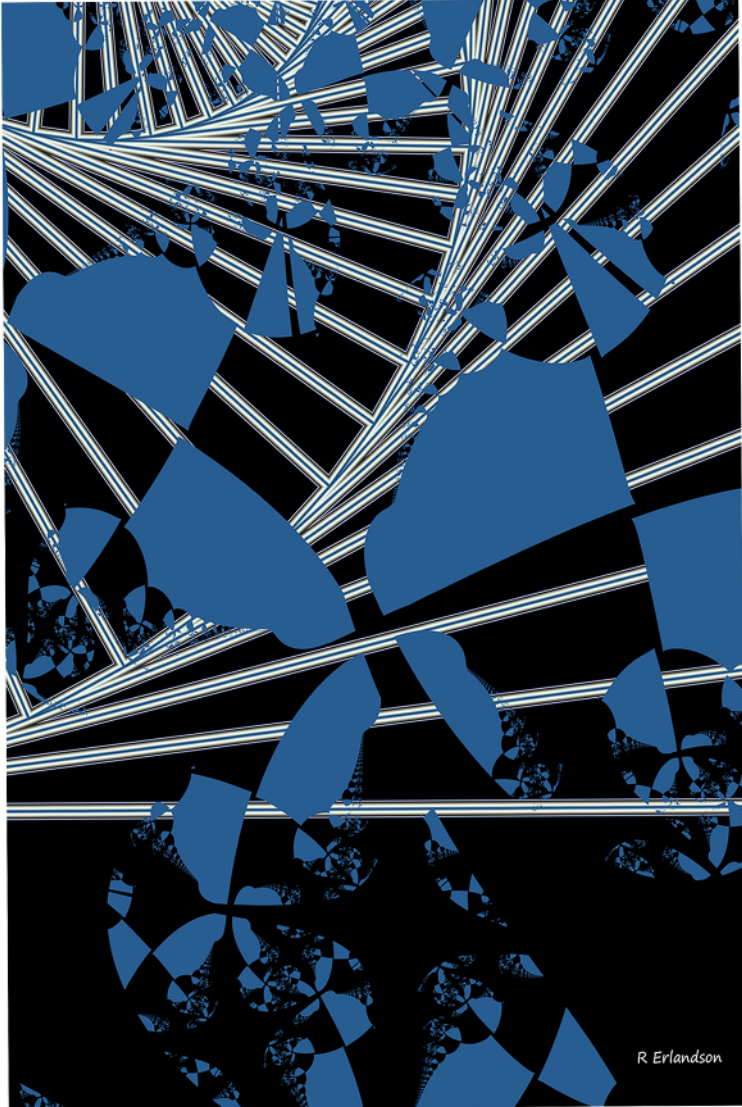


# 3rd Wednesday



Spring 2023

**Third Wednesday Magazine**  
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**Spring, 2023**

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.

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## Editor's note for Spring, 2023

The spring issue is our annual contest issue. This year we were pleased to have David James to judge our contest. David currently serves as the president of The Poetry Society of Michigan. He recently retired from teaching at Oakland Community College where his popular courses included Composition I and II, Creative Writing, Advanced Creative Writing, Introduction to Playwriting and Screenwriting, Advanced Screenwriting, and Introduction to Literature: Poetry and Drama. In 2006, David was awarded the Outstanding Faculty Award for teaching excellence.

David's books include *Alive in Your Skin While You Still Own It*, 2022, *Wiping Stars from Your Sleeves*, 2021, *A Gem of Truth*, 2019, *Nail Yourself into Bliss*, 2019, *Going Down, Friend*, 2017 (chapbook) and *My Torn Dance Card*, 2015.

David was charged with picking 3 winning poems and a handful of honorable mentions from nearly 200 entries of up to 3 poems each, a monumental task, and he made excellent choices for us.

In addition to our editors' picks from regular submissions, many of the poems in this issue came originally from contest entries. We offer everyone who enters the contest a second chance opportunity for publication as a regular submission. David James had to eliminate a lot of poems to get to his final choices and among those poems that didn't make the final cut we found many gems.

### ***3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday's Annual Poetry Contest*** Judged by David James

Judging this contest was a privilege, but it was much harder than I expected. There were so many poems in my 'in contention' list, which was a good problem to have. As I re-read them, I was looking for a spark in the language, or a brilliant image or phrase, or just a unique approach to a topic. I was looking for poems that surprised, haunted, challenged or moved me to think and feel.

The winners, in no particular order:

**"A Celebration of Nonsense"** grabbed my attention with its absurdity and humor. However, through the humor, the author made an interesting point about work and creativity in our culture.

**"The Punch Line,"** though brief, smacked me right in the face like no other poem in the contest. The final two lines, bizarre and surprising, broke through my old heart.

**"A Conversation with Henri Rousseau about his 'Vue de Boise de Boulgone'"** was instructive in its questioning of Rousseau's painting. Again, the powerful ending solidified the poem and expanded its meaning to include a truth about us all.

Here are the honorable mentions, in no particular order:

In "Chronic," I loved the connection between healing and salvation, between desire and time.

"Nazis Eating Chicken" took a mundane premise and made a strange prose poem, funny but yet not funny at the same time.

In "Opposite of an Existential Crisis," we see the 'what if' premise played out in history, both on a grand scale and a personal one.

“How to Kiss” is a recipe poem on a subject we’re all interested in, culminating in that beautiful final sentence.

I had to leave other excellent poems off the list simply because I had to limit my choices. The poems I selected in the end stood apart from the masses, focused on peculiar specific topics, and surprised me with their imagery, language and content. Thank you, poets!

David James

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*The Celebration of Nonsense* / Terry Allen

“Take a circle, caress it, and it will turn vicious.”

— Eugene Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano*

Dad, would you help me zip up?

Sure thing.

I can get my pants on. I just can't zip.

I see what your problem is?

It's hard to reach.

Your pants are on backwards.

Yeah, I know. It's *Wear Your Pants  
Backwards Day*.

At school?

No, that would be pretty embarrassing.

It's for that special extra workshop  
I've been taking before school.

What kind of workshop would want  
you to wear your pants backwards?

I told you weeks ago, Dad. It's about  
the celebration of nonsense.

What? What does that mean?

Exactly! It's about priming the brain to  
recognize patterns it might miss.

It's about creative thinking. Our  
teacher says, the mind loves a  
problem, especially problems that  
can't seem to be solved or  
explained quickly.

Who is this teacher?

We don't really know.

What?

Every time we see him, he looks  
completely different. It's the heavy  
greasepaint, and wild, colorful  
wigs, and false noses.

What's his name?



That's just it. His name is never the same. One day, he wants us to call him Captain Zig, the next day it's Pickles Noodle or Binky the Buffoon or like yesterday, it was Yucko Tumble.

That's weird.

I know. Isn't it great?

Well, have you been doing anything besides wearing your pants backwards?

Sure. We've been reading a lot of nonsense.

Like what?

A bunch of writers like Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, Edward Gorey, Laura Richards, Dr. Seuss, and Spike Milligan.

What do you get out of that?

We're exploring, Dad, expanding our minds and learning about doggerel, light verse, literary nonsense, pseudo-anglicism, absurdism, dada, experimental literature, and surreal humor.

That's a lot for a sixth grader to take in.

We just finished a unit on nonsense lyrics and studied Bob Dylan, John Lennon, and Weird Al Yankovic, oh, and also David Byrne and the Talking Heads. It was a real eye-opener and had a big effect on the class.

Really? How so?

Well before class one day, I heard two of the kids arguing, and one said, *No, you're the egg man. I'm the walrus!* and the other replied, *Look at me! I dance like this in another dimension!*

And that's supposed to lead to creative thinking and problem-solving?

Now, you're getting it, Dad. Yucko Tumble says there will be plenty of times when we'll be told to line up, stand straight, keep our eyes on the ball, and our noses to something called a grindstone. That doesn't sound good.

It isn't, son, believe me.

He also said that someday we might even find ourselves working for Dunn & Bradstreet as form and personnel reporters, strapped to a desk that's lined up in a large room with forty other desks, and that on that desk we'd have a computer monitored by our boss, and that we'd check in each day and be at that desk for eight hours, except for a ten-minute break in the morning, a thirty-minute lunch break and a ten-minute break in the afternoon, each of these at exactly the same time each day, with everything in that world designed to kill our gray cells as we're shoved into the square holes of corporate culture. . . whatever all that means. It doesn't sound good either.

It isn't, son. It isn't.

And so, he says we better learn to  
unleash the power of our own  
creative, playful, and nonsensical  
thinking as an act of survival.  
You know, son, we're going to be late  
if we don't get started this  
morning.  
Okay, dad.  
Come here. You want to look your  
best, don't you?  
Yeah, I guess.  
Turn around. Let me zip you up.

Terry Allen / Columbia, Missouri

*The Punch Line* / Ellen Romano

The poetry all ends the same way.  
I hear music my husband can't hear,  
I eat a blackberry, but my husband is dead,  
the apple tree is in bloom, the hills on fire again,  
dead husband, dead husband.  
I'm a magician with a big reveal at the end,

*Behold! The woman who has fallen off a cliff  
yet still walks and breathes.*

I dust the piano I don't know how to play,  
feed his dog,  
watch the news every day,  
as if something still meant anything,  
as if last night I didn't lick his hat band  
for the last remnant of his sweat.

Ellen Romano / Hayward, California

*A Conversation with Henri Rousseau about his “Vue de Bois de Boulogne”* / Joanne Durham

The focal point in the painting – two tiny distant figures.  
The trees lean towards them, branches snake  
their long necks to catch a sliver  
of their communion. In the foreground, each vein  
of leaf distinct, each blade of grass tongued to speak.

Henri, I wondered decades ago in college Art History, why  
did you make those figures the smallest objects in the painting?  
What good was a focal point

if you couldn't tell if it was mother & child, bear & swan, angel  
& Grim Reaper contemplating a deal  
to disquiet those woods that sought only shade and light?

Still, you were my favorite, not Monet's dreamy cathedrals  
or Jackson Pollack's splattered ink. You told me not to lose  
my child's view, even as I penciled my eyebrows and straightened  
my hair, walked into adulthood pretending

I knew where I was going. You paused your lion calmly  
beside the sleeping gypsy, made the world's strangeness  
benign enough to embrace.

And you tried to warn me, Henri,  
that our place on this planet is small and blurry.

Joanne Durham / Kure Beach, North Carolina

*Chronic* / Erin Covey-Smith

I want to take the ill hours of every day and color them in sunbursts. I want to bake muffins with the winter light slanting through the window – catching dust moats in its fingers. I want to take those endless hours out of my body and pour them into a productive and generous life.

At the least, I want to take better care of my houseplants and my husband, both too patient with my negligence. I want to answer the phone when my mother calls. I want to have no need for practiced patience while the pain clears, for deep breaths and bed rests – to have space instead for a compulsive jump in the ocean, surprise visits, spontaneous sex.

Above all, I want to believe in healing. To believe that if I, along with the ruptured rest of humanity, burst from the same exhausted star as the roots, the rocks, the rain – that if I can mend, so can everything that tears at the seams.

And all of us  
can have  
more  
time.

Erin Covey-Smith / Freeport, Maine

## *Nazis Eating Chicken* / Benjamin Davis

I started thinking about how easily Nazis could sound silly—just one letter away: Nozis, Nezis, or Nizis—when I got to Nuzis it got me thinking about *Newsies*—a movie about white American teenagers who, if born in Germany, would probably have been Nazis. I watched this movie a lot as a kid. Also, as a kid, my parents had a friend named Henry. Henry once told me that his uncles had been Nazis. He said he remembered his family telling him that his uncles had been Nazis who came to America after the war. He said he'd watch his uncles laugh and eat chicken at family barbecues just like the rest of us. That's what he said to me, he said, "They eat chicken just like the rest of us." Then he smiled and ruffled my hair. This, I now realize, might've been an attempt at insightfulness. Except, at the time, I didn't know what insightfulness was—or what the point was. I only thought: he's talking about his Nazi uncles eating chicken. Maybe adults aren't as smart as I think they are because, from what I'd heard, Nazis should be in prison whether they eat chicken or not. But there they were, hanging out in the back of Henry's adult-addled brain, eating chicken like everybody else. In retrospect, I should've said, "Lions also eat chicken and we keep them in cages!" In retrospect, though, I was nine.

Benjamin Davis /Seongnam, South Korea

## *Opposite of an Existential Crisis* / Diana Dinverno

If on a sun-striated day in 1914, a Colt .45 had misfired — when lowered, struck the would-be assassin's foot — prevented the pistol's aim at its intended targets, from being heard in Sarajevo, or by the world; and if earlier, in 1908, the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts took a chance, said yes to sketches submitted by a troubled-teen, opera-lover; and if my grandfather had stayed, sheltered by skyline of that English-seaside town, rather than move his family to Glasgow, that cold-water flat where my grandmother contracted tuberculosis, and bit by bit came undone, children fleeing, one by one; then, things may have been different. No hair-trigger alliances, miles of trenches with a metallic stench, or forlorn, paper poppies; no jackbooted monster on a Vienna balcony, no patchwork stars, broken glass, Dachau, or Stutthof. No vanishing. My birth father would have remained an Englishman, far from a young woman in Detroit. Oceans of misery avoided. I wouldn't have been born.

Diana Dinverno / Troy Michigan



## *How to Kiss* / Hannah Fuller

Have it be Winter. Cold in the bones kind of weather. Wearing a sweater & jacket & a chill. Have it be in a bar, somewhere fancy but not too fancy. Somewhere that serves Amaretto Sours with the little hearts on top. Talk her ear off. Let her talk yours off. Take off your jacket, empty your pockets, lay your heart out on the bar countertop. Let her lick her alcoholic fingers. Let her eyes linger on yours too long. Ask her if you can put your mouth on hers. Grab her face softly, pull her in. Do it slowly, tenderly. Think about nothing else except her lips. How they taste like candy. How you can't wait to swallow her whole. Make sure you collect your heart, get your jacket. Make sure you tip the bartender. Ask her about the book she's reading currently. Ask her why she doesn't paint anymore. Ask her how long she plans to compare herself to her mother. Lean in again. Let her lean in. Look into her green eyes, into her soul. Kiss her again. And again. And again. Kiss her until the world collapses in on itself.

Hannah Fuller / Rochester, New York

## *Dog* / Casey Killingsworth

Dog, you transform yourself into your four-legged past by lunging at me to the end of your leash as we run by each other on this path, like we're tracing our own ancestors playing out roles we learned before we were born.

When we get back to our houses, you to your yard full of no imagination, me inside four walls that scare me, we will hide behind our genes, meaning only that the comfort we seek is familiarity and not happiness.

Dog, just ahead is the fork of the trail where I am bound to go right, always, bound by my species to believe it will bring me better luck today, and as far as I know the idea of luck has never entered your mind. You're lucky.

Dog, what if I told you today I'm going left, what if I defy my own kind, and what if you broke your harness and got loose and grew an imagination, and if we just ran along this trail forever, what we would do.

Casey Killingsworth / Stevenson, Washington

*No Words Today* / Rick Blum

No words to expose  
closeted musings  
to the harsh light of reason.  
No words to describe leaves  
splashed crimson and gold  
in fatal resplendence.  
No words to condemn  
petty charlatans posing  
as political savants.  
No words to illuminate  
better natures or spark  
misunderstandings that linger  
like frozen lakes.  
No words to intrude  
on an exquisite day for  
hiking a wooded trail  
oblivious to cosmic calamities  
and personal slights,  
or entering the ether  
while Coltrane transforms  
an insipid song  
into a favorite thing,  
or staring raptly  
into the swirling void  
just beyond understanding  
where words are meaningless  
anyhow.

Rick Blum / Bedford, Massachusetts

*Fish in Fish* / Gary Wadley



Drawing

Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky

*All the Necessary Sadness* / Emmie Christie

Lobsters don't die from old age  
They just get tired from molting and shouldering  
All the necessary sadness a being needs  
To move from shell to shell,  
A suitcase packed with words from  
What their fathers said twelve years ago  
At the bottom of the ocean, from when they found out  
Hell was not a fire, but a sinking,  
An endless mounting pressure on the soul,  
On the energy, on that quivering, raw thing  
Crawling to the next house.  
And all the gravity of the sea  
Pressing, always pressing, while the body keeps  
Progressing, and dragging the grief around  
Itself like a hundred blankets to keep out the cold,  
That chilling freezing, deep, deep place,  
Where the fathers and the faith and the other dead  
Things drift down to, to keep away from the silt  
Of the grave. Lobsters don't die from old age,  
They crack from the strain, from staying inside  
Houses too small, beliefs too small, the curses  
Of the generation before sinking into their joints,  
And they fall to what their fathers said  
At the bottom of the ocean,  
Where all the other dead things crawl.

Emmie Christie / Omaha, Nebraska

*A Theory of Everything* / Devon Brock

If I am slow enough, quiet enough,  
long enough, I may present to a stone  
some theory, some glib hypothesis  
on the advent of time and the mewling  
sense that existence, that hard and irksome thing  
wedged between this and that ellipsis  
is an old dead tree: heartless, barkless—  
flocked with many spectacular birds  
going this way and that. Raucous.

*Ever Since the Invention of Light* / Devon Brock

Down every avenue, hunched  
in a doorway is the shadow of fear.  
Call it. It will come like a cat  
to your ankle. It will grease  
its way up your leg and lodge  
itself in your throat.  
And for all the wire and glittering  
madness of light, for all the furnaces  
and turbines, it's the first turn  
of the spindle, the spark that lit  
the dry grass and kindled our beacon  
of heat, that Darkness, a patient  
old god, took to the edges of hope  
where he shakes stones  
in a bag and grins.

*Sonnet for a Dream called Lethe* / Devon Brock

Some bridges, like cats, arch up from a long  
wary sleep and plant their paws shore to shore,  
before easing into their spines. And dreams  
are like this, one thing lapped on another:  
cats, bridges, freight over freight, pylon  
to pylon as all at once a bridge, unmoored  
from the architecture of bone, leans  
on its haunches and bounds over the river.

Some dreams are like this: the span of a life,  
a spoonful of gray green water; a cable  
with which to bind those two long nights  
split by a current where the freights gamble  
with the tides and muscle through the tolls,  
to dock at a wharf where madness is sold.

Devon Brock / Garretson, South Dakota

*Lake Erie Winter* / Joshua Gage

--after Donald Revell

It is conceivable that the glass and concrete  
curve in such a way, in such a mannered disproportion,  
that the whole city becomes a cathedral.  
Nothing has changed along these streets you walk.  
The grey sky collapses onto grey water, grey horizon.  
There are places, doorways and corners, to curl  
into like pews to forgive your sober thirst.  
Voices you can't trace rise and whip the wind  
into wanderlust. You move your feet, convinced  
that if you could wrap yourself around the gentle snow  
the way these buildings do, you would rot  
a little more slowly. Perhaps if you dreamed  
the way architecture dreams, you might even heal.  
The cold ascends to mock the bones beneath your skin.  
and mark the assigned paths of the city. In this retrieved light,  
the streets smell of myrrh and old rain. Your feet  
attend in blank regard. But you are here for the curves.  
Look up. Look at how the buildings close in  
lovingly around the snow. Look at the grey sky, the angels  
poised, wing to wing, in percussive constellations,  
a gaunt orchestra gathered to guide you home.

Joshua Gage / Lakewood, Ohio



*Splendid Auto Body* / Richard Merelman

The drab morning fits my solemn mood,  
because the left front fender of my Honda  
has slumped over the rim of the bumper.

I drive at a crawl to Splendid Auto Body  
by the Beltline. “Splendid?” *Hopeful*,  
given the number of drunks on the road.

The place squats between Liberty Bail  
and a plasma center. A bright spot  
is the Splendid sign, all gold glitter.  
An urban mirage? Have I blundered?  
Not much business; only a lone  
pickup truck, keys in the ignition.

Out of a door marked “Office” bursts  
a mechanic: tall, skinny, maybe thirty.  
His work shirt reads *Gary*,  
*one of the good guys*. Gary’s off  
to lunch. *Running late*, he says.  
I sag, beg him to help me. He sighs,

pauses. Then he circles the Honda,  
flicks and jiggles the fender, kicks a tire,  
watches the bumper sink six inches.  
I moan. He whistles, fingers the gap  
between fender and bumper. *Oops, my toolbox*  
he mumbles. In a second, Gary’s flat on his back,

half-wedged beneath the corroding frame.  
I want to warn him to be cautious,  
but something stops me. He struggles to loosen  
a rusted screw. It strips, bends, stays put.  
Gary twists, fixes a wrench to the head  
of the screw, tugs. I wince. The screw squeals

and rips free. A dented bracket supports  
the front suspension. Gary orders me  
to raise the fender high as I can.

Me, with Silly Putty muscles?  
I grab the fender, pray, flex,  
and hoist that sucker. *More*, Gary pleads.

I plant my feet, brace my shoulders, heft,  
hold. Gary bolts a new bracket  
to the bumper, replaces a few screws,  
wiggles from under the chassis. *Set her down*  
he says. Ten minutes have passed.  
Gently I lower the fender. I figure we're done

but Gary plugs in a heat pump, smooths  
the skin of the fender. *That's that*,  
he says, tossing his tools into the cab  
of the pickup. *Wait*, I shout. I owe him, don't I?  
A shrug. *Forget it*, he says. He coasts  
to the driveway, wishing me a nice day.

Nice day? Could be.

Richard Merelman / Madison, Wisconsin

## *Lucky* / Karen Zlotnick

When the cable snaps and breaks into pieces all over the Taconic, the green canoe on the Land Rover in front of me plunges into the passenger side of my windshield. I have no thoughts other than to veer away from it. Even after I ram into the minivan passing me at that unfortunate second, I keep my foot on the gas as my hands turn my car away from what I perceive is a monster next to me.

In the hospital under a morphine fog, I dream that the monster enters my room. I grab the meal table and attempt to steer my bed away from it. The next night in another dream, the monster hovers over me and tosses a baby's car seat from its talons. There is no baby, just cushioned plastic and straps and buckles, loose among the stars.

In a few days I'm less foggy, and in short conversations — with my mother, with police officers — I listen to details of the accident. Deaf in one ear and blasting Radio Woodstock, the driver of the Land Rover didn't know his canoe had left him until he got to the lake. The minivan tried to stay its course, but thrusting into its side, I drove it into a spin until it flipped onto the rocks that separated the northbound traffic from cars heading south. I am lucky. My car missed the rocks. The woman wailing a few doors down is the minivan's driver. She's my age, thirty-four. She's lucky, too.

The police officer with the tight bun asks me what I remember. What comes to me is the last song on my father's favorite Billy Joel album, *The Stranger*. Before I headed home, we were at a small family gathering, and we'd been talking about the way albums end. Do they fizzle? Or crescendo? My father said it was an underrated crescendo, that song, and he sang the refrain for me: *Everybody has a dream*.

The conversation about albums was my way to avoid the topic plaguing him. He wanted to ask if J. and I are ready for children. He doesn't want to know that J. and I have decided on a life different from my parents' — travel, concerts, other people's baby showers. I

tell the officer I don't remember much. The IV drip has a beat, and really, I'd just like to sing. But my throat pulses, as if my voice is a hammer wrecking my father's dream.

The next day, a physical therapist comes and suggests we walk down the hall. I insist we walk in the direction away from the wailing.

J. has been in Los Angeles with his ailing brother this whole time. My parents assured him on the night of the accident that they would update him every day. He assures me now that he will be home for our two-year anniversary, that his brother is healing, that the meds are working. I blow his brother robust kisses through the phone and catch the ones he sends back. Our mutual relief floats above the wails.

I move into my childhood room for a few days, my parents almost giddy with the opportunity to take care of me. My mother makes chowder; my father, playlists. One afternoon, the sun plays with the designs on my quilt while my mother grips my hands. She weeps, and I shake and collapse into her when she confirms what I feared — why the minivan's driver wails so, no physical pain as murderous as the one she suffers. My mother can't possibly know the answer, but I steady myself and ask anyway. "Do you think she'll have another?" She responds with unearned confidence. "She'll find her way."

In morning, an occupational therapist shows me how to put on my shoes so I don't strain my back. Her shirt is green, same as the canoe. She asks why I keep moving away from her and jokes, "I'm not a monster, for heaven's sake."

The last evening before J. comes home and takes over my care, my father asks in a low voice if the accident has made me rethink my life. He's always been this direct. "I know you're carrying a heavy burden. That woman's loss—" He fights the swell in his throat. "But we're so blessed. So lucky." He's about to deep-dive into my babyhood, maybe even sing to me. *Everybody has a dream*. I hold up my hand to stop him.

I have questions. Who had to tell her? Did she wail immediately or deny the truth of it? Did she throw her pillow? Yank the sheets from her hospital bed? Yell “Take it back — what you just said. Take it back, take it back, take it back, take it back”? Or did she curl into a ball, her pillow to her heart? Did that officer have the audacity to tell her she’s lucky to be alive?

I want to say to my father, “Hear my words. If I’m lucky it’s because that will never, ever, be me.”

But I’m exhausted, so instead tell him I need to nap before dinner. I burrow under my quilt and doze. In my half-dream, I’m visited by a familiar monster. I try to shout, but to my horror, my voice goes airborne, strapped to a car seat that should be cradling someone’s baby.

Karen Zlotnick / Lagrangeville, New York

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### *Sea Otter Cove* / Lucy Mitchem



LucyMithem / Portland, Orgeon

*For Our Anniversary Next Year* / Andrea Krause

We'll abandon the screws that demand  
righty-tighty twisting, remind  
ourselves—this old house shows love  
as corrosion—the galaxy has oodles of innings  
left for us to play. I'll confirm our reservation  
at the Black Hole Bed and Breakfast  
of Infinite Content. I've heard  
it's a cute tourist town. We'll get sucked in,  
bay leaves squealing in a rolling boil,  
somersault through a turtle neck  
of electrons. Tickle each other  
with radiation. Shimmy a postcard  
to our past through a worm-hole.  
Our ordinary domestic foam, tempered  
in dry cracked hands, molded into fauna  
I wouldn't recognize in a Golden Guide.  
We'll browse the vintage shops, admire  
our ageless hologram-bodies in the infinite  
mirror. Let's buy back the clothes  
that dressed our first notes  
of whistled desire. I'll pick out a different brand  
of fragility this time, tight-fitted over-  
confident lace, pretty pattern  
to camouflage my stains. You'll bust up  
uncertainty with a soothing  
jackhammer aria, invite back in  
the cinnamon of fresh love.  
It won't take any effort to liberate,  
like our dog passing noxious gas  
while he sleeps.

Andrea Krause / Portland, Oregon

## *Laffer Curve* / Paula Brancato

To stave off fretting over her biopsy results, Myrtle the dog has started asking questions. She does this at bedtime, all tucked in, her tail curled under her butt, massive head resting on her paws, drooling over her hot pink sock. It is a good sign, this drooling. Her eyes are no longer hooded, but bright, expectant, as only a child's can be, looking toward the future.

Tonight, she wants this story: "Mami, why do the rich get richer? Siempre de esta manera?" Was it always this way? "Oh, my daughter," I say. I stroke her back, scratch behind her ears, then kiss her paws, one, by one, by one, by one. And I tell her.

Once upon a time, in the old days, in the very beginning, say 1900 to 1965, when the rich got richer in democracies with capitalism, so did everyone else. "Why, Mami, why?" Because everyone else figured out how to tax and garner their share of that wealth. "People garden wealth?" No not garden, sweetheart, garner, get, take. "Oh, you mean steal, like a bone?" Yes – I mean, no! No, stealing is wrong, it's very very wrong. "OK, Mami, lo que sea que, whatever you say."

It's more like when you find a bone on the street and you eat it, because it is somebody's leftovers and they don't need it. "You mean, like garbage?" Yes, like garbage. "Ok, Mami, got it. Taxes is like garbage." Yes, right, exactly, I say. Taxes is garbage, but you have to tax if you want everyone else to be able to eat. "There is a dog I do not like. She eats too?" Yes, she eats too. "Stupid story." You haven't heard the end yet. "Ok. Your grave." She indicates I can go on.

In the old, old days, everyone got richer together, if only a little bit richer, if only just a little bit of garbage spread around. The rising tide lifted all boats. “But Mami, we don’t have a boat!” Yes, well, the boat is a metaphor, Moo Moo, like the boat is a place you belong, like a home or a bed or place you can— “Eat a bone! Eat A bone!” Yes, eat a bone. “Ok, Mami, got it!”

Then came the economist Milton Friedman. “Oooooooo, the bad guy, El Senor Malvado, does he wear a cape?” Wait for it. “Ok, Mami, I wait.” She sits up, tail wagging. Milton – “The evil one?” Ok, yes, the evil one. “I knew it, I knew it!” Milton decided businesses should be in business for the benefit of their shareholders, i.e. their owners and not anyone else, not you, not me, not the community, not their customers nor, heaven forbid, their very own employees.

She frowns, looks up. “This is a sad story,” she says. Yes, it is. “Share- older” she says, “Owner.” mouthing the new words. “Like... like you and me?”

What?! “Like you own me.” I don’t own you, Moo Moo, you are my family. “But you own me, yes? You have, how they say, interés de los accionistas, in me?” Technically yes, but really no. “How no?” I don’t know, Moo Moo, it’s just no, ok, trust me. “Harumph,” she says, standing up, her rump waving.

Just, pay attention, OK? Listen to the story. “Oh-kay, oh-ki-dokey,” she circles around, pawing at the bedspread. “This dog who is owned by you,” she plops to her side with a heavy sigh, “is listening.” Oh, poverita I say. Don’t be like that. “How should I be?” I rub her belly and she closes her eyes. She waves a paw, “Continue, is ok.”



Suddenly came trickle-down economics. This is the idea that when the rich get rich enough, they will give to those less fortunate and wealth will trickle down. “You mean like pee?” she says, eyes still shut. Yes, right, exactly! “This trickle-down idea, she ees stupid, you know.” Will you let me finish? “You own me, go ahead.”

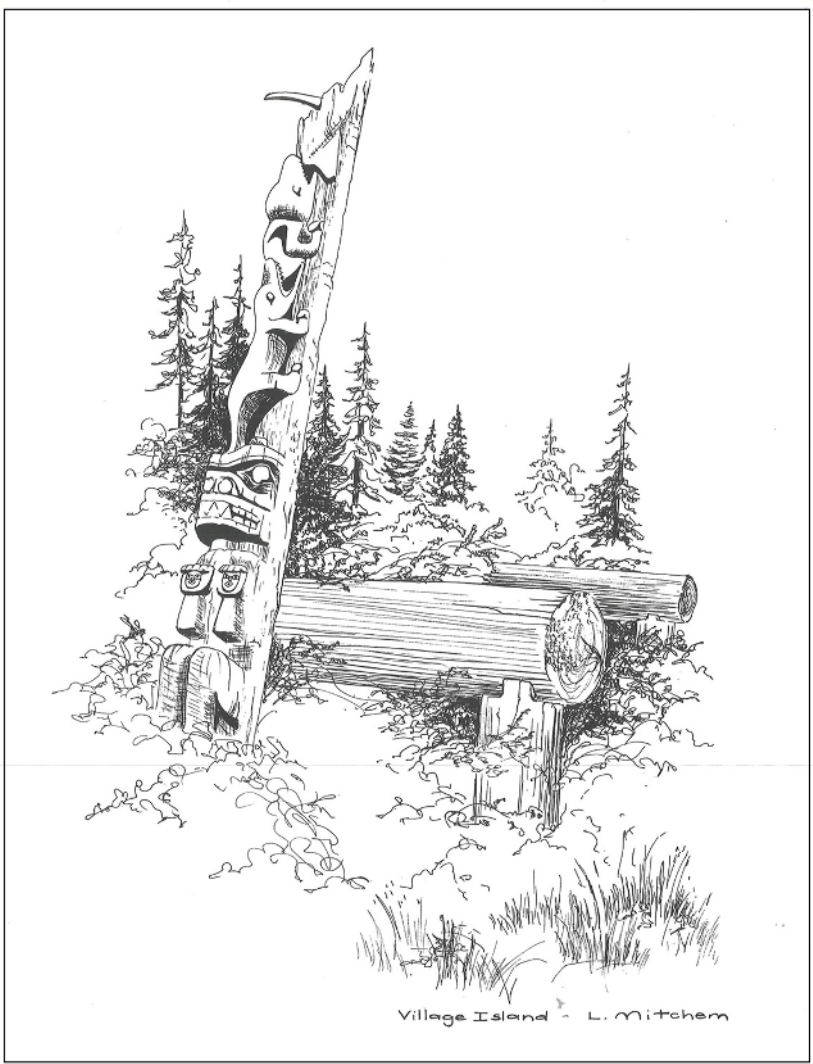
And this led to the Laffer curve, a delusion that tax cuts pay for themselves because if you give more wealth to the wealthy, the economy will grow so fast that the rich will have to put more back into the economy in terms of jobs, productivity and etc. more than what the tax cuts take away. She opens one eye. “Is a joke, yes?” Yes. “Is like they keep the bone and toss you the meat.” Yes, I say. “More pee pee, right?” My daughter is so smart.

Buoyed by her brilliance I parrot on. See, when you earn enough to live on, your excess money makes money, and if no one taxes that, you keep making more and more and more – “Do we get more and more and more, Mami?” Not exactly, I say. “So, we are not the rich?” She is wide awake now. Well, we are -- “So, the big boats rise and the little boats sink and we are a little boat!” Yes, my face falls. “A very very little boat?” She cocks a hopeful eye. Well, yes, but it is filled with love.

Myrtle licks a paw, looks up, shakes her head. “Mami, I think you made this up!”

Paula Brancato / Bronx, New York

*Village Island* / Lucy Mitchem



Village Island - L. Mitchem

Lucy Mitchem / Portland Oregon

## *Small Boats* / Shutta Crum

We are salt. We are water.  
We carry brine through tributaries,  
and feel the tides surge to the brain,  
the fingertips, the toes.

I've read that the moon is inching away,  
and that the Earth's spin is slowing—as are the tides.  
Yet, clams in the Ohio River continue to feel them,  
as do plants whose inner oceans, like ours,  
respond to the moon's gravity.

And here, sitting by your side,  
I worry that the rivers within you  
are rushing too quickly to the sea.  
Worry that someday, standing on shore,  
I'll lose sight of you in the small boat of your body.

I lay a hand on your wrist—feel your skin  
afloat above muscle and bone,  
and know that what sustains us is water.  
These waters upon which we've gambled everything  
in such frail canoes.

Shutta Crum / St. Augustine, Florida

*Not Yet Gone* / Sharon Scholl

to the memory of Randy Henderson

We say the dead rest in peace,  
fixed forever in portrait and eulogy.  
We wreath them in immortal guise,  
permanent as starlight – changeless  
while our lives remain unfinished.

We grievors cart them off in memory  
in fragments clipped from holidays,  
crises, incidents from childhood.  
We capture them in versions  
unmatched from one mind to another.  
Our loved and lost gone and yet becoming  
according to our need for them.

Sharon Scholl / Atlantic Beach, Florida

## *The Poem I Want to Read* / Elizabeth Kerlikowske

has cold wind blowing days of snow from the fir trees, unburdening them, freeing them from the ground. That snow sparkles like little scraps of joy, as much as we deserve. The poem should be a square house facing east on a curving road, aromatic as Sunday dinner, a surprise in every corner and cats snoring like old fans. The poem will not wallow in desolation; it will not preach but exercise compassion about our shared humanity. Rolling like a pencil off a table, the poem I want to read lands on the last line or perhaps hits the floor and continues rolling in a different direction or a cat bats it under the dresser, but I retrieve the poem because it's the one I want, and I'm willing to work for it.

The poem I want to read selects each word with tweezers, nothing extra--just enough vital image and meaning that no matter how the ingredients are assembled, they will always form something tasty, whether crackers rack of lamb, or a new dish that has no name yet. I don't want to feel worse after reading a poem. I don't want to feel lost or ignorant or angry. The poem I want to read doesn't know everything and probably has more questions than answers. That poem is a different angle of sunlight that elevates an icicle to a prism. The poem I want to read should be a poem I can't help but hear, a poem I want to say, so syllables gush over pebbles of my teeth and stream into air. The poem becomes one I memorize, sound and sensibility integral to my world, hanging around with Sundiata, Rumi, Shakespeare and my daughter.

The poem I want to read dresses modestly as  
a field, but favors one glacial erratic, one element  
not quite out of place but jarring for a moment,  
jumble of cardinal feathers. I'm willing to not  
know every word in the poem but reading it  
shouldn't feel like homework. After the last word,  
after I've been sung to in language like my own  
but more precise, images buffed into submission,  
I want to feel I've learned something without  
realizing it. The poem I want to read might easily  
be confused with this: the poem I want to write.

Elizabeth Kerlikowske / Kalamazoo, Michigan

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*Where We Lived* / Peter Cashorali

The building was gone, where we'd lived  
All those years, second floor front,  
Where we'd been young and not  
So young, and learned the craft  
Of how to make things out of time,  
Where the new chair should go,  
And meals prepared just so,  
Mastery of those ways of wearing hair,  
Would we be monogamous (no),  
Take drugs (some), last straws, new  
Starts in the tracks of old,  
And the sharp awareness it all  
Would be forever though sketched  
In marijuana smoke, would be  
Forever in photographs

The ceiling took, and even  
After we moved out and went  
Our ways we were still up there,  
The same gestures made like loops  
Of film, like ghosts, so that  
Driving past from time to time  
I'd look up and see us doing  
What we'd done and though it had all  
When fresh been fun, been life,  
Now it was people in the dusk  
Of the underworld, you know the ones,  
Who have to push a stone or try  
Once more to carry water in a sieve  
So that when I saw the building gone,  
The earth dug up behind the fence  
And empty air where we had been—  
It seemed—doomed to ever always be  
I felt the breeze breathe through my chest  
And leave. We were gone, and free.

Peter Cashorali / Portland, Oregon

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*In a World of Waking Birds* / Hope Clayton

The night hawks have finally stopped their screeching,  
and the yard is muddy after a sullen rain. In this world  
of waking birds I try to shake off a bad dream. The shreds  
of dawn float around me like ashes, like blackthorn petals,  
like the rice trapped in my hair after some misbegotten  
wedding.

Hope Clayton / Jacksonville, Florida

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*Harvest for the Dahlias* / Anita Howard

In a roomful of redundant books  
the deadheads await,  
prone with reproach,  
on a severed willow pattern.

Browning in the soft hum  
of their ruined bloom  
as I contemplate my fumbling  
autopsy for seeds  
that may, in time, rekindle summer fire.

Still a vestige of the breath  
of soil and water  
hangs about them,  
like a parent's decayed hopes.

Anita Howard / County Cork, Ireland

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*Thank God for Jim* / Richard Jordan

His love of pizza. That's what I remember most about my grandfather. Sicilian, a corner piece with charred pepperoni and lots of onion. The thickest crust. My brother and I snuck a slice into the nursing home, and Gramps devoured it, beaming, smearing grease on the clean blue bed sheets. HOW ABOUT A BEER? he said, a sparkle in his eyes. JIM ALWAYS BRINGS ME BEER. We didn't know who that was, didn't ask. But thank God for Jim, we decided.

Richard Jordan / Littleton, Massachusetts

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## *Littering* / Jeremiah Durick

I remember those signs warning us of the fifty dollar fine for littering. They always seemed ominous, and we would be on our best behavior as we approached them and for a few miles after we passed them. Ah, but we littered, left things all along the way, our lives seem to be filled with those moments when we discarded things, some out of car windows, others just left out for the rubbish men to retrieve. A lot of it was junk, but some of it were things we could have kept, we should have kept. There was my last watch. I took it off, dropped it or threw it; in its own way it was already junk or quickly joined those ranks. All the things that disappeared on us had that moment when they teetered on the brink and then were gone, our own litter, without the fine, but sometimes later regret. I could create a timeline that would follow my progress through the years. There I am moving along throwing things out, littering, dropping off, forgetting, misplacing, stewing, scattering, cluttering, and there up ahead is a sign mentioning a fine I'll pay for all this – someday.

Jeremiah Durick / South Burlington, Vermont

*Birds and Their Lack of Conviction* / Ken Holland

I'm burrowed beneath blankets waiting for  
The furnace to kick in. Even the crows outside  
Can't get out of bed, the cold's that bad.  
Carrying the weight of winter.

I imagine one crow too many landing on a branch  
And that branch snapping from the ache of its freeze

The way people are known to snap in particular winters  
That run long and hard inside us. Nerves like power lines  
That grow taut and brittle, sheathed in a rough fist of ice

Ice that has little else to do but add to its own sense of itself,  
Heedless of the burden it brings to bear, or the sound  
Of what might be the sound of something elemental failing.

We're always waiting for something to break  
Even if it's our veins blue with blood

How it's hardly worth calling out

Not when the furnace has just stirred itself  
Back to flame, the lift of dust set adrift in the current

And how it's only the crows who remain unconvinced.

Ken Holland / Fishkill, New York

*In It for the Long Haul* / Ken Holland

It's time for me to let go of my youth  
because my youth has let go of me.  
Another love affair gone awry.  
Things said that should never have been said.  
The rhetoric of apology upon apology.  
Sadly scripted. Sadly proffered.  
As youth bundles what little is left of itself  
and carries its own weight out the door.  
Pressing into a night still warm from  
the distance it's traveled, the miles of  
pushing back against the day. These the hours  
where youth retains just enough of its own image  
to walk into a diner, settle into a booth and  
in the crossing of its legs make it known  
it wouldn't mind being offered a ride.  
The lighting in the cab of an eighteen-wheeler  
better than any sun-strewn sky. With a  
long-haul trucker who's giving youth a loving eye.

Ken Holland / Fishkill, New York

*April 19, 2022 - Vestal, New York / Joanne Corey*

The wind javelins the snow at my window,  
almost ice as it strikes the pane.  
    Snow cements the roof,  
        the walk, the street, the car,  
            encases our home in a shroud.

Like the April day I bundled all  
    five pounds of my daughter  
        into a too-large sweatsuit  
            and comforters to bring her  
                jaundiced to the doctor's office.

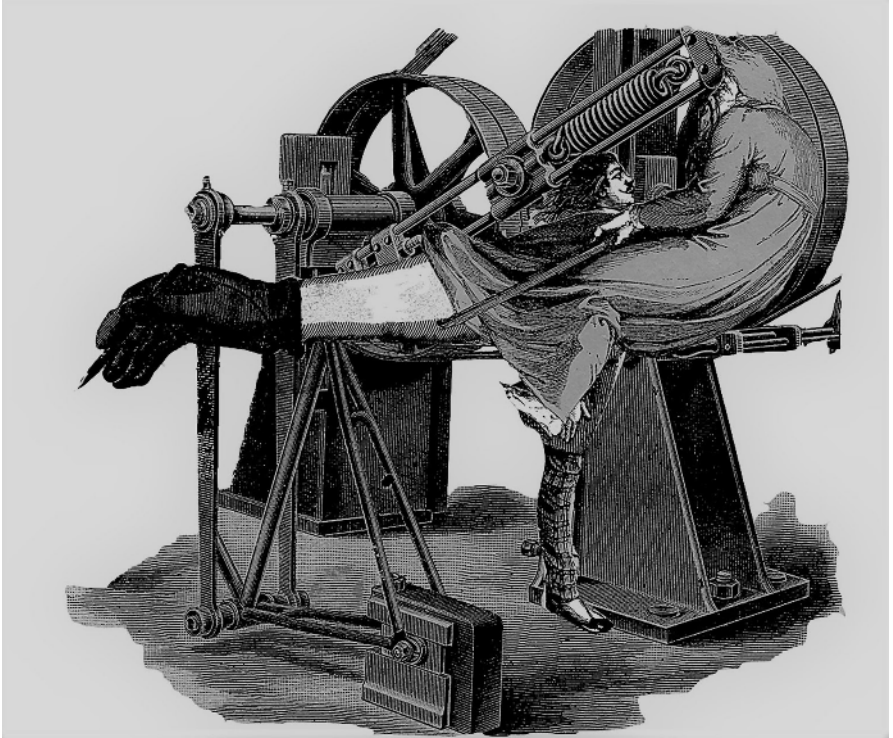
Like the snowstorm on my early October birthday  
    that cracked the trees  
        still laden with leaves,  
            the thick whiteness  
                too much weight to bear.

Like the March blizzard that brought fierce  
    wind and feet of drifts, stranded  
        us in Vermont, the drive home three  
            days later on a one-lane  
                gulch of interstate.

The worst storms arrive early  
    when we are not prepared, or late  
        when we have dropped our guard.

Joanne Corey / Vestal, New York

*Handwriting* / Ken Weichel



Collage

Ken Weichel / Benicia, California

*Poses* / Joseph Kenyon

The day began in a fading world  
like forgetting an appointment

then a wallet

Then a familiar name...

Now night poses backlight  
the mirror of a life ringing

the terminator between  
liquid and glass

mortal and venal.

The barista says last call with the gentleness of a mother  
laying her baby in a crib

and I

make sure her fingers touch mine  
when she returns my card.

So many times  
the very

very  
least

is enough.

Joseph Kenyon / Barrington, New Jersey

## *Turkey Wing Feathers* / Judy Kaber

The part of the shaft outside the body—*rachis*,  
like the stem of a plant, or vertebral column.  
She collects these quills, stores them in old milk bottles,  
puts some in a large, green cup on her desk.

Sometimes she reaches out to stroke them,  
lets them incubate ideas, become doors that lead  
to a forest where branches quiver in slight wind  
and there's no telling what might be found.

Some men use a flask for inspiration, but this slight  
graze of what once meant flight is what she craves.  
She salvages them from where a raft of wild turkeys  
crossed her lawn, hens wandering, plucking

at grass, pebbles, one large tom with tail feathers  
spread, standing still, eyeing the distance. They move  
with the speed of mist, drift slowly among trees.  
She's seen them in high branches, dark clumps

like scars on the trunk. She's even witnessed  
them take flight across the stream, heavy bodies  
gripping the air with their wings, rising frantic  
against steel sky. Remembering this

exhausts her. She prefers the static feathers,  
barbs clinging in lines of light tan, brown. She leans  
on her elbows, stares at the cup, the screen, digs  
words from what she only partially understands.

Judy Kaber / Belfast, Maine

*Exoskeleton of November* / Sarah Brockhaus

In the greenhouse I find the shy husks  
of insects, gone except for the outline:

dragonfly, wasp, moth. The veined wings  
stilled, a tan lens over the patient, dark

earth. The pavement outside is etched  
with leaf decay, like shadows gone soft

around the edges, memories of autumn  
while the air thins into winter. Within,

summer holds out a few weeks longer, the sweet  
pea tendrils clinging to each other like teenage lovers

in the back of a car, desperate to discover  
each other, believing their hands have been exchanged

for answers, believing this is the shape they'll inhabit  
always. When the freeze catches up, they will wonder

at the soft shell of their bodies, the empty  
where they used to keep sureness. They don't

yet know this, too, is growth: their gentle rot  
back into soil is already a promise of spring.

Sarah Brockhaus / Salisbury, Maryland



*Was Out in Wind* / Steve Fay

was out in wind  
behind a wheel  
how I longed for droplets

never but still  
figures of dust  
one gray as deep shadow

like steel  
the changeable gusts  
skittering in gaps

in my truck  
side mirror dangling  
my very spirit

an all hallows eve ghost  
exquisite chill  
ready to fly home

someone opens a door  
long ago  
scraping thumping

the way the dust lives  
along the gravel road  
distributed sated

waiting for the downpour

to be created  
to be washed away

in corn stubble  
some miles away  
a strip-mined pit turned lake

reflections broken  
five swans white  
wings honing clouds

I dreamed of rain  
under abandoned beds  
between knickknacks

the lonely surfaces  
an old book  
the shadow of those clouds

sneezing spray  
surrounding me  
driven by wind

fighting gusts  
seeds in their scatter  
careening

in any tornado  
my own reflection  
pummeled flecks

rising up finally finally

Steve Fay / Cuba, Illinois

*Your Father's Music* / James Scruton

*only when he was nervous  
about fixing something, anything...*

—Thomas Lux, “My Father Whistled”

Your father whistled, too, you remember,  
but just to beckon one of the dogs.  
He called cows to the barn  
in a basso not to be confused with song.  
And only when he was milking them  
did you hear him humming,  
a wordless lowing of his own  
as he leaned against each animal's bulk,  
the nerves to calm not his,  
this morning chore one of dozens  
daily on his hands, large hands  
that lifted you back then onto horses,  
over fences, hands sure as well  
with tools, machines, baskets  
of tomatoes, squash, and corn  
carried to the same kitchen table  
where he taught you checkers  
and how to shoot the moon  
playing hearts, his voice  
still with you, his truest notes.

James Scruton / McKenzie, Tennessee

*Potential* / James Scruton

*Potential energy* it was called,  
our physics teacher instructing each of us  
to hold a pencil high, point down,  
without dropping it, an example

of *mass times gravity times height*  
he said—formula for what doesn't happen,  
science of the unspent effort  
I kept in mind whenever I was lectured

about not reaching my potential,  
daydreaming through school and sports  
and jobs, all those ergs left up in the air,  
so to speak, calories like the candles

I never burned at either end, joules ungenerated—  
the way, right now, I'm letting my pencil  
hover above an empty page  
and its lovely potential poem.

James Scruton / McKenzie, Tennessee

*Geobird* / Ken Weichel



Ken Weichel / Benicia, California

*Cyanistes caeruleus* / Caroliena Cabada

In a time-lapse video of a Eurasian blue tit finding an empty wooden box and then building her plush nest of moss, dry grass, twigs, and her own royal blue feathers, I imagine doing the same thing: building a nest in my empty box of a room with wood laminate floors and eggshell white walls. I imagine taking branches from the landscapers on campus, sawed off so the trees grow away from the building windows. My floor becomes a green carpet littered with red leaves gathered at the height of the leaf-falling season. The final stage is shedding my hair like the Eurasian blue tit sheds a layer of her feathers, creates a blanket for the eggs she lays in the corner and keeps warm with her body. She stands up when the raw, pink babies peck through with their goldenrod beaks. This is where the similarity ends. The gaping mouths, outlined in yellow and sharpened to a peak, terrify me. I would be a horrible mother, really.

Caroliena Cabada / Lincoln, Nebraska

*In a Café* / Ruth Holzer

(after the painting by Edgar Degas)

She's changed into her best  
lace-collared dress and ruffled hat  
to sit slump-shouldered, stupefied at a table  
next to a man who's looking the other way.

Absinthe awaits, a milky green soupçon  
of paradise, essence of anise  
and wormwood, the sip that banishes care.

Absinthe, nectar of poets, the artist's elixir,  
the worker's evanescent reward.  
She'll drain the glass that's not her first  
while the man puffs on his long-stemmed pipe,  
abstracted. Everyone here drinks alone.

Ruth Holzer / Herndon, Virginia

## *Grunty Pigs* / Debbie Collins

Sally was as big as a car,  
as large as a house, no --  
as big as the barn she lay in

her piglets nuzzled their little noses  
into our palms, sucking our fingers through the  
slats as they did at their mother's teat

they were better than puppies with  
their little grunty noises and tiny hooves,  
dancing around their mom

don't you kids dare get in  
the pen with her, she'll  
tear your leg off, Grandad said

he picked the babies up by their tails  
and handed one to each of us, they  
shit all down the front of our shirts

every once in a while Sally would  
roll over, her hugeness flattening  
a piglet or two beneath her

a dozen babies became ten, then nine,  
then they were finally old enough  
to move out to the big lot to join their little cousins

we buried the flat piglets under the  
pecan tree next to the barn with  
daisy chains on their tiny graves

we named them: Arnold, Kevin, Tina,  
as we tucked them into the dirt  
beneath an indifferent sun

Debbie Collins / Richmond, Virginia

*We're Alive* / Tim Suermondt

As I stroll the back end  
of the Luxembourg Gardens  
a statue of a general  
or a statesman (an often fancy word  
for a politician)  
seems to be imploring me  
to give it a look. And I do,  
moved as I always am by the forlorn.  
During my examination a bird  
lands on the statue's head to conduct  
its business, perhaps a sort of justice.  
"This person was important once,"  
I say to the bird, as if it cared.  
When the bird flies off  
I continue walking. We're the ones  
who are alive and triumphant.

Tim Suermondt / Cambridge, Massachusetts



*Ants* /Buff Whitman-Bradley

At night  
When the ants  
Bring their final loads of the day  
Back to the communal space  
And close the entrance  
Behind them,  
Leaving a few outside  
To guard against  
Invasion and mayhem,  
Before they retire  
For the evening  
They form into small groups  
To discuss large questions,  
For example  
What is the size of the soul?  
There are various points of view:  
Some say the size of the soul  
Is relative  
To the size of the body –  
The larger the creature, the larger the soul.  
Others contend  
That the soul of an ant  
Is exactly the same size  
As the souls of the huge, heavy-footed gods  
Who walk about so gracelessly,  
Crushing ants and beetles  
And kindred life forms  
Heedlessly and willy-nilly  
Beneath their enormous, deadly  
Grotesquely armored pedal appendages.  
And some take the radical view  
That the size of the soul  
Is in inverse correlation  
To the size of the body,

That the soul of an ant  
Is vast,  
Whereas the soul  
Of those clumsy  
Clomping, tromping deities  
Is so miniscule  
As to be virtually undetectable.  
These different opinions  
Are always addressed  
With the utmost courtesy  
For all ants admire and respect each other.  
There is no arguing, no yelling,  
No storming away in a huff.  
And after a vigorous airing  
Of everyone's ideas,  
Like all of us after a long, hard day,  
The ants grow tired and ready for sleep.  
So they bid each other good night,  
Find suitable spots  
Amongst their hundreds of companions  
For settling down with their souls,  
And fall quickly into a sweet slumber  
Of exactly the right size.

*Three hawks* / Buff Whitman-Bradley

A sodden morning  
After an all-night soaking  
Here at the bottom of an atmospheric river.  
The tub-thumping rains  
And the pains in my leg  
Kept me awake for hours  
And I arose with big plans  
For an early afternoon nap.  
After breakfast  
We walked the dog  
Along the dripping streets  
Where all color had been drained  
Into sidewalk puddles  
And overflowing gutters.  
Persimmon trees  
Were emptied of their ornaments.  
Great piles of drenched leaves  
Clogged storm drains.  
The creek was drunkenly muddy  
As it barreled through town  
Carrying fallen tree limbs  
And lost soccer balls.  
The air had sharp teeth,  
And the sky was a great, gray scowl.  
But above the tall hillside oaks  
The whistling and wheeling  
Of three red-tailed hawks  
Drew our gaze upwards  
And lifted our spirits  
On an unpromising winter day  
I'd almost given up on.

Buff Whitman-Bradley / Fairfax, California

*Ride on the Moon* / Ken Weichel



Ken Weichel / Benicia, California

## *Calls* / Frank Brunner

The Cascade Acres creek is only three feet wide  
beside Kate's chicken coop and listing slide.

Still, three feet's enough to steam at dawn.  
The mist creeps past the neighbors' rusty swans,

casually slaloms chimes, and lifts from trailers  
all the way to heaven the secrets and the failures

of girls like Kate. Her own two boys were late  
last night, but Kate majored in How to Wait.

She heard the bikes roll up, the kicks on chrome,  
the chains, two wasted brothers stumbling home.

She flails and dents the door. She wanted more  
than this, than mist, than grown-up kids who snore

the sun down and the smoke up, but her folks  
swore she should look for acorns to find oaks.

Many years, Kate tracked loons to find her peace.  
You hear loon calls no matter where you lease

a full hook-up and concrete slab up here.  
Loon calls smooth kettle ponds, pour over weirs,

and roll across the Adirondack steeps.  
They keep you up or help you fall asleep.

But now, Kate blames the calls. They made her miss  
the meaning of the morning rising in the mist.

Calls lie. She sees how TV dishes' eyes  
settle on satellites and miss sunrise.

Her trailer's stern is lost in a fog shroud.  
It's almost – *almost!* – like she's in a cloud.

Frank Brunner / Lake Placid, New York

*Unseasonably Warm* / Shelly Jones

Our hands don't grow  
cold as we dig  
in late December

soil - still pliable,  
never frozen.  
Dirt lines our palms,

gathers beneath  
our fingernails  
like waxing moons

as we tuck spring  
bulbs, papery skin  
yielding to green stalks

already sprouting,  
in the waning  
sunlight of fall.

Shelly Jones / Oneonta, New York

*When Ma Calls* / Gloria Parker

I tell her what she wants to hear: *As a matter of fact, Ma, I am seeing someone, That's right, a new beau...*her word...not mine.

I say it's too soon for details and she doesn't press me for more. She hangs up happy, and I don't give my subterfuge another thought.

Truth is, I'd rather have a dog... as long as he didn't shed and would take himself out for walks in the dark and the cold.

Meal time'd be a picnic. A can of Alpo would do it for him. He'd lick the bowl clean and I'd drop it into the sink to let it soak.

Beau would sleep at my feet but'd be an independent sort.... not one of those needy types that dog your footsteps.

He wouldn't mind that I keep the tv on all night, and I'd be okay with his drinking out of the toilet. There'd be no arguments.

Then again, he'd probably bark at squirrels when I was trying to read, and there'd be nothing I could do about it. He is a dog, after all,

and when I'd pose a serious question, he'd just cock his head. If not for those things, I might consider getting married again.

Gloria Parker / Wayne, Pennsylvania

*Dressed in Black* / Gloria Parker

Four of us in the car  
on the way to the funeral  
for Margaret's husband...  
the fourth she'd buried

when Teresa says, *Oh well,*  
*another Irish drunk bites the dust.*  
Every thought, however crude,  
just leaps out of her mouth.

Two weeks after the funeral,  
the dead flowers...trashed,  
the coffee urn, the casseroles...  
returned to the neighbors

and the couples they'd socialized with,  
gone back to the shelter of coupledness,  
Margaret calls to say, *I thought they were*  
*my friends too. I feel like nobody cares...*

and then the words, *They don't,*  
escape without my permission.  
She's too rapt in her grief to hear them,  
but they do come back to slap me in the face.

Gloria Parker / Wayne, Pennsylvania



*The Daughters* / Gloria Parker

All three in their sixties now...still known as *the girls*.  
They sit side by side on the yellowed white sofa,  
fidgety hands in their laps.

They speak in whispers as if he might still barrel in  
from the bathroom, holding his pants up with one hand,  
snapping his belt through the air with the other.

The gaunt woman in the painting stands at the end of her  
long day. In the dim hallway, too many same-looking doors  
have closed behind her.

Bony fingers, wrapped around a mop handle...its business end  
in a bucket on the floor. Did someone pose for this portrait?  
Someone they know?

All the questions they never dared ask...he was the artist,  
after all...not to be questioned...never deigning to give  
anyone an explanation.

The sisters will soon draw straws...who'll have to take her  
from her home above the fireplace, carry her to the attic  
and turn the face of resignation to the rafters?

Gloria Parker / Wayne, Pennsylvania

*Falls in Teakearn Arm / Lucy Mitchem*



Drawing

Lucy Mitchem / Portland, Oregon

*Our Beloved Pet* / Bob Bires

Our touches—my light  
massage on the back  
of your neck while you drive,  
your hand flat between  
my shoulder blades as I make  
tea by the sink, the playful elbow  
to elbow jostle in the grocery,  
the contact of our lips when  
you say “Kiss me” for no reason,  
even my fingers stroking between  
your legs from behind, as you bend  
over, clothed, laughing, to sweep up  
crumbs—all are wistful pantomimes  
of past desire, not preludes to future  
lovemaking. Once a dog slept  
between us, down at our legs  
under the blankets, a space now  
cool and hollow.

Bob Bires / Chattanooga, Tennessee

*She'd Sit and Sew* / Andrena Zawinski

“A curious gladness shook me.”—Stanley Kunitz

Evenings she'd sit there rocking and sewing,  
darning a sock, stitching a tattered buttonhole,  
hemming a skirt. Or more elaborate projects  
crocheting a hat, shawl, or throw as if this  
private piece work were its own peace.  
Even as repetition weakened her weary fingers,  
she sometimes reached down to tousle my hair  
as I slumped in a sleepy heap at her feet.  
And when through the dusty blind slats  
a thin string of light threaded across my lap,  
it was then that a curious gladness shook me.

Andrena Zawinski / Alameda, California

*Pentimento* / Scott Waters

Pick up your brush  
and paint a grassy flatland  
ribboned with flashing streams  
shaded by California live oaks  
under a bluebell sky

after the paint has dried  
grab a palette knife  
and smear a deep brown rail of fence  
across the green grass  
like a beaver laying down its first log

finish the fence  
add cabins and red barns  
windmills pricking clouds  
a muddy road winding between the oaks  
and a black stagecoach rattling through

after another drying  
blot out the oaks and grass  
with a grid of grey streets  
lined with barred-window houses  
and telephone poles

use a fine brush  
to add the sidewalk candy wrappers,  
used condoms, grease-stained napkins,  
potato chip bags, plastic bottles,  
and glowing Cheetos pecked by crows

slice the sky with power lines  
but otherwise leave it bluebell blue—  
like a yearning for innocence,  
or a reminder of your place in things.  
A plea for the wild.

Scott Waters / Oakland, California

## *Grace* / Mary Rohrer-Dann

In her cupped hands,  
my little sister offers up  
a desiccated sparrow.

*We have to help it.*

I know the dead  
cannot be raised,  
having long ago failed  
to bring back our mother,  
and this tiny body is well  
on its way to dust.

I am not the kindest big sister.

I like to tease, to scare.

But my sister's dark eyes,  
holding fast on mine,  
glitter in her pointed little face  
like fierce seeds.

We dump some Fisher Price  
*Little People* from a shoebox,  
gather grasses, pink mimosa  
blossoms for a nest, hard green  
crabapples for the bird to eat.

*Now it needs to rest*, I say,  
and we tuck the box beneath  
a bush, tiptoe away.

After supper, we find  
the shoebox empty,  
wonder  
if the chirrup flickering  
from branch to branch  
in the mimosa above us  
is our sparrow.

I sleep that night a dreamless sleep.

Mary Rohrer-Dann / State College, Pennsylvania

*Contrails* / Henry Stimpson

streak the blue dome  
with white stitching  
until the warping far west  
in late afternoon  
bends them down  
salmon and gold

*Martha's Vineyard, August* / Henry Stimpson

Late afternoon  
footchilling sand  
and the  
ribbed sea  
turns a  
final solid  
crayon-blue

Henry Stimpson / Wayland, Massachusetts

*The Sunlight I Carry* / Jude Dippold

On a day so drear  
that light tatters  
around its edges  
like the frayed cuffs  
on old denims,  
I summon hope  
from the sun of memory.  
My breathing slows  
as my skin remembers  
the tender mercy  
of a woman's touch  
and eyes that dance  
on the darkest days  
when children  
play in the rain.

Jude Dippold / Concrete, Washington



*Peek-a-Boo* / Phillip Temples



Phillip Temples / Watertown, Massachusetts

*In Praise of Purple Carrots* / Karen Kilcup

They have warts. They're furry,  
but the hairs are fine, and soft  
as a spider web. I found them  
in a February rare seed catalog—  
garden porn for the shivering months—  
among the stubby Uzbek Golden  
and mundane orange, their delicious  
name irresistible: Black Nebula.  
I didn't know carrots came  
in purple. Despite the lurid  
glossy photo, I didn't believe  
in them, bought a packet because  
I needed proof.

My mother told me that color looked bad  
on me, but I always wanted a purple dress.  
*Aubergine*, my Scottish friend calls the shade.  
With carrots, mice nibble paler roots,  
but they leave purple ones alone.

Cut them in coins—you're rich.  
Slice them lengthwise, like a sword—  
you're armed for hunger. Put them in soup,  
and they bleed, turn turnip and cabbage  
and corned beef sunset-dark, change  
water into wine. Scrubbed clean, they strip  
their tulle skirt and shine—  
*Look at me!* I can dance  
with anyone and stay myself.

Karen Kilcup / Lee, New Hampshire

*Focus* / Raymond Byrnes

Wait, wait until a big roller thunders  
into the ledge like a loaded ore boat.

Freeze white spray at its peak an instant  
after sunshine ignites the bulge.

Kneel on a cracked boulder, bend down  
to frame fragile harebells rooted in stone.

Switch to video for aspen-leaf shadows  
trembling on water-polished rock, and

back home on winter nights, after paging  
once again through Up North albums

may you dream beneath indigo sky as  
whitecaps chant their endless cadence

may you smell companion spruce while  
counting flights of nighthawks in migration.

may you stare at lights clustered in a galaxy  
and contemplate the clarity of long-dead stars.

Raymond Byrnes / Leesburg, Virginia

## *Love* / Christine Potter

There was a time when we actually said *I want your body* to each other, right before running down the after-school hall shrieking, but never at the person whose body we really wanted. We

said it in fake-deep voices to each other—never to boys. Bent over, gasping-for-air laughing, half-hiding behind the open door of a locker: *He heard you! He saw you!* He'd have been leaving track

practice, still in his shorts, books dangling at the end of an arm with four fingers curled over them, the way boys carried books, never propped on a hip or held in front of their (oh, God!) chests,

like us. He'd be absolutely oblivious, walking into low afternoon sunlight beyond the heavy brown door near the auditorium. A teammate would hoot his last name. And we'd wait until

he slid into somebody's mother's car to go out after him. At the sleep-over, Ruth, who had liberal parents, would make up 2 AM stories about each one of us actually Doing It with our

crushes. *And then his little thing touched her little thing*, they all ended. You put your head under your pillow and tried not to listen when it was your turn. I swear to you this was Love,

all of it, although we had no idea what to do with anyone's body. Ours constantly betrayed us in cramps and soft, pale thighs that shook under our mini skirts. Still: love. Love! Why else do I

remember the school newspaper's editor and his fuzzy blue gaze as he accepted the football team photos I'd taken for him, worrying over f-stops and exposures? He looked up and smiled at me!

I walked home afterwards, trying not to think of him, or Ruth, or how my friend Jane said he was Methodist and wouldn't dance, ever. And a senior besides, so too old for me. But it had to be: Love!

Christine Potter / Valley Cottage, New York

*How the Heart Works* / J. C. Reilly

Inside my heart lives a mourning dove, cooing, cooing.  
“Where is my mate? Will he come for me?”

My mate roosts in another’s heart. Will he call to me?  
This is all mad dreaming, sudden as a lake.

This is all mad dreaming. One time at Sadding Lake  
I urged my dove to fly far and leave me, and I died.

It was to save the bird I urged her to leave. I died  
until she flew back, pity in her eyes like copper coins.

She resettled herself in chambers, pity like copper coins  
Turning blood to snow. Still my mate, he does not come.

My blood turns to snow, and still he does not come  
for me. A nest is lined with feathers and ice.

I prepare for his arrival—a nest lined with feathers like ice.  
Inside my heart a mourning dove is sighing, sighing.

J.C. Reilly / Marietta, Georgia

## *Angry Drinks* / Jiayou Shen

At an hour after her 9pm bedtime, Gogo's grandpa was snoozing. Gogo could hear his snores in the bedroom down the hall. All those court appearances earlier that day must have drained him.

Gogo couldn't help with that, but she could help with her boredom. At the age of seven, she deserved to stay up later. She wanted to have fun, like back when her grandmother was alive and watched movies with her until her eyelids got all heavy. The movie player was sold to pay off the cast on her arm a while back, but there were still plenty of okay things to do at the apartment.

Gogo put on her holey purple socks and tiptoed over the floors. Her breath stopped at every creak, and she relaxed at the sound of every snore. The short hallway to the kitchen felt like a long road, but she made her way.

The kitchen was dark, but Gogo had lived in this apartment for a long time. She knew every minute detail, from the coupon book to the keys for the window locks. She opened the fridge and winced at its bright light.

Like a worker ant from her old backyard, Gogo scurried back and forth from the fridge to the table. Lemonade, root beer, yesterday's oven empanadas in a plastic container. And her cup! She couldn't forget her cup! She retrieved her purple cup from the shelf and placed it on the table. She felt a cold breeze from the fridge. Right, she should close that.

Gogo closed the fridge door with a louder sound than she would have liked. She stayed still and listened. Grandpa's snores hit her ears and Gogo knew it was safe to move again. She pulled a chair up to a cabinet as quietly as she could and stepped atop it. The height and how the chair wobbled was scary to her, but Gogo got used to it.

All she had to do was keep a good grip on the cabinet frame. She opened the cabinet and retrieved her crayons and paper. The crayons were a 64-pack that made her the talk of all her classmates at her new school. This time, after placing her treasures at the table, Gogo got up on the chair again and closed the cabinet doors. She jumped out of joy at her bravery, and then froze. Her grandpa's snores caught up and stuttered but returned to normal. Gogo's shoulders released their tension.

Gogo went back to the table. She poured lemonade in her cup and drank it. She poured root beer in her cup and drank it. She winced as the fizz went down her throat. Root beer was an angry drink she couldn't help but like. She pried the empanada container open and took a bite. The cold beige filling burst into her mouth. It was salty.

Gogo drew what she thought was a purple dragon in the darkness to the tune of snores. She had deemed it too much risk to turn on the lights. She colored the top of the paper in what she presumed was sky blue when she stopped. There was the sound of footsteps outside of the apartment. She knew those footsteps.

They stopped at the front of her door. Gogo heard the violent jiggling of the handle. Holding her breath, she crept to the door and undid all the locks. Gogo's hands unfastened the door chain and opened the door. On the other side was her mother.

"Mom!" Gogo whisper-shouted. Her mother's black eye from when Gogo last saw her was almost gone. She launched herself into her mother's arms. She couldn't believe it! Grandpa had said she wasn't going to see any of her parents again.

"Darling," Gogo heard her mother whisper. "I've missed you so much." Her mother held her tight, like someone was going to wrench Gogo from her. It almost hurt.



Gogo craned her shoulder and looked around her mother. Her father should be around; he never left her and her mother alone for long. “Your father’s in the car, and he can’t wait to see you, Darling. He promises he’ll stop drinking so much,” her mother said, like she had read Gogo’s mind.

“Can we drive to the beach again?” Gogo asked. In truth, she didn’t care where they went. All Gogo wanted was to hug her parents for as long as she could and tell them about the gifts she got for her last birthday. She wanted to visit tons of cities in one week again. She wanted to watch the stars in the car while her parents went to work. Plus, there was a spelling test next week that she hadn’t studied for. She hoped to return for the classroom Halloween party, though. She had an epic, angry dragon costume planned.

“Of course, Darling. It’ll be just the three of us. Let’s go now, we have snacks in the car.”

“Can I bring my crayons?”

“We’ll buy you new crayons.”

“Okay.” Gogo whispered. She felt giddy, like she was about to set out on an adventure. All that root beer made her leg twitch. Barely changing her grip, her mother lifted Gogo up and slammed the door shut. Gogo caught a glimpse of her father’s expression at her cast. It was a glare.

Gogo was fastened tight in her parents’ car when she looked back at the apartment building. Her apartment lights were on. Gogo sipped her juice box. The apple juice inside was lukewarm. Gogo raised an arm at the building and waved goodbye.

Jiayou Shen / Ann Arbor, Michigan

*Old Men Fishing, With Osprey* / Richard Jordan

There are mornings nothing breaks the surface,  
no bass or pickerel tug their fishing lines.  
So, they talk to pass the time, perhaps  
about the touchdowns they scored way back when,

wars they fought in, or wars their grandkids now  
fight, obituaries. But sometimes  
an osprey circles overhead and they fix  
their sights on feathers fanned out wide, watch

it ride the wind, cut right through stubborn clouds.  
They forget what they were saying, even why.  
It's all about the majestic dive to come,  
always claws-first, shattering the quiet,

the osprey rising with a glistening trophy,  
the likes of which they've longed for their whole lives.

Richard Jordan / Littleton, Massachusetts

*Things I Do Because You're Gone* / Cory Henniges

Eat noodles on the *good* couch. Scroll through pictures  
of nice-looking people in bathing suits.

Leave a spoon in the sink.

Give said spoon a little rinse and reuse.

Watch that show you hate.

Eat the last cookie but still feel a little bad.

Sleep in the middle of the bed.

Search pictures of nice-looking people without bathing suits.

Fart wherever. Brew coffee naked.

Wear the same sweatpants for the sixth day.

Spoon peanut butter from the jar (different spoon).

Think of what I wish I told you the last time I saw you.

I can't live without you /or/

we're out of olive oil.

Message you. I know you can't read it now.

Hear the sound of footsteps approaching and remember  
why they won't be yours.

Cory Henniges / Milwaukee, Wisconsin

## *Chaos Theory* / Meggie Royer

Once, a scientist measured the mass change  
of several patients at the moment of death.  
The question: how much  
does the human soul weigh?  
The answer: twenty-one grams.  
Or, we leave the way we came:  
lighter, but full of dark.  
Intuitive, how mass changes over time.  
Uncertain, whether memories come with it.  
It doesn't seem fitting,  
for this to be all there is:  
adolescence sieved through the past  
and then again through the future,  
everyone you've slept with losing their own embers,  
some resplendent in their burning,  
others smoldering quietly like a storm,  
& still you pass with less than you had,  
and sometimes even more than you wanted.

Meggie Royer / Ann Arbor, Michigan

*Big Boy* / Ann Privateer



Painting

Ann Privateer / Davis, California