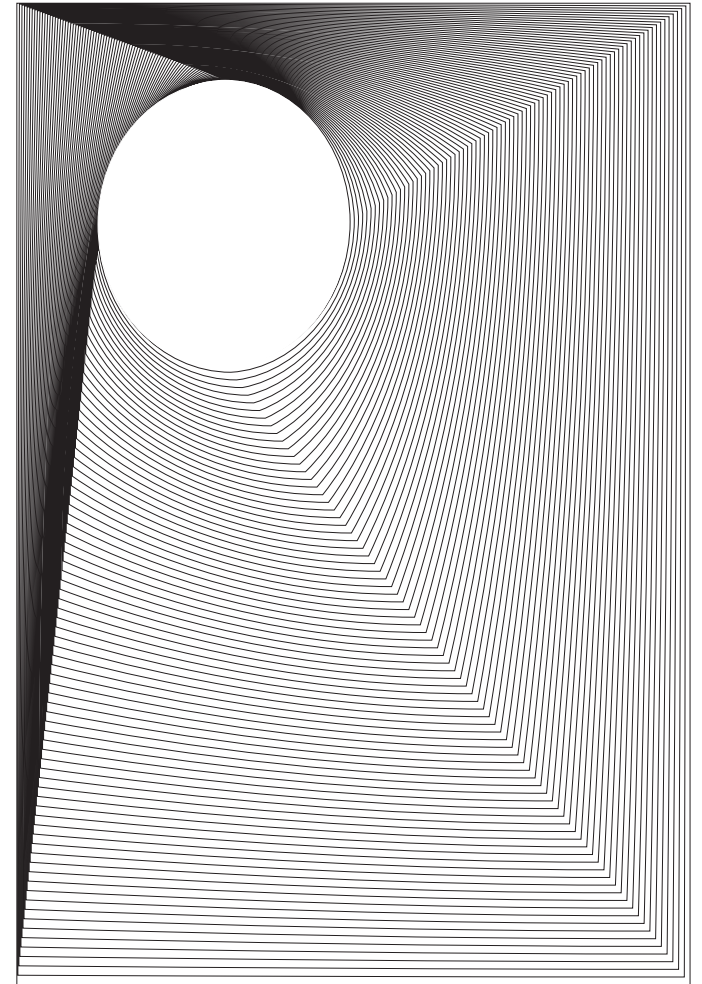


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# Parting Gifts

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## Creation of Passion

One day, Eve woke up and began to dance her insides out. It did not come all at once, though a part of it was natural. She became more accustomed, though she could not get better. It was like taking an eye exam in that way. It was like swimming through air in every other way.

Let me tell you. Her hack was pure white and the glow, the hazy glow like heat, was from her hair. The moves were watery. They were inside of her and she let them out across the garden. Let me tell you the pearl wave of her arms. Let me tell you the silk whispers of her lips.

When Adam awoke, perhaps it had been a lifetime and perhaps two, he only watched. He watched the colors trail from her fingertips and make stripes across the sun like candy. She said to him, her brown feet step, glide, slipping step: Dance. Dance your insides out. Of course, he understood. his beauty came in circles, shiny black as the night would wish to be. His long hair became sand, crystal, it sparkled across the flowers and made flesh his fruit:

When they came together, and their dance intertwined, the hibiscus came to bloom. The apricot grew seed and the seed was alive. It took to the soil and it sprang up into the dance, it climbed up and around the plum, it lashed tight as desire to the apple. When they came together, and their dance intertwined, the wings of the bird became blue sky, the white of the cloud turned to silver and sapphire.

Let me tell you what happened when lie saw them. Let me tell you what happened when lie came down among them, when lie came down within them and their breath turned to song, and their eyes became light. Let me tell you the music lie was. His melody was perfect, like love. his harmony was simple, like faith.

Marshall N. Klimasewiski

\*

Its branches— the cold  
pruned, sap

grips, my hands  
bloom :a sun

steadied for its moon

Simon Perchik

\*

The cots, the stove, the crew  
unclaimed in this Nissen hut :my mailbox  
between twelve more :a camp  
ditched, the road too narrow, curved  
from rain and letters home, tissue thin  
too weak to lift my lips, my slow  
wide, rippling sweep  
crumpled to tin, its great arc  
now eyes and claws and thirst, the flag  
soaked in blood, waving where it fell.

People I don't know send letters  
promising to lose. I've already won!  
A SOUTHERN CAPE FOR TWO that couldn't wait  
printed on the envelope —my hangar's

full. Too many capitals and these stamps  
each day heavier :monuments  
defaced the first time up  
tenacious as fly paper

—I can't separate the mail  
just by calling out, every name  
sounds as if mine at some briefing  
we agreed the last one left  
a prize that sounded more like laughter

—the letters too heavy now :a heap  
as clouds still gather each evening red  
—the last carrying their dead  
to the pile :every sky

waiting on my table to be sent home  
as a flower reaching into the world  
or letters with my name outside.

Simon Perchik

## Going Fishing

After supper we would dig,  
with shovel-shaped rocks  
or hands cupped like backhoes,  
dirt wedged between nail & skin.  
Fueled by our chatter  
and the challenges made  
the quiver in our voices  
cut through the dense,  
musty smell of overturned soil.  
The motherlode produced plump,  
purple crawlers tossed squirming  
& wriggling into the jar  
smuggled from the cellar.  
And with the sun calling  
us home from the crease  
of Summit Hill, we ignored  
the cool air  
and dug deeper.

Kevin J. Smith

\*

Each night the longing  
as if it had a pedigree  
could bark, a collar  
and answers to a howl  
my father chose and his father  
and down to when this night  
first lost its way. And wanted.

No lands, without a flag :an estate  
older than boundaries —my son  
as every star is bred  
short, weak, wandering toward  
a gesture :this soup

is always cold, allowed the silence  
to remember, hear again my hands  
rummaging. Or my father's. Or forever.

Nothing finishes. My son is fed  
on the same floor except now  
there's a table, just as rickety :the spoon  
won't reach his lips  
without the needed spill :the family name  
written into his eyes  
so deep nothing except the dark.  
And missing.

Simon Perchik

Filled with Cheer

To his sister, who will be spending the entire month of  
December in Hawaii, she wrote, *Wish you were here.*

To her brother, with whom he always fights, she wrote,  
*Hope to see you soon.*

To a long list of other relatives she signed their names  
illegibly at the bottom of the card.

To their neighbors to the right, who are incredible snobs,  
she wrote, *Hope you don't mind last year's card.* To the  
neighbors to the left, the ones with five snot-nosed children,  
she wrote, *Stop by any time.* To other neighbors who had  
already sent them cards, she sent nothing.

To his best friend and golfing buddy, she wrote nothing,  
but signed the card as Mr. and Mrs.

To his college roommate, who they visit two or three times  
a year, she wrote, *Dear Friends*, and addressed his wife and his  
kids by name, misspelling them all.

To his other friends she sent cards in envelopes with the  
first line of the address deliberately scratched out.

To the newspaper boy, who sleeps late and can't throw, she  
wrote, *Thanks for great service*, and enclosed \$20.

To his secretary, whom he doesn't appreciate, she wrote,  
*Please accept this little gift*, and enclosed two crisp one dollar  
bills.

To his boss, the faltering AA member, she wrote, *May your  
holidays be filled with cheer.*

Just as she sealed the last envelope, he came into the  
room and kissed her on top of her head. "Finished? Sorry I  
made such a fuss," he said. "You really are sweet to do the  
cards."

She smiled and half forgave him, so she only mailed some  
of them.

Mimi Dollinger

Zero

The sun, even, is pale,  
reflected in air  
brittle as a pane of ice  
west on the horizon at dawn,  
like a ghost  
seen in a mirror,  
the moon.

Karl Elder

Leland

Back home a kid could not  
not believe in nymphomania  
when lust meant lover's nuts  
at the sight of weeds  
or moan of a diesel  
pulling a weight  
equal only to his own desire.

In a town where it seemed  
the fathers forgot how  
we'd stand on the tracks,  
look beyond the limits  
in either direction  
where there were women,  
I was certain,  
inserting their men  
with both hands.

Which of us, each  
must have wondered to himself,  
would get lucky?

Karl Elder

bushes where the small  
town radio station  
guy who couldn't carry  
ceiling tiles but liked  
foreign movies tried to  
get wild for what all  
of them wanted except  
the one she wanted

Lyn Lifshin

Somewhere East of Taos

and  
i have no regrets  
never

it was good  
sinking the Buck knife  
into the flesh of his arm  
tearing out the muscle  
the skin  
the tattooed swastika

boot heeling the lifeless skull  
leaving the corpse  
out  
for the wind  
for the sun  
for the coyotes  
to carry away  
beneath the brown earth  
of this river bridge  
not holy

Charlie Mehrhoff

Hearing  
She Said I Told Him  
Lyn Lifshin Is Going with  
a Dispatcher

Reading at Mills Mansion  
with the old woman who  
could hardly climb the  
steps up to the ebony  
room of blue Chinese  
carpet. Black dress  
with stripes, after 4  
hours of trying on  
dresses. Poems clotting  
in a bag of plaster  
like knots under my  
skin. My hair must  
have smelled of  
marijuana, her head  
of the night. Smoke and  
cool apples, a late  
drive back in the van  
with the Doberman curled  
against me. My lover  
must have been as close  
in the wine dark telling  
me to put my house on  
the market months be  
fore the dog turned wild

Lyn Lifshin

I dream  
of dying

Pierced by the fire  
of starlight.

Birds in flight  
through my eyes.

Return my bones  
to the sky.

Charlie Mehrhoff

Phoenix

where white men  
grow beards  
and perish  
beneath the dying sun

refusing this darkness  
refusing the night  
he fled the town  
drifted  
through miles  
of heartbreak

only to die  
on the run  
somewhere deep  
within this lost land

I loved you

Charlie Mehrhoff

The Mad Girl  
Swears Off Media Men

with their cool  
and too quick answers  
their toupees,  
blase as their purr  
“I just want a hug”  
the midnight talk joek  
whispers fingering  
a trojan when the’ flick  
reviewer says he  
likes to take it  
slow he means he’d like  
to take her but not to  
Martinique as the  
sportscaster begged  
when she looked away  
as he asked her to find  
him a young boy, one  
with soft skin who’d  
let him in as she  
had the college  
radio man with his  
lithium and his  
dark rooms hamsters  
die in, black as where  
the computer show man wanted  
to dive, gurgling about  
enemas parking his  
cycle across the  
driveway in back of  
the cars inside her  
blood so she couldn’t  
leave or hiding in

Columbine Pass, August, 1983

Posing for the open shutter that makes everything history, dumb, like settlers, dirty and dazed, staring at the camera, at the landscape that continues despite us. Each step is memory closer to an end. Nightly thunder becomes bloodroot, columbine. Anchored by fever, I think of the climber in Tibet who died of altitude sickness, his lungs filled with his drowning. His wife dragged the body down the mountainside, and later claimed he followed her and wouldn't go away. Now we have the pictures in books, the flowers we name to remember. I can't remember ever leaving, the shutter's click, or what we said. The story grows until we almost die of fever. The trees become symbols, the leaves gestures, hands stretched across a face. All day we watched a hiker reel in the switchbacks, dragging his shadow through a prospect of flowers.

Jim Zola

Improvisation

His hair is tinted a bit blonder than it probably is. It's part of his job. This doesn't bother you. You know about the male species and their feathers, powdered wigs, silk stockings and the face patches of years past. How pirates wore earrings. But why didn't those men of the sea need women around, anyway? His shirt is like fine white paper, the beginning of an origami design, pure and stiff, with only a suggestion of a crease, a means to an end. There is a scent about him, a natural, sweet bouquet. It is just like you to think these thoughts aloud but this time you hold your tongue.

At dinner, he says he doesn't have a girlfriend, he's never been married and he isn't gay. You never asked. You kiss in the car. Slow kisses. No one has ever kissed you before in this way. It is as if you are being kissed by a woman.

The implication of his '32 Ford, with wheels that look as if they've been spit-shined with a toothbrush, is pushing you over the edge. It waits outside of the top forty club where everyone is younger than the two of you, where you have two of the best bodies in the place, strong and taut. It's part of your job. Neither of you talk about the ring on your finger. This is business related. You dance quick, then close and slow. You brush a swag of hair from the side of your face. His cheek rests on yours, the sweat of curiosity is similar to your own.

When he asks if your daughter is with her dad in Denver this evening, you know the time has come to tell him what you both are avoiding, conveniently perhaps, for the same reason. "In Denver. In the same house where you came to pick me up for lunch that Friday," you want to say. "In the same dining room where we taped a reading of that play, just in case I got the part. There is no divorce here. Not even a separation. Well, perhaps a separation of vision and spirit.

On the way back to your hotel, his cronies from the old neighborhood pull up beside the Ford and he tells you that now his mother will call him in the morning, asking about his date with the bare shoulders and long red hair. You want to ask what he'll tell her, but you have other things you're about to say.

Mary Crescenzo Simons

Gingko

A gingko boasts its many blonde maidenheads  
over an old woman who coos to cracks in the sidewalk,  
Her violin case, it is rumored,  
is empty.  
From day to day she lives  
in the dark Earle Hotel  
making formal excuses  
for checks that do not come.  
The branches above her  
rise in flaming yellow worms  
while other trees display  
naked thin branches.  
The gingko leaves fan against  
indigo fruit lined with shallow gullies  
just as generous hair beats  
shriveled spheres that tumble,  
and burst and stick.

Theresa Elder

Breaking & Entering

I stride along and my tempo is the tempo  
of all my side of the street. I am thinking  
  
of streets, they way they are named after trees, the way  
the names outlast the trees. I feel like a man  
  
who is searching for the house he was born in.  
uncertain about the address, the name of  
  
the street, every house is memory. I don't  
remember my first house, its sad windows, but  
  
I feel as though around the next corner, I  
might see a house that no one lives in, and from  
  
an open window, hear a familiar voice  
singing the song I am about to break into.

Jim Zola

with getting lost, Fred is early.

After a while, Fred is no longer early. Tina, however, is a half hour late. Fred has another beer.

Bowlers keep coming in for drinks and they look at Fred in his suit. They smell his aftershave.

Tina is an hour late. Fred has had four beers. The bartender is about to stop serving him when she walks in.

Fred stands up when he sees Tina. He smiles as she walks over toward him. He decides that he will not try to kiss her for now. He is still smiling.

When Tina reaches the table, she bends over and looks at the suitcase. She opens it up. It is empty inside except for an old black sock of Fred's.

How could he have missed such a thing? Tina, with two fingers, picks it up by the top and tosses it under the table. It falls limply on one side of the supports.

Satisfied that it is empty, Tina closes the suitcase. She turns to Fred, lets out a small burp, and says Excuse.

She leaves.

Michael Zadoorian

## Making Sense

How is he today? said Cecil Morfee to his sister Clara.

Not a good day, she said, closing the door. Clara, like her younger brother, came around to the kitchenless apartment at the Hazydale Senior Complex twice a week to check on their grandfather.

The young man walked over to where his grandfather was sitting. On the floor, next to his chair, was a brown slipper. The leather that covered it was cracked and gnarled. On top of the television was a paperweight; a flower embedded in a half sphere of glass. His grandfather was staring blankly beneath it, at the nighttime version of Wheel of Fortune.

Grandpa? How are you today? said Cecil, as he sat down on the sofa.

The old man made no reply.

Grandpa, did you hear me? How are you?

Sick a bed on two chairs and hand me a toothpick, said the old man, not looking up from the screen.

I will, Grandpa Cee, but first tell me how you feel.

Meet me at the clothesline, that's where I hang out.

Grandpa, there's no clothesline. Cecil raised his voice slightly. You live at the senior complex. You know that.

The old man looked deeply into the eyes of the younger and said: I'm a match, strike me and see where you light.

Cecil took a deep breath, exhaled. Grandpa Cee, don't you know where you live?

Upstairs over that vacant lot.

Clara came over. Getting anywhere with him? she said.

All he remembers are his jokes, said Cecil.

Remember what he used to say when someone asked him what religion he was?

Non sequitur! they said in unison.

I had forgotten about that, said Cecil.

The noise roused their grandfather. He looked away from the images on the screen and snorted. If wishes were horses, he intoned poor men would ride.

Cecil took his grandfather's hand. It was spotted and cool. Grandpa Cee, he said, just don't babble. Talk to me.

The old man looked at his grandson with no hint of recognition. I feel for YOU, he said. But I can't touch you. lie snorted again and returned to the television.

Clara, you wanna try? said Cecil. I'm getting nowhere

fast.

By this time, Clara was watching Wheel of Fortune and had to pull herself away from the bonus round. What's the point? she said.

I want to tell Mom that he was at least making some sense today, Cecil said.

All right, then, said Clara, turning to her grandfather. Hey Poppy, she said. I hear your friend Albert took a nasty tumble. Is he okay?

The old man looked at her. His eyes were shimmering and clear as he spoke.

He didn't get hurt, he had on his light fall suit.

Clara smiled. How old is Albert anyway, Poppy?

Quickly, the old man retorted: he's in the flower of his youth—a bloomin' idiot!

The two of them laughed. Cecil wanted to join in. Poppy, he said. Where's Albert now?

He just went around the corner in a rowboat, said the old man.

All of them laughed this time. Clara looked at Cecil. So tell Mom, she said.

Just then the old man sat up straight and bellowed, Call me anything you want, just don't call me late for dinner! he then slumped back in his chair.

Okay, Grandpa, said Cecil. That's enough.

But the old man could not hear what he said.

Michael Zadoorian

## The Assigination

Fred and Tina have broken up. Our marriage is over, says Tina, months later. Fred is still holding out. He is the one with hope. He knows Tina doesn't mean it. He knows that the time they spent together wasn't as she said—a joke, a waste of breath. Tina says that their marriage was only happy for him. That he had caught her on the rebound. That only he could twist twelve and a half months of misery into something good. Fred is the one with hope.

When Tina calls, Fred is overjoyed. She has actually gotten in touch with him. He has been waiting for just this to happen. She says she wants to meet with him. She wants to borrow their good suitcase because she is going on a trip to Las Vegas. She does not want to visit their old apartment.

They decide to meet at a place called the Bolero Lounge. Fred has never heard of it, but Tina wants to meet there because it is near her new apartment. Fred is happy to agree, especially since the name of the place conjures up all sorts of sexual thoughts for him. It's been a long time since he's had any of those thoughts.

All week long, Fred is anxious about his date with Tina. He has a hard time concentrating at work. People keep asking him if he is all right. Yes, he says to them, I am fine.

On Friday, the day they are to meet, Fred comes home from work and gets cleaned up. He puts on a suit and a new shirt, finds some aftershave and applies it briskly, as it says on the bottle.

Fred calls up information to get the number of the Bolero Lounge. When he talks to the man at the bar, he hears some odd noises in the background, like thunder.

In his car, on the way to the Bolero, Fred stops at a supermarket and picks up a mixed bouquet for Tina. While he is there, he also buys some cat food and a small jar of pickled beets.

Driving around, Fred has a hard time locating the bar. He passes the corner three times before he realizes that the Bolero Lounge is in a bowling alley. In the parking lot, there is a sign that says, "Bowlero Lounge Entrance." It is pointing to a door.

Inside, the place is dark and musty smelling. There is hardly anyone there. Fred puts down the suitcase at a table in the middle of the bar. He sits down and orders a beer. Even

## An Unending Dream

I have a recurring dream  
in which all the people  
I've ever known in my life  
end up together  
in the old high school gym  
for a giant sock hop  
a reunion of sorts

I know both my friends  
and my enemies are there  
because we talk and laugh  
or shake our heads and stare  
and I'm glad to be with them  
but I can't make out their faces  
clearly  
and I don't know how or if  
the evening  
ever ends

Michael Estabrook

## Wedding Story

This is a dream of a wedding. Or it is a wedding: it doesn't matter, the two are the same. The bride floats down the aisle; the groom waits, sober and grave, by the communion rail.

The wedding has been delayed for an unplanned, unexpected funeral. The wedding party waited in wine-colored velvet and dark tuxedos on the steps of a children's school, across the street. Behind them they heard the slam of basketballs in an echoing gymnasium. In silence they watched the old people help one another down the steps of the church, clutching railings, each other, or damp Kleenexes. The breeze, as if curious, lifted a strand of a bridesmaid's hair, then dropped it.

Weddings like this are preserved in photographs, allowed to yellow in trunks. They are passed down to children and children's children, until the faces they reflect are remembered by no one, and the cracked pieces of paper are dropped in wastebaskets.

Here are the bride and groom, in front of a fluffy white cake. They carry long-stemmed glasses full of white wine. Laughing, she pushes the cotton-candy veil out of the way so he can kiss her for the photographer. She feels the brush of his moustache, the tentative touch of his lips. In that instant the flash of the bulb reveals them as skeletons—"Till death do us part."

The bridesmaid sits some distance from the bride and groom. She is standing forward, cheeks flushed, watching the people at other tables. Her face unconsciously reflects the faces she watches; laughter, mock horror, affection flit across her face. At a word from the man next to her she turns, composing her face. He pulls the collar of his shirt out and turns his head from side to side, as if to relieve the pressure. The bridesmaid smiles and sips coffee. None of the people around them pay any attention.

Upstairs in a room whose bed is covered with coats and other people's clothing, the bridesmaid places the velvet gown in a travel bag, zipping it closed almost regretfully. The man comes out of the bathroom, snapping off lights. "Let's go." In the suddenly darkened room, turning back she sees once more the river from the window, the sun glinting off the high arched bridge.

As the bridesmaid spends more time with the man they stay in other hotel rooms, although they are never surprised with a view of a bridge. They face each other in the dark, seeing each other's silhouettes and vague facial features like shadows on the moon. They say, "I love you"; the words are charged with great significance, sounding unfamiliar and too large to the woman, as if they must be said because they don't quite fit the mouth. In the dark the words are followed by kisses and shows of tenderness, but sometimes, if she wakes before he does and sees his hack, bare and freckled in the early light, she thinks they might be true.

They plan a wedding much like the one she was a bridesmaid for. Velvet gowns, tuxes, an ornate white cake. The flourishes of the cake are beautiful but the taste of it is dry in her mouth; it must be nervousness, she thinks. In the photographer's flash she feels frozen in her smile, stiff and unable to move. She wonders if that other bride, if all brides felt the same. Afterward the groom pulls his collar away from his neck and turns his head from side to side.

As she cleans their apartment the woman realizes she is seeing, over and over again, a railroad yard she visited on a walk alone one night before she met her husband. She waded through knee-deep grass to see abandoned cars and rusted metal, lit by a single streetlight. A stream must have been nearby; she heard a soft murmuring behind some bushes. She remembers the damp air, smelling faintly of rust and mud. At that moment the woman felt that all the possibilities of life were open to her.

It is years before she remembers the bridge she saw from the hotel window. She is lying on a delivery table, legs strapped up and apart, about to deliver their third child. As the baby slides out like a piece of herself, she sees the bridge vividly. The height of it, its confident arch over the sunlit water, the sense of loss as the door closed behind her.

Patricia O'Donnell

### The Returning Place of Self

Swept down, then stopped momentarily  
like a leaf in a downspout,  
the sleeper holds on to light,  
lets it roll from his fingertips.  
In the tension between holding on  
and letting go, he sleeps.  
Time passing is not duration  
but space, the separation of darkness  
from dreams, dreams from wakefulness.

La-luh, la-luh, la la...  
the voices, slurred or clear,  
retreat from consciousness  
or the memory of consciousness.  
Light surrounds the voices  
with its own tone, remote or staged.  
The dreamer watches himself act  
and be acted upon, the object  
and initiator of action, both  
creator and process, no end in view:  
actors in a serial of lost beginnings.

Between desire and fulfillment  
images mesh into spaces.  
Whether he wishes to let go  
or to stay in the dream, the dream  
remains the dreamer's place,  
the end of thought's spillway,  
the home he has made of himself.

Jane McClellan

## Why

I submit work because I don't know what else to do with it. I could of course simply file it. Watch my living space diminish.

Writing, painting, and singing are as essential to my being as eating, sleeping, and sex. Creativity may have the edge. As a former opera/concert singer, from age 12, I needed people out there at the edge of one's body, to be listeners.

My father died when I was five, and my mother lost interest in me. I turned to books for company. Grew up on Shakespeare. The tragedies made life easier. I found a list of great authors: Mann, Dostoevsky, Huxley—so many I would read them as if they were friends. I won prizes for stories in school, but fate decided I would sing. Most of my time and energy was focused on training and performance. I always managed to paint, keep a journal, and write poems (which were never submitted) even after my two children were born. It was five years ago that I found time to submit, because a workshop teacher suggested it. It was a new dimension. Editors took time to write notes of encouragement, and the other kind. I've been through so much rejection, I think I'm pretty immune to it.

Submitting is just another path to dialog. The summation of my life, and others I observe and read translated and reduced like a recipe, painting or mini-opera, or happening.

Continuing along the path, you finally arrive at a reader, or listener. Contact is made. Something of what is in a poem is shared. James Baldwin speaks of the terrible and the beautiful. Conflict, rescue, betrayal, everything one lives. Or just turn the words upside down and play. Allow accidents, take risks like throwing paint on wet paper!

If I stop submitting work, the wetlands dry up, the fish don't swim or spawn, the birds fly away for lack of food. The water is there, blocked as my room, everything piling up, cut off.

Can a poet survive artistically writing without submitting? Of course. But I choose dialog, which requires a relationship. I am just one part of the process. That which enters me, I relay. When I let go, it's amazing to watch the next runner.

Joan Payne Kincaid

## Aerobics

Well, what do you want?  
begins his exercise...  
it's too big.

They don't have it—  
Don't get 4 at 6 for a dollar.  
I escape to find 2 pillows

for the price of 1  
(supposed to be  
left in the camper

but never ever  
are so you sleep  
with your breasts

straight up  
or crushed  
because you don't

have them  
and  
nothing to wrap your arms around).

Joan Payne Kincaid

The Garden of Paradise

A machine containing cesium-137  
is found in a junkyard in Brazil.

In a field scattered with barrels, fenders,  
sets of steel wheels and whole bodies of cars,  
two men discover a marvelous powder.  
Soon a ring of children come  
for the cold green light and lovely dust.

Some smear cesium on their arms.  
Some climb under abandoned cars  
and shine with eerie coldness.  
Some taste that miraculous stuff.  
Some rub its grittiness on their hips.

Some carry a pinch to their brothers.

The children begin to die at home .  
in an hour, a day, a week, their bodies  
consumed with knowledge of good and evil.

This is what they hoped in their hearts to see-  
the secret cairn of small lives opened  
and, in the drab world of their parents,  
their loveliness exposed at last.

Jack Coulehan

The Cottage on Lake Michigan

It was in the woods  
one rusty screen door leading to steps  
a kitchen, a white gas stove  
the pilot light shining in blue  
like the features of the michigan bass mounted  
above the fireplace  
its blue mouth wide open as it stared  
at the lake outside the window

Every summer, around that cottage, I learned how to hunt  
for food  
walking with my mother down the hilly dirt road  
which had more hand-sized rocks than dirt  
picking red raspberries  
only she could see  
a glimpse of red in green like tired eyes  
gathering them like a brown bear

At night people built bonfires outside our cottage  
my mother watching them through the back window  
as they drank beer and skipped stones against the waves  
while lake michigan slowly beat the shore

Michael E. Nowicki

Grace

Today the geese and lilac float in light.  
Grey-green the trees  
are heavy in the haze.  
Behind my eyes my blood  
burns blood blue-red. Blinding  
the tulips.  
The cotton seed sinks in the lake.

The body is our transit. No one  
can hear it die.

    But watch.  
The instruments of light are silent.

The Public Crier is quiet.  
No one believes in death today.  
No one mentions gravity.  
But now the celestial mass of the moon  
pulls the rock-fish where she crawls  
blind along the limestone  
and the chalkstone  
and the fossilized  
mammoth bone

where the mud is dense and formless  
as substratum, as dark—  
where the mud turns  
our thin fish skeletons to light,  
invents from the scales of our fish skin  
flash and phosphorescence,  
day stars and geese.

Forget everything you cannot hear. Light  
as feathers and luminous  
we are climbing  
a spine of stairs to God.

Laura Kasischke

The Football Coach  
and Mama's Memorial

The last time we talked  
it was under the stadium  
when he coached the Lions  
and I was the new teacher  
in town. He thought I would  
and I wouldn't, thought  
he could make more than one  
touchdown and score in the back  
seat of a '64 Chevrolet.

This morning he phones,  
a Deacon of Grace Church  
that brought grief food:  
chicken, baked beans,  
and three kinds of potato salad  
that terrible November  
Mama's car swerved off the road.

"The church has some money  
given to honor of your Mom,"  
he says. "You don't mind if we use  
it for tables . . . I told Mrs. Brusque  
I'd ask because we'd been acquainted  
for a long time. I said I knew you  
better than anybody.

The old men who work  
the potluck suppers  
are down in the back.  
It's hard to haul  
wooden tables up and down  
the stairs. We could  
alleviate this situation.  
Got funds enough for ten."

Sue Walker

Tombstones

Outside it's raining. Inside your room is full  
of wet flowers that open  
and shut  
like a heart pumping.  
Leaves curl into their stems  
and die.

My husband moans in his sleep  
reaches out for his mother's breast.  
I think of the tombstones  
in the churchyard next door.  
I move to the hollow  
of his hand and  
crawl inside.

Sue Sanie Elkind

