

Cover photo by Karen Huffman



Geer Austin, Beth Bahler, Paul Beckman, Alan Catlin,
David Chorlton, Robert Cooperman, T. M. Cox, Tessa Dratt,
Michael Estabrook, Linda Nemeč Foster, Sanford Fraser, John Grey,
Michael Hettich, Albert Huffstickler, David James,
Elizabeth Kerlikowske, Jennifer Lagier, Lyn Lifshin, Joanne Lowery,
Irene Eberling Marsh, Lowry McAllen, Ken Meisel, Ben Miller,
Errol Miller, Simon Perchik, Greta Rana, Elizabeth Rees, John Repp,
Roberta Pantal Rhodes, Jonathan K. Rice, Anne Richey, Ken Smith,
Jennifer Smith-Morris, John Sweet, Russell Thorburn,
Ryan G. Van Cleave, Michael J. Vaughn, Angelo Verga,
Philip A. Waterhouse, Chris Waters, Jennifer Westmoreland, R. Yurman

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Parting Gifts

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Index by Author

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Small's Paradise/Geer Austin/42
That Good Idea/Beth Bahler/31
Sonia/Paul Beckman/62
Horse Latitudes/Alan Catlin/24
Jose Denoso's Obscene Bird of Night/Alan
Catlin/24
Art/David Chorlton/6
Breclav/David Chorlton/5
Brno/David Chorlton/69
Evening Train/David Chorlton/6
"Major" William Paige, Gold Creek, Colorado
Territory, 1873/Robert Cooperman/43
Roland Strickland, of the Boom Town of Gold
Creek, Colorado Territory, 1873/Robert
Cooperman/43
A Midnight Drive Across Lake Weiss/T. M.
Cox/54
Yahrzeit Light/Tessa Dratt/68
Great Uncle Olin/Michael Estabrook/27
Uncle Bill/Michael Estabrook/30
Celebrity Dream/Linda Nemeč Foster/34
The Woman with the Two Rivers Growing from
Her Hair/Linda Nemeč Foster/40
Commuter Man/Sanford Fraser/4
Undergrowth/Sanford Fraser/4
Beside the Point/John Grey/67
The Last Meeting in the Restaurant/John
Grey/66
Black Dogs/Michael Hettich/64
Breathing Underwater/Michael Hettich/10
She Loves/Michael Hettich/9
Window/Michael Hettich/65
Expanding My Myth/Albert Huffstickler/35
Pilgrimage/Albert Huffstickler /38
Dead Sleep/David James/19
Before I Read the Poem That Won the
Prize/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/47
Beyond Divorce/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/44
Instead of Emerald/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/45
"Now I lay me down..."/Elizabeth
Kerlikowske/44
What We Do/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/26
Año Nuevo/Jennifer Lagier/57
When the Wolf Knows Your Address/Jennifer
Lagier/26
Asked Once Again "Did You Sacrifice Much to
Become a Poet?"/Lyn Lifshin/16
Early December at the Hotel Hospital/Lyn
Lifshin/25
Black Dogs/Joanne Lowery/58
Divisor/Joanne Lowery/59
Floaters/Joanne Lowery/60
How It Feels to Die in the Twentieth
Century/Joanne Lowery/15
Incandescence/Joanne Lowery/16
Amelia/Irene Eberling Marsh/48
Barbara's Dream/Irene Eberling Marsh/48
Snoring/Lowry McAllen/35
The Boys Fishing on Belle Isle/Ken Meisel/51
Rehearsing at the Fox Theater/Ken Meisel/50
#232/Ben Miller/8
#233/Ben Miller/65
Dispensation/Errol Miller/22
from Another Lost Cause/Errol Miller/55
from How Long After The Sermon/Errol
Miller/58
from The Inner Crust Of Earth/Errol Miller/55
W 46/Simon Perchik/18
W 57/Simon Perchik/18
W 60/Simon Perchik/55
The Creation: A Woman's View/Greta Rana/41
Was It Only a Rumour/Greta Rana/41
Erasure/Elizabeth Rees/50
Eight Haiku/John Repp/12
Window/John Repp/11
Unmindful of the Rules/Roberta Pantal
Rhodes/29
Pissing in the Dark/Jonathan K. Rice/3
Good Grief/Anne Richey/26
On Hubble/Anne Richey/28
Funicular/Ken Smith/73
Mary Loretta/Ken Smith/8
An Old Man and His Baseball Cap/Ken Smith/7
The Good Old Days/Jennifer Smith-Morris/52
at the oneonta holiday inn/John Sweet/36
closer/John Sweet/36
the ghost of a moon/John Sweet/37
The Art of the Fastball/Russell Thorburn/17
He Drank the Sun Down Ashamed of the Way
We Treated Her/Russell Thorburn/56
Picture Frank Shopping/Russell Thorburn/1
The Only Dance/Ryan G. Van Cleave/70
Infatuation Poems/Michael J. Vaughn/11
Instructions for Finding Frosted Glass at the
Beach/Michael J. Vaughn/61
Dawn 8/Angelo Verga/23
180 Proof/Philip A. Waterhouse/49
Vital Signs/Philip A. Waterhouse/49
Air Conditioning in Dakar/Chris Waters/72
Earthly Spirits/Chris Waters/72
Mission Sunday/Chris Waters/71
Alley Walk/Jennifer Westmoreland/13
That Small Dark Bird/R. Yurman/4
Cough Balls/R. Yurman/46

Index by Title

#232/Ben Miller/8
#233/Ben Miller/65
180 Proof/Philip A. Waterhouse/49
Air Conditioning in Dakar/Chris Waters/72
Alley Walk/Jennifer Westmoreland/13
Amelia/Irene Eberling Marsh/48
Año Nuevo/Jennifer Lagier/57
Art/David Chorlton/6
The Art of the Fastball/Russell Thorburn/17
Asked Once Again "Did You Sacrifice Much to
 Become a Poet?"/Lyn Lifshin/16
at the oneonta holiday inn/John Sweet/36
Before I Read the Poem That Won the
 Prize/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/47
Barbara's Dream/Irene Eberling Marsh/48
Beside the Point/John Grey/67
Beyond Divorce/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/44
Black Dogs/Michael Hettich/64
Black Dogs/Joanne Lowery/58
The Boys Fishing on Belle Isle/Ken Meisel/51
Breathing Underwater/Michael Hettich/10
Breclav/David Chorlton/5
Brno/David Chorlton/69
Celebrity Dream/Linda Nemece Foster/34
closer/John Sweet/36
Commuter Man/Sanford Fraser/4
Cough Balls/R. Yurman/46
The Creation: A Woman's View/Greta Rana/41
Dawn 8/Angelo Verga/23
Dead Sleep/David James/19
Dispensation/Errol Miller/22
Divisor/Joanne Lowery/59
Early December at the Hotel Hospital/Lyn
 Lifshin/25
Earthy Spirits/Chris Waters/72
Eight Haiku/John Repp/12
Erasure/Elizabeth Rees/50
Evening Train/David Chorlton/6
Expanding My Myth/Albert Huffstickler/35
Floaters/Joanne Lowery/60
from Another Lost Cause/Errol Miller/55
from How Long After The Sermon/Errol Miller/58
from The Inner Crust Of Earth/Errol Miller/55
Funicular/Ken Smith/73
the ghost of a moon/John Sweet/37
Good Grief/Anne Richey/26
The Good Old Days/Jennifer Smith-Morris/52
Great Uncle Olin/Michael Estabrook/27
He Drank the Sun Down Ashamed of the Way We
 Treated Her/Russell Thorburn/56

Horse Latitudes/Alan Catlin/24
How It Feels to Die in the Twentieth
 Century/Joanne Lowery/15
Incandescence/Joanne Lowery/16
Infatuation Poems/Michael J. Vaughn/11
Instead of Emeraude/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/45
Instructions for Finding Frosted Glass at the
 Beach/Michael J. Vaughn/61
Jose Denoso's Obscene Bird of Night/Alan
 Catlin/24
The Last Meeting in the Restaurant/John Grey/66
"Major" William Paige, Gold Creek, Colorado
 Territory, 1873/Robert Cooperman/43
Mary Loretta/Ken Smith/8
A Midnight Drive Across Lake Weiss/T. M. Cox/54
Mission Sunday/Chris Waters/71
"Now I lay me down..."/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/44
An Old Man and His Baseball Cap/Ken Smith/7
On Hubble/Anne Richey/28
The Only Dance/Ryan G. Van Cleave/70
Picture Frank Shopping/Russell Thorburn/1
Pilgrimage/Albert Huffstickler /38
Pissing in the Dark/Jonathan K. Rice/3
Rehearsing at the Fox Theater/Ken Meisel/50
Roland Strickland, of the Boom Town of Gold
 Creek, Colorado Territory, 1873/Robert
 Cooperman/43
She Loves/Michael Hettich/9
Small's Paradise/Geer Austin/42
Snoring/Lowry McAllen/35
Sonia/Paul Beckman/62
That Good Idea/Beth Bahler/31
That Small Dark Bird/R. Yurman/4
Uncle Bill/Michael Estabrook/30
Undergrowth/Sanford Fraser/4
Unmindful of the Rules/Roberta Pantal Rhodes/29
Vital Signs/Philip A. Waterhouse/49
W 46/Simon Perchik/18
W 57/Simon Perchik/18
W 60/Simon Perchik/55
Was It Only a Rumour/Greta Rana/41
When the Wolf Knows Your Address/Jennifer
 Lagier/26
What We Do/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/26
Window/Michael Hettich/65
Window/John Repp/11
The Woman with the Two Rivers Growing from
 Her Hair/Linda Nemece Foster/40
Yahrzeit Light/Tessa Dratt/68

Contents

Picture Frank Shopping/Russell Thorburn/1
Pissing in the Dark/Jonathan K. Rice/3
Undergrowth/Sanford Fraser/4
That Small Dark Bird/R. Yurman/4
Commuter Man/Sanford Fraser/4
Breclav/David Chorlton/5
Art/David Chorlton/6
Evening Train/David Chorlton/6
An Old Man and His Baseball Cap/Ken Smith/7
Mary Loretta/Ken Smith/8
#232/Ben Miller/8
She Loves/Michael Hettich/9
Breathing Underwater/Michael Hettich/10
Window/John Repp/11
Infatuation Poems/Michael J. Vaughn/11
Eight Haiku/John Repp/12
Alley Walk/Jennifer Westmoreland/13
How It Feels to Die in the Twentieth Century/Joanne
 Lowery/15
Incandescence/Joanne Lowery/16
Asked Once Again "Did You Sacrifice Much to Become a
 Poet?"/Lyn Lifshin/16
The Art of the Fastball/Russell Thorburn/17
W 46/Simon Perchik/18
W 57/Simon Perchik/18
Dead Sleep/David James/19
Dispensation/Errol Miller/22
Dawn 8/Angelo Verga/23
Jose Denoso's Obscene Bird of Night/Alan Catlin/24
Horse Latitudes/Alan Catlin/24
Early December at the Hotel Hospital/Lyn Lifshin/25
Good Grief/Anne Richey/26
When the Wolf Knows Your Address/Jennifer Lagier/26
What We Do/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/26
Great Uncle Olin/Michael Estabrook/27
On Hubble/Anne Richey/28
Unmindful of the Rules/Roberta Pantal Rhodes/29
Uncle Bill/Michael Estabrook/30
That Good Idea/Beth Bahler/31
Celebrity Dream/Linda Nemece Foster/34
Snoring/Lowry McAllen/35
Expanding My Myth/Albert Huffstickler/35
closer/John Sweet/36
at the oneonta holiday inn/John Sweet/36
the ghost of a moon/John Sweet/37
Pilgrimage/Albert Huffstickler /38

The Woman with the Two Rivers Growing from Her Hair/Linda Neme Foster/40
 The Creation: A Woman's View/Greta Rana/41
 Was It Only a Rumour/Greta Rana/41
 Small's Paradise/Geer Austin/42
 "Major" William Paige, Gold Creek, Colorado Territory, 1873/Robert Cooperman/43
 Roland Strickland, of the Boom Town of Gold Creek, Colorado Territory, 1873/Robert Cooperman/43
 "Now I lay me down..."/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/44
 Beyond Divorce/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/44
 Instead of Emerald/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/45
 Cough Balls/R. Yurman/46
 Before I Read the Poem That Won the Prize/Elizabeth Kerlikowske/47
 Barbara's Dream/Irene Eberling Marsh/48
 Amelia/Irene Eberling Marsh/48
 Vital Signs/Philip A. Waterhouse/49
 180 Proof/Philip A. Waterhouse/49
 Rehearsing at the Fox Theater/Ken Meisel/50
 Erasure/Elizabeth Rees/50
 The Boys Fishing on Belle Isle/Ken Meisel/51
 The Good Old Days/Jennifer Smith-Morris/52
 A Midnight Drive Across Lake Weiss/T. M. Cox/54
 from Another Lost Cause/Errol Miller/55
 W 60/Simon Perchik/55
 from The Inner Crust Of Earth/Errol Miller/55
 He Drank the Sun Down Ashamed of the Way We Treated Her/Russell Thorburn/56
 Año Nuevo/Jennifer Lagier/57
 Black Dogs/Joanne Lowery/58
 from How Long After The Sermon/Errol Miller/58
 Divisor/Joanne Lowery/59
 Floaters/Joanne Lowery/60
 Instructions for Finding Frosted Glass at the Beach/Michael J. Vaughn/61
 Sonia/Paul Beckman/62
 Black Dogs/Michael Hettich/64
 #233/Ben Miller/65
 Window/Michael Hettich/65
 The Last Meeting in the Restaurant/John Grey/66
 Beside the Point/John Grey/67
 Yahrzeit Light/Tessa Dratt/68
 Brno/David Chorlton/69
 The Only Dance/Ryan G. Van Cleave/70
 Mission Sunday/Chris Waters/71
 Earthly Spirits/Chris Waters/72
 Air Conditioning in Dakar/Chris Waters/72
 Funicular/Ken Smith/73

Funicular

Ken Smith

In a stroke
 As blunt as a balled fist
 In bathtub water,
 I lost the use of my left hand
 And the point of stories,
 As if they required accompaniment
 Or coaching gestures for continued conduction
 Through filaments frailer than eyelashes,
 Reminding me my left eye
 Now always threatens closure,
 The frank disclosure of boredom or fatigue,
 The eye flutters and stutters,
 Like a child attempting to swallow sobs
 A mouthful at a time.
 And then there was FUNICULAR.
 Recently in downtown Los Angeles,
 This word unfamiliar terrorized me.
 My companion gnawed at me with repetition,
 Nurturing a void long suspected.
 FUNICULAR,
 A word unknown to me,
 Intimating the stroke had abandoned me
 In the hollow of my ignorance,
 As besetting as the scent
 Of oriental lilies.
 FUNICULAR,
 Devilishly talismanic,
 Its absence fueled my apprehension,
 As water stokes hunger,
 Purged me of intellectual surety, and
 Exposed my engorged emptiness
 Always lurking
 Like another stroke.

Earthly Spirits

Chris Waters

For better traveling, for deer to graze, fields to plant,
they burned the trees and brush. Tiring the land there,
they removed here. Raided, infighting, falling
to hungry nature, they also left. Across the land,
boulders, carved strangely, stand oddly.
One after the other, languages, endangered, die.
Gods of memory are bred with storming deities.
Place-names, foods, sounds, gestures, mascots,
customs, features, uprooted remnants, earthly spirits.

Air Conditioning in Dakar

Chris Waters

Dakar I

A large unit in a small hotel room, 95° on the street.
Pandemonium, maids' raps went unheard. The icicle air
stabbed my lungs. I brought the frigidaire outside shaped
as a constant cold embracing me like a snake until
the machine broke down. In the magic of a flash,
phlegm and sniffles stopped. It took another bout
of rheuminess before the picture cleared. I OFFed
the air conditioning for good, showering on the hour.

Dakar II

First pooh-poohing the wisdom of an old African hand,
at last Louis with an s and a beard, my room-mate,
gave it a try. Right away, the cold he'd brought went home.
Fini to air conditioning. Long live sweat, head to toe.

Picture Frank Shopping

Russell Thorburn

Frank Kumanchin held the phone out to the grocery store. "Can't you hear those goddamn kids crying?" he demanded of Toni on the phone, not moving from the mirror by the candy bin. Every time Frank looked into the mirror he saw his father's eyes staring back. "Like big brown jelly beans waiting to be eaten," he'd say to Toni. Then he would remember how his mother had opened up the door for the KGB to arrest his father. "Their mother left those kids in the shopping cart," he reported to Toni. He watched them as they rubbed potato chips in their hair. There was a dizziness about it that arrested him, and if he didn't have Toni as a girlfriend he knew he would shop around for a work girl here. Her dyed black hair would have to jiggle as she rang up each item.

He loved to push a cart through the store. He listened to its wheels slide across freshly mopped floors, turning around to see his tracks. He imagined the electric stare of the security camera. He grabbed a handful of items he didn't need, glancing at the overtired clerks facing the pallets to be unloaded. He imagined the check-out girls dreaming they were asleep with their boyfriends while he put back every item on the shelves.

He stood there by the phone in thought, knowing their mother would return but sometimes a parent vanished and never came back.

Frank pictured his father being arrested. His brown eyes frightened, watching his silent mother and his father who resembled the whitest of birthday cakes. "My father was no revolutionary," Frank wanted to tell these faces with their politics laced tight into their hard eyes. His father drew swirling lines of chocolate on perfectly white cakes until they were too perfect to eat.

His son had observed his father's bearded concern over each raw ingredient. The birthday cakes were what Frank would miss. They seemed to make the world a sweeter place. Frank helped mix eggs and flour, sending up a perfect white cloud every time he stirred. "If you're going to do one good thing in your life, it might as well be baking birthday cakes," his father would say.

Frank Kumanchin had hid beneath the kitchen table. His father cried all he was good for was decorating cakes and making fantastic pastries.

"Picture Anna in her thirties," he demanded of Toni, then told her his attractive, blue-eyed mother was an informer. He saw Anna in her worn housedress, her long brown hair pulled back in a pony, her skin white as flour, lips pursed as if ready to break her silence. In betrayal she was so lovely. He told Toni to picture her dirt-stained dress, a pocket torn, the banged up little pointed shoes and a row of buttons down the back of the dress unbuttoned, exposing flesh. "Picture her until it hurts," he said, but he didn't know what she pictured, and he forgot what he was trying to picture himself.

He pictured his mother slender but well rounded with rich brown hair, a cigarette raised to her lips to light. She would abandon him for the chance of making movies despite Stalin and Krushchev.

“Darling, your mother is going to be a famous director,” she lied to her son.

At her parties bearded men in wooly, holey sweaters smoked cigarette after cigarette, trying to get right that certain pose of fame. They drank vodka and offered Frank some, who hid behind his mother’s legs. He saw all kinds of battered, beat-up, tight-laced shoes. High heeled ones too of women younger than his mother.

In the bathroom once he saw a man kissing his mother, her dress all undone down the front. She laughed when she noticed him watching them. She told the man kissing her, “Don’t mind him. He hasn’t seen anything yet.”

Toni said nothing to everything he told her.

He told her about his father, what his father had told him and what he would tell any of his sons, if he had any: how they woke his father up and dragged him into the washroom, a cold but brilliantly lit place where they hosed down new prisoners, and sprayed him full force into a quivering mass. While he crouched on the freezing floor and gulped air, he yelled out pastry recipes. He held his hands over his face and told them everything about baking. He hoarsely whispered the yolks had to be whipped into a delicate froth and the flour ground fresh from the sweetest wheat. He told them baking was a religious act, not a revolutionary one. Through his sore, bleeding eyes he saw somebody writing down his confession. He cursed them every now and then for stealing his recipes, but in their laughter they beat him dry like a wet rug with hickory sticks.

“Let me tell you about the Venus cake with shaved almonds and sweet black cherries.”

“An Amazon pie with twenty blackbirds.”

“A Brazilian cheese cake with cherries.”

Frank spat into the phone how his father made fools out of them: all of the recipes were fictions; how his mother had betrayed him for a career in film-making, a chance to be someone other than a mother or wife, a few lies whispered into the ears of those who listened for them.

His father was left outside in the cold for ten minutes, his hands shoved between his legs, the aurora borealis ravaging the still night above in peasant green and yellow or a magisterial red.

Toni on the other end yawned, perhaps thought of putting the phone in the refrigerator. If anything, their whole conversation was frozen in time.

“You know they waited ten whole minutes before they rescued him,” he related, staring at two toddlers asleep in a nearby cart.

Before he knew it he saw the night manager staring at him. Frank knew he didn’t want to talk with him. He watched the night manager, a short little man with acne, pens and felt-tip markers sticking out from his left shirt pocket, bend down to look at the toddlers in the cart. Frank wanted Toni to picture chips in the toddlers’ hair, their feet curled and thumbs sucked. Nobody had claimed them in the ten

Mission Sunday

Chris Waters

Go out in the highways and hedges and compel them to come in. May Earth’s fires take the Jews and Moors. Massacre Protestants who lie and say I tried to kill their Admiral. Shoot, decapitate, de-limb, de-finger heathens refusing you their golden idols, who lag in mines. Despatch the witches, may your fire inspire even the ire of the heretics abroad. Detonate vehicles, sanctuaries. Barter, ship, cram, whip, starve, drown, sell the soul-less. May hundreds of thousands, crumbled, lessened, slain, slay, lessen, crumble hundreds of thousands. Old men, children, women, level them like soldiers, slay, rape, beat, press, disembowel the stragglers. Learn me by heart and purge, try falsely, jail, mistrust friends, doctors, faithful protectors. Murder millions. Choose the way, needle, grenade, embarrassment of gases, flamethrower—dear echo of my first jealousy. Murder millions. The bourgeois, the different, one in four of you. Murder millions. Protected by monsters, shoot monsters, hundreds of thousands, whose children’s turn has come to slay hundreds of thousands. Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

The Only Dance

Ryan G. Van Cleave

She finger-traces a smile on his horizontal lips.

Motel heat coaxes sweat from his forehead
that slides into his eyes, salty and colorless. But his
lips touch her neck's skin with a dampness that's
warm and more wet than pure saliva. It's not the same
man. A different motel. A hotel. A brothel.

The back of a '74 Chevy up on blocks. The downstairs
cot piled high with Grandma's afghans nobody
wants. A cool fall evening under the Big Dipper.

It's spring. Huddled dream that is sick, morose,
stilted. Their legs form two V's that merge into one.
Pre-dawn thickness. A diary of the Bishop that

is stuffed with pages torn from the dictionary. She's trying
not to laugh, but there's so much comedy in this
if she lets herself get past the morbidity of their panting.
Furnace blasts of hydrogen. Empty chalk outlines.
Redwood fog. Final collapse of a dying white dwarf. It's December.
Brown Gypsy eyes. Green seconds of a digital clock.

It's March and the air is frozen more cold than moss-encrusted
Civil War graves with no headstone. She touches
the flesh between his toes. It's next week already. He's a hair stylist.
A prince. Green boiled peanuts. Moth on yellow primrose.
A polar bear washing bloody paws in a sea of solar colors.
She's calling out names she wasn't aware she knew.

The floor is darkened by insects. Air conditioner's on full tilt.
An electric toothbrush is buzzing madly in the bathroom.
Smells like primrose. It's time for the cocoon to pop open.

minutes he had been talking to Toni. She had last told him to shut up, not to bother
to stop over, if he couldn't talk about something else other than his Russian father.
He thought it was silly to worry about children in a grocery store, or fathers who had
been arrested, but that was all he could think about.

He held his breath and expected Toni to exhale for him. But there was nobody
breathing on the other end of the phone. He felt stupid holding the phone when he
was talking to no one; he said, "Good-bye," and meant it, but he imagined he would
call her in an hour or two, if not sooner. He pushed his cart down the aisle thinking
of what he could get and put back, one of the cashiers reaching his gaze in an
exchange of maddening love, and looked behind him at the night manager following
him through the store with his price gun.

Pissing in the Dark

Jonathan K. Rice

He would piss
off the backside
of the wrap-around porch

after dusk
when all you could see
was the smoldering tip
of his cigarette
brighter on the inhale.

Lightning bugs
would slowly flutter
and flash their luminous specks
through althea and dogwood.

The stream would end
with the bark of a dog
and a zip.

The porch swing would creak
as he'd settle
to finish his smoke.

Undergrowth Sanford Fraser

At the edge of town, pieces
of dark brown glass from bro-
ken bottles of beer stick
in the mud and weeds, stones
from a tipped-over wall stand
on someone's old box spring, wild
roses poke through worn-smooth
Goodyear tires, violets climb
from the pock-marked kettle
we threw away.

Commuter Man Sanford Fraser

A garbage truck grinds
& swallows the morning street.
My eyes open.
Sunlight slams into them.
I roll only my stomach
wrap the blanket around my neck.
Half-awake, I drift
begin to fly:

Someone else takes
my 8 o'clock train.
He doesn't run, stand-in-line
or wait.
Always on time
he wears a long, blue cape.

That Small Dark Bird R. Yurman

In the odd shimmer of summer evening,
part neon part afterglow,
a street full of birds flitting
telephone line to telephone line
and knots of people outside
the pet shop, hardware, Forest Lounge,
Tae Kwon Do, one tiny black bird
settles on a trolley guywire
not three feet above my head
clicking and kawking.

I glance at him and move on.

One loud kawk.
His wing brushes my shoulder
from behind. He flaps twice,
perches a few feet down the line.

I pass him again.
His sharp cry
sweeps by my head
wing not touching
this time.

Again, again,
the calls louder
more insistent.

Between swoops that noisy bird
sits clicking on the wire
feathers so black they shine.

"What," I call back,
"What is it you want?"

I turn the corner. No bird follows.
From the star dense sky
no clues.

evening, my mother's face in the moving shadows it cast, her stillness appeasing
whatever powers may be.

Today is Halloween. Next week will mark the fourth anniversary of my mother's
death. I found a yahrzeit candle at the grocery, all by itself, tucked behind the kosher
noodles. I will light it later this week. Like my mother, I will set the candle in the
middle of the dining room table. In the dark, the candle casting light against the
walls, she and I will visit for a while.

Brno David Chorlton

A city floats above ground,
aloft from time,
aspiring to the clouds,
unpopulated.

The lamps still burn
inside its houses
and buses wait
at traffic lights
where they stalled.

Raindrops hang from wires
strung across the streets
where voices travel
at the speed of sound

to waiting telephones
that ring all the time
in hotel rooms
where shoes stand empty
by the doors.

Yahrzeit Light

Tessa Dratt

My mother didn't allow Halloween in our home. Even now, in middle age, I lust for a vampire costume, fangs and dripping blood, or a witch's cape, cap and twisted shoes. She refused to acknowledge the entire month of October. Nor would she consider September, the month her sister passed away, or July when her father died, or June when she lost her mother.

And then there was April, her marriage month. "A terrible time to marry," she said. "Never marry in April. It makes for complications." In her old age when she was ill-tempered and despondent, only January and August remained acceptable.

"But, Mom, January's cold. And August is sweltering in New York. I don't get how you figure it."

"You don't have to," she said. "That's just how I feel."

"You put your hat on the bed!" she gasped when I came in from school and tossed my felt beret onto the comforter. "Are you trying to invite disaster?" she asked, horror in her blue eyes. She sighed softly then, settled back in her chair by the window and picked up her book. "I knew nothing good would happen today," she mumbled, more to the page than to me.

"But nothing has happened."

"The day's not over yet. Last night I dreamed of babies. That is always bad."

Because of my father's business, we traveled when I was young, leaving New York for months at a time to summer in Europe. When all the bags were packed and stacked around the living room, my mother made us sit on our suitcases. My father, brother, mother and I sat in a circle holding hands, heads bowed. No one spoke for a long time, to assure a safe departure and safe return and health and happiness for those left behind.

Before one of our trips we had to rush down to the pier under the West Side Highway to board the ship on time. My father had been late getting home. We left without sitting in silence.

The message came in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, over ship-to-shore radio. Mother's mother had died. Jewish tradition holds that the dead must be buried within twenty-four hours or three days at the latest. The funeral took place without us.

Jews light a yahrzeit candle—a plain transparent glass filled with white wax and a wick—on the anniversary of a death. The candle burned twenty-four hours, from sundown the night before the anniversary of the death until sundown the next

Breclav

David Chorlton

"I don't think there's anything here;
it's just a town on the border."

—Passenger overheard on the train
entering the Czech Republic from Austria

A red-haired lady
with a crumpled face
smokes all day
dispensing paper from a roll,
charging three crowns a turn
in the stall
as she watches for tips
in a saucer.
When the communists ruled,
she insists,
life was good
then she flicks back a hand
to dismiss her surroundings
whose windows
have fallen away
leaving space
for the crows to fly through.

*And rain filters down
through the eyes
of invisible needles.*

In the pale blue museum
the tickets are sold
by a singer
who follows the stairs
to the time
that God was illegal.
His fingers coast the wall display
where he points to himself

and says
we sang anyway
and paid later.

*And the sunflowers blacken in rows
as their shadows
consume them.*

At the Grand Hotel
the only thing grand
is the name.
The curtains are laced with dust
and the new times
are served in old cups
to the couples who sit
in bright clothes
waiting for fashions
to reach them

*And the still water shines on a pond
as it opens an eye.*

The middle aged servers
in the station buffet
look dour
when they serve up coffee
to somebody traveling on
but the waitress whose blouse
is a yellow
only young people wear
and whose skirt is caught in a sash
walks quickly
and smiles with the cheeks of her ass.

Art

David Chorlton

A goldsmith has fashioned a pendant the shape of a lizard, hoping to give back to the underworld what was taken out for him. He dreams of a mine into which miners go and never return. In his dream he reaches down for them and pulls out his hand full of letters addressed to him. When he unseals them to read, he finds the same message on them all, telling him to forget the disappeared and work the gold until it is beautiful. He wakes up and switches on the lamp, finds the lizard at rest in his trembling hand with incised scales and minuscule feet, and fears for the lady fated to wear it.

Evening Train

David Chorlton

Entire cities rush by while passengers wait patiently to go home. Bruges moves north trailing behind its cathedral, Athens goes south in a blur of white stone and Florence follows with cypress trees in a solemn line like the green flames that rise from fingertips that have clawed a way through their coffins. Paris, Warsaw, Vienna; the world goes by without stopping, and when it has passed the slow train follows with its one carriage illuminated from within by fires of deliverance.

Beside the Point

John Grey

I have always planned my indirectness like an architect. Whatever moves you must first leave you cold. A bare hill, the grass cut clean by yesterday's goats, a mediocre roundness, a slope, as gentle, as uninvolved as an old photograph of people unremembered.

I know its mood as surely as my own but I leave your senses dangling like a hook over this wide bass mouth of words, only snapping them together at the end when having let you read so much, I feel guilty at playing on your hunger, feed you like a child. It was solitary

like me as a boy, its boundaries cut clear by this flat plain leading to it, the distant forest, a thunderhead rolling in, gray and unwieldy, for sun thwarted, force fed on its own light like a father who'd rather choke on sentiment than spill it.

It is asthmatic I imagine and its ankles are weak and it needs the support of unlovely boots. And maybe it sits up in bed on humid nights when sleep is impossible and writes it all down or builds a boy in its head like I do a hill as a sop to you supposedly but I expect in fear of what it's really saying.

The Last Meeting in the Restaurant

John Grey

We have some explaining to do.
We are the enemies of explanations,
asses squirming in chairs,
faces like prairie wheat,
rippling back and forth in the wind,
unable to hit on stillness.
Our histories need to
walk side by side
and travel for a while
but we have trouble spitting them out
as we tie ourselves up
with fingers nervously corralling
thirty pieces of silverware
or folding our lives in and out
of the napkins in anxious origami.
My hair craves a comb,
your lips another dose
of that thick, angry lipstick.
I haven't been to the bathroom
in ten long minutes,

your mirror cries out to you
from your pocketbook.
If we are words at all,
they are confetti
tossed carelessly about this cathedral
as if rehearsing for the wedding
of where we are now
and who we'll be later.
Nothing settles.
Nothing grabs the webs of this moment,
catches the lights of our eyes.
We have some explaining to do
but we have declared war on
explanations,
our armies trained in the head,
rushing off at a moment's notice
to the far-flung extremities
of our lives
snuffing out sense
the moment we try to make it.

An Old Man and His Baseball Cap

Ken Smith

Beneath my apartment window,
In an alley reserved for crippled cans,
Rats and cats and children,
The garbage is collected twice a week.

From my only chair,
Waving my baseball cap
Like a politician's hand
To keep unseasonal flies off my hair,
I devour the refuse.
Like bent shadows in the British Museum,
My meticulous vision seizes
The discarded in darkness;
Avoiding the jaundiced sun,
I never mistake buttons for brooches
Or hub caps for jardinieres.

An exorcist of refuse,
I wave my baseball cap
And pound commands into my folded lap.
Shrouded like gypsies,
Shrieking figures weekly appear,
They give me the finger
And steal me blind.

Nothing is left
For an old man
But his baseball cap
After the garbage is collected once a week.

Mary Loretta Ken Smith

I heard you dying,
Draped in watches and religious chains,
You created one hell of a divine commotion
Mutely commanding roses
Bloom blind eyes
In early spring.
On the telephone,
I heard you die
Like a child continually jamming fingers
Into stuffed pockets
For that redeeming piece of change.
You wrenched
Mind through cracked lips
Into a question
Dribbled dead,
Except for sleeping birds
On telephone lines,
Meant for someone
I thought was me.

#232 Ben Miller

Renny, it was Renny that did it, the janitor with the radio rubberbanded to the mop.
That guy with the bright black shoes. Came up behind the tray lady and stabbed her
onto the conveyor belt, Renny.

Renny: *The fat, winter fly in the bowl of the cell lamp buzzes in a way that reminds me
of the hair of a party I once went to. Bangs of sound combing out the open windows.
Everybody danced a lot and by themselves. Even me. I moved in unison with my hips
and the other ones.* For all I know I might still be there. For all I know the fly might
not be dying but exercising. *Nothing will be certain until the next time there is a
power outage.*

#233 Ben Miller

They took turns slamming the front door on his galoshes until the neighbor came
over to make sure nothing was wrong. *Sure about that, Mae? How you doin', Teak?*
They sewed all his suit jackets together so that to put on one was to put on them
all—clothes of the playboy and the family man. He thanked them politely for making
it easier to choose what to wear in the morning. Could it be Father had always
dreamed of being a wool accordion? Unfolding down the street like a closet? That
was the year no runners showed up for the marathon and helicopters raced the 26.2
miles instead, vying for a crown of wind. Teak cut his forehead trying to watch. Not
wanting to worry anyone, he cauterized the wound with a firefly.

Window Michael Hettich

In another life, she practices
breathing underwater.

In another life she practices
learning how to feel things

right. In another life
she practices listening

to freight trains pull
their weighted miles through dark

While she lies alert
in her bed, pretending

she has vanished, finally
become *everything*

and nothing, pure absence,
solid as a window.

Black Dogs

Michael Hettich

To be fair, she hadn't
mentioned her loneliness
her fear of weather,
of the way even slight wind

seemed to blow ravens
in a swirl around her house—
to peck at her windows
and doors, and she hadn't

mentioned her fear of the wind's dying down,
of that stillness which summoned
dream creatures: black dogs

which seemed to bark rain
which turned her field
that stretched out as far
as she could see, into a kind of

lake so richly
green she felt
naked, more naked,
just looking out over it,

than she'd ever felt
when her so-called lovers touched her.

She Loves

Michael Hettich

a memory of solitude
in which she didn't feel oppressed
by what she has accumulated
inside herself, a solitude

where she was not off-kilter,
soft-focused, as she is
most often with friends
and family, with even

her children, who need her,
with her husband, who's
preoccupied
and loves her. She remembers
a nurturing loneliness—

so she tells her children stories
of a girl who had magic
in her bones, who could slip
inside herself, to find

whatever world she needed
She tells again about the time
she walked into a cave
and out into a landscape

of other, wilder animals.
She talks again of *living wild*.
She describes the kind of fur
she wore there, the feeling

of fur curling up
inside her as she scurried back
to her parents, who never noticed
she was one. By now

her children sleep soundly.
her husband is preoccupied
or sleeping, so she tells him
once again about the afternoon

she walked so far
she lost her way
right at the horizon,
at the very edge of blue...

Breathing Underwater

Michael Hettich

She claimed it was impossible for her to laugh in the morning. She said in the morning she felt lonely for the wonderful relationships she carried on in dreams, friendships she'd maintained for years, *through all my changes*. She said it was hard, just *hard*, to even smile after leaving them *in there* and moving through this waking world, this unforgiving place where object feel solid but break so easily, forever. *By noon I'm all right*, she said then; *by noon I've reassured myself that I'll find everyone well when I fall back to sleep tonight*. She flushed a little, smiling. I didn't want to tell her I rarely remember any dreams, that even when I do remember some moment from my sleeping, it disappears as quickly as I remember it. So I changed the subject. We'd met by chance a week or so earlier and fallen into a long discussion of whatever came to mind; I don't remember now exactly what we talked about, but I do know we walked a long distance, that we stopped at some point for coffee and then stopped a little later for wine, that we'd left each other reluctantly, at dawn. I hadn't told her I was color blind, and I hadn't yet told her the whole world smelled fresh and permanent when I was with her. I couldn't find the words, but it was true: everything smelled as clean and eternal as a cool jasmine-blossom night when she was beside me, when we walked and when I listened to her talking; and the things we passed while we walked, houses and trees and even cars, had sensuous presences wonderful to breathe. Then she claimed I'd shown up in her dreams, that I'd taken off my clothes there and displayed by sleek body. She claimed my dream body was furred and purred, *though you're definitely human*; she claimed my dream body had wings when I needed them; then she told me she could swim underwater *as far as I can sleep, which goes down as deep as the solid darkness at the core of things*.

"Well I'm not some people, Sonny. I'm your mother."

"And?"

"And what?" she asks—more threatening than asking.

"Nothing, Mom. But maybe you could think before you talk and insult someone."

"After all these years you are telling me to think before I talk. Listen you little pisher you. You had it too easy growing up. I knew I should have been a tougher mother. My family told me 'Don't be such a pushover for those boys, they'll just break your heart in the end.'"

"Mom. Before you bleed all over the phone, tell me about your new cleaning lady." I knew I could get her off of any topic with this question.

"So far, so good. I got her from the butcher. It's his cleaning lady's cousin. Been here only three weeks and already she has a full schedule. I was lucky to get her."

"So she's doing a good job?"

"How good a job can she be doing when I've only been training her for such a short time. She tries to speak English to me and I tell her, No. No. Speak Polish—no English. Once they start speaking English, it's all over. They start asking for bus fare, lunch, and more money. They know there's less discriminating people than myself who'll take them on. There's no loyalty anymore. Sonia was the last of the old breed."

"Mom. Have you ever checked to see if Sonia had any daughters?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, I did."

Sonia

Paul Beckman

My mother, in our weekly call, told me that she lost another cleaning lady.
“Mom,” I said, “How can you continue to lose 150 pound Polish women? If this keeps up the police are going to start digging up your cellar.”

“Very funny, Mr. Borscht Belt, but I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

I didn’t want to chance an allergic reaction by suggesting that she vacuum her own house and change her own sheets.

I started next week’s call by telling her that the ship, the S.S. *Kielbasa*, was coming on Tuesday and if she wanted to get first picks, she ought to be down at the dock at dawn. I offered to drive her and she told me that if I just called to make fun of her then it didn’t count as that week’s call. She hung up.

Dad left my mom comfortably off when he died. I was still in college. She lives modestly in a two-bedroom condo in New Haven, overlooking the harbor, and if nothing else, she had her priorities straight; grandchildren—each one exceptional, daughters-in-law—they mean well, family—don’t get me started, bridge—at least I have bridge, sons—three sons, enough said, and cleaning ladies—you have to get them right off the boat from Poland because once they start speaking English, they’re no good anymore.

I have the most trouble and the most fun with her Polish cleaning lady theories. She never says that they were bred to clean, but I know she believes it. Deep down my mother must feel that Poland is the cleanest country in the world, with all of the women running around with schmattes, rags, on their heads, a dust cloth in one hand and a broom in the other.

Her record for longevity with a cleaning woman is three months, except for Sonia. Sonia, for eight years, took two buses twice a week no matter what the weather to get to my mother’s house and clean. After the first year, my mother tells people proudly, she no longer had to follow Sonia around and tell her what and how to clean. “That Sonia,” she says, “she was a pro. She was like family. When she left me for a full-time job with those rich momsers I was heartbroken, but being a lady, I wished her well and gave her an extra five dollars that week.”

“Mom, don’t throw your money around like that,” I tell her

“Laugh, Sonny,” she tells me. “You got that shiksa you married to do the cleaning. I’m all by myself.

“Mom,” I tell her. “Do you know that it hurts my feelings and Mary’s feelings when you talk like that” That’s why she doesn’t come with me to visit very often. You say hurtful things.”

“What? Am I supposed to be responsible for everything that comes out of my mouth?”

“Some people are,” I tell her.

Window

John Repp

Even yesterday, Bunk spread manure.
Cheeks wet, Victor cut the loaf.

Everyone testified for Joveen, happy day.
She loved the view from this window.

Infatuation Poems

Michael J. Vaughn

One

On a night-long drive through the Siskiyou and Cascades, I spot four meteorites, but cannot think of a single thing I could possibly want. One by one, I forfeit my wishes to you.

Three

It is easy for me to bring on that rush of feeling, that peculiar fullness that portends crying. I picture a shoreline cave, a driftwood fire, a ring of chattering friends, the starglow silhouette of Cyclopean cliffs, and you, your face too close to see.

Four

It is clear that I have seated myself too close to the counter. The northeast quadrant of my peripheral vision flickers with neighborhood women lining up for coffee, and my head flinches up and down like a wallflower yo-yo. Not you. Not you. Not you.

Eight Haiku

John Repp

Dawn in the plaster-dust foothills—
sparrows cling to latticework—
tiny grandmother lugs water

Huff into the field—
sub-zero quartz sky—
white doe browsing for corn

Mormons sidle
through the street fair—
a woman riffles a book on sailing

Slide into her—
street light snapping—
mosquitoes whine among tombstones

Cast off the break wall—
dusk flickers on the swells—
hermit crabs dig in

Ferris wheel shattered—
roofs strewn in the sand-hill streets—
smile for the camera

wild turkeys in the marsh—
a row of monks
bowing now and then

off to work—
despite death—
wet kisses!

Instructions for Finding Frosted Glass at the Beach

Michael J. Vaughn

The glass is commonly found in the middle rocks
at the edge of the high-tide wash
an hour before sunset in fall
when the waves are beginning to churn

Walk easy, look hard, but
not so hard that you can't hear the ocean

The best are found alone
on plains of wet sand teased by the breakers
Keep your gaze to the sun and
watch for them flashing
guitar-pick chinks of white, green, brown
the rare and lovely blue
stitching your pockets, scraping as you walk

Take five minutes to watch the sun fall away
this will cost you the green and the brown
which will turn in the gloaming to coal-dark lumps
but the clear is still a possibility
even, occasionally, in moonlight
as long as you ignore the luminescent impostor
the triangular fragment of shell

Remember that your quarry lies in a middle ground
that these fallen stars come not from
beauty but from someone
throwing litter on a beach

Do not feel the need to restock
this will be done for you

Floaters

Joanne Lowery

The ones big as horseflies
I'd be happy to give to any
of several hundred of my enemies
till the streets are clogged
with swatters' swatting and gawkers' gawking.

But it's not the season
for vermin or revenge,
and they love my jelly more.
Tiny gulls soar,
hawklets take their lateral plunge,
hang gliders traverse nose to temple.

Meanwhile victors celebrate
their smiles and congratulate noise,
all of them gathered in one gigantic
penthouse cocktail lounge revolving.

Their view is my black heart
and something starving to get in.
Effluvia, detritus, esoterica
from a meteor shower
skid across blind glass.

Alley Walk

Jennifer Westmoreland

He comes in, he goes to the kitchen because you go there. You have a beer because you want a pause, you want to have a pretend moment of socializing. He sits opposite you at the table. He looks at you but neither you nor he speaks. You sit at right angles to him, thinking this will enable him to touch your hand or even your face. But he doesn't touch you. He has never touched your face, except to kiss you that first night. Now it is your second meeting. He doesn't kiss you now. You flip through a magazine. He was panting when he followed you up the stairs. He pulls back the curtain an inch and looks down at the alley. But he makes no comment on what he sees. He has a hard and fast rule: no conversation with her. You don't look at him. You keep drinking your beer and looking at the magazine. You're thinking about your face, does it look hard and old, do the lips look thin? It doesn't matter. It can't be all bad because it wasn't enough to keep him away. That woman on the bus to the museum the other day, would her face have kept him away? She was young but her head was bald in spots if you looked from above. Didn't it comfort you to meet her, to know that perhaps he would have rejected her face? She wore very loose men's work pants and a man's short zippered jacket. You know if you think hard your top lip starts to rest inside your bottom lip, the way your mother's did when she was sewing, when she relaxed and let her guard down. So you don't let your guard down now with him. You want to keep your lips as full as possible. The resting lip—it's in the category of the sound of your own snoring. It means you're truly relaxed. I'm always happy to hear myself snore. It means I've been sleeping well. Not that he would ever want to sleep with me. So I borrow another man for that purpose; I imagine myself with another man when I sleep. It would be no fun imagining sleeping with someone you can't speak to on waking. Even Woody Allen spoke with the whore in "Decon-structing Harry." I finish my beer and walk to the bedroom. He follows behind me. I don't cross to the corner of the room. I stop right there and take off my underwear. I have on a skirt. I lie on the bed. He takes off his clothes and folds them onto the chair. This gives me a pang—that he looks around for the chair and puts his clothes on it; he has that much presence of mind. Still no speech. I lie back on the bed. I don't look at him. He makes that gesture of his—falling on me like a log. And

here is where he communicates. He takes off the rest of my clothes. He doesn't want to communicate but he does in taking off the rest of my clothes. He communicates that he wants them off, that there is something he wants from me. He doesn't want to be tender, he doesn't run his hands over my body, he says nothing about my body. I remember, at this moment, something he said the other time: Let's try this. That was when he turned me over on my stomach. I think perhaps he was trying all the positions he'd seen in a video. Let's try this. At the time I thought he meant, Let's see if this makes you feel good. Now I think he meant, Let me check this off my list. I've practiced remaining silent and I remain silent now. I don't breathe audibly. I don't convey a sense of pleasure. Which is worse, someone frigid or someone enthusiastic? Both are criticized. But at bottom someone enthusiastic is thought worse of. We really don't need enthusiastic women in the world, do we? We can keep the population going very well without them. I try to be frigid, to not lean my flesh into his flesh. To lie perfectly still. He takes my leg and puts it around him. Communication again. As usual, he makes no verbal sign of pleasure. I tell him he should go now. This is not our tradition. Our tradition is to have a second round. But since he refuses to speak he can't argue. He takes the clothes off the chair. I try to maintain my frigid posture. No squirming or turning. I'm watching him. I know what he's thinking: if I don't kiss her she may not invite me back. He comes from the doorway and kisses me. Earlier we had sat in Farmers Market. He preached about a movie. This movie, "Metropolis," had been one that Hitler liked, he said. He said that movies could be a big influence. I said that even John Lennon had got his hair cut like Robert Redford's. He didn't look at me when I said this. I noticed his arm. The bandages were off it. I touched the scar. Some men started shouting behind us. I thought they were restaurant workers. Then I realized it was eleven o'clock and the bar had just opened. We were sitting a couple of feet from the bar. As if on cue, the men had begun their role of rowdy bar patrons at exactly eleven A.M. I touched the young man's scar. Perhaps he didn't want to be seen being touched by me in public. Perhaps he took this as a go-ahead signal. He said, "Do you want to get out of here?" We walked down Fairfax to my place. We took the alley. I said he reminded me of the man in the movie "A Price Above Rubies." He angrily said that it was just the beard. At my back door I had to search for a long time for my keys. I found it amusing that something so personal as lost keys should delay his impersonal transaction. He saw the big safety pin holding together the embroidered bag in which I keep my credit cards and money.

Divisor

Joanne Lowery

Need to take the number of people kneecapped
inside a 90-mile radius and divide
by the only one whose walking matters,

pretend the surgeon cares enough to distance
his feelings from the ivory pulp
to get the job done, to deny
the caring that brings him
to that bloody table.

And so, to spare crippling
and crippling again I count
the knees kicking like doors
into someone else's blue heaven.
I count patella one, patella two,
his perfect three and four.

There is enough life
for all of us, even.
We are round restored hemispheres
left with no remainder.

Black Dogs

Joanne Lowery

come in all sizes and shapes
to fit the times in your life
when you know nothing new
except what belongs on a leash
too sad for color
glossy as the dead
docked or tailed
paws paws paws

the long and short of it
the way people mistake panting
for smiles, tongue sideways and uncooked
a nose cold with health
the yard squirming with puppies
cuter than any humanity you ever had

the beast Winston Churchill knew
the pet Abe Lincoln kept
the soul Jonathan Edwards let
dangle in torment from dark morning
to bright dusk with joylessness abounding
with the idiot self leaping for frisbees

but missing, missing
lunging at the end of the rope
as the world sails by

their funny backward act of love
wherein they stand almost human
and let it happen
as you have let this happen
throwing a bone to keep them near
to keep them fed

to be their kennel
to breed them for protection
when you turn out the lights
when you close your dull eyes
when they circle three times
and lie down comfortably
when you are their nest
where you offer your hand
for their kiss and eternal gnawing
to the pack of them
each a best friend

from How Long After The Sermon

Errol Miller

For those who are listening
whose grass is greener...

the parent of labor accidently broken
(such a listening-room within spirit's reach)

iron-ore dust/pine resin/fig trees/lilac & wisteria

the scent of nude November/thin air/
remembrance.

How It Feels to Die in the Twentieth Century

Joanne Lowery

They made us remove our clothes
stand naked near the edge.
I remember thinking he and I
looked like Adam and Eve
for all the world to see
what we had done our five years
of man-and-wife come to this
pit, toes curling the rim.

And I remember how fast dusk fell
through the purple sky while we waited
holding hands those last few minutes
we would ever have ever know.
Later I realized he translated their plan
and pushed me a half second forward

fell on top, a fountain of dead weight
chilling me with the will to survive.
So I feigned my fate
and imitated my beloved
till a fat cloud hid the moon

and I wiggled up and away
from his dear punctured body.

My legs were tall trees loping
through a cold forest
for ten days you may have read
about in your hometown paper:
it is always necessary to explain
why we are here; afterwards
it is the work of others to tell
how we finally went away.

He left without a fig leaf
while I wander Eden
despising life's gift.
Not the shame nor their eyes
nor the infernal event.
No, each morning I wake
with Eve's old bare shoulders'
shrug, this yoke of memory.

Incandescence

Joanne Lowery

At 3 AM when headlights
rake the bedroom blinds
I wake to wonder
if it's the same late driver
passing every night this time.
The weight I feel
is just blankets
and rain.
Any children who need tucking
sleep in a different place.

Any men who need fucking
have driven their profiles away.
If hope plays the fool
and starts babbling about dawn
I'll roll over and dream
of dead dogs with soft heads.
How their ears perked like trees
on either side of the road.

How my hand drove back and forth
like the luminous wands of a clock
pinching close to a tin bell.

Whoever he is, he will be home by then
his headlights snuffed
all love extinguished.
My once-in-a-lifetime burglar
won't rattle the back door
left open for crickets.
All that is over now.
If I squinch my eyes
the background sparkles
incandescent. This means
to burn intensely by itself.
This means soon the watchtower
will sweep its beam
over snow.

Asked Once Again "Did You Sacrifice Much to Become a Poet?"

Lyn Lifshin

Someone comes back to the
house to pack, a ghost nearly
but one who can't stop
hissing, "I'll never have to

hear that poem again."
He's dead to me but his
daughter will buy all my
books, wear them like masks

to taunt him. On her way
to becoming a ghost, my
mother banned a relative
who said "your daughter

couldn't write those poems
if she loved you." If she
could still haunt me, she'd
phone, maybe, learn E mail

to tell me "it's ok, write
anything as long as you
show me." While the
others bleat *if you were*

*my wife I'd never let
you out of the house, or
sneer, read that poem and
we're done. And by the*

*way, you can't read the
Holocaust poems, you
can't write about Jesus
like that especially*

during the holidays

Mother seeing through us
while we watched the mermaid
in her one-piece, wondering how she flipped
her tail out from those human feet,
her armpits full of black hair,
her double chin our specialty
for each foulmouthed curse
we cast into space.

Those black flies huddled around floating objects
while Father licked her ears and the day seemed
to stop out on the delicate bone of a lake.
When we ached from pulling his weight
back from the water, his eyes
large as knuckles and his gray hair slicked
over that barrel of a chest,
we heard Mother say, "Let him love
what dragged him down."

Año Nuevo

Jennifer Lagier

Varicose clouds
tell me: dig shelters, fill sandbags,
hoard bottled water.
Instead, I press gardenias, bind letters,
memorize your loins moving
against mine.

In my oven
a bird darkens to supper.
Later you
slice its white breast.

I offer a toast.

He Drank the Sun Down Ashamed of the Way We Treated Her Russell Thorburn

Where did he find her and did he take
comfort in women our age, letting her sleep
in our house? Our cursing over her
another language we cupped to our mouths.

How his impractical spleen made us
see more clearly her dark brown hair,
her face still staring into ripples
an oar left, as if deep down she were being tugged.
But we could not help ourselves, and insulted
her more, taking stock of her varicose veins,
when she slid her jeans off to a single-piece suit.

We were convinced she was a mermaid
who let him breathe
through her mouth underwater before
spoilng the surface where frogs reposed
on lily pads like royalty—and not
a middle-aged accountant Father dated
after Mother died in the cancer ward.

The Art of the Fastball Russell Thorburn

Their fists knuckled on wood,
swinging at what they could not stop,
some mystery like Homer's.

Their cracking voices showing
their bodies were going through a change
as they walked back to the dugout,
after flailing at fastballs
flung with guile, fingers overlapping
the stitches that were like scars
from Greek wars.

How I rubbed my curse into cowhide
about to see them swing at air,
wondering how poetry
made me throw faster
than other thirteen year olds,
why I drew in Zeus

and his mansions, human places
where a body could wander
like Cyprus or Phoenicia,
as if knowing that their strangeness

gave me power that busted
in on them, an incantation
hot as those pastures, where their best
was to foul off pitches.

When I was thirteen Greek myths
were terrible as an older sister's body
in a bathing suit, the engine
a father dropped into an old car.

I threw until all magic wore off
from the stitches and each ball grip
with its time-worn prophecy
echoed in the catcher's cave
where the rattling chicken bones
of some oracle pronounced each man
mortal and bound to fall.

W 46

Simon Perchik

On tiptoe though this clock
adjusts for the approach
levels off the way a TV station

lets some tiger crouch
then crack your throat
—the flowers higher up

are blue but on the plains
mostly they're red
—you set this trap

on a wall that grows
out in the open
expects its hour hand

to protect you
though the soil is poor
once it leaves the valley

grows stones and snow
and footsteps :the numbers
never go off by themselves

each carries a list
—you were left behind
last wearing that jacket

torn at the collar, fleece
by the mouthfuls from counting
back and forth, airborne

exactly on the hour :each chime
circling you for a place to hide
as if it was being followed.

W 57

Simon Perchik

You almost please, the pail
smothered the way sand
still expects a small red flame
and human sacrifice

—it's an old tradition, the shovel
held so one arm reaches slowly
to another though the dunes
have no trees left, are weighted down

by sunlight on this half-finished wall
—for more leverage you inhale
empty the Earth by patting the mound
till it crumbles stone by stone

already dried-out rain, evenings
half driftwood, half on fire
from your lips, your eyes
your hands and even now your breath.

from Another Lost Cause

Errol Miller

Begs the question
to be answered what
is “normal” & what is
half-ass redneck? Through
vicissitudes of glee an ailing
patient, crazy crazy theory.

An abusive relationship, me
& my writin': dip & weave, dip
& weave, furious nouns & verbs en-
dorsing that ol' initial surrealism.

On a verve of otherwords
lookin' good like a lotta gravel
sprinkled here & there, fresh manure,
OK, if it works, manna from the mainstream
four-corners of existence, the Southside,
The Bay Area, Chicago, & L.A.

W 60

Simon Perchik

When a seabird falls in love its heart
beats louder—you can hear the claws
and suddenly around your throat

from which there is no escape
though this cricket in back the couch
hides sometimes for hours

sometimes a whole day and slowly
a great distance closes in on you
—you hear how a gull

as if for the last time
circles down the way each grave
once in the ground

hooks on, can't be extracted
smells from stones and kisses
and little by little

your mouth begins to rattle
torn open, bleeding
from the shovel and the hunger.

from The Inner Crust Of Earth

Errol Miller

Primary because/not an imitator/so
in aesthetic manner inside some ancient
cave-dwelling/dreamy & substantial:

this is the real world men fight over/banal
outside corners/blunt ugly spears/so
far today.

The curling iron meets her ear as Ava jumps and yells, Don't bite her back!
It bounces off the wall.

Ava hears the sizzle, almost a hiss, and jerks back. You stinking mother.

Ava, Ava. Are you all right? says Anya. Did I get you? Let me unwind it and we'll take a look. Sit down. *You're scaring me.*

Down the hall the child sets up a wail. Ava smells the odor; not just hair this time. The skin probably blistered and opened. She hears her mother's footsteps. She turns to the mirror and braces herself for the reflection of those close-set black eyes.

A Midnight Drive Across Lake Weiss

T. M. Cox

Roam the wharf until dawn.
No undines swim tonight, cool flanks
to the ebb-tide.
Only empty bottles and plastic wrappers,
floating silent between the planks.

Fishermen sandbag pungent tides
of beer and whiskey.
Constipated vowels, mangled digestion
are their offerings to the red dirt.
The lake meekly accepts their steel hooks.

Black-veined water fills the windshield.
Dock pilings seem poised for some
phantom wave.
A fat lunar lens peers down through
shapeless clouds to record its
ghostly cresting.

Dead Sleep

(a one-act play)

David James

Cast:

Larry: a single guy trying to get some rest
Pizza man
Two solicitors
Two emergency med-techs

Setting:

A messy apartment with the door in the back middle of the stage, a window on each side of the door. A large tattered couch sits center stage. In front of the couch there is a table. At one end of the couch, there is a coffee table with light, and a telephone.

Larry fumbles with a key at the door from outside. He enters, slow and tired, closes the door, lets his coat slide off his shoulders onto the floor, and then falls over the back of the couch. He reaches over and turns off the light. All lights dim, but the audience can still see clearly. As the play progresses, every time the lights go out, it becomes darker and darker.

Larry: I'm dying.

He sighs several times. After a long pause, the phone rings. He sits up, turns on the light, and answers.

Larry: What? Yeah. No. No, I don't want a free lawn care estimate. I don't even have a lawn. Goodbye. No, none of my friends have lawns either.

He sighs again, rearranging himself on the couch, turns off the light. After a long pause, he sits up.

Larry: Damn.

He turns on the light, walks offstage into the bathroom. The audience hears the sound of urination, and the flush of a toilet. Larry comes out with a towel, wiping, and tosses the towel on the floor with about ten others before falling over the couch. He turns off the light. After a long pause, the doorbell rings. Larry doesn't move. It rings again, then several times.

Larry: What, what, what.

He gets up, turns on light, opens door.

Pizza Man: You order a pepperoni and mushroom pizza?

Larry: No.

Pizza Man: Is this 2112 Sleepy Lane?

Larry: This is 2121.

Pizza Man: You know, this is the third time today I've done that. I'm really sorry, man. You want some garlic bread?

Larry: No, I just want to...

Pizza Man: No charge, man. It's extra. They'll just throw it away.

Larry: No thanks.

Pizza Man: I'll leave it here, for later. Hey, sorry to bother you.

Larry: Yeah, yeah.

He closes the door, rolls over the couch. He sighs, turns off light, stretches. After a long pause, the phone rings. He turns on light, answers.

Larry: Yeah. Do I need replacement windows? No. I don't have any windows. Now leave me alone. (Hangs up phone.) Why me?

He lies down, turns off light, scratches his butt. Audience hears a fly buzzing. When it stops, Larry slaps his own face, and buzzing resumes. He turns on light, swatting through the air. Buzzing stops. Larry picks up a vase, aims, and slams it on the table, breaking the vase and table. He lies down, turns off light. After a long pause, he hiccups.

Larry: Dammit.

He sits up, turns on light, holds breath for a long time, exhales, hiccups. Tries again with same results. He gets a glass of water, drinks it upside down, smiles, and then hiccups. As he walks to bathroom, he startles himself in the mirror, and hiccups stop. He falls over couch, turns off light. Long pause. There's a knock on door. Then banging. Larry gets up and goes to the door.

morose when I'm here.

I think Jack's going to pop the question, says Anya, turning the curling iron so Ava can feel heat on the back of her neck; six inches of potential second-degree burn, right there. Ava says, Not too close.

I told him he has one year or I'm moving out. It's been eleven and a half months. Anya releases the hair, warm on Ava's shoulder, and digs the comb into another section of her scalp. Then I can have some bambinos to go along with yours. Wouldn't that be fun?

Ava hears, You're a wiggly one, aren't you? from her mother and Hang on, little, gal, one step at a time, from her father.

Look at how curious she is, her mother says. I think she favors her left hand.

Her father: Definitely.

And those curls, she goes on. According to Ava not one hair fell out.

Then her father says in a low voice, A baby ought to do her good.

Ava pictures her mother nodding, looking at him from the corners of her eyes, a look that means, Stability, yes. It's high time Ava quit these shenanigans. I'll give her a Prozac, right upside the head.

So where do you want to go? Anya says, brushing.

Anywhere.

Maybe you can, kinda, start something up with someone while you're here.

I won't be here that long. Just a short vacation.

A restraining order is not a short vacation.

It's an endless vacation, Ava says, and laughs. She is reminded of the time a childhood friend curled her hair and her mother, upset that it was accidentally scorched, screamed, *I'll have to cut it off up to HERE*, and karate-chopped Ava at the base of her neck. She fell against the towel rack.

Anya: Does he have visitation or what?

Ava smells the sweet burnt smell of charred hair. She remembers lighting WD-40 with her father on Independence Day, how her bangs caught fire and after he smacked it out, how the hair fell like black snow in front of her eyes. She says, Let that one go, already.

Her mother calls, Hey, did you know she bites?

She's teething. Let it go before it ignites, Ava says. You're scaring me.

Her mother's voice careens down the hall. You know what your doctor had us do with you, don't you.

The school of thought on that has changed, Ava calls. Her voice rises on changed.

Her father: Well, it worked, didn't it?

Let's go to Gina's for dinner, says Anya. Get the word out that you're back.

Her mother: Ai! Maggot!

The Good Old Days

Jennifer Smith-Morris

It is a put-Ava-back-together visit. An attempt. She fell from a wall again, lost herself, shriveled. Her father has taken the week off to “do things around the house” and her sister Anya, despite pressing issues in her romantic life, has driven up from Tucson. Ava herself arrived much like other times, except this time she carried a suitcase and a child in from the car.

At lunch, her parents whispered into their beers how good it is for Ava that Anya is here. Maybe some old-fashioned competition is what she needs, her father said. Anya’s doing so well, after all; her job, not to mention that new car.

Ava and Anya whispered that their parents had worn a rut in the floor from their bedroom to the recliners. Have you gone anywhere exciting lately? Anya asked with a grin.

Over coffee Anya said, Ava, did you really burn down your house? but her parents threw her a look so she said, Just kidding.

Anya, the younger sister, now the more fashionable and sophisticated of the two, pushes Ava onto the toilet seat. I’ll blow it dry upside-down for body, she says, and shoves Ava’s head between her knees. We’ve got to get you into a salon. God. What do you use on your hair? Dish soap?

Ava remembers being in this position once before, during her RN practicum. The doctor was decorticating a third-degree bedsore, clipping out strings of oozy skin. Ava felt gray and her supervisor directed her to a chair where she sat, ears to her knees, as the doctor and supervisor chuckled. Ah, the good old days, said the doctor.

Anya says, Remember all the times you braided my hair and pulled until I cried? It’s payback time.

You wanted me to braid it, Ava says.

Their mother and father are trying to dress Ava’s squirmy toddler. Come to Aunt Phyllis, Ava’s mother says. By the way the baby is screeching Ava can predict that she is flipping on her stomach. Flip, and she crawls six feet before Ava knows what happened. At times it can be charming. Ava hears her parents’ laughter. They’re both in there, aren’t they, she says.

They probably can’t figure out which end to start on, says Anya.

The baby squeaks and giggles and Ava’s mother and father laugh. Her mother uses the light, honey-laden voice she uses for neighbor kids selling magazines, and supposedly used for the sisters themselves when they were young, though Ava for one can’t remember it. She tries.

I haven’t heard them laugh like that in years, Anya says.

You haven’t been here in years, says Ava. But you’re right. They’re usually

Larry: *(whispering)* Go away.

Voice: Is anyone home?

Larry: Go away, please.

Voice: Did you hear something?

Larry: Nobody’s home. Go away.

Voice: It sounds like someone’s in there.

Larry: This is a recording. Scram. Get lost. I’m not home.

Voice: I guess no one’s home. Leave the brochure in the mailbox.

Larry: I don’t believe this.

He lies on couch. Pause. Phone rings again. He turns on light.

Larry: What the hell do you want? No, it’s not a good time. I don’t need a security alarm system. I live in a safe neighborhood. Now stop bothering me.

He turns off light. He starts to snore like the Three Stooges: snore, whistle, EBBBBBBBBB. Snore, whistle, EBBBBBBBBB. Then he’s silent. After awhile, rock and roll music starts playing, coming in through the one open window. Larry’s foot begins moving to the beat. He gets up to slam the window shut. He jumps on the couch and lies on his back, pillow over his face. After a long pause, two EMTs bust in the front door carrying an electric shock unit. They turn on the light, put the paddles on Larry’s chest and shock him.

Larry: Aaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Larry bolts straight up. The EMTs congratulate each other and leave. Larry runs over and locks the door. He sits on the couch, buries his head in his hands. He lies in the fetal position, turns the light off.

Larry: All I want is a little peace and quiet.

After a loud sigh, there’s silence in complete darkness. Suddenly, there’s a gunshot. The audience sees the light and flame from the discharge above the couch. The light is turned on by the intruder, wearing a nylon stocking over his

head, pointing a gun at Larry's chest. He looks up and sees the audience and runs out the door. Larry falls off the couch. The phone rings five times, and finally Larry answers it.

Larry: Yeah, hello. No, I supposed to be dead right now. Can you call me later? Sure. I guess so. I can't—I'm in a play! Yeah, later, bye.

He hangs up, pretends to be dead again. It's quiet. The lights go black.

Dispensation

Errol Miller

What we have here is eating us alive.
A dark gray/green eyes/from the Fifties, perhaps.
The Blob & other pieces of the puzzle.

"It" has continued 40+ years/on & on & on.
Call it a hymn to authentic outer limits.
Call it an accounting never made.

Realist fiction the way things lift out of fat broth.
Somewhere between Oxford & Star City an ordinary epigraph.
As if they were blue-collar factory workers revived.

So Main Street continues to expand.
The agrarian peasants have moved to Jefferson.
This is their first time out.

Smoke & mirrors/political beliefs.
Generalist texts/the Jazz Age/succulent figs.
Ah, Bohemia, lost generations, ourselves.

The Boys Fishing on Belle Isle

Ken Meisel

They are here, the small boys
fishing off a point
on Belle Isle.
I see them as I drive
by in my big car, and the white cumulus clouds
brushing God through the trees
is the same delighted motion
they must feel,
blowing windy water
across their naked feet.

A man on a soiled bike
jams his fist into the warm air outside
an Afro-American bookstore
on Jefferson Avenue.
A dog romps over the grassy
shore and frightens all
the pigeons away.

A fat man
rubs his crotch, and his skinny buddy shoves
a dark bottle forward.
They sing loudly. For Joy. Unevenly.

I am nobody at all.

Rehearsing at the Fox Theater

Ken Meisel

My father's big band, rehearsing
at the Fox Theater, 1936
crank-up of tenor saxophones
blurb blurb blurb
spank of trumpet arpeggios
through the thick acoustics,
the drummer, smacking sticks
across the dry surface of a snare
like a shotgun in a storm;
the janitor, pausing, to listen:
the trombone section, burping, bellowing
the piano player, chopping
4/4 time like a choir
thumping on the pews. Snap
of music on the music stands,
Sam Donahue cuing up
the horn section, the girl singer
crunching out her cigarette,
someone belching up
last night's beer buzz, a
sudden movement up the stairs of sound,
exploding into Swing.

Erasure Elizabeth Rees

I do it daily, till it's so:
practice does make perfect.
To master shrinking,
I study like a pro.

Now my toes barely tap
the floor from a chair.
Then my hair loses grip,
my socks top my forehead.

Soon I stop showing up
in photographs and letters.
I lose count of which life
I'm steadily rubbing out.

Dawn 8 Angelo Verga

The scarecrow sitting on the steaming grate
Knows where he is
He knows where to sit
-The steam from the palace-shaped building
The mirage off an apparition
A vision between his catnaps—
He knows where he is
He knows where he sits

Odysseus, keen, hungry, appears early
Swanlike the dancers preen themselves
Still planning the festival of his arrival
They smooth their hands over lean long hips
Practice smiling on each other

Dawn,
Dawn is crossing a bridge in hollow light
Crossing a river that is cold as frozen fish
Feeling the sun kiss your forehead, chin, neck
Then her orange tongue moist in greeting

Dawn is good for that man
He no longer needs defenses
He lets his arms drop

He picks his feet up, loosens his belt
Grabs toast, sweet bananas, jam, butter
Gulps hot black coffee

In ancient times whoever stood & sang the longest story
As the soldiers strapped their battle-shields on
Or the moon drowned in the earth's growing shadow
Was anointed king
That's when poetry had the power to move things

The scarecrow sitting on the steaming grate
Knows where in hell he is
Which abyss he's in
He knows where to sit, what time it is
He knows who he is, who he isn't

Jose Denoso's Obscene Bird of Night Alan Catlin

Restrained within these pale,
antiseptic walls, strapped down
to stiff as dreams metal cribs,
caged-in by unretractable arms
folded across the bulging chest,
leather thongs for chewing, wired
into place, the principle of sustaining
force maintained even in artificial
induced sleep, rare moments of release,
incomplete artistic rendering;
a mixed media of charcoal, india ink
and water colors all washed by a solution,
gray. Each landscape is a silent terror
like anticipating the aftermath of a fire,
sliding into a territory of black ice
with no reference point for up or down,
just a fractured sky, a bent horizon
waiting for the obscene bird of night.

Horse Latitudes Alan Catlin

"Wreckage of sunken boats becalmed in the
Horse Latitudes Windless soul's doldrums
LosAngeles AsiaMinor of the intellect Exile."
Thomas McGrath's
Letter to an Imaginary Friend

Moonlit night
on the sunken river
a desert land of dead
horses
a no man's land for
ghost riders reading
tombstones, carved
inscription in bone;
the last word
has to do with
a community
of spirits,
a dry wash of
petrified woods,
calcified, alkaline plains
prehistoric creatures
converge on, partaking
of the essence contained
in the shallow edges
of invasive shadows
turning completely black.

Vital Signs Philip A. Waterhouse

Pretty girls
carrying light
weight plastic trays
adorned with racks
of vials with pretty caps,
party reds and yellows
and greens, the trays
carried in and out
rooms and wards by
pretty girls with needles
and apologies,

the ampoules'
freshly siphoned
levels barely disturbed
by the smooth gait
of the pretty girls
leaving, each tube then
a world of coulda,
woulda, shoulda from each
donor.

In one bed, I saw
a man with a black moustache
holding a tan teddy
to his stomach, both
asleep.

180 Proof Philip A. Waterhouse

Any Saturday
afternoon/night r&r
a ten-step-turn-and-gouge
recurrence this south valley.
Frost the cupcake
with a Fourth of July
the same time, you been dealt
a big, big cracker, real short
fuse.

That was the situation
for Jason and Marcie,
for everybody, more sweets
and meats cooked up,
hard likker dug up, than
for a preacher's funeral,
and turned out the most
inside-out wedding ever, Marcie
leaving Jason and a packet
of young promises
at the altar only half of it.

Jase kept his cool.
Looked the preacher in the face,
said -Pick a name, sir,
female of anybody else not here.
Have one? Good, now, marry me,
then, everyone, let's howl!

Don't need a full moon.
Any Saddy do this one of a kind,
shit kickin', cock fightin',
bird and human kind, cotton pickin'
oil patch. Cum own down.

Barbara's Dream Irene Eberling Marsh

There is no moon
but the sea glistens
a clam-shell patina
lit from below.

Just out of range
your childhood
father walks easily
on the water, beckons.

You are running on air
gaining speed
even as he dwindles
falls off the edge.

You have come too far
cuticle of shore
pared away.
Your breath will fail

Your long slow plummet
to the ocean floor
its ledges gaping
toppling.

Amelia Irene Eberling Marsh

You had never minced
your words and now
ordered your best-loved friend
to silence, to honor
as you held her
the famous scholar
sobbing with dementia.

Finally you tell her
the queen is in the other room
and requests total quiet.
Your tongue curdles
you tell more lies
plans for vacations
hikes along the cliffs.

She limps to a window
its Oxford view
struggles to open it.
You remind her about the queen.
You see your taxi, turn
to say goodbye but
she has wandered
left one shoe, is
pushing a wheelchair
its owner asleep
head dangling
fingers trailing the floor.

Early December at the Hotel Hospital Lyn Lifshin

Piano and brass.
Fire light reflected
in marble as a woman
in a wheelchair
dances without
legs. Someone slated
for bypass and new
valves to push and
pump as the jazz does
leans into a pale
young girl, her licorice
hair tangling with

crutches, struts the
baby in a stroller
whose father shakes
holding her and
the woman who
hobbles out with a
"Happy Holiday in
case I don't make it"
before they shut
the piano top, pull
the plug on the
mic



Lyn Lifshin

Good Grief

Anne Richey

The birds' chirping
sounds like jackhammers.

What is it
with the crack of dawn?

In here, whispering
through the cold plastic
against his ear—

she's so sorry
to have awakened him—

it's the hospice worker's
breathy sympathy
reporting
the croak his father
mustered at the end,

the edemic arm,
the pitiful 101 pounds ("just bones")
but peaceful, really, and

he should
take solace in that.

On *that*
her tongue
darts into his ear.

Damn, he's getting a hard-on.
Damn, oh...

She's so sorry,
so sorry.
Click.

He pulls the sheet
over his head
and lies perfectly still,
the only honest thing
he can think to do
besides curse
the heartless birds.

When the Wolf Knows Your Address

Jennifer Lagier

During indigo hours,
honking geese
stroke south between stars
and a sullen moon.

Planets glow,
skim broken cypress.
Shadows pool beneath artichoke swords,
press rosemary needles.

Love paces and howls
beyond these walls,
claws the lintels
of dream

What We Do

(for Nick)

Elizabeth Kerlikowske

Five four three two one
The ball drops half a continent away
Our front door flies open
We rush barefoot into the snow
Our feet numb by the mailbox
we run a lap around the house
a fresh family of tracks
Sure we know there's roots
stones paving blocks underneath
None of that matters
It's the New Year
Anything can happen
Even our feet want to feel it

Before I Read the Poem That Won the Prize

Elizabeth Kerlikowske

I want to thank my progenitors
Without all of them I wouldn't be
However, I would like to single out several for particular attention
First, a big thanks to the entire Tinney clan of Fremont, Michigan
for that tendency toward manic depression
or "the way the Tinneys are" as it's known in Newaygo County
Without their help, I would never have written a word
Next, I'd like to thank my mother
for dying suddenly when I was three
A trauma suffered at an early age has been proven
essential to the genesis of art as a coping mechanism
Another big thanks to my dad for both kidnapping
and abandoning my sister and me a second time
which cinched my life as a bohemian
I'd like to thank my Aunt Susan and my cousins for their shunning
because it taught me the immortality of memory
where they will always swim in the summers of my thought
I'd like to toast my father's family for their addictive personalities
Without my addictions, what would I do all day to keep from writing
Finally I'd like to thank all my relatives who've lived past thirty
for dying promptly at eighty-four
because it's nice to know what time it is
And now, my poem:

Cough Balls

R. Yurman

the owl doesn't eat her prey
she bolts it whole
rats small birds insects toads

swallows teeth toenails feathers bones
then hacking like a lifetime smoker on a damp morning
her gullet convulsing in rapid flurries

she hawks up he indigestible remains
bristles from the bellies of earthworms
the hard wingcases of beetles

skulls of fieldmice
claws and beaks from smaller owls
fur of squirrel nail of vole

daytime—beneath her roost a layer of owl pellets
several feet thick, tight blackish cough balls,
flash like varnished trophies in the sun

twilight—she blinks awake and stares
night-raptor's gaze swiveling
three-quarters circle left three-quarters circle right

darkness—soft flick of wings
her field of sight clear
over the violent beak's sharp downward curve

she rustles aloft, razor talons,
a scalpel and tweezer ready to snatch,
drop in flight

silent apparition
in and out of shadow
she glides

Great Uncle Olin

Michael Estabrook

My great uncle Olin's mother, Ella, had an accident
falling on the ice while he was yet in her womb.

He was born deformed, short, stunted, his arms
permanently akimbo, back twisted with a hump off

to one side. I've seen pictures. But he was, apparently,
mentally fit, because he never married

and lived out his whole life on the family farm haying
in the fall, sugaring in the winter, and caring for the dogs

and chickens, cows and goats. After Dad died Uncle Olin
sent some flowers with a little card attached that read:

"Very sorry for your loss,
but he's better off in heaven."

On Hubble

Anne Richey

There is no speech, no sound...
—Psalm 19

Windwhipped sparks off
the icy roofs of Brooklyn brownstones
spiraling down
in the morning sunlight,

and, now and then, adamantite bits,
caught in contrarian updrafts,
rocketing into the blue.

Spectacular escape!

And my thoughts
leap to Hubble's billions
blazing in hyperspace, endless dazzle,
scintillas in spades—an enormity so vast
the mind shuts down.

I know the stars like the back of my hand,
said my buddy last summer, night winds

whisking us into open water.
Glad to hear it, I answered gamely—
(And I had agreed to this?)

Look, the pole star.

I swear I tried,
but couldn't find that venerable light
for the countless points of fire in elemental black;

and then, odd thought, I pitied my friend—

his trusty star,
his friendly constellations.

You're really scared, he said.

No, no, I said. No more talk, I meant,
for now I'd gotten my moorings:

the waters below,
the heavens above...

I would have my terror.

Instead of Emeraude

Elizabeth Kerlikowske

I couldn't come into your room
although I heard you hear my voice
and say my name
along with the only other thing
you ever said that last year
"Kill me. Please kill me."
I don't want to live like this."
And I thought
I am too young
that this is my mother's place
but she was dead already
And my uncle Pete was dead
and Grandpa had passed on
So I stood outside your room
in the tiny Dowagiac hospital
where the nursing home had brought you
and I didn't go in
You would have clawed at me
with your talons, your bird mouth
making words I couldn't understand
You would have been tiny in the bed
who had loomed large in my life
You would have cried
You were always crying then
and there was nothing I could do
and I am bad at doing nothing
I pretended to myself that I'd never made
that drive in an ice storm to see you
I pretended as I drove home
with my baby son sleeping next to me
that I hadn't signed the order
Do Not Resuscitate
but I had
and when they called on Christmas morning
this once I knew I had gotten you
exactly what you wanted

“Now
I lay me down...”
Elizabeth Kerlikowske

Since you were a kid
you've known that death
begins the same as sleep
You're walking toward the bed
that looks so good so soft
like great-gra's ample bosom
whipped cream piled on cocoa
steep but you can make it
You clamber up the side

no prayers necessary
and are swaddled in comfort
held where you need to be
and free where you don't
It smells like winter morning
in the country and you can't
breathe deep enough
You feel a gentle roasting
like when you lie just close
enough to the fireplace
Your hands and feet
now arms and legs
loosen and evaporate
a shower of rising confetti
How astounding it is to fall
up into the snow-covered firs
where Christmas balls wink
wearing the face of the mother
you've waited your whole life
to meet

Beyond Divorce
Elizabeth Kerlikowske

You want the common sounds of
running water, a faraway cough
a crash and a bolt of swearing
You want to find lights on
you know you turned off
The book opened and a passage highlighted
The peanut butter you forget at the store
in your cupboard
The driveway shoveled
Your prescription refilled
You want to know you'll see
that smile again
That's what you will always see
You want to hear the cascade of pee
in the middle of the night
how comforting that was
Even the baritone farts
were a statement of fact
You turn the football game on loud
on the weekends and that seems to help
He still lives in the sweaters and suit jackets
That's why they have to stay
Now you can eat anchovies and feta
You can wear that gold sweater he hated
Now you don't want to
You want things to be how they were
even if they were crummy sometimes
You want to be interrupted
You want the annoying fact
You want the body in the bed
because the marriage you thought was dead
before
was nothing like this

Unmindful of the Rules
Roberta Pantal Rhodes

You'd dive off the boat, swim around it, unafraid of sharks or barracudas, while I on the other hand hung close to the rope ladder, so I could make a quick leap in case one appeared. After our morning dip, we'd drink bloody Marys at about 10 AM, then switch to gin and tonics at lunch, and then to cold beer after supper. You slept on deck, the cool West Indian breeze rocking you to sleep, while I insisted on a good night's sleep and remained below in a cabin the size of a coffin. No one paid attention to the sun then or melanoma; we just poured baby oil on our bodies and fried. You vaguely mentioned Ken, your beau back home, and I didn't think too much about it, except maybe you were lucky that you had a boyfriend. I was still searching. We did meet two guys, from somewhere in Texas I think. When we got to Martinique, we took a taxi up a mountain. We drank banana daiquiris on a porch overlooking a magnificent valley lush with green leaves the size of umbrellas, wild magenta orchids everywhere, and crimson, gold and turquoise birds. It was paradise. The intense tropical humidity made everything damp, and I was in a constant state of alert. Our clothes stuck to our bodies, and no matter how much we drank, our thirst was unquenchable. Our perilous ride down the mountain careened around sharp, high cliffs overlooking the ocean. We could see our windjammer in the distance, anchored in the outlet, gently swaying with the wind. I wondered if we'd ever get back to it.

Often you dove off the boat not caring that you were too drunk to walk, much less to swim, but the cool water made you feel better, and when you climbed aboard, water dripping from your tall, lanky body, you'd say in your Southern drawl, "C'mon yo'all." Even rain didn't stop you. You made your way around the boat lost amongst the whitecaps. Everyone else shivered in rain slickers, huddled together. You said the water was the warmest place to be.

You dove onto the dance floor on Dominique, oblivious of the men with guns encircling us, or the local women kicking us just because we were there. You twisted and turned, hands in the air, shouting *hallelujah*, your legs twisting. I dragged you toward the food table, where a giant roasted pig with an apple in its mouth dominated the table.

In Antigua you danced on the roof of a grocery store until the electricity was shut off at 11 PM, the music stopping just as you warmed up. You danced around a great blue heron, as he cautiously eyed you, turning his head slightly. When we finally arrived at the hotel you complained that there was no bar.

Next morning, tables and chairs appeared from nowhere, and a man in a brightly colored shirt offered us freshly squeezed orange juice and plates of mango and banana. It wasn't hot yet. The breeze dried your hair. An iridescent

blue-black dragon-fly perched on your plate. Then, swarms of mosquitoes arrived, biting and stinging. You swatted them with your hands and then with your towel. It was useless; we had to leave.

As we made our way back to the launch, we passed a group of people carrying a wooden coffin on their shoulders. An elderly woman walked behind the casket, moaning, while others, somber-faced, followed.

On our last day you kissed everyone good-bye, then drove off to the airport. I asked if Ken was picking you up. There would be no one to meet me. You smiled, but didn't answer. You had mentioned him only once during the trip, and I wondered why you would vacation without him on a boat with so many single people.

Back in New York City, I didn't hear from you. I got married, wrote a children's book, bought a house, and then one day you sent a letter. Just when your life was most like mine, Ken had dropped dead. You sent a picture. You were dressed in a suit, high heels, your silky blonde hair in a pageboy, your two small sons with their curly, black hair squinting in the bright light. At first I didn't recognize you. You looked uncomfortable stuffed in a suit. Not fat. Awkward. Your arms couldn't swing and your hips couldn't sway. Your stiff white Peter Pan collar seemed to jab and strangle you. Only your eyes could move comfortably. They seemed to glance beyond the camera toward the horizon.

Uncle Bill

Michael Estabrook

A man on the beach reminds me so much of Uncle Bill:
burly and barrel-chested, thick hands, red hair,

round face smiling. My father's big brother, authoritative,
all-knowing, never showing any weakness, strong

even at the end when he felt the weakness encroaching,
and decided to finish it before it finished him.

"Major"

William Paige, Gold Creek, Colorado Territory, 1873

Robert Cooperman

When I ambled
into the Last Hope Saloon
and spied that Yankee butcher,
Thomas Sanders, drinking
I let him have it,
a hurdy-gurdy girl shrieking
whilst two Chinese hauled
the carcass out.

He was a laughing guard
at Elmira, a hundred times
worse than Andersonville,
but Yanks won the war,
so they get to whine
and point fingers.

'Least, one of the boys
from the Army of the Potomac
told me it was Sanders that laughed
when he shot his brother
or cousin or uncle
for trying to escape.

I swore self-defense
from a Yank yellow-tail itching
to plug me in the back.
Half a dozen men backed me up
when the sheriff asked questions.

Later, after I'd been with a whore,
I saw my sister for a second.
The vision passed, but not
Sanders whispering he forgave me,
though the Lord wouldn't.

Roland Strickland, of the Boom Town of Gold Creek, Colorado Territory, 1873

Robert Cooperman

Since Rebs were too prissy
to work an honest day,
they should all buck dance
at the end of a rope.

When I saw one
still dressed in gray,
I filled him with six slugs
of poor Mr. Lincoln's justice,
the best bit of work
I've done before breakfast,
the sheriff dead and me
the only law in this town

with its liquor
hot as Satan's backside,
whores not particular,
and me not the prettiest sight
west of the Mississippi:

Losing an eye
in a raid on a Reb farm,
the wife slicing me
and screaming like she
was the one lost an eye.
Eroy stanced the wound,
Tom rounded up
the pigs and chickens.
Flames danced
like freed darkies.

I was too fevered
to enjoy the feast,
but swore vengeance
on every swaggering Reb
from then till Judgment Day.

Small's Paradise

Geer Austin

When you go uptown to Small's Paradise, you better dress right. The ladies there wear gobs of costume jewelry, slinky shiny tops and those swirly swing skirts. The gents wear big pleated pants, pinky rings and smooth dance shoes. Jannie calls her boyfriend Pat and asks him to take her to Small's for a good time.

"Why do you want me to go? You just end up dancing with some old man," Pat says.

"I'm not going uptown by myself," she says. "Are you crazy or something? I need you there, baby."

You have to love Small's. Old musicians from the neighborhood blast the foundations of the place. They set the dancers hopping their chops. The music alone is worth the price of admission.

Pat puts on his antique zoot suit and the tie with the baseball scene. He hails a cab and meets Jannie on Allen Street in front of her building. He always enjoys watching her dance with men left over from the original swing era, even if he does make a fuss about it.

When Jannie gets in the cab, she leans over and gives Pat a big smooch on the neck. He rubs that special spot in the middle of her back.

"You're a good sport, Mr. Pat," she says. "Going all the way uptown just to watch me dance with another man."

That Good Idea

Beth Bahler

It had *seemed* like such a good idea to Diane. Tell everyone at work she was engaged. Wear her great-grandmother's modest engagement ring. Then, charge on, free of the unwanted attention of a coworker who had expressed too great an interest in her, charge on toward her goal of surprising everyone at home and becoming a business success.

But Diane hadn't counted on a surprise engagement party at work. And, she thought, as she maneuvered the large gift box with the electric blanket, her briefcase, and her pocketbook out of the taxi in front of her apartment house, she hadn't realized how unretractable her charade would be. It was a biting cold March evening, windy. The weather all day actually had made her wonder why she had left her more southerly home—where the azaleas were already in bloom and the trees were budding—in the first place. It was also, horror of horrors, the day she was getting a new apartment mate. Cheryl would be on the plane to Europe now, for her sabbatical, just when Diane needed her desperately to talk to, so worried about her compounding lie—what's your fiancé's name? they had asked Diane at the party...uhhh, Buddy...when can we meet Buddy?...next month, maybe...what does he do?...uhh, sales...

And now, after this rotten day at work, she would have to face a subletter—one of Cheryl's many cousins—she had never met, whose name she did not even know. In the last few months, she had been so tied up in "keeping up" homework from work, and also so nervous about living with a new person, that she had let Cheryl make all the subletting arrangements. Cheryl was the one person she could trust unconditionally in the city.

Diane slowly maneuvered across the sidewalk to the front door of her apartment house...hoping that Cheryl had found someone like herself. Cheryl shopped and cooked. Diane cleaned. Cheryl washed clothes. Diane ironed. Still, if she could have afforded it, Diane would have taken the whole apartment for herself while Cheryl was away. At the front door, as she slipped her keys out of her pocketbook, the gift box fell and her briefcase slid on top of it. When are you getting married? they had asked...in about a year. Where did he go to school?...he went a couple of different places. Diane's boss did not like practical jokes...she wondered if she could have just maneuvered herself out of a job.

Diane opened the outside door, picked up all her things, and half crying got herself into the elevator and then finally out of the elevator at her floor.

She sniffed. More as she got closer to her apartment door.

This new apartment mate cooked well anyhow. A rich thick aroma of spaghetti sauce floated over her as she unlocked her three locks. "Hello," she called out, a bit timidly, putting everything down on the living room sofa,

walking cautiously to the kitchen. She saw immediately that the table was politely set for her as well as for the new apartment mate. She saw steam rising from her biggest pots. And then she saw—she saw a young man.

Oh, no, Diane thought, a new roommate with a live-in boyfriend. This isn't going to work out.

He was wearing a half apron over jeans and a t-shirt and she told herself she would not be swayed just because he was smiling terribly winningly at her.

"You weren't expecting me," she said, as genteelly as possible. She always found it hard to fire people at work, actually to tell anyone (even pets back home) to leave anything. But she would meet the new roommate momentarily, and she'd do it. Wait till she spoke to Cheryl about her cousin!

"Of course I was expecting you," he said.

"But the table," she nodded toward it. "It's just for two."

"Oh," he said, "you brought someone home from work? Great. There's plenty." He turned to the cabinet where she kept her plates.

Diane eased herself onto one of the caned kitchen chairs. "You're my new apartment mate, aren't you? Cheryl's cousin is—you."

He turned back with the plate tight in his hands. "You thought I was just a wandering cook?"

"Forget it," Diane said. She covered her face with her hands. "It's been a difficult day."

"Cheryl said once you got used to the idea of it, you'd love me. I meet all the roommate requirements you two had set out... I cook, not fancy, and...since Cheryl is subsidizing my share of the rent a little...I'll wash the clothes."

Diane shook her head. After she got Cheryl's cousin to leave, she was going to scream intercontinentally at Cheryl.

"You don't have to worry," the young man said, "I'm not the type who pushes myself on women who don't want me. Of course, Cheryl has been telling me about you for a good year and I wanted to meet you but I've been so busy trying to make a go at my painting."

Peeking between her fingers, she watched him put a mound of spaghetti on her plate and spoon sauce on top of it. The sauce splattered, just a little, on her blouse collar.

"Don't worry about that," he said. "I'm an expert clothes washer. You have to be when you don't have a lot of clothes."

"If it doesn't come out," he added, "I could always paint over it."

"If you spill sauce on my suit," Diane said, "and you do stay on here (what was she saying!) that's extra rent on your part for dry cleaning. My work suits get luxuries."

"I can't afford too many luxuries," the young man said. "So you'd better serve yourself." He squeezed his lips together.

"So, also," he said after a few minutes, "...as long as we have separate bedrooms and bathrooms, it's not a big deal to have me for an apartment mate,

They flowed from her head like twin cascades of the past and present, the old and the new. Where could she go, with her hair like rivers, what could she do? It was impossible to go home to Poland, it was impossible to stay in Cleveland, it was impossible to be a woman from both sides of this earth, trying to hold it down. Some say the woman disappeared into the rivers that claimed her. Some say she walked into the rain and became the rain. And some refuse to believe that a woman's hair can change into the waters of two rivers by a mere act of a strange dream. But then, they don't know the woman. And they don't know the woman who first told the story: Marya, my mother's mother with the green eyes who died long ago, whom I never knew, but could only imagine.

The Creation: A Woman's View Greta Rana

In the beginning, it was the sound of water over the moss-clad stones that made them melt into one-ness. Not the word of a stone god made in anyone's image. It began and the seed ripened inside the skin, undefined by borders of shamefulness on the blank map of human destiny. In the beginning, it was the sound of wind whispering through the bamboo that brought comfort to their fingers. And the two souls murmuring gave birth. In the beginning, he knew only her as mother of eternal wonders. And the sunlight shone through her hair woven with glistening miracles. Now, she's merely someone else's daughter and he no longer hears the sound of water.

Was It Only a Rumour Greta Rana

(February 18 to April 8, 1990)*

Today, we burned our dead,
before others awoke to the dawn
of another day;
and searched among
the heaps of refuse by the river
for the jute sacks thrown away
by the others: and being done
we knew our children's blood
was part of the shame and fear
that would stain them.
So we sent our keening cry.
We wonder, did they hear?

* The period from February 18 to April 8 is known as the *Jana Andolan* in Nepal—the People's Movement. It was a period of painful transition and destruction, after which multiparty democracy was introduced.

The Woman with the Two Rivers Growing from Her Hair

Linda Nemec Foster

Here is a true story stranger than any fiction. I know it's true because my mother told me that her mother saw it with her own two eyes. The "it" was a woman—young, beautiful—who had two rivers growing from her hair. She was from Krakow and as a girl would weave her long, yellow hair into two heavy braids. They looked like twin strands of gold, "Prawdziwy zloty." Real gold, my grandmother would say. But that was long ago in the old country when the woman's hair was still only hair. Although she was very beautiful—with her hair as rich as a sunset, skin as pale as sweet milk, and eyes as green as deep emeralds—she was very sad because no man seemed to be able to fall in love with a girl whose hair looked like gold. As a matter of fact, all the men and boys who ever met her felt uncomfortable in her presence. They were so awestruck by her hair that they never noticed anything else—including her! So she longed for a better, happier life. One day she decided to leave her mother, her father, all her sisters and brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends and come to the New World and live in America. It was difficult to say goodbye to the only life she had ever known, but she knew it would be even more difficult to stay in a place that would constantly remind her of lost love. The journey by steamship across the vast blue expanse of the Atlantic was long, hard, and lonely. But finally, she arrived in New York and made her way across that state and Pennsylvania to northern Ohio. She settled in Cleveland because she liked the way the foreign sound of the word left her Slavic lips. She especially loved the sound of the city's river, Cuyahoga, even though it took her many weeks before she could even begin to pronounce it. "Cuyahoga," she said, "Cuyahoga." As if trying to will the river into her tiny bedroom on the third floor of Mrs. Okasinski's boarding house. One night there was a terrible storm. Thunder rolled, lightning flashed, rain fell from the sky in endless torrents. That night the woman tossed and turned in her bed—she dreamt a strange dream. She was a mermaid swimming in the deep, clear waters of her homeland, the Vistula River. Her legs had turned into one huge fin, her beautiful hair had become filmy seaweed. Even her green eyes had turned into the blue-white of mother-of-pearl. The Vistula flowed around her like scattered diamonds. For the first time since leaving Poland, she felt homesick. In the morning when she awoke, the rain was still falling, like drops of a river from the sky. Her pillow was damp—not from the dream, not from the tears of homesickness she cried in her sleep—but from her hair. Her long, golden hair had inexplicably transformed into the two rivers she loved so much: blue Vistula of the fish-maid; green Cuyahoga of the exotic song.

right?" He had very safe looking brown eyes. He now piled food on his own plate and sat down.

"It's still a big deal," Diane said. Oh, Cheryl, wait till she got Cheryl! Cheryl who thought Diane was neglecting a social life, Cheryl who was always trying to drag her out to the movies, a party, a concert.

"Well, at least eat," the young man said.

"I ought to know your name," Diane answered, making a slow production of picking up her fork.

"Ted...Ross. And honestly I didn't know you were engaged. Cheryl didn't mention it."

"You *should* leave."

"You have my favorite kind of ring. The old fashioned setting and all."

"You understand about leaving?"

"Yes." He picked at his spaghetti. "I would have no place to go right now except the 2 x 4 loft where I do my painting. My apartment went coop. If you need to know anything else about me, I'm college educated and I sell refrigerators on Second Avenue. Not great at it yet. I've had four paintings taken by galleries. No shows. Back home they're just waiting to announce in the local paper: we knew Ted Ross would never make it. Cheryl said to tell you I had a girlfriend and then you'd be more amenable...but I'm not a good liar and I don't right now. I would be faithful with the rent."

"I'm thinking," Diane said.

"Okay." He followed her lead of silence.

"What did you say your name is?" she asked finally.

"Ted."

"Would you mind if I called you 'Buddy'?"

"Call me anything you want if you let me stay." He stuck out his hand, such a big hand, such a snug hand as it turned out, for her to shake.



Russell Thorburn, Elizabeth Kerlikowske, and Roberta Herter

Celebrity Dream

Linda Nemec Foster

Last night, my first night sleeping
in a friend's apartment that I had rented
for the summer, Salman Rushdie appeared
In my dream like an unexpected house guest,
kissing me on both cheeks, assuming
I had read his latest book, introducing
me to other writers from his subcontinent:

a short, dark man with a huge white turban
that was actually bigger than he was;
a woman with an emerald stud in her nose
and eyelids encrusted with blue sapphires;
an older man whose face had one large eye
instead of a mouth, an eye that always wept.

But Salman was in charge of this dream
and he was in a pretty good mood
with his half-closed eyes and small smile.
Not at all the aloof dilettante
that an ex-wife described in a tabloid.

He talked about writing *The Novel*, the break-
through book that would herald the new
millennium, the new approach to civilization,
the new metaphor for everything—the whole
she-bang. He balanced this esoteric
monologue with suggestive body language;
his memorization of every position
in the *Kama Sutra*. A veritable lap dance
of sexual culture. Ah, the joys of writing
past midnight; ah, the joys of sleeping
till noon; ah, the joys of making mad
monkey love while a half-hearted Islamic
death threat looms over your head.

The dream ended when he left me
standing in the hallway, sweating
and exhausted, while a half-naked
blond man delivered a new sofa—
upholstered in moss green—to the tenants
two floors up. To the left of my field
of vision, a single dog barked.

the eyes far, far back in the sockets and very bright.
So I sat and drank coffee till my money (from the cop) ran out
and tried to bum a ride with the truckers. No deal.
The roads were iced up and there were insurance investigators all
over the place.
Finally I gave it up and started walking back to the center of town.
Cold, very cold. Everything ice around me. The whole world was ice.
Everything but my mind, which still exploded from time to time.
Maybe that was why I started back to town:
I didn't want to stay anywhere too long because people would see
the shape I was in.

I walked slowly through the frozen streets, looking for light
and warmth.

Finally I came to a train station and went in. It was light and warm
and after a while I came to myself enough to see the Traveler's Aid booth.
If ever a traveler needed aid, I was it. I went over and talked
to the lady in charge.

(On the streetcorners that night earlier, the newspaper vendors
had fires built in big tin oil drums and sat by them selling
their papers

with the orange flames highlighting their black faces.
Once I stopped by one to get warm but the flame-lit face spooked me
and I moved on. I remembered that picture for many years)—
The Traveler's Aid lady lent me a nickel and suggested that I call
my mother, which I did.

And that was how I came to leave Chicago—on a bus for Washington,
peering out the wide windows at the white frozen world,
wondering why my mind wouldn't stop exploding,
wondering what I could say to my mother that would reassure her
with my face a papier-mache skull,
and what I could possibly say to that strange, distant man lying
there in the hospital.

Outside the broad window, the trees were hung with ice
and everything very white, very clean-looking
and, now that I wasn't cold, very beautiful.

Pilgrimage

Albert Huffstickler

I landed in Chicago the coldest night of the year—broke.
I was 19. It had been snowing and the roads were iced.
The last ride I'd gotten had given me a dollar but when I looked
for it later, it was gone.
I had started from Florida with ten dollars. It had taken me
3 days.
I was going to see a guy named Glenn at the University of Chicago.
Don't ask me why. My head wasn't right and I thought he might
have some answers.
There weren't any in Florida with my young wife pregnant and my
father
sick with cancer, just departed for an army hospital in
Washington, D. C.
Anyway, I was going to do something, get somewhere and get help,
put my head back together. Things kept exploding inside it.
So I went out to the university but I didn't find the guy I was
looking for
so I came back to town, having just discovered that my dollar was
gone. I was very hungry and very cold.
I wandered the streets for a while and then finally went up to a cop
and told him I was broke and couldn't find the guy I was looking for.
He called somebody and they came and got me and took me to the
police station,
fed me two bologna sandwiches and a bottle of milk and then took
me to the edge of town to a truck stop.
"If you can get a ride out of here tonight, this is the place,"
the cop said.
"If I was you, I'd go on back to Florida."
I'd been thinking the same thing myself—or of possibly catching
a ride to Washington
where my mother had gone to be with my father when he was operated on.
We all knew he was dying. That was part of what was wrong;
not all of it.
Maybe I could go and visit him and say—say what?
I'd seen my face by then in the mirror of the restroom.
It looked like a papier-mache skull—hollow and lumpy at the
same time,

Snoring

Lowry McAllen

I know the air's chilly but I'm feeling hot from her standing here beside me. I
take my shirt off and drop it to the floor and lean against the bricks of the
balcony. She's pretty drunk too.
I lean further and spit down through the glowing streetlight.
She leans but doesn't spit. I almost ask her but before I do she puts her
hand against my back.
It's a cold hand and I just stand there with the street spinning below me. The
hand is a good start. I pull my elbows back, straighten up and turn toward her
and then her hand comes away.
"Be right back," she says and goes into the hotel room. Another one of us is
in there snoring. It's been a long trip. Guatemala. El Salvador. Now Mexico City. I
hear the toilet flush.
I lean back on the bricks and their hardness goes up through my elbows.
Heels crunch on the sidewalk from a block away and I watch a man in a black
coat walk beneath me and then on to the corner and then out of sight.
I go in and she's snoring on her bed.

Expanding My Myth

Albert Huffstickler

The wanderer crossed over to the realms of death.
It was evening.
All the lights in the houses were on in this little village.
He had thought he would come home here
but found himself standing outside a lighted window
watching a family eat its supper.
They did not know he was there.
"They do not know I'm here," he told himself.
He turned away into the evening.
The land spread out before him, tinged by the coming dark.
He lifted his face to the sky.
A shadow of a moon hovered above the horizon.
He set his course by it and started walking.
"I'll move on to the next place," he told himself confidently.
"There's always something at the next place."

March 22, 1993
in front of H. E. B.'s Grocery

closer John Sweet

an actor in
the field
or else a man who
takes pleasure
in burning

either way
the smell of
gasoline

the roads flat and
endless in
every direction

you'd call this home
if you could

trees pressed hard
against
a yellow sky

your sister's
dead hands
carving fingerprints
into a plywood
wall

and no one here
sees the need for
escape

no one understands
that the animals
eat their young
and call it
salvation

and how much closer
will we ever get
to god
than this?

at the oneonta holiday inn John Sweet

a window table for
the sunday dinner buffet
at the oneonta holiday inn

a view of the interstate
and rows of identical hills
moving into the distance

an empty house
an abandoned gas station

pink floyd on a radio from
somewhere in the kitchen

senior citizens
keep an eye on
me and my wife as we
eat our chicken

they wait for us to
explode

to start taking hostages

we finish our drinks
pay the bill
go back to our room

april turns on the tv

i write this poem in
the thin blue glare of
situation comedies

the dead aren't
brought back to life
but that was never my
intention

the ghost of a moon John Sweet

this one
is an invisible prayer
offered in the early afternoon

the ghost of a moon
nailed to one side
of a peaceful blue sky
a sun without heat
falling from the other

myself in the middle
small
trying to stay above water

trying to stay inside
myself

rooftops and powerlines
and all the other shit
that constantly
drags me under

sirens and fear
and the bag ladies
pushing shopping carts
down washington ave

and i'm trying
and it's so easy to
close my eyes
and all my hands want anymore
is the warmth of
someone else

and april's afraid
when the world gets too big
and the walls start
to move in

and she wants me close
and says it's
still not enough

says she's afraid
of what might happen
tomorrow
and the next day
and the next

and i'm trying