



- William Aiken • David Aivaz • Tim Applegate
- Geer Austin • Henry Berne • Rosaleen Bertolino
- Sherry Calkins • Steve Carter • Vincent Cioffi
- Michael Clark • Michael Gills
- Gayle Elen Harvey • Albert Huffstickler
- Mike James • Michael L. Johnson
- Elizabeth Kerkilowske • Kathryn Kulpa
- Yvonne LinckOsborne • Richard Luftig
- Lowry McAllen • Trissy McGhee • John McKernan
- B. Z. Niditch • Joyce Odam
- Rosalie Sanara Petrouske • Travis Purser
- Daryl Rogers • Geri Rosenzweig
- David Schuman • Curtis Smith • Anne Starr
- Russell Thorburn • Rodney Torreson
- Kimberly Tucker • Carole Waterhouse
- Robert West • Anne Pierson Wiese • Susan Wilde



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Parting Gifts

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In *Senegal: Poems on Africa* Chris Waters brings a bucolic light to the Dark Continent, as if he boiled the fermented cauldron himself with his seasoning of English, French, and African dialects.

—MIKE CATALANO,
Editor of *Melting Trees Review*

SENEGAL

CHRIS WATERS



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Notes on a Broken Chandelier

Kjersti Reed was born in 1943 in Fresno, California. While a single parent, she learned how rewarding family life can be. She also completed a BA in Fine Art and a MA in English/Creative Writing at California State University, Fresno. In 1989 she moved to southern California where she earned an MFA in Creative Writing from San Diego State University. She is winner of a 1992 INTRO Award (AWP) and an Academy of American Poets College Prize. Recently, her poems have appeared in *Pearl*, *Kalliope*, *The North American Review*, and *Press*. She teaches writing in the San Diego area where she lives with her partner of five years and teaches writing at the University of San Diego and Southwestern College.



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When the cops came, he told them the story in his broken English. "Pretty good shooting, huh?" He said. But the cops handcuffed him, took him down to the station, booked him and kept him there.

Mrs. Martinez got her husband's cousin to take over the store for the rest of the night. She took a cab to the court on Center Street and waited for arraignment.

The body lay for hours on Sullivan Street in the middle of its circle of blood and dollar bills. What a shame, people said, even if he was a junkie, to die for a hundred bucks and change. And how unfair that Mr. Martinez, who never did anything bad except drink too much and run numbers, would be sent up the river, leaving his wife to mind the business all by herself. Mr. Martinez never thought about that, they said, when he stepped onto the street and pulled the trigger.

The bloodstains stuck to the pavement until the next rain, and the people on the block walked around that spot for some months, but they kept buying their beer and their cigarettes from Mrs. Martinez. The business stayed open, although she let the numbers game slide. Her hair turned gray while Mr. Martinez was away, and her skin dried up and looked ready to crack. When Mr. Martinez came back, his hair had turned the same shade of gray, and he had lost a lot of weight. He started running numbers out of the store again, but business was never the same.

Two Poems

Robert West

1.

And there:
such everyday
odd counterpoint

as birdsong,

2.

a holding forth
and out
among the pines.

Miser

Robert West

On its final
go-round autumn
changes its tune:
now his own woods
are heckling his
rations, as green
opulence turns
fool's gold,
the rustle of leaves
ticking down to
a withering.

Bodega

Geer Austin

Mr. Martinez couldn't believe how good life could be. In the bodega on Sullivan Street down the block from the church where they hold Mafia Mass, he dispensed beer, took numbers, butchered meat and kept a careful eye on the till. That is, when he wasn't in the back of the store sneaking a drink. At those moments, he left his wife in charge of the till.

Mrs. Martinez perched on her stool and pecked at the cash register. Because her English was bad she spoke only to tell customers how much they owed. She daydreamed about life in the Dominican Republic and the mother she left behind when her husband uprooted their family fifteen years earlier and took them to New York.

All day and all night, Mafia guys swaggered into the store for the cigarettes they smoked while loitering in front of their social club, just a few doors down Sullivan Street. Kids came in for candy and gum. Artists slunk in and bought quarts of beer. The Dominicans in the neighborhood bought up most of the food, and they played the numbers when they had the money.

Mr. Martinez strutted around the place like a native New Yorker. He earned more money than he had ever imagined. He eyed the neighborhood with suspicion, but instead of cowering behind the cash register, when he was out front, visible in the plate glass window that overlooked the street, he kept his gun drawer open so he could see the handle of the revolver he kept there. He'd bought the gun from the guy who came into the store every Thursday for the Mafia's share of the numbers game.

It happened that Mrs. Martinez was on the cash register the night a blond, well-dressed guy came in acting kind of crazy. He glared at her, and she shrank into her stool. He lunged across the counter and hit the key that opened the machine. There was just over a hundred bucks inside, and he scooped most of it up in his hand and was out the door before Mrs. Martinez could open her mouth and scream.

Mr. Martinez lurched out from the back, and she shrieked at him what had happened and pointed at the door. He grabbed the revolver out of the drawer, stepped onto the sidewalk and fired at the robber. By some weird stroke of luck, the first and only shot hit the robber in the back of the head, and he fell face forward into the middle of Sullivan Street. The bills flew out of his hand into the air and fluttered down around his body.

People came out of nowhere and the street was crowded in an instant. The Mafia guys disappeared when they realized what had happened. The residents of the building across the street hung out their windows and watched the blond robber bleed. Mr. Martinez never imagined so much blood could be in a person.

Rider

Lowry McAllen

One kid came up the front door of the bus with a mask on and another kid came up through the back and I could tell this wasn't going to work out for them. They were so skinny and the bones at their wrists seemed to poke right through the skin. Mother told me to stuff what I had in my shoe, maybe 20 pesos. Enough for lunch.

They lifted these crooked pipes before them like they were swords and said they were there to collect our money. Hard times, they said. They hoped we would understand. The driver looked sideways at the kids, bored.

One man in front handed over some money and the kid took a step down the aisle and then the man jumped up and slammed the kid in the back of the head. The kid wavered but didn't pass out and then somebody grabbed the pipe from his hand. Another guy blasted him in the face.

It didn't go any better for the guy in the back. One man grabbed the kid's head and slammed it against the bars you use when you're going down the steps. The elastic strings holding the masks to their faces popped and one of them looked like my cousin Aurelio.

Mother cheered the men on. This was the first time she'd been in a robbery like this. She didn't get out much. I took the money out of my shoe. When the kids were unconscious everybody went through their pockets. Then a couple of men picked them up by their shoulders and knees and dumped them on the sidewalk.

We drove off and I felt like I should have gotten out to give them a hand. Maybe buy them a soft drink.

A Reflexive Reflection for Shelby Stephenson, Who Made It All the Way Around

Robert West

home is
where the

heart is

where the
home is

Brakes

Lowry McAllen

Each shiny station he crashes into is a flashing dizzy mess of faces and the brakes screech and he is screeching along with them. A raspy tight voice that has come to perfectly imitate the brakes after months of working at it. Lights flash on the control panel before him. Some say he's going too fast and some say he's going too slow.

He screeches again in the moldy space at the head of the Metro. He likes the perfect mimicry. *Que se chinguen*, he says to everything. Fuck themselves. *Que se chinguen*. He likes the way it sounds too.

The tracks dip and sway and he spots the tail lights of another train in the tunnel and a safety switch pops and the train jerks against itself as the brakes automatically lock up. He'd been ready for the autopilot and he swivels around to look through the oblong window into the passenger car in time to watch them be tossed about. Some of their lips move in what he hopes are curses. Sleepers lurch out of dreams and shake their heads. That's the best part.

Despite all this, each day is longer than the last, no matter how much he listens to the radio that is against the rules or smokes *mota* or counts the stations and the line crossings and no matter how much he watches the dashing faces on the platform or throws the riders by jerking the train one way and then the other. *Que se chinguen*.

Untitled

William Aiken

When you refer to yourself regularly as "fuck"
("Come on, fuck, drink the coffee without spilling it"),
you know pretty much you have concluded
your reproductive cycle.

This endearment,
reflective of the wide range of your triumph in love,
leads to the best bed you'll ever have.
So long, fuck, *requiescas in pace*.

Red Scare

B. Z. Niditch

Twelve years old
and at a meeting
of the "Culture Club"
they called it
on the West Side
I hear Finnish and Yiddish
and people are reading
small magazines backwards
hiding them like dark eyebrows
behind the *New York Daily News*.

Suddenly the secret police arrive
in clean double-breasted suits
and take the literature
on the table
we can always tell
what they are about.

Two guys are taken away
Jake, who once played for the navy band
during the war
stationed in the south
when a black woman
with Christmas packages
got on the bus
and Jake got up
and he was put down
by the bus driver
thrown off
turned Red,
now in the 50's
is taken away.

I heard he is better dead.

The Last Political

Prisoner

B. Z. Niditch

You visited her
on her blanket
she wrote
love letters
to herself

All afternoon
the guards
watched her
even when she went
to pee

She was called
all sorts
of nondescript names
the regime hated
like a hooligan
or a parasite

She was working on
my book, *Exiles*,
and laughed at them
as she was translated.

twelve tips for anna karenina

Susan Wilde

don't give up your kid
don't be mean to your ex-husband
get a dog
join a gym
mind your manners

be glad you're getting a little

when you get a chance to be one of the people, take it

remember him as a person, also struggling, but remember yourself more
enjoy him, but enjoy yourself more

pretty is as pretty does
stay back from the edge
get back on the horse

Living Legends

Robert West

It was Jonathan
Daniels who saw
fit to announce
that "We Southerners
are a mythological
people," which is
by itself of course
perfectly ambiguous.

The extinction
implicit in "myth"
here deferred by
the present tense.

A subnation of heroes
or half-monsters.

Message from My Ashtray

William Aiken

Die, old man.
Live no longer
on the burning of others.

Piano Man

Steve Carter

His last gig was like any other Thursday night. Manny, the owner, would tell about it afterwards. People had to be turned away, a good number, as had been happening for the last six months or so. They left disappointed, forming a few friendly groups hanging around outside, sharing cigarettes, throat lozenges, gum, life savers, glancing now and then at the door before drifting away for their homes or other clubs.

He came as he had been coming for over three years, an older man, once stocky and even tight-skinned, but now slack and rumped in dress and carriage, his eyes going bad. The tables had been moved to make room for the band performing that weekend, and in the dimness he bumped into a couple chairs, as he did sometimes now, feeling carefully along the counter. Nowadays, early in the evening, the few times he used the fake book or sheet music, he would bend close to the page, squinting, drooling a little at the mouth, perhaps stumbling over a few notes, until something would click inside and he would remember and look away, confident of the chords, the melody, his own powers—though to be honest he almost never used the book anymore anyway. He didn't need to. He just needed an idea. A push in a certain direction.

Instead of yelling "Melancholy Baby" or "Stardust" or some more current pop tune, people now would just call out themes. "Faith," they would say, or "Disappointment." And he would begin playing, first standards, then show tunes and light opera, then snatches of hymns and classical pieces, medleys woven ad lib together, every tune directly or indirectly reinforcing the theme. And the customers would stop talking, even forget to drink. Their eyes would glaze over and a strange, other-worldly calm would descend.

At some point—though this didn't always happen—he would begin to play pieces that nobody could identify. The names seemed obvious, right on the tip of the tongue, but afterwards nobody could remember even how the tunes went, those insubstantial, evanescent melodies, wispy as clouds, heart-clutchingly familiar. When he reached that point, a few would even sometimes stand up, entranced at certain riffs or phrases. There seemed to be one song, one melody, aimed precisely at each person.

This was the night the woman came, perhaps 30 years old. She could have been his daughter or a younger sister, even a young wife feeling left out, ignored. She wore a light blue dress, comfortable, just slightly loose, that reached to below mid-calf with white hand-smocking on the breast like a child's dress. Dangling from her ears were gold hoop ear rings, not too large, and on her head, something like a maroon dashiki with paisley designs, which gave her an oddly oriental or African look.

He'd just started his last set, and was trying to read some hand-copied sheet music, something he'd composed the night before. At first, they didn't speak. She just reached across to help him keep the right page in front of him as he played.

When he finished, their murmured conversation could just be heard by the customers on the closest tables. They told Manny about it afterwards. "Frank," she said, "why?"

He paused, seemed much affected. "There's nothing I can tell you," he said, and his eyes rolled away white in their sockets as if it were more than detached retina or some diabetes- or alcohol-related eye problem, as if it were real blindness coming on, something congenital or something latent that just hadn't shown itself till then.

"Life," a drunken voice called out from mid-way in the room. "Death" echoed an amused, half-teasing voice from closer by, a man with hollow cheeks and dark eyes, overdressed, wearing a finely tailored business suit. Immediately, Frank began one of his medleys, gradual forays into the past, standards and show tunes first, then hymns and snippets of classical melodies, but this time before the final stage was reached with its un-classifiable but unforgettable music, he looked toward the woman at his side, rolling his heavy, gray irises in their pure white globes and looking almost over her head. "Sing," he said, and slowly, but without hesitation, she rose to stand before the microphone.

She sang a song that seemed almost a folk melody from the Middle East, perhaps Jewish, perhaps Chinese or Arabic, the kind of music that may have inspired the troubadours of early Europe as well as early church composers like Palestrina and Monteverdi. She sang with tremolos and grace notes that seemed to hover momentarily in quarter tones or halftones in between notes in the eight-note octave before they slid up or down. The rhythms seemed to call for tablas or tahors or bongos, hinting at jazz.

When she finished singing, she sat down beside him amid warm but polite applause and waited for him to finish the final set. When he did, they walked together past a few murmured words of thanks, but mostly past silent appreciation, past people who seemed slightly dazed, shocked inward by the music.

A week later, when he failed to show up, the first time in three years, Manny tried to get in touch. All he had was the post office box number where he sent Frank's check for the Thursday gigs, and when he called to inquire, the clerk found the card filed a few days earlier when the account closed. He read the scrawled words over the phone: "Terminated. From this point on, no forwarding address."

The Land of the Free

Susan Wilde

Fortune says they never saw it coming
The people who get fired
Even when they are told to empty their desks
And escorted to the parking lot
They don't believe it
They never knew

Fortune says that at this very moment you
May be falling out of favor
With your boss
Fortune lists the telltale signs
And at the end reveals
The biggest clue of all:
Your boss refuses
To look you in the eye

and the home of the brave

Computation

William Aiken

Think of all the people in the world:
Six billion of them not in love with you!

Are you not lucky here?

My Daughter Peels an Orange in Winter

Rosalie Sanara Petrouske

Cold clashes on the lake
and somewhere ice breaks
But here, in a silent splash
of golden light from the room's
solitary lamp, my daughter peels
an orange, hooks her thumbs
beneath the skin and pulls.
So serious, I think, in her
concentration. At five, she knows
centrifugal force. *This is what happens
when I spin around on my sled, she says.*
Now the warm scent of oranges beckons
to me in the kitchen washing dishes,
draws me to the other room
where oranges flower in air.
I bend to kiss my daughter's hair,
and she offers a crescent slice,
a grove in Italy, fields humming,
full and green with life.
When I was a child, I held my arms
to my chest tight, spun in circles,
willed the earth to stop spinning,
yet it was always me.
The present becomes the past.
There is no way to capture
the light—Shutter, snap, click.
Frame my daughter peeling oranges
on a December night.



Rosalie Sanara Petrouske

Again

Michael Gills

Cooper chews a sore inside his mouth, watches his wife flip and turn at the deep end where the boards are. Into her mile, she hangs under the pale water for six, seven meters, then ruptures it, a fierce butterfly. God, she can swim. This, Easter weekend. They are alone inside the college natatorium. Outside, dogwoods ignite the cobalt sky, but it's dim here, and the air is the smell of dirt dug up to bury an infant child.

Shadows warp the steel joists above where banners announce past championships into space. Cooper is behind the aluminum bleachers.

They pile against a windowless wall. He hears Yvonne's body, the bladder breaking sound her breath makes on every third stroke. She is into a rhythm now in the straights, the flip kicks. He does not think of her as a normal person swimming. She makes him want to pray.

Cooper holds a finger to his throat, times his wife by heartbeat. She's thirty-three, one end to the other. He's no match for her in water. She has held state records, swam the 800-Free for the University of Maryland, was an alternative for the boycotted Olympics in '80. Home, inside the shrouded nursery—their shrine for what is lost—scrapbooks bulge with clippings, hefty medallions, ribbons, body shavings. One contains a flattened dixie cup, taped to the middle of a big blank page. Guess where this hair came from? is magic marked across the top, where dirty blonde hairs curl from the cup mouth. The deep blue letters have faded purple, lost their humor. Cooper put a hank of this in his wallet, between cards. For luck.

Cooper crawls out from behind the bleachers. He's on hands and knees—like a rat, or a skunk, he thinks—to the ledge where five-feet is chiseled into concrete. He sinks in, crouches down to nose-level. His urine is warm. It rises, yellow fingers against his chest.

Across the pool's width, a water jet is a lone eye, a vortex spiral. When he was a kid, Cooper once watched a quarter horse fight drowning for a solid hour on a creek trotline. An October afternoon, the light going the color you see underwater when brush piles burn across back pastures in Arkansas. The whites of the thing's eyes, nostrils wild for sweet earth air, sharp hooves kicking the muddy water. An hour by the clock.

From this level, Cooper can see that his great-grandmother's wedding band is missing. Yvonne wears no bathing cap. Her blonde hair is darkened by water, slicked back over the crown of her head. She's had it cut. He hasn't seen her in two days. Cooper holds a breath. He has the sensation of being both inside and outside of himself. Yvonne is swimming toward him now, lurching in the backstroke that makes her vulnerable, blind to the distance between her and the wall she must use to flip. A bubbly wake skeins out behind her. Cooper wants to

warn her of her progress, caution against the concrete that could break a finger, an arm, her skull. He doesn't, and Yvonne spins into a flip, blooms under the onion-scented water.

The sound of it all. Cooper hears the complaint in a place inside himself that he has recently come to regard as his core. The thing squealing, light in its eyes. None of them brave enough to dive down with the knife, saw cords from treble hooks. The terrible noise of it, Cooper had to fight his need to laugh out loud, to split a gut. So goddamn terribly hilarious. Simultaneously, he recalls, a baby laughs and cries.

Cooper breathes heavy air, lets his body slide down the slick wall to the floor, where he sits eyes open to the chlorine burn. He has read that whales can talk across three-thousand miles of ocean. Say things that translate into hallelujahs or I love yous or go fuck yourself, maybe. Through the green haze, he can see his wife struggle on the plane between him and air. She will not see him. She has not seen him since the child died. Underwater, not far from his outstretched legs, a penny's dull head shines.

Yvonne, closing in.

Cooper chooses words carefully. Air is holy. I wish, he says, bubbles arush. It was me. Quit, he manages.

She passes.

His voice is eerie glut, the voice of someone whose lost a larynx, speech through an amplifier held tight to vocal cords. Baby. Cooper says it deep in his throat, swallowing a little.

Yvonne swims away.

Not air, sticky foam liquidizing the rattle in his throat. The horse's mouth twisted grotesquely in the end.

She has quit listening.

Cooper cooked all through their pregnancy. He was careful, laid off the salt, went easy on onions and garlic. He read the books, learned cervix dilation, plus and minus drop ratios. Classes, understanding broken water, everything. The birth was induced, twenty odd hours. Pitocin leaked from Yvonne's tear ducts and every other orifice. Cooper held a leg, counted out loud. One, two, seven—the numbers took on personalities. The worst, medusoid nine, blocking ten from one.

A newborn's penis is erect. A boy. A little man. Cooper cut the cord, sawed it in half. Home, three sleepy weeks, squalor and silence. Joy held briefly between the brute's teeth.

Near the far end of the pool, where the floor drops abruptly to eighteen-feet and is printed by the fingers of divers who have broken falls, Yvonne begins her kick. She somersaults, initiates a four lap medley of butterfly, back, breast, and the free that will bring her sprinting home. She is motion blurred, a sting in his red eye.

The hell of it, the worst of all, was that he just quit breathing. Out of the blue sky. No fight, no nothing. The still blue eyes, the frozen mouth. There, in

Dancing Naked

Rosalie Sanara Petrouske

1.

When I was sixteen I slipped off my faded jeans and cotton blouse, danced naked in the woods for my husband. He gave me his Aztec vest to wear, its brown wool woven around my breasts, its fringe caressing my legs. On winter nights, we pulled the quilt higher over our nakedness.

2.

Years later, stepping from the shower, I wrapped a new lover's robe around my skin—white soft cloth, musky with sweat and soap. We read Brautigan and Blake, ate omelets in bed while snow pellets dashed the window above our heads.

3.

A woman over thirty, I dance naked to the slow notes of my young lover's bass guitar. Outside March's last blizzard (or so we think) lashes his attic roof, wobbles through cracks in the wood. We crawl under his Icelandic furs and shiver toward our unborn daughter.

Winter Mother

(for Senara)

Rosalie Sanara Petrouske

Frozen under blue ice, the lake pushes waiting for early thaw—it is dark in the morning when we wake up, dark at night when we go to sleep. At midnight, only the moon reflects silhouettes of two howling hounds, black against the bulk of land.

We bury ourselves in quilts, dried rose petals, traces of violet from long ago trunks where our aunts, our grandmothers lived wrapped in fox-headed furs.

My daughter hides under the curve of my chin, naked we carve into each other, become one shape. Starving wolf mother, mad with delirium can only think of her young. I hold her for life is dear, all the while knowing when we are apart she balances on the crooken beam of summer; she is liveness of motion, of grace, her white arms holding her aloft.

In our bed of drifting snow, I read to her, my voice smothered in an avalanche of words until she sleeps.

the crib, the Pooh bear mobile still as ditch water. A name, written in blue cursive across a woolly lamb. The stereo was on, music was playing. The penalty of music.

He deep breathes. Outside, dogwoods flower the cobalt sky.

Inside, horses nicker in Elysian pastures. Beer bottles broken under muddy water. A grave is dug, bootsole slipping on the spade shank.

They will suffer each other in silence. Yvonne's slammed shut room will fill and fill; they will live and they will die and rot into the earth under stones in a place called Solgahatchie Bottom. Down their carved names the dirty raindrop plows.

Cooper takes a breath. It hurts. Yvonne's shoulders, her big back break water into water, as her arms slice air. She is near.

Again, his lungs fill. He coils, under the water, tiptoe to the hard wall, pushes.

It happened on a day when the light in the room went the color one sees underwater when leaves are burning all up and down the street anywhere and smoke gets on the water. Cooper was first to see. The still mobile, the deformed tiger, the grinning pig, the haunted swing engineered for silent winding. A gone cold child. Then Yvonne. She didn't want to know. A thing.

A high keen whistles in his ears. Volts of juiced blood rip through the veins, his outstretched hands. His nails spark beads, clear acetylene fire. Yvonne's round shoulders churn, her white belly-skin flashes. He can, will, touch her. If water is air, a howl quavers the rafters.

Moments verge on moments, sure. Seconds revolt against seconds. Stupid Cooper insisted on digging the small hole himself. It was tough going and, finally, someone called a backhoe in. The service was sweet one watcher said. Their Sunday clothes smelled stale. Behind the caretakers two-story, a boy and girl were gleeful on a swing and slide set. Someone was grilling. You could smell it.

Now, he can see her wrinkled palms, the white goggle strap that constricts her head, how the dark suit crawls up the halves of her bottom. She is fast. Cooper kicks, can see the tiles on the far wall, how the filtered water jets out from the vortex.

When it was finished, they cut the corpse loose, drug it to the levee bank with a nylon rope. Somebody retrieved a shovel.

They switched off digging until four feet, where water leaked in and they had to get creative. Cut roots jabbed the diggers. Dirt got in their mouths. Someone, who were they but boys, found a sledgehammer, a nice ten-pounder with a wood handle. One bent a leg while another hammered. The breaking took time.

We dress our dead too carefully. His face is hot. His hands on her neck, her face, his face on fire. Our dead. Cooper lets go, he turns loose. Dear God. she swims.

He opens his eyes to the brilliance of an azure sky, where Yvonne's face is just above his own, her hands touching his head.

"It's okay, now," she says, brushes lips against his cheek.

Cooper tries to sit up. He smells her, Yvonne's skin, honeysuckle in the gutter.

"Why am I here?"

"Be still. Stop it."

She's putting her fingers in his mouth, training the tongue away from the roof. Over Yvonne's shoulders, Cooper sees the belfry clock on top of bright Founder's Hall. His teeth chatter. He tastes what leaks from under a molar filling.

"I don't want this. Not anymore."

"Who does?" She has his head in one bent arm, brings her face near his. Cooper sees the yellow in her eyes, the scar on her left brow "Wake up." She says it like he's late.

He has feeling in his legs now. Two wild blue jays and a cardinal make ruckus in a nearby dogwood. It the Sunday after the full moon after the Vernal Equinox in the season that their infant son has died.

"I'm sorry." Cooper props on an elbow, looks his wife in the eye "I'm sorry."

Yvonne half smiles, shuts her eyes. She's crying and then she's not. "Us?"

Her breasts are swollen, leak a little still. The boy would make both hands into fists, shake them, make a sound that needed something on the gut level. Cooper has read the books. He's a smart man.

"We'll pull through. We'll make it."

"Pull through?"

"Yeah."

She lets his head fall. "Make it?"

The belfry clock chimes. The sound is cold steel, it penalizes him. The music, an error.

"We'll try again."

"Again?"



Michael Gills at the first inauguration of Bill Clinton, Washington, D.C., January 1993

Sonogram

Rosalie Sanara Petrouske

There in the dark blotch—holding ribs, lungs, heart—we see the throb of that organ beating so fast it will surely explode. Is she the size of a plum, an orange, a fist? Her image filling the screen is as large as a human hand spread wide.

There is an eye, the outline of a chin. She flutters, side-kicks and tumbles. A little naiad, life-giver to this lake, paddling through my abdomen and I cannot feel the motion, but I see her, a small swimmer caught in fickle currents.

I cup a hand over my stomach, guide my fingers across its contours. Soon this child will enter the undertow, treading water fearlessly as she swims toward the open sea. When she leaves the safe cove of my body, she will have to invent the strokes to reach the surface.

Threads

Rosalie Sanara Petrouske

The baby boy in the picture has a cowlick.
He is brown-eyed, my Aunt Eva's son.
On the back of the photograph my mother has written:

*Merritt James
1 year old
This is Eva and Bill's little boy.
This is Duane's little cousin. He was born
March 25, 1943, and Duane sure thinks the
world of him.*

My mother told me about Eva and Bill crossing Ludington Street, how the blue cuff of Merritt's Sunday suit unraveled, and the long navy thread left a trail from one side of the street to the other. Merritt was five then. This was before his mother received electric shock treatments, before her auburn hair was shorn like a sheep's. This was when he could still remember his mother.

I turn the picture over, study that child's face, struggle with the resemblance: the cowlick, those long-lashed dark eyes, and the nose, delicate for a boy's, upturned at the tip. I shiver at the clear innocence, the gleam of iris and precious smile bronzed in sepia like first shoes, and then it becomes clear—it is my daughter's face.

Departure

Kathryn Kulpa

A sailor tries to pick her up in the airport in Chicago. He winks at her with one Caribbean blue eye and she smiles but hurries on, following the sign with the arrow:

DEPARTURES. She never thought until much later of the improbability of that sailor in landlocked Illinois. Or did lakes count?

There are things to notice in the airport but the one she particularly notices is the bathroom, its vast and curiously inhuman design. The sinks have no knobs for the faucets. Step in front of them and water runs. Step away and it stops. She steps in front, away, in front again. She looks at herself in the mirror and what she sees is her sweater. A light blue v-necked man's sweater, long and loose and soft, with the sleeves pulled up into soft folds around her elbows. A costume. Marilyn Monroe as Lolita: *My heart belongs to Daddy*. A costume for the girl she has chosen to be this day, December twenty-first.

She is nineteen, going home for Christmas break. But the girl in O'Hare Airport might not be going home. She could be going to meet a lover. On her way to donate a kidney to a long-lost brother. She could be a criminal; a spy, heartless and tragic, selling microfilm to the highest bidder. A girl in disguise, running away from a murderer, or running away with a sailor she met in Chicago. A girl in a blue cotton sweater in the lobby of the O'Hare Airport, waiting for a flight that is two hours late.

J. D.

Kathryn Kulpa

A cigarette just hangs there.
His leather takes the sun.
He wears a red windbreaker;
He's crucified on a gun.

*And she saw him
As though her white dress was falling,
Crumbling away;
As though all she knew was falling
Down the white stairs of the church,
She saw him.
And in the night, lying
Between her and a man of stone
She saw him, saw him.*

The language of pain is verbless.
Eyes that are closed say NO.
The language of boys is an empty place,
a wildness that never lets go.

Southern Tradition

Daryl Rogers

In the photo
my grandmother
is sitting sidesaddle
on a brown and white pony.

My uncle brought it
from North Carolina
for his daughter's
birthday:

a typical sentimental gesture
from a drunk
to an abandoned child.

I don't know how my grandmother
got on the horse.
He might have picked her up
and put her there.

When he was a teenager
he would carry her into the yard
and lock her out of the house
if she scolded him.

She made excuses for him.
He was her favorite.
He didn't even come home
for her funeral.

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Memory

Mike James

it holds to earth

a breath
felt
in the small
of your back

such things

The Flower

Mike James

grows toward darkness
grows toward light

takes in one
world

and then
another

Genesis

Mike James

how light first
started—

what is left
of the
story that

began with rain

The Kidney-Shaped Pool

David Schuman

Remember that summer when I called you Miss Higgenbothum and you called me Randy?

Hanging out in your father's backyard, by the old kidney-shaped pool. It was a fifties kind of pool, and we wore our sunglasses even when it rained, and I'd pour you vodka over crushed ice and say, "My pleasure Miss Higgenbothum." I'd wear a Hawaiian shirt and you called me Randy, because you thought it sounded like the name of a cabaña boy. Your father had a small pool house; a damp shack that reeked of chlorine and mold. There was an inflatable dragon pool toy that you would lie on when we went there to fuck.

And we played this X album over and over, until your dad would come out of the house, red-faced and teary eyed, and say, "Can't a person mourn in peace?" And he'd sit with us and drink sometimes. You showed me a pictures of your mother at your age and said how you were afraid it might happen to you.

I thought you should get away, so we moved in together. It was July Fourth, and we were dragging our new thrift store sofa up the stairs to our place, a one-bedroom on Maple Street. You were happy because Maple Street sounded like such a fifties street to live on, in keeping with the theme we'd given that summer. But when we moved in there was no pool, only vodka. When I'd come home I'd say, "Hello, Miss Higgenbothum? Anybody here?" And you'd shout from the bedroom, "Fix yourself a drink and come join me." It was always dark in the room, and I'd need five minutes for my eyes to adjust enough to see your face. If your feet stuck out of the bottom of the blanket, you'd wiggle your toes so I knew to cover them. But you pulled them away if I tried to touch. You'd say how the phone rang all day, and how you wouldn't answer.

On hot weekends I'd want to go back to your dad's to sit by the pool again. I'd put on Bermuda shorts and an old straw hat with a frayed brim and say, "Shall we?" But you didn't want to look at your father anymore.

I finally went by there in late September, alone. Your father was out back smoking in a lounge chair. "How's our friend Miss Higgenbothum?" he asked, but I didn't say anything. He was looking at the dead leaves floating on the blue water.

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Archaic

Joyce Odam

The lovely lady in black chiffon has sent me a book of her poetry. Its pages are musty and damp from cellar and rhyme, and each time I open a pale brown page the words are entwined with death-smell and love—and I read slowly for the full effect of who she was.

Privacy

(for Stella)

Joyce Odam

You are widowed tonight. You have written the letters. It has been a good love. You are proud of your memories. You are calm. All morning you have woven the light to a clear window and have looked through it into a shared view; all afternoon you have been practical, keeping yourself whole and true.

You are widowed. Friends shy from this; you allow their distance. You mark the center of a circle with a line. It folds in half for you. Now you can weep or not—whichever you do. Widowed. The thought is not new; the thought is days old. You will honor the sea with the poetry of his life. He will praise back to you.

A Story Overheard

Joyce Odam

This cat was just smelling the roses, just like he knew what a rose was, there on a June morning, with all the traffic going by. This scrawny old alley cat was just pressing his nose into the bush like they were his springtime fantasy, and he was subdued with joy, and so engrossed with feline ecstasy, to at last discover roses.

Foreigner

Daryl Rogers

In the ruined, star-drowned landscape that was West Texas at night, while among friends, I ate enough Mescaline to kill a normal man.

A waitress inside a truckstop wanted to know if we could name the Texas state bird and was insulted when I suggested the Locust.

She called us yankees, (hey!) spun around and stomped away while the members of my party screamed and applauded until tears ran from their insane eyes.

Onion

David Schuman

The winter the baby was sick, we kept to ourselves. I worked late to make overtime, and Lily couldn't talk to anyone, except the baby. She talked to her nonstop, asking in a little voice, "What's happening baby? What's going on?" I'd come home from work and in the kitchen would be Jam, our dog, standing like a soldier before his gate, staring into the dim hallway; cut off as he was all that winter from the life of the house. As I watched Jam eat the dinner I prepared for him, I'd hear Lily talking in the bedroom. "What's wrong, little onion? What's the matter little onion?" Jam would whimper at the sound of her voice and bark when the baby cried and cried, so that I'd have to hush him. The baby barely ate, though we tried to make her meal times happy occasions. Lily held spoonfuls of mashed food to the child's tight little mouth and we sang to her like John and Yoko, "All we are saying is give peas a chance." The baby would look like she was trying to remember how to smile.

When the baby slept, we held somber conferences on the details of her illness: the pink medicine swirled in her vomit; the raspy, halting way she cried just before sleep; the weakness of her grasp on our fingers. We slept curled under four blankets, always cold that winter. Lily was covered in goose bumps. She would hold out her arms to me and say, "Feel," and I stroked them to get her warm.

The Lost Baby

Nathaniel Smith

It was a four-month baby. I never even saw its face close up, but I must have been on duty at the time it disappeared. At least, I was the first to notice, in the basement laundry room of our big complex, with friends and relatives chatting among piles of laundry or folding sheets on the scuffed white tables and complaining how many machines were always out of order. One moment the baby was on the floor—no one knew how it got put down like that—and the next moment it was gone. We all hunted around, opening up the big washers and driers that hummed around us and peering down a large drain in the floor, a hole without any grill, only a big plastic pipe with a right-angled elbow a couple of feet below the cement floor. But we found no trace of it at all and heard not so much as a whimper. Most of us thought a baby that age could never just crawl off on its own; others, though, said it was much older than it appeared and could easily have run off and become a vagabond. I'm the one who had to go outside and break the news to the mother among the people standing around in the garden. As you can imagine, I was upset and embarrassed at my role in the whole affair, but she seemed oddly unconcerned. "Well, those things happen," she said; "we all know that." Then she folded up all her clean clothes and went off to spend a few weeks at the beach with the washing machine repairman.

Sunday Morning

Nathaniel Smith

The grackles are preaching again this morning. Who among us, if clothed in black robes flashed with purple highlights, could resist the vocation of the pulpit? From their high minarets, "Look to the sky," they call, "Come to my church, brother," they cry, "Listen to me!" Harder than ever, they lean on their bell ropes, holier than the blue jays and the crimson-gowned cardinals, far holier than you and I.

Salvador's Ashes

Yvonne LinckOsborne

"Acts of injustice done
Between the setting and the rising sun
In history lie like bones, each one."
—W. H. AUDEN, *The Ascent of F 6*

I. Into the Fire

As we descend through the clouds
fires dot the rising landscape.
Smoke spirals up and smears the windows.
How this small country burns.
The cabdriver speaks no English
but knows the way through the
surreal night. There is no speed
limit where we have landed.
Small cookfires burn the black
out of the tropic night.
We feel we've been duped
and set down in a wrong world.
The air smells like burning dung.

II. A Land of Extremes

Handsome houses lie behind iron fencing.
Gleaming white cornices are decorated
with gargoyles who peer over the trees.
Protected in their grandeur
from people who scavenge for wood.
Eyes watch you in this world,
from a world apart. The bus labors
up the hill past children trudging
with faggots piled on their backs.
Shacks sit jumbled along the road.
The wash hangs off sagging lines
and any available space by the cookfires.
Dust billows up, blanketing the laundry.
The children's playthings are hidden.

III. A Sustainable Hope

We visit the experimental organic
coffee plantation, an anomaly where
chemical abuse has scorched the earth.
Shuffling their bare feet in shyness,
the young girls smile. They pick
coffee beans all day and are lucky.
We have banjo entertainers
and organic beans to take home.
Down the rutted lane, hovels butt
up against each other but on this
mountain, the people are happy.
The coffee is rich and bitter.

The Museum

Nathaniel Smith

Without a word, by a gesture that knows no foreign tongue, the guard tells me it is closing time. Unwilling to forgo a final gallery made expressly to my taste, I sign back to him, from my watch to the wall of Old Masters. Through them, I have visited Babylon, Rome, Versailles; their memories paper the walls of my life. The guard, unperturbed, continues his routine, starting to draw shut the padded curtains that keep evening from entering the palace. Does he realize who I am, how important it is that I receive more time than ordinary visitors? Suddenly my legs are tired. An upholstered bench stands nearby on the polished parquet; I sink into the soft dark leather. The gray uniform goes on checking windows, turning off lights, whistling tunelessly to himself. Then, "Good night, my friend," he says, rather familiarly, it seems to me, in perfect English, closing the door behind him. I hear the heavy bolt slide into position. His steps die away in the night.

Reading

Nathaniel Smith

It's my turn at the podium, and I gaze out over the audience, expecting blankness. But here is something I've never seen before: thoughts rising, like smoke, between me and the back wall. Some of them, left over from previous readers' light-hearted wit, spiral like hawks on a mountain thermal. These are white-tailed and light-winged, translucent, and on the whole do not prevent my own words from reaching the last row. Others, more rubbery and opaque, hang like balloons in corners where the air is still, while those that listeners just can't get out of their minds swell in white columns like a forest of symbols. The most troublesome, though, are the thoughts that no one has been able to speak: Their dark billows shroud the ceiling, creep back down the walls, and work their way over the two small windows, as if Christo had started wrapping our room from the top. I carry on with my appointed task, but the fumes make me reel, and the audience becomes restless, starts to cough, looks longingly toward the door. I shuffle my papers, searching for something more incisive, more from the heart, to clear the air and save the day.

Letter

Kimberly Tucker

When I was a kid, I used to sit under the pear tree, poking sticklets into cast-off fruit and watching the billboard man paste up the new picture, one square at a time.

One day I bought chipped old colorful plates from a flea market table... They were imperfect and silent and soon broken for I smashed them all to bits and put the different pieces into groups. If one had a yellow fleck, into the 'yellow' container it went. If a shard had greens in it, into the 'green bits' container it went, etcetera...I bought a tub of grout and started building mosaics on everything from remote control holders to plant pots. I learned from this that each broken piece was useful; no matter how small. And beautiful too.

I used to think I was a piece 'broken off of a person' and not really a whole person. For me, to be a 34-yr. old woman with autism is to see the world is fragmented: To see my face in pieces when I look in the mirror; to see if the part in my hair is straight but not to see myself as a whole. It's okay to see this way. This is my normal.

Asperger's Syndrome (the Autism I have) is sometimes referred to as high-functioning or mild autism. It certainly doesn't 'feel' mild at times! In fact it seems that my 'condition' is somewhat shrouded in mystery and the more highly able a person appears to be, the less the health professionals have to offer. Shedding light on a syndrome shrouded in mystery educates the reader and encourages her/him to understand the mechanisms of the condition and the impact it has on the person who has it. I wish to prompt the reader to look again at their own worldview and the way they conceptualize their surroundings.

Sometimes I am mute beyond my willful control. Writing keeps me from disappearing.

I sat under my pear tree, watching the man change the billboard picture with his long broom. It was fun to guess as each new square was pasted up over the old ad, what the new picture would be. Sometimes he'd leave it half completed and come back the next morning to finish the job. Then I'd have all night to wonder from the few squares what it would be in the end. Sometimes a toothy woman holding a toothbrush, sometimes a shining new car getting its gas from an attendant in mechanic's attire. It seemed I owned the billboard. It was a fixture in my yard; by the highway near the sandpit.

The grapevines wore wild sweet perfume. I liked to believe I owned that scent as well. The vines grew in a tangle which separated my hill of a front yard from the highway. One day I watched in horror as highway workers arrived in matching overalls and commenced to chop my vines. They tossed them in filthy

truck beds like so much sweet trash. Outraged, breathless, I ran into the kitchen (mindful of the sharp nail near the torn screen on the entry door that I was always catching my clothing on)

My mother was quite calm. "There's nothing we can do. You know eventually we'll have to move from here. They say they're tearing down this house to extend the highway or something."

But the grapevines had always stopped my rolling balls from wandering into the highway traffic. Who gave this order to chop them? Who had this right?

"We have to write letters!" I said to my mother. I was angry and near tears but still hopeful I could halt this injustice. "Who can we write to about this? What's out landlord's address? Or the place where the highway guys work?"

She laughed. How could she begin to know that the grapes' sweet perfume and the rotten pears for poking were a perfect bath for my senses? With the billboard for seeing; all my senses were at peace. She couldn't know how the blissful uniqueness of that brought me relaxation. "They're *smiling* as they cut them down, you know. I hope they get poison ivy." My anger was futile. I went outside and watched whistling men work.

I found church to be a beautiful place without too many stressors. My church was a structure of gorgeous, worn terra cotta brick. Like the stoic old school I so adored as a child, the church had radiators too. The pipes through which warm water flowed were my church's veins. The clunking of the radiators its heartbeat. My church was a living thing to me, rich with all the invisible stirrings of the people who attended services there long before me when the congregation was but a cozy handful. I'd been to the local library and repeatedly checked out the same book on my town's history. In the book I'd seen the black and white likenesses of the very people who'd laid the first cornerstone for my church's foundation posed, shovel in hand. This is what I imagined as I sat in the pew during services...the faces of those who started my town; the ones who worshiped in those very pews before me; filled with dreams and hopefulness and purpose.

My mother and I sat in the same side pew each Sunday; four rows from the back, with a solid white beam blocking my view of the Father so I'd never be disturbed by unexpected eye contact. Blessed routine: No surprises. Sit, stand, kneel. Do it again. When it came time to shake hands with my pew neighbors and declare, "Peace be with you," this was difficult. Hard to touch. Hard to *be* touched. Easy to say words I meant, hard to look into eyes and smile as I did so. I was on edge until the ritual passed. I endured it and was relieved and relaxed when it was over.

The clear windows that were lined horizontally under the colored ones were sometimes opened when weather was nice. If the sun was bright, dust motes swirled in sunbeams. I sat in my wooden pew, which shone despite its

The Ash Tree

for Mike Hannon

Tim Applegate

Then I saw the ash tree
in the middle of the fairway
and imagined Ireland, the fires
gone cold in the stoves

and the old poets bent over their notebooks
while steady rain dripped from the branches
and the river's ancient water
rushed over
its bed of white stones.

Would Seamus Heaney
lay up now, choose the safe approach
around the tree's wide shadow
even as we raise a pint

to every careless shot we ever
attempted, to every dollar
pissed away in a wind
that carried, too, the music of our joy?

Jean Genet Tim Applegate

At dawn a wheel of vultures
circles the sky above the pasture
where a cow has died. Rain's
dark ceremony, leaves streaked
on a windshield as I drive
into town. Endless stream of commuters
drinking coffee, heart attacks at fifty
now the sky opens and I think of Jean
Genet, his larcenous fingers
picking the mysteries of a lock
foggy docks of Marseilles.

* *

At dawn a wheel of vultures
circles the sky above the pasture
where the dead sing beneath the grass
and old bones turn white in the sun.
Once woke from a terrible dream
and thought of Jean Genet
to calm myself. Iambic
footsteps same alley words
sewn on a page.

* *

A drop of blood on a white
petal—that's the novels—
lost sailor
Junkies shiver in the rain
Sunday morning.

age. I watched the dust motes twirl in the light that beamed in over the lovely old radiator. Swirling, sparkling, floating, dancing, they sometimes landed on people!

I read from pamphlets the same words each week without much variation. Ah, blessed routine! No spontaneous speech required here! Men sang above me in seats I didn't see—in soprano voices, like ladies. A perfect mix of sights, sounds, and colors. When it was time to sing, I usually mouthed the words and pretended to sing, with no sound at all escaping me.

Light beams that made it through the colored glass windows illuminated the single strands of hair on the heads of the persons seated in front of me, making blonde hairs appear green or pink. I saw a perfect dust speck twirl perhaps not so aimlessly and lodge in strands of hair atop a singing man's balding head. I had to smile, filled with secret knowing. I too would bring home specks in my hair and in my clothes—holy dust motes!

Death Has No Place Anne Pierson Wiese

Perhaps the fact of death would seem less strange
if out my bedroom window and below
there were a family graveyard in the snow
where those like me who have gone before change
only by familiar yards the arrangement
of their sleep; if my own place I could know
below such white, specific, well-known snow,
perhaps my death would seem a mere exchange.

But here in the city death has no place—
like drifting smoke it's exiled to the air,
long aloft before it breaks into space,
tossed with rain and exhaust, thin as despair;
here, since death appears and leaves us no trace,
I'm afraid to go without knowing where.

On Viewing Van Gogh at the Met Richard Luftig

Nothing is straight
up or down. Books quiver

on a table of swirls,
this world where shoes

and chairs break out
at right angles. Even

a self-portrait curves
away, sloping, eroding

until all that is left
are eyes that look

so alone you could
confuse them for your own.

Above a sky, far away
stars, cold galaxies

for his only friends,
push along with the dip

and rush of a dying moon.
Tucked in a corner

his name—just the first
they will know who I am—
lost among tulips, hiding
between flower and sadness.

The Folks from Iowa Visit the Mall of America Richard Luftig

Old ladies with thick-skinned hands
sit on fresh-painted benches,
hold their wrists to clutch
handbags hard to their thighs
like virgins. Not a seed cap in sight

but old farmers, still breathing
in their fields yellow with July,
work to catch each other's eyes
still snatching glints of winter
wheat off carcasses of remembered

tractors. They shuffle soberly
behind their wives across acres
of tile and half-tons of skylight,
staring sly and wide-eyed
at Victoria's Secret. Now and then

they steady the hands of toddlers
who throw pennies into every pool
in sight; the ripple and splash
of wishes that hit then vanish
under the recalcitrant water.

Pigeons Anne Pierson Wiese

Shit like white chalk and applesauce,
they feed their young regurgitated stuff.
Pigeons' pink cartilage feet
are the only part to stay 3-D
when they get flattened in the street
while eating pizza crusts.

When it rains they sit in dismal rows
on window ledges—getting wet.
They can afford to ignore
you when you pound upon the glass;
pigeons know you will not touch them:
they are inviolate with disease.

I dream of ways to thwart pigeons,
but spikes, glue, fake owls askew on drainpipes—
none of these will do the trick.

Pigeons evolved by learning to live
on top of sharp objects
and knowing the difference
between plastic and flesh.
Plastic is good for all-weather nests;
flesh, you eat.

But see the winged carnivores take flight—
rise above the trees of Washington Square Park
in a dark arc

double into a fleeting carnival wheel of wings
that spins within the blue airy bowl
of evening light.

My mind finds the word: Art.
How it rises—unabashed—from messy life,
and we rise with it.

All Alone Out There

Anne Pierson Wiese

She is all alone out there, my parents think.
All alone in Southern California,
our daughter careening one hundred miles per hour
in her American death machine—a silver pickup truck
powered by luck and flammable gasoline.

I see palm trees. Aged dusty arcs of leaves
with owls nesting in their frosted trunks.
And me, happily afloat on Rose's lime juice,
pine gum, cocktail cherries—everyone sun drunk.

My parents think like automotive engineers
called in to hold disaster seminars:
hairpin turns in the mountains and drop-off
cliffs on the coast, carelessness in the driveway—
vehicular tragedy haunts them the most.

But man-made water works can fail, creating
panic and stampedes, or supermarket
foods be poisoned with disease. All alone
in Southern California it's a tie:
cult killers in the canyons or cancer from on high.

I consider the inconsistent Pacific,
the Santa Ana wind with fire on her breath,
the waves, the chimera scrawls in the sand,
the skin-thin sky, the mind's mazelike sealed breadth.

Every year—look ahead—there will be the fire,
the water, the earth, the urge toward sunset.
We are all alone out there.
Nothing has changed that yet.

Go Get

Travis Purser

He runs through the white and tan corridor, his Gorilla tennis shoes slap, slap,
slapping the polished tile. It's very clean here. Daddy's going to be down there.
He knows it. Going to go get his daddy with his mommy. Mommy drove him in
the fast car. Diesel froze in the Rabbit. This place got a lot of metal. Steam. Big
blue flame coming out back. Did he sleep here with that flame going like that?
Pack of coyotes on the way through the gate? Snow-studded tires making all
that noise on the asphalt? Big elk standing out there? Frost coming out his nose.
"This where your daddy works. Going to go get your daddy 'cause the diesel
froze in the Rabbit." He looks for the bad people—the ones with the bad names
that his daddy says he's not old enough to say yet. The big flame, blue and red,
way up in the sky. All those pipes froze. Brown hawk will not fly up there. He
knows to stay away from the fire.

Family Picture

Anne Starr

Staring at the camera,
He extends his arm over her lap,
Holding her down, trapping her,
Slumped, tired and thin against the sofa.
The three gifts from God kneel in front of them.
The oldest girl with her father's scowl.
The round and unhappy girl in the middle.
The youngest, an unsmiling boy.
The picture was framed and hung.
When the frame broke, no one fixed it.
It seemed right that way.

Mercy, Marina, Light

for Marina Tsvetayeva

Vincent Cioffi

Sailboats against the skyline, Marina,
and you are dead. The black water, Marina,
and sails against the inscrutable
buildings remind me.

The city is sleek in your absence
Marina, and I say it fills us.
You say, *In my kingdom there is the azure
fair summer and time.*

I believe you for a while
but 42nd Street abounds,
abounds and there is a woman with painted
hips in motion and a man with no legs
licking the air around her, creating
on the azure-less stone currents
his salivate sculpture.

And I reel because you are there,
Marina, in the night city, the midnight
street, the woman in motion and
the man building with his tongue
eternal sin and temporary salvation.

Say now Marina, *The draught blows
away my soul, eats me and abides.*

One woman Marina.
The man behind her calls,
as he bends her over the pine table
amidst the wreckage, whore. I call
mercy. I say light. I say

she hung herself from a locust beam
she could reach.

Pulling Ticks

Michael Clark

The hand wants a smooth, warm place:
behind the thick flaps of the black Lab's ears,
or the soft fur under her collar. There we'd find them—
some still flat chitinous tabs, anchored whole-head and resolute,
but some that had been feeding for days, clustered like grapes,
engorged and ready to drop into a patch of Queen Anne's Lace
somewhere and burst into a thousand ticklets.

Fingers evolved to dwell, pull, and worry,
so we'd pick the full ones like overripe tomatoes,
careful not to squeeze. Their tick skins had stretched,
the normal marbled brown fading to a uniform tan.
Head dwarfed to a pinpoint at one end, legs helpless.
If you could see a tick's eyes, I imagine at this stage
they'd be pinched shut—thinking, *grit your teeth,
contain a little while longer.*

But we'd harvest them before it came to all that, fill an ashtray
with them, smooth heavy buttons, some still attached
to gray mouthfuls of dogflesh, or wearing black Dali moustaches
of retriever coat. When we were done the dog would grin
a wet summer dog-smile, and romp off to the pasture to collect more.

Someone would produce matches then and we'd begin:
first, drop the ones that could still run to the patio, and one by one
set the match-heads on them. They would spread like hands,
nailed to the cement by sulfur and blue fire, legs spreading
then curling back as they burned. We saved the full ones for last,
sometimes they were so full we could hear them pop
when we boiled the blood inside them. They would deflate
into black splashes, sizzle out the matches, and we would
roll them underfoot until they were nothing, atoms scattered
beyond the possibility of this shape, beyond this tiny intrusion,
beyond the shell of our silly beautiful horror.

White Ground Road

for Raitis

Michael Clark

A dead black rat snake, slack like a downed power line,
strung along our four hands and hot and thick as tar,
I don't remember why we decided to move it—
maybe because it seemed so clean in its skin and freshly dead,
or because we would never hold a live one like this.
Its crushed-open mouth still wet with bright blood
hung by my left hand in a silent laugh.
We glanced at each other and tossed it into the honeysuckle,
and moved on, backpacks loaded with bricks,
a practice hike for summer's Boy Scout camp.

At the five-mile mark, a creek that elbowed under
a one-lane bridge along the crisp edge of a sod farm, we threw off
our packs, stripped, and waded in, the cool water rising around our waists.
The occasional passing farm truck was a heart-thump
over the bridge. Later we dressed and ate flattened
peanut butter sandwiches on two midstream rocks.
Mid-silence, a copperhead

uncoiled itself from the underbrush, leaping between our faces
in a burnished blur, splashed into the creek beyond.
We yelled back to the bridge, dancing stupid loose-limbed panic,
electric fear flashed between our eyes, breathless—
the air charged with the cool, dusty smell of ozone
from the summer storm gathering itself over the hills
like a dark skirt gathering over smooth thighs.

The Embrace

David Aivaz

With the first swipe
The grease stain on the stove
Darkens, deepens:
"Ripeness is all."
It opens itself
To the second swipe.

Foundation Settling

Michael Clark

Alone in my box of night, the uppermost room of a tall thin house:
the nocturnal engines and twittering night-birds have given up
their serenade. Somewhere below, through the still air
green with the phosphorescence of the clock-face, a woody snap
separates the quiet. If I had a dog, it would raise a sleepy ear.
Instead, I turn, lift my head from the pillow, watch the shadows.
Once my father told me such sounds were the house settling
into its foundation; now I wonder what pressures bear
down on the beams and joists below me, what change in the air,
what molecular shift might have triggered that sound. What absence,
what held breath, what tiny movement from warm sheets to cold—
what heavy quiet, what flutter of an eyelid, what contraction might force
a joint to click true, or make a bent nail break, or bow a heating duct
against the straight beam that has carried it silently all these years.

Work

Travis Purser

Things you're not supposed to think about at work: Silver-dollar nipples. Lovely,
cold, raisin nipples. A sensational black girl challenging sunburned tourists
down Main Street with feathers on her nipples. The compact, precise feeling of
a stainless-steel ball bearing in the palm of your hand. When I was in sixth
grade, I saw Susie Hodnie's breasts through the gymnasium barrier on a
marching band field trip. They were unreal, as unlikely as the death of my
grandfather. Something to question, to forget about, remember, then wonder if
you had only imagined—and easy to imagine. Not something to ask your
parents about. Hey, Dad, is Grandpa dead? Does Susie Hodnie really have
nipples like that? My father, the engineer. He's never revealed it, and I wouldn't
ask him, but I'll bet he hasn't always concentrated only on building things.

Mammoth Guest Book

Travis Purser

You probably knew we'd eat all your soup and drink up your tea, that we were sick when we left Los Angeles. That we'd be cured. All agree it's the toxins that don't exist here, and the stress, which takes a full 24 hours to realize. The first time I skied, I was ten years old in Denver where boys "choose" newcomers with southern accents. My father rented equipment—Exorbitant! Absurd!—then sent my sister and me to Keystone without money for tickets. I've lived in cities too long. Today, I saw a seagull at 10,000 feet blown back into its pine tree by a gust of ice crystals. I searched feet first an underwater cavern at Hot Creek and thought about the man who vanished in 1968. His boiled dog. A woman who died in Death Valley. But the mountains—Mt. Whitney, especially—the John Muir Trail, the satin mud and sulfur from pushed-together continents, the high, clear, wide Owen's Valley, the horizontal line where the snow begins, cottonwood trees, juniper, the steaming turquoise cauldrons, a fissure that leads to China. Man, oh, man. Now, while Trina and Philip walk, embracing, around this lake where her parents honeymooned, Kathleen emerges naked as an otter and says, "We'll all move to Ketchum!" Thank you, from each of us, for sharing your home.

Miles to Go

Michael L. Johnson

Though the old sleep
shallow and less,
at least they take
more of what's left
while wide awake
ere they're bereft
of all but rest
too long and deep.

Task

David Aivaz

No phone,
But old phone books
To pile on the hardwood chair.
A finger in the rag
(Else what's a ceiling for)
Flicks at the stain.

It's toting them back
I seem linked with vanity.
People I once called by name
And thought I knew: what
Have the reached for? How
Are they reached? Not then,
Not now.

A phone book is the weight
Of all its names, unlisted.

The Bad Seed

David Aivaz

The social worker phoned from Florida,
A young and lilting voice:
Could I come down to see my dad?
(No, I couldn't, I'm in poor shape too.)
He's not dying, it's just that (reluctantly,
The clincher) when she asked about his son
He said, "I have no son."
I think my laughter startled her.
There he was, midst the props of age,
A warm young thing attending: still a flirt
At eighty. I was glad to learn
He was OK.

Restless Verbs Make His Heart Beat Faster Than It Should Russell Thorburn

He knows words are refugees,
that he must craft them
into phrases as beautiful
as wild-eyed flowers
in the ravine, the field
where he steps gingerly
over the steaming traces
of last night's rain.

A Distant View, a Movement, a Flower

Russell Thorburn

It is strange how things
leave us breathless,
without a common language

to say this hand reaching for yours
is from my own fountain.
The music we want is each other,

and every time we talk we find a distance
between the words, the landscapes
won't shatter, the hours leave us
quivering cages we call ourselves,

and you say don't forget me,
don't deny me love.

A Place Erased

Yvonne LinckOsborne

The detour signs led us away
from the road we knew.
Within a mile the car was silent
The two-lane road narrowed and pot
hole increased with the rotting
berm which fell off
into discarded tires.
Shacks
and crooked trailers
dotted the road. We'd crossed
a border that was only penciled in.
People sat on dusty porches

barely off the road. Our children
in the back
were suddenly paying attention.
The road curved through hills
along ditches brimming over
with cans, bottles, and broken glass
Dust that hung in the air
blew through the windows.
Our detour through this erased land
made our children put down
their games
and ask questions we couldn't answer.

The Insect Life

Russell Thorburn

His anger growing about his brother-in-law
and his fucking mouth in the asbestos factory,
the wealth of insulation inhaled by the lungs,
uncontrollable coughs afterward,
his head between his knees, this dangerous brother
who sees himself as a bodiless creature,
with ravings about the universe and the clock
clawing at the air above his head
as if the hours couldn't breathe
and time wouldn't budge noonward, this
clerk, his wingspan spreading ten feet,
shouts at the auditor who invades
his office to inspect one Franz Kafka,
to pin this insect of a man onto a board.

Jerome's in a Cell Lit By a Hundred Candles

Russell Thorburn

each flame with its eye upon him
as he wonders in Greek about Latin
and how to fit so many healings
in the life of Jesus
as if they belong to a part of him
he cannot say to anyone but women,
whose presence raises
at the back of his neck
their astounding beauty
as bare feet slide across stone to rescue him.

Incongruity

Carole Waterhouse

It was the summer that the bald man refused to wave to her. The same summer that the lines of the painting Tess was working on wouldn't come together. Incongruity. That was the name she had come up with before starting. The lines were supposed to look wrong, but in a way that somehow looked right.

They had rented a summer cottage in the country at Tess's insistence. It provided her with half the calmness she longed for. The rear of the run-down house ("cottage" in realtors' terms) offered a scene that looked like a pastoral painting, complete with real sheep perfectly balanced across a hillside. The front faced a noisy three-lane highway.

Her boyfriend, Doug, had been skeptical from the start, saying he didn't see why she needed to immerse herself in all this green when her paintings weren't about nature anyway. Later, when words were no longer chosen so carefully, he called them pictures about nothing.

Facing the side of the house, in between sheep and the highway, there was another hillside, where Tess would sometimes see a man standing. He was tall and broad-shouldered and his head, which was complete bald, ended in a series of thick ripples at the back of his neck. She couldn't actually see the ripples—he was too far away—but she knew, somehow, that they were there. His expression, too, was something she had to guess. She always assumed it was harsh except on sunny days, when the skin of his head would shimmer softly in the light.

Whenever she saw him, Tess would wave, a large, exaggerated motion that she would never think to use anywhere but in the country. She even whistled once, wanting to make sure he noticed her—Doug said she had a whistle shrill enough to knock the ears off a dog—but the man never waved back.

As summer progressed and the lines of Incongruity still refused to come together, subtle changes began to occur. Doug started spending less time around the house, said he was taking long walks, though he never left on foot, always in the truck. Then the dog came, a massive beast that took up half the truck cab, looked like an old woman with a bad perm from the back. It moved into the house, sat with them when they ate at the kitchen table. Doug called it his true companion.

Still, she was surprised when he told her he was leaving, that he wanted to start a new life. One with the dog. He didn't actually say that last part, but Tess understood. The dog was right there, sitting on the seat beside him as the pickup rumbled down the driveway for the last time.

*Three pike are cooking over chunks
of maple and ash, kindled by slivers
of pine and birch. There are loaves
of black bread and there is strong tea.
The fish smell so much like wood
you can taste sap in their flesh,
leaves In the after-taste. Your third son has
the web of his right hand between
the teeth of a woman who does not
love him. She bears down and
your granddaughter is born, her father's
blood in her mother's mouth.*

It has been winter all year.
You are by the river fishing
for your people and you are weak,
so you tie the three lines round
your wrist remembering the horses
you let drink from your hands
the morning you killed them
in the field.

You are on your back
so close to the water the world is fully
that black reflection pierced
by the three lines you have cast through it.
With fever in your hands and with
God in your eyes you see that evil is
the stigmata on the body of the world.

*Imagine a kingdom fraught
with the absence of love.
There's a woman born of a man whose
hand bled in her mother's mouth.
There's a noose and a beam
of black locust. She is
swinging in the breeze, swaying.
The beam creaks, locust blossoms are
falling through space around her.*

Imagine cutting her down.

The Village Priest and His Fever

Vincent Cioffi

Birth's a falling into blood
—Marina Tsvetayeva

If you are a village priest
in central Russia in the 1850's,
you plow your own land, thresh
your own grain, and minister
to the spirit as best you can.

This is you plowing the land:
a horse you first saw standing
in a field with mist in a far
corner and a horse you first saw
drinking are yoked to a plow. The earth
is in your eyes, dust rising
from the eight hooves, the black
reins wrapped round your wrists
penitentially. You are
washing the land with toil.

Your wife is giving birth
to your third son. The peasant's
lantern, a spear of birch soaked
in oil and flaming, smokes
and glows. You place the web
of your right hand between Ekaterina's
teeth and she bears down and your son
is born; your blood in his mother's mouth.

This is you the year it was a world
without end. Snow in June.
Snow in August. No crop. No food.
Each morning you walk, weak from hunger,
to the river and drop your line.
There's a fever in you and you hold
this fever in your hands as you fish
and have visions on the river bank.

Standing there on the front porch, Tess watched as Doug waved at her through the rear window, just over the dog's head. She raised her own hand and waved back. It wasn't much, she thought, but maybe a small sign of hope.

Then she realized she was wrong. What she had thought was Doug's hand wasn't. It was just the dog's tail, wapping back and forth against the rear window.

As Tess lowered her arm from the goodbye that had never really been, she noticed another motion out of the corner of her eye. It was the man on the hillside, waving back for the first time, a large sweeping motion that made use of his whole arm. He rocked it back and forth over his head like a stranded person signaling a plane.

Tess turned, surprised, offered a generous wave of her own, trying to mimic his gesture. The man waved and waved back, the arm flailing over his head, as if trying to make up for a whole summer of nothing. And Tess returned it, stretching her arm out as though she could reach across the hillside and touch the man, maybe even rub her fingers across the warmth of the smooth, glistening head.

After a while, she lowered her hand, wondering if she was wrong again. The whole thing was going on too long. She remembered that the man was completely bald, that from this distance she couldn't even be sure which side she was waving at.

The arm motion could be something else—a new trend, maybe—outdoor calisthenics. Or there could be another person on another hillside, invisible from Tess's angle, an accomplice he was sending secret signals. Then again, maybe he was just shoeing flies.

She looked back at the driveway, but the truck with Doug and the dog were already gone. Even the dust they must have raised had settled again. She looked down the road in both directions for a sign, anything—a dark shadow in the light, a weed turned in the wind—any change that might suggest even the slightest hint of which way they had gone.

The Big Shining Sea

Yvonne LinckOsborne

The lake is never the same.
Toda it is a slate of weeping eyes.
A breeze skims the surface,
stirs up half-moon ripples
that bump and converge.

Waves mirror the bottom
in ridges of sand semantic of time.
Each ebb pulls the sand from beneath
my feet and I sway with the power
of this lake with the reach of an ocean.

Freighters crawl along the horizon heading
for Thunder Bay with time to get back around
before November. The mistake of many
is to straddle the trough in November.
Over a mile deep, this lake keeps her dead.

Numb, I walk to shore. These waters never warm
except in the hot spring coves or closer
to the power plant. Yesterday the lake
was beveled glass. Tomorrow waves will pummel
the shore and we'll need jackets to walk
the beach of our shining big sea water.

All That Is White

Gayle Elen Harvey

Too weak to paw through dim stitches of
ice, winter-starved deer are crossing the shallows—
For now, it is almost enough, austere, steeped in the forest's
slow motion,
their silence telling you they need to be what they are—
pulled into landscapes you may never understand
with only shadows left behind, without scent,
reddening.

A Malignancy

Michael L. Johnson

Like the Minotaur in his Labyrinth
of nightmare myth,
like the poetry of Sylvia Plath,
like a lamprey-mouthed wraith,
like Jason with his deadpan mask
in *Friday the 13th*,
like the black monolith
in *2001*, this growth,
like my obdurate faith,
keeps coming back.

People are muttering outside my apartment. Open the door. A large fat man with a heavy tread is pacing the aluminum-colored hallway. Keys jangle. What are you doing here? I ask him. He scowls at me and turns his back. When I shut the door, he begins pacing the hallway again. When I open the door, there are more people in the hallway, all with large rings of keys attached to thick black belts.

If you have so many keys, I say to them, why can't you just let yourselves in somewhere and stop this horrible pacing? They stare at me and begin to whisper among themselves. I shut the door.

My daughter is watching a daytime talk show. She shrugs. Somebody ran away, she says. She points to the television host with the tan, seamed face and bright teeth. They're talking about it right now.

But I didn't hear anybody running.

My room gets lots of sun. I've moved the couch and the dining chairs to a corner of the room to protect the television set. It is quite comfortable here. There is the park, far far below. It is beautiful outside today and the grass is as bright as a flag. Today is the kind of day that people meet lovers in the park. From my window I can see them embracing.

A man stops me in the hallway. I'm sorry, you can't go out today.

I really must go out, though, I tell him. I have someone to meet in the park.

His hand closes around my arm like metal. He winks at me. There's a special show on tv today, just for you, he says. He forces me back into the apartment.

You are an awful man, I say. But there's nothing I can do.

A small child keeps bothering me. Her eyes are green and squinty and her fingers scratchy, like little twigs. She pats at my face and arms until I swat her away. Bug off! Who does she think she is anyhow, acting as if she owns me. I am your daughter, she says. Your child! she shouts right at a large woman sitting in a chair. She stamps her feet. Microscopic balls of spit sail through the air, land on woman's face. Child is ripping up bits of paper, throwing them in the air. Her mouth opens and closes and angry noises come out. Woman changes the channel on the television set. A fine man talking, with bright teeth, a stiff, thick head of hair, black robe. He bangs on the table with something wooden. Why is he hitting the table with that hammer? It's a gavel! child says. Child sits down, lays her head on woman's lap, says, We can cut your hair if you like. Her hair is soft. A fine man on the television set. That's better.

The Cosmology of Madness

Albert Huffstickler

There are black holes in the cosmos of the psyche where lonely men in Salvation Army castoffs stand forever on the corners of unknown cities. Their feet are frozen but their hands can move and they count their change eternally and are always a nickel short of a cup of coffee and they are always down to their last cigarette and their stomachs are growling. And this is the good part. Because when they close their eyes, a whole new world of horror opens and their bodies tremble like piano wires as their mouths gape and their jaws clench in horror and they are riveted to this place and cannot open their eyes to shut it out. And this is the good part. Because all through the time when they are trying to come to grips with the horror of their lives, a cold, distant voice is saying, "Pull yourself together. Concentrate. Stop acting that way. *Do* something about yourself. Stop that moaning." So they stand there, heads bowed while judgment is passed on them because everyone knows that this is a Christian nation and it was not Christ's intention to have the likes of these in the same company as decent people. No, these people just need to stop being so self-indulgent, they still have a chance to make something of themselves. And this is the good part because, underneath this is a bottomless pit where there is nothing at all and you are falling through that nothing endlessly and you are crying out but no one hears your cry because no one is there, Christ has never entered this place, though Mary sometimes reaches out and you can feel, just for a moment the touch of her hand, the rustle of her blue gown against your cheek and then that too is gone and you are still falling.

There are black holes in the cosmos of the psyche
and few who enter them ever return and the few
who return are changed.
They hide their eyes from men—not from shame but
from compassion because where they have been
is in their eyes and what they have seen is there
and to look deep into their eyes is to go where
they have been, to see what they have seen
and to look too deep too long is to never return.
Quack's
Jan. 26, 1999

Dark Matter

Gayle Elen Harvey

(for Jonathon)

Suddenly, everything's changed.
The wind's no longer subject to plain speech.
It's louder than the sound of every forest
it has lived in—

Too late for the rough blade.
Someone has just turned a corner.
Mirrors float empty
and raw. They will keep no vigil,
not even for the sweltering angel of death
with its urge to harvest—

Green horizon for the thirsty.
Light, softly, the dark lung. Summer persists
of its own free will.
There is no way out. Like the blunt edges
of grass, it is everywhere—

What difference does it make if the sky eats
the last slice of moon?
Nothing, now, is occasional—
How will you miss us before
you are gone?

My daughter holds my hand in the elevator. I remembered her name today
so we get to go outside for a walk. The lobby is dark and solemn with an ashy
smell. We step into blinding light and a strong breeze. Hold my hand, I say to
my daughter. She must keep me from getting lost; this is why I pay her such a
generous allowance. My daughter pulls me into the park. She drops my hand
and runs toward the orange and blue slides and soon I don't know which of the
children is her.

People are gathered around the fountain, sitting on the benches or
standing. A woman wearing blue bedroom slippers stands completely still with
her arms stretched toward the fountain. She does not blink. Another woman
slaps herself repeatedly. These people should be home taking naps; how can
anyone allow them out of the house?

I circle the fountain cautiously. It smells like old urine here, when I walk
closer to the benches. Too bright. A man in a wheelchair is sunbathing, with his
large head turned straight into the sun. He looks relaxed, as though he were
sitting in a large, warm tub. I sit near him, on a green bench. His hands look
very sure of themselves, gripping the tub. His legs are covered with a blanket. I
cannot tell if he is handsome or not, his fleshy face is so smoothed by the sun.

Hello, Helen, he says, winking at me.

Hello, yourself, I say, I don't believe I know you.

But you look very familiar to me, he says. We must have met before, I just
can't think of the place offhand.

My heart begins to pound. It can't be and yet I can't help asking, Do you
think you might be my husband?

Oh, you poor thing, he says and his head draws back. He wheels away. I
watch this man wheel around the fountain, moving by pressing a small button.
He rolls up beside me.

Actually, Helen, I think I am your husband, he says.

I feel a pinch on my thigh and a skinny child says to me, Mom, it's time to
go home.

Please stop pinching my leg, I tell her.

This is ridiculous, says the man who says he is my husband. Jets of steam
flare out behind him as he rolls away.

Wait! I cry, Let's have dinner! But his chair moves so fast, he's already out
of sight. The skinny little girl pinches me again, hard, on the inside of my thigh.
This is why I never take you out, she says.

That man was not your husband, says my daughter, slapping at me with
powder and perfume.

How do you know? I say.

How do you know? she says, you can't even remember your name, you
don't even know how old you are! She runs off and slams the door.

Memory isn't everything! I yell after her. Even though I am handicapped, I am
still capable of feeling. There is a barrette on my sweater shaped like a horse.

Divorce Court

Rosaleen Bertolino

My daughter breathes heavily into my neck. We're watching television—Divorce Court. Gary is suing Gail for divorce on the grounds of mental cruelty, throwing a stapler at him, and cutting off the buttons on all his shirts. He wants full custody of their seven year old son. Gail is countersuing Gary: mental cruelty, physical abuse. He claimed to be writing a historical novel but sat locked in his study all day reading cheap dime store mysteries.

We watch the commercials as avidly as we watch the shows. Sometimes they're better than the shows. A small boy with a sweet turnip face runs in slow motion. A small dog trembles. They hurtle into one another's arms. This is not a commercial for hamburgers. My daughter and I weep softly. We're waiting for someone special to come into our lives. My daughter has it all figured out. Game show hosts have a lot of money. This one seems nice, she says, pointing to a man spinning a wheel. We don't need any more money, I tell her, we need a cure. You can always use more money, she says.

I can never remember what time it is. I know food is in the fridge. That my hair will grow. That I will look down on the tiny park. I would like to walk through the hedges there someday, stand by the fountain. I met a man there once. He was tall and strong. We walked together in the park, our warm fingers laced, our shoes tapping the pavement. We kissed, we screwed like rabbits, we got married.

Sometimes I watch the food in the little refrigerator. I turn off the lights, pull up a chair, open the door. The food inside so brightly lit and so immobile. I'm sure that something happened to me around or inside a refrigerator once. I can see olives, just like these green ovals and a cold pink piece of meat.

I'm thinking about getting my hair cut but my daughter refuses to make an appointment. She likes my hair long, she says, as her small hands pat my hair, tug the brush through the tangled ends. My hair grows longer and longer, past my waist. My husband caught the virus first; one day he disappeared. My daughter says her memory is very clear. He was tall, she says, almost as tall as you, with short hair and rough skin on his face. She takes my hand. His name was Gary, she says, he read mystery novels. Oh Gary, that's not right! I say. Well, what is it then? shouts my daughter. I can't remember. Spot? Happy? Blue? Gary, Gary, Gary! screams my daughter, stomping her feet. Those are cat and dog names, the dog was named Blue. A blue dog.

The virus is progressive, cyclical. I never know when it's going to strike, when I'm going to forget. Some days are better than others. I prefer to remain in here: My daughter is brought for visits, groceries are delivered. From my window I can see a small geometric park. All around it are tall buildings, which make it seem like a toy.

Ivan Dreams of Painting a Pig

Russ Thorburn

Tuberculosis had a way of shoving reality off the table, a way of making life multidimensional. Such were Ivan's thoughts on the night he died.

He'd been having a bath, the interns scrubbing him until he bled. "I need to see Leo Kumanchin," Ivan said.

"You want to see the janitor? Not the doctor?" the intern said, his voice crackling like gunfire on a snowy night.

The other intern, a large man with sad Chekovian eyes, didn't say anything at all. He was scrubbing Ivan's back as though he meant to scour through clean to the other side. He could have been painting a canvas on skin—a tortured Picasso—the way he worked that hellish sponge.

Ivan heard the intern curse as he fell into his arms. "Lean forward, dammit," he said. "I don't want to go home crawling with bugs."

Ivan tried to answer—tried to curse him back—but all the interns heard was a rattle. He was having one of his bad nights; a night on which he didn't know if he would see the dawn. Who would care if he died anyway stashed as he was in this Siberian sanatorium?

Leo might care. Leo understood about sorrow and he always listened when Ivan told him of his dreams.

They slid him into the cold porcelain pit like raw meat. They poured burning water over his back, laughed when he caterwauled. "You want to murder me," Ivan said. The intern holding the sponge replied, "Let Leo, the famous pastry chef, save you, if he has the balls." His flesh stung from the hot water. "You're trying to burn up all the good in men," he said. They held his head underwater while they raised his ass and scoured it with wire brushes.

He dreamt of chasing a pig through the showers that night. The pig had been scrubbed by the other two pigs who worked on him. He ran after the boiled pig with a paint brush in his hand. They had told him, "Go paint a masterpiece." Through the burning steam he thought he saw his friend Leo beckon to him. When the dream was over, Ivan stared up at the ceiling, unsure if he was alive or dead.

He knew Leo would ask him about his dream.

"You painted a pig?"

"I might paint a series of animals," Ivan would reply, blinking at the bearded mongrel face of his friend, whose own dreams were equally bizarre. Leo dreamt of running too. Only it wasn't a pig he was chasing in his dream—it was his son in Wisconsin. Leo pursued his son through the snowy streets, watching him dart in and out of the traffic.

In his dream his son stripped off his clothes. He shouted out to his father he would first let a dog love him than his old man. But Leo never have up, and howled through the snow, collecting his son's clothes.

Ivan watched the ceiling closely. He saw figures of the Last Supper emerge one by one—Judas leaking dark olive eyes—as if they knew something was happening to him. Through the water damage he imagined he saw Leo with them. Ivan shoved his hand to his mouth.

He heard Leo's voice in his ear. "If you die we won't be able to talk about your dreams."

Ivan shook his head, knowing the interns would return in the morning to scub over his wounds, the penitence effect revealing the painting they had bled from his flesh.

"Dream for me," was his reply.

His feet were twisted into a suicide knot by the sheet. His face in fragments nobody would read. He imagined Leo mopping the floor where his excrement fell.

Once Leo told him, "The last moments of one's life become art."

Leo would look down at the fluids that swirled in the string of the mop. He knew Ivan's life had been a mess, but he would mop up the shit and urine, wring it out of the bucket, and smoke a cigarette before saying goodbye—his face rubbed raw from grief.

Misinterpretations of Salt

Gayle Elen Harvey

Small craft ought to be warned.
A heavy light is broadcast like the wet shine
of marigolds—
Someone begins dreaming of salt, white like skeletons,
the rib cage of a deer.

Tabernacle doors swing open—

With slowness and waiting, salt begins to fade
through the humid woods.
You steady yourself beside bonfires of green light
which are never exact.

Her last, small bracelet of salt—
its ruthless beginnings lost among waves, fingertips, reefs
of dismay.

Hot, stinging, neat as a toy, as a fireboat surging toward crimsons
upriver—salt sleeping off reason,
lying in wait among the dark
singing stones.

The Man Who Ate 10-Dollar Bills

Gayle Elen Harvey

(after a news item)

Compelled for a held breath, commotion,
that sliver of green—
Then another. Persistent.
Jaws clenched to resist repetition. Unable.
Tongue leaping from
emptiness, begging tomorrow's green marrow,
despite the expense,
the unstable— What great weight
of error that turns him sleepwalker, awakened
with the harsh news, he's rumor.
Devalued. Then another.
He calls out. Unable to resist
repetition— another—
He's no one.

"Red Boats"

Gayle Elen Harvey

(Nicolas de Stael)

Rivers are burning like fever
Weighted and bare, even the moon's turned
prodigal—
Clouds cut back the sky.
Two boats, the color of blood, are moving toward sleep
as if it were martyrdom, one more season without
tree-line, the cold light
of passion.

Troubled by its depths, he must leave his family behind—
It might take years, the final reds too sharp
against water.
How many more edges are there
to be broken—

Back to School

Elizabeth Kerkilowske

The battered peaches
of summer fermenting in
a wire basket

American Pie

Elizabeth Kerkilowske

Cooking creates order from chaos.
Just picked vegetables bombard the kitchen, a typhoon
of cukes enough to feed the country of Kate Moss
for years. What is the definition of buffoon?
A man who plants a dozen eggplant plants. Bizarre
Moroccan recipes proliferate. Cumin-thick rivers
of chutney trudge toward the basement in jelly jars.
Another kettle of pasta sauce. Tomato aspic quivers
in the Frigidaire and we're done playing catch up. A dry
week has slowed the ripening. The fertile garden trickster
whose every plant put forth big fruit relaxes with a sigh.
The harvest has moved east toward Cassopolis and Inkster.
Time for Coyote to back me up against the half-full sink
and see if we can make the eyes of the potatoes blink.

Chores

Elizabeth Kerkilowske

The cold of a summer morning surprises me
like how glass feels when you don't expect to touch it

My hand and my sister's hand are on the door
Condensation drips down as the sun comes up

Dew soaks the grass and each foot step
echoes dark green as we walk toward the meadow

I hear the metal bucket clank into her leg
and scrape the high whistling grass
buckets way too big for fetching wild strawberries
but just the size of our expectations

Unfenced and wild the meadow blooms ungainly
stalks, tipsy with bright hats of beauty Bees

The bruises on our knees We kneel and spread
our hand-made skirts that are printed with thistles

The grass tickles and water stains our legs
Our fingers find the tiny perfect berries
The stain on my sister's lips tattles on her
a teacup full of hours measured in berries

Later we have muffins but her belly aches
I hide hers in the pocket of my thistle skirt

I Walked Slowly

John McKernan

Toward
The logic book

As if it were
Marilyn Monroe
Asleep on my couch

Shedding silently
The brain's tattoo
Of last night's
Tango & smoke & orange vodka

I watched those breasts slowly
Rise and sink under blue silk
And remembered clearly her words
"I hated the Kennedy brothers
Both of them Rich spoiled wuss"

Lies to Whisper to Death

John McKernan

"I love
Only you"

"I love the silences lying
On your tongue as much
As your speeches"

"When I lie in your arms
I want time to stand still
To last forever Like a baby
Nursing on sweet thick milk"

"I've heard all the stories about you
The other men The other women even
But I refuse to believe them I know
Some people's pain leads to hate
Even a sundial knife covered with snow"

In the Irish West

Gerri Rosenzweig

I.

The marketplace stinks of blood, piss-soaked straw,
shouts of men in the alleys,
chink of slippery chains,

smoky music fills the pubs each side of the street,
dark moves in like a shy woman mowing the fields.
Light wind, a haze around street lamps.

II.

The cow has the sad eyes of a goddess,
her udder sways like a pale blue bag,
her hooves are caked with shit.

She moves in the mournful sack of her flesh,
an iron bell hangs from her neck.
Hay and the red barn are far away.

III.

Froth of grass around her beak,
the goldfinch flies into the woods
like a bright

thread someone pulls
through a tapestry of leaves
in a small town.

Fog and Milkweed

Gerri Rosenzweig

Back from the woods as if
nothing had happened this summer night, as if she

hadn't flashed her chestnut rump in mossy places, lowered
her long lip to streams

with the rest in fog and milkweed.
In the half light she slips into the snug

of my bed as if she belongs here, spice
of grass on her breath,

hooves and mane tossed in the closet, and her mind,
jittery all night with distance,

cool now as the milky icon of the moon
floating past my leafy bedpost.

The Cool Mud of Dawn Geri Rosenzweig

The bad side of me is out
on parole, skulking
on stone steps, kissing

the furred throat of belief.
Curses I bruised the sky with
sleep in the cool

mud of dawn.
I tremble at the soft bite
of clouds, the thought

of evening arriving
like a woman re-arranging
her purple shawl,

but the dog
is my shepherd,
I shall not stumble

on the slag heap
of words, he leads me
through wet grass

past shuttered windows,
he opens the silk
confessional of his ear

in the shadow of birches,
across wide fields I follow
the dark snout of forgiveness.

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The Fullness of Zero Geri Rosenzweig

Cupboards dream of blue dishes.
A drawer keeps the ghost of a spoon.

Her fridge is stacked with white silence
and the stove holds a small pan.

Ivy curling around the window
casts an underwater light at one

in the afternoon while her sink,
in the heat of August

ponders an absence of water.
We lift the knickknacks of her

life from shelved nooks as the fan
above the stove stays quiet

in its plastic hood, the clock,
bereft of hands, looks on.

Sit down at the red formica table
in the center of her kitchen.

Live for a moment
in the fullness of zero.

Grateful for the Bullfinch Geri Rosenzweig

My old mother lived to ninety three.
Her mother too.
I love the trees in winter.
Some days I miss my husband.
He had a quiet way about him.
Never bothered anyone.

Clear days I stand at the door
counting blue hills,
they shift and blur.
Birds I've fed for years
crowd my hands.
They take me

For one of their own.
Whirr of their wings
in the winter light
brings back childhood.
Last night, before I turned
on the lamps,

I saw my husband
bring firewood
in by the back door;
he had a way
of building up the kindling,
like beehive in the grate.

The mirror is crooked.
I straightened it out yesterday.
Most of the time
I know what day it is.
I'm grateful for the bullfinch,
his colors dulled by winter.

The Ski Mask Geri Rosenzweig

Look how this mask suits me,
black as the smallest hour.
I was meant
for border crossings,
midnight departures under
a thin moon.

I keep my distance,
flickering like a flashlight
at the margins,
I'm the one
who calls out from
the cocoon of autumn's sleep.

Come, the snow goose
throws down the rough
skein of her cry,
leave the children,
the spilled wine
can take of itself,

weeds are beautiful
in the shaking
stalks of their names,
coded shadows
witch bright
in the sleeve of night.

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Her Trailer by the Hudson

Geri Rosenzweig

The icon of her head
holds fast in the frame of evening.
Lamps glow in her trailer by the Hudson.
She flicks on the TV.
Somewhere out of sight
her bed, its striped woolen blanket.
Downhill, in trees by the river,
a few tree frogs hang on.
The horned owl booms her appetite.
Salt sweeps into the river.
I gather up my collar.
Cloaked in forgetfulness
black seeds of wildflowers
enter a cloister of wind.
I creep to the window to find
tomorrow's inventory
waiting on a dark table;
cereal bowl, spoon,
speckled juice, paper napkin.

Cold stars, frost in the distance.

Dreamflowers Henry Berne

Sowing the night
has brought porcelain lilies
hard white trumpets
of disdainful sound
and funereal aroma
rising from a garden
fleshless fingers reaching

Children Again Sherry Calkins

She hears the thump-thump of tires
as they pass dark Indiana farms,

her husband dimly seen in dashboard
light. Beyond him, flickering stars

rise above the wheat fields,
whole constellations of fireflies.

The car slows to a gravel
stop, and they run, giddy,

into the cosmos with a Mason
jar, holes in the lid.

Images Henry Berne

A quiet stretch of creek
runs through open space.
Trees stand,
repeating themselves
on the polished surface.

On childhood feet
I cross
a small, arched
stone bridge
from a storybook.

A trail leads through trees
that beckon, birds that speak.
In the distance a modern king's
counting house thrusts its crown
into the sky above the city.

This Is How You Dance A Tango Trissy McGhee

When she met us at the airport, Damaris was thin and shaking. It had been a year since we had seen each other. *I need a cigarette*, she said, but I wouldn't let go of her, just breathed in her hair, felt her hipbone against mine.

The bus ride in to the city was two hours. Argentina in winter, cloudy July. Anne and I had traveled fifteen hours by plane and were swooning with fatigue. We smelled of travel: too much perfume spritzed on in the duty free shop over our own sweat, the smell of bad food in our skin, the free wine we drank all night on our breath.

When we got to Damaris' place we couldn't even sit down for fear of staying. *Sleep later*, Anne said, *sleep later*, and pinched my elbow. We walked the empty Sunday streets, loose concrete tiles clanking underneath our feet. So much to say to each other that our tongues were thick and instead we smiled, touched each other and just looked up.

Damaris led us to a restaurant where we ate oily gnocchi and drank red wine. The swishy waiter called us *chicas* and had to kick us out so they could close before the late supper shift. We wandered out of the restaurant, dizzy. I felt the soft haze of wine fall over me. We walked hand in hand, three across, feeling each other's heartbeats. Sunday was the day of the open market in San Telmo square. We walked through booth after booth of antiques. Old paintings, glass bead necklaces. A few booths full of colored glass spritzer bottles in greens and blues. There was a strain of music overhead. *Let's go check out the tango*, someone said.

A crowd had gathered. There was a couple in the center of the clearing. She was gamine with two perfect curls at the back of her neck. He was very tall with Indian in his face. They were speaking to the crowd, the music had stopped. Now he was taking his position and she walked to him, graceful and small in a black dress with cheap fringe. Her shoes were scuffed, his pants worn and shiny. She looked at him a moment. He smiled and said something to her then she entered the fold of his body and curved herself into him.

The music swelled around us and they began the dance. I walked away from my friends to find a better view. The couple danced with rapid fluttering steps then slowed to an aching pace. He stretched one leg out; she was wrapped around him. Their bodies, pressed tightly together, stuttered and jerked. They seemed to surprise each other with what they did.

What can be said about the dance? A dance born in the slums. It unwrapped the mystery of sex to show me another mystery underneath. It encompassed the fury of prostitutes, the broken hopes of immigrants. It held creation in its grasp. It flaunted in front of me all the sorrow two people feel in

each other's bodies. I gasped when she slid down his leg to the cement. I wanted to be there, begging them both for something I'd lost or never had.

Each time the music stopped I stood still like a junkie, a jilted lover, veins open and waiting for another hit. Then she would edge back to him and he would receive her. They wound around each other and waited with me for the music to begin. They would start again, spinning together, his feet madly moving, hers thrown between his steps. He seemed to throw her without ever letting her go. She seemed to be holding him up. I watched their breath rising together and have never felt lonelier.

When you fall in love, do you feel it, the exact moment? I felt it like a bang against my body. A sudden craving for something I'd always wanted but didn't know it. I stood there feeling virginal and ready. I yearned for that contained violence. Something knocked against my ribs; something like my breath wanted to get out. I hoped that the dancers would notice me there with my heart murmuring. I hoped they would pull me into their dance. The man's face was contorted with pain or hope or something. I wanted to be up there with my face nestled against his jaw. I wanted to tremble and strain like that. It was like being punched in the stomach. I felt hopeless, as if I was crying and alone on a street corner. I felt the years of passionate embraces of desperate lovers clamped in this dance. If I could I'd invent the word for it. As it is I can only say its like falling a long way down through a blackness so beautiful it makes you howl.

I was surrounded by people of this city. There seemed to be no tourists. I could no longer see my friends. I stood behind an older man and imagined asking him to teach me. I wanted to say to him, *I come from a country where we don't remember war. I've never felt that kind of terror.* I wanted to say to him, *take me in your arms; dance a tango with me as you tell me about your disappeared. Were their bodies pushed out of planes to be swallowed by the water below? That river thick with murder. Tell me about the children who were stolen. You must wonder where they are sometimes. Show me where you hid all that grief inside you, let me see it, let me touch you there. There are so many ways to suffer, why can't I have this one?*



Trissy
McGhee

The Luxury of Disguise

Curtis Smith

In my too-tight baseball uniform and hastily painted black eye, I take to the street, my sloshing, plastic cup raised to the stars, me—the beaned batsman, the grand marshal of my own fools' parade. Rat-a-tat-tat goes the high school drum line, the brass section belting out a flat but enthusiastic rendition of "Shaft," and I sing along, loud and shamelessly off-tune. Can you dig it? Ahead are the horses, the swishing tails and clip-clopping hooves. Steam rises from their dung heaps, a noxious fog in this crisp October night, and look at me! I'm the big leagues' answer to Fred Astaire, tiptoeing a graceful jig to avoid the mess. Winter's coming, no denying its bite, the surrounding orchards picked clean, the last of the yellow jackets feasting on rotting windfalls, but in this happy snippet of time, there's no thought of ice or snow because it's Halloween in this little college 'burg! (Can you dig it?) Halloween and the art students have an excuse to sew their elaborate costumes and the rest of us have an excuse to publicly swig milled rum and cider or whatever else the bad boys and girls are serving along Main Street's gauntlet of sidewalk parties. Already the cleaning crews are out, straw tossed on the dung heaps, the piles scooped into rolling hoppers, the harsh scolding whippers of push brooms. The fastidious Pennsylvania Dutch! a blitzkrieg of sanitation! God bless the shit collectors and God bless America—this is my thought as I gaze down Main Street's hill where the parade route still churns with a happy bedlam. God bless Miss Apple Blossom and her court in their freshly waxed Caddies. God bless the Berks County twirlers on the floodlit square, their shimmering rhinestones and spangles that make it appear as if they're composed not of flesh but of diamonds and light, their batons spinning upward in a synchronized Kodak moment of a thousand silver flashes. God bless the marching squads of sororities and sports teams and civil do-gooders. If I could throw my arms around them all I would, but instead I hug the nearest girl, a white-stockinged nurse with a beer in each hand, and we share a drink and a fleeting kiss before she fades back into the melee. A fire engine bleats, the roar of a motorcycle club jockeying their hogs into precision maneuvers—a din so great it pounds like a new heartbeat beneath my ribs. Still others join me, taking the plunge into the street, drawn by the naughty gravity of downtown parties and bars, drawn by the naughty thrill of marching in a fools' crusade. Can you dig it? Above, finger-thin clouds pick at a moon that seems to be smiling down on me alone. Pretty the moon and all the misbehaving moon children below. A cow with an obscenely swaying udder gallops past, a bed-sheeted Jesus lugging his own cross, the chaotic post-parade swelling into a human stream of alcohol-blurred desires. All around me groups form and dissolve, plans made and forgotten, shouts to stragglers and newly-made friends, shouts made just to hear how far one's voice can carry on a frosty October evening. Damn right I can dig it—the blessed unreality of it all! a costume providing a degree of separation, the luxurious opportunity to step outside one's own skin, and tomorrow, when we look back on tonight's foolish parade, it won't even seem like us, our disguises taking the blame....

New Day Rodney Torreson

Near the barn
the morning flexes its tree muscles.
Through a gaping space between
branches, a yawn.

West of there,
where the oats stagger and sway,
the hungover wind hasn't a clue
it helped a tornado
touch ground near Dubuque.

Grass blades wade
a low spot in the pasture
overcome by yesterday's rain.

The old machine shed,
according to the crisp incline
of the grain elevator, leans less
than during chores
the night before.

A mare's head lifts over
the stringy bough of a willow,

her dark eyes
polished to a wish.

The fog oils the chase
of the three-legged dog
nipping at the thin,
aristocratic ankles of the Holstein.

A long hose length back to the barn
the cat's nine lives
all appear
around a milk bowl.

Up near the house,
the daylight, hot to dapple redness,
revels in the sheen
of the still green apple, the only fruit
for a blossoming farmgirl,
discovering her curves
in a sky-blue hula hoop
in those first wide and wobbling
whirls
of a summer love.

Mother of Pearl Sherry Calkins

While at the bathroom
mirror I see
a mirage, a girl
who watches,
wistful, as I
powder my nose.
She smiles,
hears you
at the closet,
twirls away,
and transforms
into a toddler,
a boy who
sways
in footed pajamas,
story book
in his hands.
I finger the straps
of my slip, blot
my lips and watch
the tissue fall,
weighted by a dry
desire, as you
clasp a string
of pearls,
cool and persistent,
around my neck.

Snowbirds Sherry Calkins

"A parent owes a child two things:
roots and wings."

—Chinese proverb

I calculate their miles,
perhaps Kokomo by now, even
Indianapolis. I am nearly there
among the backseat boxes,
as I once was, a child
kept awake by moonlit landscape
and voices too hushed to ignore.

I watch her pencil a crossword,
listen to him hum Patsy Cline.
There is map conversation
over stale thermos coffee,
their yawns a lullaby.

They migrate south, away
from this mitten of memory, already
cold and dusted with snow.

Headlights Wheeling Rodney Torreson

late at night around
a gravel curve. You glimpse secret
animals inventing them-
selves, wild
fur swatches splashing to
cover watery bones; livid,
anonymous forms
that hate you for where you've
not been, but quicken
your heart around
the curve. You taste them
in the milkweed through
the windshield; and a shy woman
on her haunches
among the ragweed, on
each forearm
a shock
of brown hair
that you brushed in passing
long ago, somewhere.

Fiona Weiss: Feelers Rodney Torreson

From among the pansies and azaleas
he slipped so close
his beard grazed her arm
through the window screen,
where it lay on the sill that limp
summer night while she watched TV,
an insect she was about to
slap. He crawled her arm,
small, impervious, loose
from his own life,

Creeped the round of her shoulder,
skirting
her blouse. A small rush.
She felt him again, up under her chin,
smashed him across his pupils
stretched to their limits, shrieked
as he shrank back into
the wild summer colors dimmed only
by the dark working hard in the shadows.

In the weeks toward
a golden corn harvest, he had a part
in everything beautiful. Even she
could see how his eyes,
spread into every window,
beneath every bed, in the feathered
glances from neighbors and friends,
were exotic, more brilliant
than in a peacock's fan.

Dead Man in the Grove Rodney Torreson

One of the trees was rooted in him.
Always as a child you wondered,
"Which tree pushed through
a cavity in his bones
or opened up his grimace
by popping up through the mouth?
Which tree
said he was born of man
shot down in a rage
during a barn dance a hundred
years before? Which tree
had a father of flesh abandoned
by a woman and comforted by a tree
sparing a seed for the
loneliest of the dead?
Which tree, if you had played a fiddle,
would have bent its limbs a bit
or been swayed to tell his story—
festering through a spring blossom?
Which tree could muscle a smile
by the thinnest arrangement
of its leaves?—that would say,

"I am the son returned larger
than the father."
In dreams you wanted the fist
of a tree to start a new fight, punch
through your bedroom window
and say, "Here I am, the third tree
in the fifth row. How could you
have been so blind as to miss
the tortured son of one so alone,
that after he lay dead in the field,
no woman wanted him wrapped
in her arms and carried home?"
So alone and it would go on and on
until you promised it
that after you awoke the next morning,
you would make it forget,
link it to the present
by a long, sturdy rope,
fashion a tree swing, and in a vision
pumping higher and higher
and glimpsing white thighs,
bring it your neighbor's daughter.

