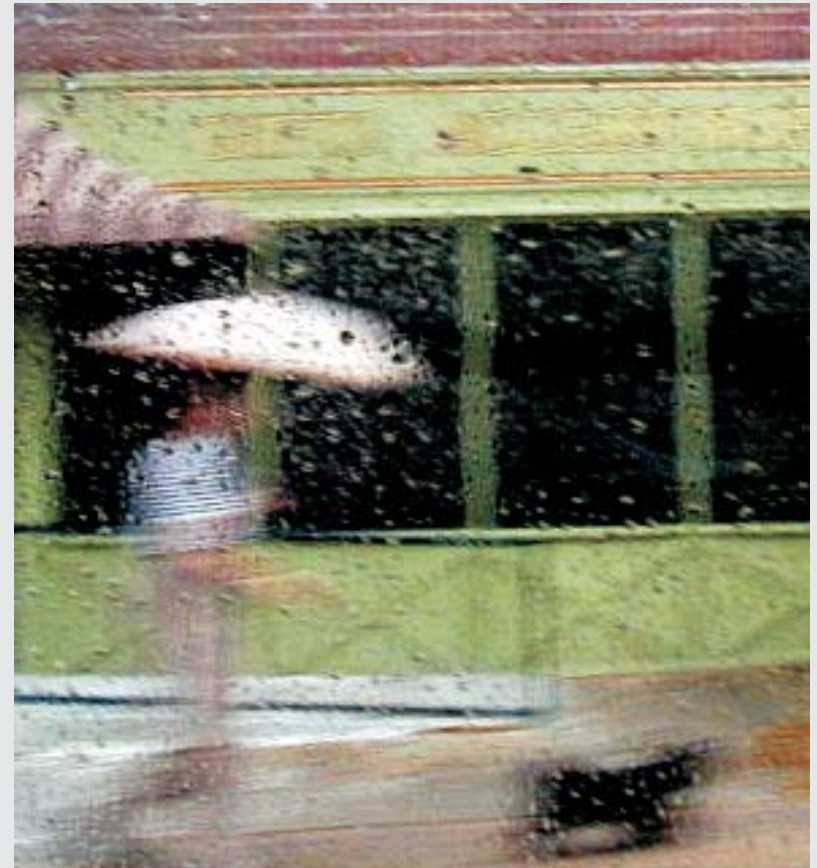




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March Street Press has been a flurry of activity lately, thanks to my recent loss of employment (thanks again, GW!). All books available from amazon.com or directly from March Street Press, 3413 Wilshire, Greensboro NC 27408

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parents setting the fields to flame. Her father dipped a straw broom in gasoline and dragged it behind him in the dry scrub. Her mother lit a match. As the flame came closer, her father had to run, dragging the broom and the fire chasing him on the ground, the both of them looking like devils cutting the earth open and the flames of an underworld leaping out. As a child, she must have bristled at the sight of her parents loosing hell fire.

What My Postcard Should Have Said Susan Pilewski

I drink cheap Australian Chardonnay.
 Take long walks along the Strand
 And on the quarter hour outside my door
 I hear the Abbey bells.
 Still formulating stories
 Which I may or may not tell.
 Nothing here reminds me of you.
 Don't miss you yet. Still don't
 Wish you were here.

Settled the Dust

Stephen Frech

If there is fire, the trees will learn the art of thick bark
and sparse growth, the grasses the trick of retreating
into their roots.

—Richard Manning, *Grassland*

My father and I left on a Thursday. Neither spoke for three days. He has important things, grown-up things to think about, I thought and said nothing to distract him. I sat at the train's window and wondered at how vast Kansas looked, tree-green hills, then open prairie, then the farmland I had wrongly imagined covered all Kansas, whiskered fields, harvested months prior and winter-wearied.

He is going to pay a man, I thought. He will buy something regretting the money. He will sell something with sadness for the thing sold.

But he carried nothing with him and we had so little money I was surprised to be traveling by train and not by bus. Surprised and delighted, but my father was quiet and I knew to be quiet, too. So my happiness, walking around on tall stilts, had to tip-toe.

No one met us at the train station, and we had to walk, my father carrying the one bag we shared. The air was damp and warm, a rain just having settled the dust. When he spoke for the first time in that hotel room, his voice cracked from disuse: Run a hot bath. He hung my suit from the shower rod and ordered me to scrub clean in the tub.

The next morning, I was brought into the court room for only a few minutes, and I thought my father was in trouble. He sat alone at a wooden table. My mother, I'm told, was the woman sitting at another. I didn't know enough then even to look at her. The man beside her asked questions.

I knew to be careful, and because the train ride had been so lovely, I talked about how easy it is to sleep when the bed you're lying on rocks you. I must have said the right things: wrong things, hard days had never tired my father, but that night he crumbled into bed in his fine clothes.

When we rode the train back to Ohio, the Kansas fields were on fire, everything charcoal black behind the flames. The grasslands—bluestem, clover, aster, seed-rich serals I know now, but didn't know the names of then—smoke and black dirt. My father said the farmers and cattlemen burned the fields on purpose; kill the old growth and the roots send up new sprigs through the ash. The line of low fire crossed at strange angles the line of wire fence farmers strung over the fields. Fire couldn't be guided by fences and didn't need to be.

Years later, a woman who grew up in the grasslands would tell me of her

Harbinger

Kimberly Tucker

One for sorrow, two for joy.
—Nursery rhyme

I was counting crows when she made herself heard. She was a big inky thing hooked onto the utility pole with thick legs, shimmering all purple and green.

On garbage days, yes, crows caw. Crows have memory. A better memory than Bobby had. The crows arrive in murders, packed in trees in my dead-end street before the first Hefty bag hits the pavement. They know its Thursday.

But this was not a caw. I watched her beak moving, working to make that rolling, clucking sound. And she was gone. She didn't linger in the grass. Didn't fly off to another pole top. She *fell* into the air; swooped up and away.

I ran for the woods, forgetting the water I'd meant to bring.

It was one of those parks with graffiti-covered picnic tables and hiking trails that wound through woods. I left the main path and sidled through a narrow valley of rocks that shimmered with black mica. And on the other side, there was the gurgle of the stream I'd heard. I could spit across it, if I had any spit. It wouldn't do at all. It hadn't rained for weeks and it was shallow as a bath. I cupped my hands and took some to my mouth, but couldn't drink it. It smelled foul with oil and algae, foul as a man's sweat.

I looked up. A thick, knobby tree limb curled out over a cliff face; a finger beckoning me to climb. I patted Bobby's belt and climbed. There it was this morning, the belt, coiled under the bed like the snake he was. The only thing he'd left behind. Besides the hound. He said he figured after he went to all the trouble of installing the doggie door, I might as well keep the mutt.

Standing at the top, I considered my view from the cliff and frowned. In my hasty

climb, I hadn't even lost a foothold. *Eh*, I thought, *I probably would've only broken an ankle anyway*. In fact maybe there were better gallows up higher. The tree limb didn't look as sturdy now from this vantage point. It's worth doing right.

I parted thorny shrubs and ducked through. Left at a rotting tree. Behind a boulder, a shimmer of red. She was so like Snow White's Rose Red that I thought I was imagining her. Quiet, methodical. Anything but lost. She sat cross-legged in a red cloak with saucer buttons, scratching earth with a stick. She was burying something gray in a hole.. burying a lump.

"Rose Red," I said, not meaning to make a sound.

She turned to look over her shoulder at me. Her black hair was so carefully arranged here in this wild place. The daughter of the woods should be

snagged with brambles. From her cloak pocket she pulled a wadded paper and bounced it off my knee. I unfolded it and read it aloud.

"With dew for sipping and eyes of know, stumps for homes, I hear it with my heart. In painted rocks their mica mirrors glisten. The night hums if you listen."

She was peering up at me from under her hair. There was no expression.

"Did you make this up?" My voice cracked with thirst.

Her full-moon eyes—so light...moss gone yellow at the edges—probed me. I had to look away. I looked instead at the paper in my hand.

"Eeeeah!" she shrieked.

My heart was a smashed watch. But I breathed again and realized it still kept time. I saw just her cloak—a flicker of red, disappearing into some big pines. I ran after her.

"Rose! Rose Red!"

In a few minutes I feared I'd be lost. The woods stretched dark with sunset. I would have to call the police and tell them about the lost girl. This was a normal thing to plan to do.

In the dark house I remembered the blown bulb I'd never replaced and turned on the television for light enough to see the phone dial. I ran to the kitchen for water.

When I returned, I nearly dropped my glass. There was a girl on tv. She peered out from the screen with eyes of know from under wavy bangs. The reporter held a long microphone in front of the girl's mother.

Slobbering the girl with kisses, she spoke. "I'm so relieved to have her back safe. She just walked out of the woods, three miles from home! Three miles away from the search team. She doesn't speak, you know. She wouldn't answer them if she did hear them calling her name."

She choked and held her hand to her chest. "She likes to play that she's a witch...I just want to take her borne. I want to thank everyone who helped look for Cricket—that's her nickname. She makes very realistic wildlife sounds."

The reporter looked puzzled. "Wildlife?"

"Cicadas, crickets, dogs, crows..."

At this the little girl cawed into the camera. "Krr. Krr." She looked again into my heart.

two weeks since the miscarriage?

The newsman was saying, "...autistic girl that was missing since Friday reunited with her happy mother. Back to you Tom."

a week since Bob told me he was leaving me...a month to the day Auntie died.

I uncrumpled the note and read aloud by tv light to my beagle

Roll Gold—Caprice Caricature Mummer Rose Aquatint

for Richard Steger

Edward Mycue

"We talked to two authors this week and by coincidence"

"Terrible weather for this time of year"

"Ah, but it's not this time of year at all"

I could be the portrait of artist as young classmate,
a certain visible rose in green dancing boots
yet to write his autobiography as a mathematician—
cryptographer because at least one chapter is in code,
a code I should add that I am still trying to explore.

It's funny how you can come into yourself unaware.
To the brink, to the zero, to the secret day, to the
game of living to do something less to be something
more is to try getting even and just explain yourself
to myself. All my powers, punctures, faith medicine
however complementary/integrative dissolve into maggots
who are waiting: they are waiting until I get it right.

Lucky for me (lucky?) my gondola has no cars. Still
time, time for role gold, for caprice, for acting out.
Artists age from alligator, organdy bird until suns
dissolve in the cup of the mountains in a green flash.

Too Talkative Friend Thomas Downing

The trouser cuff covers for the shoe,
conserving leather, awaiting length,
but like a too talkative friend,

betrays too often,
where the shoe has been.

Death Squad Morning B. Z. Niditch

The death squad general
eats cherries
his assassins
are in the basement
throwing unlaundered shirts
on the floor
suddenly from the balcony
Chopin
and the odor
of freshly cut roses.

Esplanade B. Z. Niditch

Some have bodies in the sun
are landscaped or nudes
when visions and passions
give way to colonial statues
a lost child on the deck chair
leans away from the poker players
while a gentleman all in Sunday white
with a stolen picture Bible
escapes to forbidden pleasures
on a bed of green leaves
near a path of wine bottles
and under the hooded bridge
where the caressing river
darkens the underbranch daylight
near a paradise of boats
heated in limbo
two shadows near the sea
take in each other's burnished lives.

A Day Like Any Other B. Z. Niditch

Chopin is playing
an etude
next door,
the mirror
is faceless
and the secret police
are removed
to be in the neighborhood,
clippings from newspapers
marked yellow
are on the dusty floor
and in the corners
of your mind
scales of compulsiveness,
you suddenly feel the voice
telling you to leave.



70

Huckleberry. He sighed mightily and closed his eyes. Tomorrow I would buy lightbulbs.

Crows aren't pretty, even if they do glisten in rainbow colors like oil slicks. She was almost graceful when she talked to me. I slammed the car door and looked skyward for the sound. I saw her lean into the air, her beak open and that eerie *Krr* rolling out. She fell toward me then ascended. I watched till she was a black speck in the gray sky.

The belt!

I retrieved it from the back seat and deposited it in the fast food dumpster next to the store. Before going inside, I paused to count the crows bobbing for fries—"...One for sorrow, two for joy...Three for girls and four for boys. Five for silver, six for gold...seven for a secret never to be told.."



Horae. Geoffroy Tory. Paris. 1525

3

One A.M. B. Z. Niditch

Openly trafficking
below the public square
in windowless surroundings
the leafless sky stretches
by the gas yellow lanterns
the black shadow
of a moist umbrella,
your soaked red hair
in the mingled rainstorm,
everyone looks around
but no one speaks to the lips,
ears and eyelashes
in the communicated corner,
the chosen walk
in the dark barracks
and giving to each other



A Heron B. Z. Niditch

A heron
is blue black
splashes out rhythmically
from the mirror's pond

When you were
talking about Shelley,
Lawrence, Lenin
and Homer's watercolors

nature forgives us
in greensward riddles
pulls gently to charge herself
as a Muse in drag

not knowing
as in Twelfth Night
what shapes our speech
or body language

or how the heron
appears in a sunset
with us as half-animal
and partly humane.

Roiling Bands Thomas Downing

There's a glance between strangers—
hot like red roiling steel
hotter than August lightning
fisted into steeple bins
cracking cross and slate
shaking knees and symmetry
begging to be coiled in bands
to linger more than instantly.

The Fish at the End of the Lane Thomas Downing

The mail box is the fish at the end of the lane,
four by four mounted, or piped to postman height,
old carp fat, pull down lip-pierced, all carp ugly.

The mail box is the gravesite at the end of the lane—
some days vault-filled, like us, with boredom and surprises—
attended to by curious, blade-armed, worshipers.

The flag on the mailbox at the end of the lane is red.
Red erect stops the postman, further stretching his arm;
it conceals more than half a story to be told later on.

March Alliance Thomas Downing

A righteous march sun roasts clouds first,
separating them from colder selves,
then warms eagles over crows chasing hawks.
Sol reaches down to sleepy owls in oaks
landing last on earth, reviving frantic motions:
Coats unzipped, balls knocked to fences,
caps tossed aside, and slides into third.
Geometry fresh, angle allied, triangle trim,
unimpeded by leafy greens and yellows,
reverent March shadows stretch
awakened hound and grizzly-like,
further out than raucous voices in the night.
Sun muscle warm, shadow cool, work and play
renew as boys and men strip to the waist.

Eclipse

Edward A. Dougherty

What is this thing we call sin? Is it like Morning Glory vines you rip out of the garden for hours until all you see is undesirable?

The eclipsed moon rose over the line of pines, over the garden and Firbank Field. We huddled together pointing out the Dog Star, took the Pleiades eye-test, and watched as the moon changed from a rose in the black sky back to its familiar face. The night was soft around us as March blew through into April.

And belief? Is faith drawing connections in the scattered and distant stars whose light comes to us only later? Now a bear, now a mother and child. Is it a map we hold to the night sky to seek the shapes that are out there whether we recognize them yet or not?

We sang all the moon-songs we could remember, raising our voices with all the romantics who've gone before: heads tipped back to that white disk floating in the world beyond, the world above, the world all around us. And I, too, return again and again to it, finding it in the square of window facing east.

And I keep coming back, circling, revisiting the face of the mind that rounds and wanes like the moon which rose red and filled like a bowl with milk. *God is a mother, someone once said, who gives us the universe to suckle.*

The Romantic Quest

Edward A. Dougherty

Like hummingbirds that buzz and whirl in their quest for sweetness, the extension cord

is on a romantic search for beauty. It quietly crackles when connecting that surge,

filled in an instant with an awareness, the burning oneness of it all, and here I am

one small part, a loop in the great coil, a type for the universe itself

But in idle moments, wrapped in an orderly circle or jumbled at the bottom of the closet,

all electricity gone cold, the extension cord is stunned by doubt, a flock of Yes

but. It's not enough to have the experience and savor it, it wants the meanings too.



and baby...

Beth Bahler

Ginger and Tom took their baby everywhere. They did not have a network of friends they could trust with Margie or money for babysitters. They lived in a tiny apartment outside the city of the university at which Tom taught. Earlier in the month, Tom's department chairman had kindly invited them, the three of them, to tonight's dinner party. They had argued today, though, about going at all—Margie had just gotten over a wicked virus.

Only at the last minute did they decide they had to make an appearance. At five o'clock Ginger dressed Margie in her only ironed Polly Flinders dress (it had been Ginger's dress when she was a little girl, actually), with a heavy jacket over that and her thickest socks on her small feet, with an extra diaper over her diaper for any sudden situation that might occur. Even Margie seemed pleased to be getting out of the apartment when they started out. Ginger had brushed Margie's hair with the gold curls grouped to one side, and had added a rainbow ribbon.

"You're sure she's not pale?" Tom asked as they were strapping Margie into her car seat. There was still a chance to change their minds but they knew that might be considered rude, might somehow jeopardize Tom's opportunity for tenure.

"She's fine," Ginger answered him, cavalierly swinging the baby bag of extra-everything into the back seat next to Margie.

Once there, though, Ginger had second thoughts. Dinner took forever to begin—and then the meal itself moved forward in slow motion. At least it was informal, with a highchair brought up to the table for Margie, who was seated between Ginger and Tom.

Surprisingly, it was Tom rather than Ginger who seemed to be able to concentrate on the gathering. Ginger couldn't stop turning to her daughter. Sometimes Margie looked terrible to her—other times, absolutely fine. Margie sat up nicely though throughout and ate the baby food Ginger had brought with her and drank her whole bottle of milk.

Ginger tried intermittently to pay attention to the others who were discussing critical university and world affairs.

It was at dessert really—a concoction of cherries and whipped cream and a cognac laced layered cake—as the conversation slid from more monumental issues to the speculative topic of saving potential memorabilia—comic books, baseball cards, a certain glass given out at a gas station—that Ginger glanced at Margie and panicked, thinking her daughter might truly be sick.

The baby's face was pallid and, when Margie suddenly rested her head on the tray of the highchair, Ginger was certain Margie had gotten her chills back.

Ginger wiped off the baby's mouth, cheeks, and fingers, and pulled Margie out of the highchair. She pushed her own chair back and put the baby in her lap. The person to their left moved just a bit farther away from them.

Surprisingly, Margie did not feel feverish. She whimpered a little, but then nuzzled against Ginger and half-closed her eyes. Tom gave the baby a smiling

peek, one of his cute teasing little baby waves. So he wasn't worried. Usually he was super sensitive to the baby, even more than she was. Which had to mean that Margie was just tired and showing signs of that. Otherwise, really, wouldn't it have been too terrible of them to drag her out tonight?

Tom, now, for no reason that Ginger could fathom—he had never had a collection of anything in his life; she had done stamps and dolls—was completely inside the memorabilia conversation.

"I say," he was pontificating, as if he were in front of a classroom, "how about this? Ginger and I with a new baby could be a test case. Granted we don't have that much room in our apartment, but we could start saving things now."

Ginger wondered if Tom meant what he was saying. It would be intriguing to save things. Her mother had saved Ginger's Polly Flinders dress and now she was using it for Margie...but maybe the truly "saved" things don't even, ever, get used. She'd bring collecting up again to Tom on the ride home. And, if they did start this directed saving, they would have more to talk about in general. And eventually they'd have a bigger apartment, maybe one day a whole house, in which to store things.

Their host put up his hands. "Who hasn't thrown out things which have appreciated a million times? But, also, who hasn't passionately saved things that turned out to be worthless?"

An already tenured professor in the department shot out with a comment... "Are you saying," she asked the gathering, in a mock dramatic tone, "that if our parents had saved the minutiae of their lives, we might not have had to be writing research grants ad nauseam?"

Ginger was going to add something, glad to be in a grown up conversation for a change, but, by the time the room momentarily got quiet, she forgot what she was going to say.

It wasn't until they had their coats on, the first people to leave, that her personal thought on the dinner discussion came back to her. She was holding the baby bag by the strap and hugging a shivering Margie against her. She could see that even Tom was worried now, his face set in one of its grim modes.

As they were starting down the front stone walk, Ginger impulsively turned back to their host, who was illuminated in the doorway. "If we saved everything," she called out, "we would be too overrun, don't you think?"

He didn't seem to hear her.

Their car, as Ginger and Tom anxiously drove a crying, inconsolable Margie home, was full of remorse and recrimination, empty of conversation. Who in the actual throes of parenthood had time to think about saving things?

Parenthood, Ginger understood now as she tried to soothe Margie, was always to be filled with these ever threatening brinks, this overwhelming guilt. It would leap at her from behind plants. It would seep into her head at night as she was trying to sleep. It would, with all the decisions that they would have to make about their child (children?) over the years, possibly overwhelm their marriage. And then, rather than save, they would (wouldn't they?) be dividing everything up.

Fireflies in the Bamboo Grove Edward A. Dougherty

The cicadas were still
grinding away the afternoon.
A single one would do it.

Slender poles in the wind.
The pond a shadow.
Invisibly, water eased itself
into that dark bowl.
Lilies were dull sticks, knobbed
where blossoms once were.

Every day this summer
green ran away with oppressed steps,
abandoning us like this.

Then, yellow lights in that hollow—
so much, so lively. And out of that motion,

A lightness came

up out of the grasses that had turned black
in the night, out from the arching bamboo itself.

The Birth of Hope

Edward A. Dougherty

Out of alkaline hills, hills born
of anger and fire, raised up
on the patience of evergreens,

out of these hills, the air frees itself
from the soil. A single wind,
 (called Spirit because
 there is no death in it)
dried tearless, exhausted
but still moving,
whispers in children's ears

the taste of iron, and the geometry
of the one thing it never forgot—
the soothing electric sound of water.

So when a boy becomes a man,
when a girl becomes a woman
hope can bloom:
cracked and burning, a comfort
rising from within.

Science Lesson

Bernadette Higgins

Ten days ago you took my soul,
transformed it into water
and poured it down the drain.

In anger and confusion I came back
and scolded you for doing so, trying
to retrieve what cannot be reclaimed.

"Water is water," you said.
"Here, have some more."

More Light

Edward A. Dougherty

The cactuses want more light
than water. It continues to rain
outside where it can't reach them.
Chimes name the music
in the wind. And Beth's face,
pale in fluorescent plant light,
makes me want to live
my life. The curve of her back.
She's writing, and the glass tabletop
rings softly like a chalice.

Mockingbird

Bernadette Higgins

I took my dog out
to a dank canal side
and shot him there because
my husband would not
pay the licence fee.

He was a red setter
with a beautiful coat
and passive eyes.
I will miss him and
his uncomplicatedness.

A Shark in the Mind of Someone Contemplating Wilderness

Alan Catlin

"Blood, that euphemism for what moves us."
—Anne Michaels

What moves between the unflensing
of the bones, those internal organs
left to float in briny emulsion, diseased
as medicinal waste discarded before
the self-immolation of flamed bodies,
singed by lab coat porters swathed in
prophylactic plastic, armored against
latent plagues of viral dreams;
what moves within the blackened pitch
of divers eddying amid insurgent tidal
breaks, an energy of fits contained within
Precambrian eyes too dull with impulse,
instinctual needs, to be considered savage
or wilful, consuming skinned prey,
the suspended, inanimate, a bloat of infective
tissue spired on a cantilever of internal light;
what moves the compressed jaws of great
whites, the hammerheads, masticating dead
museums of the heart, deadening the nerves,
enrapturing the deep, hastening the funneling
drain into the unfathomable brightness
of light? a shark moves at the end
of the mind, patrolling postdiluvian lands,
sand castles built for the restive dead,
condemned to a post life of eternal suicide,
a wilderness of dreams.

Newfoundland Ponies in the Open Landfill

Alan Catlin

"and in my hands an empty glass
that magnifies the sky"—Simon Percbik

astride the mounds of detritus,
the discarded, cascading down into
sodden valleys, catch-alls for teeming
rains, leftover fluids, motor oils, battery
acids, transmission and radiator liquids
siphoned empty or not, refrigerator
coolants, air conditioners, appliances
large and small, fly wheels and fan
blades transferring the breeze from one
rusted element to the next, thought
forever dim filaments temporarily alive,
enlivened by a currency stricken from
the night; in the unnatural light, ghost
ponies cast imprinting shadows on rubble,
these remains, permanent as nuclear
bomb impressions on fragmentary
retaining walls.

Shirt

Bernadette Higgins

I wear your shirt
Now my shirt,
My hair shirt.

John Hawkes, The Blood Oranges

Alan Catlin

Tenderest juices, passion fruits
innermost layers exposed, conjuring
the half-women from the roiling sea
to be with half-men, satyrs with paint
brushes and poems, sculpting ruins
instead of statues, false icons for easy
worship, altars for the sacrificed instead
of Gods; the plucked heart removed is
food for the rapacious warriors of love,
no prisoners taken in half-tones of mid-
nights, illicit lust is a brush stroking
canvas, the split skin of blood oranges,
a fatal poisoning of self-inflicted wounds;
by morning, only the dead dream
of unrequited love.

Five Words

Bernadette Higgins

Each day she wakes and thinks of it.
The letter. She makes the train journey
and thinks of it. The letter.
Five words. "Dear friend, I'm still here."
Five words. "Sorry, I'm no longer here."
It never arrives. It never will.

What safeguards do we have
against indifferent strangers
when this is what is meted out
by those who profess to love?
This strange man, with his ponderous ways
and lopsided intelligence, cannot spare her
five words, an envelope and a stamp
to neutralise her agony.

Lisette Model's Feet

Alan Catlin

In the darkroom, taking shape from negative light, thousands of pairs of bare feet, some reclining, bottom sides out, unclad for beach fronts, wrinkles describing lifelines, spent pleasures, glorious defects, others tagged at the right big toe, named or unknown, still others captured from above, taken waist high, bones revealed close to the flesh, veined and gnarled by misuse, carbuncular, scarred, tattooed Yin and Yang on opposite sides, some cut by surgeries, others not at all, mates to the millions of unmatched shoes left by soon to be dead men and women walking along the main highway just before the fall of Saigon.

Debit

Bernadette Higgins

We share
a bank account
and a bed
but never at
the same time.

Now you want
to open a
separate account
and I don't
care enough
to fight.



Views of Mt. Greylock from Herman Melville's Studio at Arrowhead

Alan Catlin

"Rage, rage against the dying of the light."
—Dylan Thomas

Humped in the shape of a great sperm whale, back bent as an undulate, skirted by a drift, a wisp of clouds frothy as spume, a spray of waves well beyond Atlantic coastlines, those late August mornings locked inside dark, low ceiling, study walls, pacing wide floorboards as a widow walker would or pausing to stare through thick panes of glass as if from a pilot's cabin, navigating seas, charting the progress of a struck leviathan's passage from one world to the next, a poor scribbler's sad handwriting, almost impossible to read of a drift of snowreefs, stunted trees stuck beside glacial reefs those long winter days and nights near Greylock's shadow, the white tips of the whale rimmed by firelight, bleak sunsets endured facing due North, suffused in ambiguities both written and assumed, all the unanswerables within a false light's casting, the near impenetrable shading before complete darkness.

Crabs

James Radlow

They heard a beating of wings. Hai glanced up at the sky. A flock of gray birds passed over their heads, climbing upward. Geese: they may have been resting in the lagoon. A smile crossed Hai's lips. Tuyet Mai supposed he had snared such birds in years past.

The old peasant, old Mongol as she imagined him, had the keenness of a hunter, of a race bred for war: he had sensed the soldiers before any of them. She could not believe that he had seen them, with his old man's eyes—a moment ago, they were simply not there to be seen. But now they had appeared, coming from the inland direction. From Hue. They had just crossed the horizon.

That was the route Tuyet Mai and her woman Ba had followed not twenty four hours before. Wearing worn-looking clothes borrowed from kitchen-girls in Mai's own household, they had submerged themselves in the stream of helpless refugees from the fighting—peasants returning to their hamlets, fisherfolk to their villages, moving eastward out of the city toward the salt flats.

No soldier or official had noticed or stopped them, Mai thought. So far their masquerade had been a success. An old fisherman had guided them through secret places on the island and eventually, circling back toward their starting point, to the village of the old peasant Hai. Now Hai had led them to a hidden fold in the earth, a vantage point from which they saw trenches dug by the soldiers the day before, he said, and saw the approach of the soldiers; and the soldiers, Hai said, would not see them.

And now, for the first time since she had arrived on this sliver of an island, this sand-spit, Mai was afraid. Was there so much reason, or any reason, for her to be precisely in this spot? The soldiers would be just below them, near the trenches. If there was a strong wind, if a soldier glanced toward them, if the wind flattened the beach grass at the top of the dune—or not that chance even, if a soldier were merely of Hai's race of predators, if he had that keenness to sense his prey that men of quieter races do not have—then there was no saying otherwise, they would be discovered.

She opened her mouth to say she had seen enough. And then, and then there was what she feared, a strongly blowing inshore wind uncovering the top of the dune. She pressed her face into the sand, wishing she could suddenly burrow deeply, disappear. It must have been the same with Hai and the others. She did not look.

The wind died down. Once more they were shielded by the screen of beach grass. It was too late to speak: the soldiers were too close. Some were

we got sing a song city to city Bradley Capps

trying be famous in this world
showing record company our talents
we got sing a song
people think we're nobody
they said we're talentless
they said we have no future
but what do they know anyway
we'll prove to them

that we do have talent
the ones that laugh at us
will be our turn laugh at them
nothing will ever stop us
we got to sing a song
showing you what we got
singing to the city
city to city
city to city
we got to sing a song
city to city



That Them This Is Me Bradley Capps

they said why should hang around
the people I do
they do things I never would
even dream to do
but they got their life to live
that them this is me
don't judge me for what they did
just judge me for want I did
I know I'm no angel
I had made my mistakes
I know I will pay for each of them
sometime before I die
but that alright
because longtime ago I except
jesus christ as my savior
I'm heaven bound
and god know who made the list
or not
and I'm not worry what people say
that them this is me

Nightgowns

Ray Miller

I grew up with four older sisters and two brothers in a house with three bedrooms. We sisters slept two or three to a bed until Catherine left home. I slept with Aimee and Louise for five years, then with Aimee three more. Mother made us all long flannel nightgowns in our favorite colors. In the winter, we were never cold in the drafty old house, because of the gowns, and the shared body heat.

They left one by one until finally Aimee left for college too. My baby brother and I were left at home and we had our own bedrooms. I lay in the cold bed upstairs and remembered how Aimee used to pick fuzz balls off our blanket and fill my ear with them when I was asleep. Louise always slept with a hand over her ear.

At breakfast I complained to my parents about sleeping cold. "Can't have the furnace run all night." Dad said, "Besides which, it's only September and not even cold yet," but Mom smiled.

She took the threadbare nightgowns from a storage box that morning and cut them into squares, then sewed them into a quilt for my bed. She finished it before the first snow. Even in the dark, I could feel Theresa's soft blue, Aimee's pink, Louise's pale gold, Catherine's forest green, and I was never cold.

Interoffice E-mail

Susan Pilewski

Craig said the leather man was a psychologist
whom he assisted later at the Black Party

with an impromptu performance piece
involving mousetraps and candle wax.

We must have played it just right-
I don't feel totally destroyed today.

I danced with this Swiss guy in S&M gear
and treated him like a dog, on request.

Left the club in the rain, half-naked with one shoe.
Hope your Monday is going well.

in black, some in gray: Vietcong, certainly. There were some thirty of them. They held their assault rifles ready for use. All but one did: that one must have been an officer. He wore a holstered pistol, but carried no rifle.

There were prisoners—perhaps twice as many prisoners as soldiers. All the prisoners were civilians. Some were young: boys and girls in their teens. The prisoners drooped with tiredness; they must have been marched here from Hue without a pause.

As she watched, the prisoners were herded into groups of ten, of twelve. Soldiers came up to each of these groups. She could not understand what the soldiers were doing: then she saw. Each group had been circled about with a cruelly tightened length of wire. She had heard of such things. Such a tied-together group is called a crab. The VC were known to tumble a crab of ten or twelve or more persons into a body of water—the River of Perfumes, say, in the course of the battle for Hue.

The crab floats for a long time. But of course it must end, and no one would dare to rescue them. Drowning in a little band—hating your fellow victims as they drag you down and as you do the same for them—what a lovely refinement it is to have to suffer both physically and spiritually, to die the physical and the spiritual death at the same time.

But there was no river here, there was no real reason for the tying together in crabs. Another kind of cruelty perhaps—and now she saw that the prisoners were standing where the trenches had been dug, and she saw that the soldiers' weapons were raised. Their officer screamed orders. Soldiers shoved, bayoneted, tripped prisoners nearest them. Each crab toppled clumsily into a trench. The soldiers stood above the crabs, aimed their weapons.

Tuyet Mai had heard so much of Cong savagery. Now she saw that some prisoners, shot at close range, would die at once. Others, shielded by dead bodies, would die slowly. No peasant or villager would have means, or courage, to save them.

Need she be here to drink the blood, to savor the anguish of those who for a time would remain alive in the midst of death? Quickly quickly she slithered down the dune and away from the sight and the coming sounds. It meant nothing that the tears flowed down her face. It meant nothing that her throat was bursting with sobs that she did not dare allow to be heard. She was the one who had chosen to be here. She was already bowed and weak with self-loathing when she heard the guns begin firing.

Last Song

Ray Miller

I sat beside my father's hospital bed, but I was a whole life away from him. We never spoke as equals, and after his next to last stroke, just the day before, he couldn't speak at all. He couldn't swallow and he was blind. A tube drained his saliva so that he didn't choke to death. Ten hours earlier, I hoped for him to die without waking up. Now I just sat. No reason to hope for anything.

I guessed when he was conscious because of his eyelids fluttering. He could generate a slight pressure with his right hand. There had been tiny signs that he could hear us when we talked to him. My mother had left a radio playing when she went home to sleep. A lame easy listening station that played dentist office/elevator music. My mother claimed that he had always liked it, but I couldn't remember him ever listening to any music, only football and baseball games.

A living strings version of an old song came on. "I Love Paris."

"Hey," I said. "I remember you singing this when I was a kid. You did it all goofy." Then I sang a little bit of it: "I love Paris in the summer yum yum yummer I love Paris in the fall you all."

He gasped, tried to cough, tried to laugh I hope. I think that he laughed. He fell asleep again soon, his wheezing got steady and shallow, so maybe that was his last song, the one he took with him.

A Child Learns Fear

Susan Pilewski

After consequence has caught you
and taught the inevitability
of landing after flight.

A cigarette left smoldering in the ashtray.
The back of your father's camel hair coat.
The fist of a lie clenched taut in your belly.

You come to weep at the circus
the Black Bear forced to wear sequins,
each dyed neon poodle through each flaming hoop,
when everyone else cries more more more.

Driving Number Four

Ray Miller

I saw my first decapitation in driver's ed. One minute it's a double date, drinking beer and driving a convertible on prom night, next minute, the guy is impaled on the steering column and his date's head is flying back over the trunk. Mr. Clark had already tested us on identifying the parts of the automobile, and so he finished with two days of gory Blood-on-the-Highway movies. The next week we went out onto an enclosed driving course behind the football field to get into the cars.

The driving course was large, large enough for five cars to drive at a time. Paved, of course. There were three stop signs, a traffic light, and places to try parallel and angle parking. Even a hill where we were supposed to remember to park and then turn the front wheels into the curb. You drove a car with Mr. Clark and a couple of other students until he judged you ready to practice the course on your own.

Many of the students qualified for a solo on the first try. Some of them had driven before. After my third chaperoned session he handed me an ignition key attached to an oversize wooden disk labeled *Number Four*. "It's the white Chevy, Mister Miller," he said. "Stay in the outside circle. Don't park until I have time to watch you."

I walked over to the white Chevy and got in. It was a sunny February day and around 40 degrees. A hint of spring coming. I fastened the seat belt and put the key in the ignition. I felt that my whole life had been leading up to this. Things were starting to happen. I felt meaner and taller and stronger. I pumped the gas and turned the key, the engine caught. Number Four had a radio, not all the cars did, AM only, but that wasn't unusual in 1966. There was a rule against playing the radios in driving class. There was a dress code that required a boy's shirt to have a collar. There was a rule against chewing gum except in the lunch room.

The control knobs were removed from the dashboard. I had a BIC pen in my shirt pocket, and I took the top off and stuck the long end into the slot where the power knob had been. I turned it slowly until it clicked on, then moved it louder, static. I looked around. Mr. Clark was across the course showing Beth how far outside the lane she actually was. I used the pen top to work the tuner over to CKLW. The Rolling Stones' "Jumpin' Jack Flash" was playing.

I turned the volume higher. I put my foot on the brake, moved the automatic transmission to D, and eased off the brake, then onto the gas and pressed up to the 15 MPH speed limit. The sun was shining, the Rolling Stones were screaming, rocking, and I—I was driving Number Four.

So Many Wars to Choose From Christien Gholson

No sign. Just a few jars of face-paint in the middle of an empty wet parking lot. Cobalt and iron. The plastic awning above the front door of Carmen's Restaurant slaps against metal poles. Mauve, white. Arcane green. The man who left the face-paint behind has been playing Erik Satie all night on an upright piano in a room the size of two canopy beds. It's a tight fit even though there are seven keys and three fingers missing. There's more space than music. It's arguable that what isn't played becomes a separate score, feeding the ants beneath the carpet.

There is no bed. He sleeps on the upright piano. The sun burns last night's rain off the Street. Today, Carmen will ask him how he lost his fingers. He'll say, "In the war," leave it at that. "Vietnam?" she'll ask. He'll smile, say nothing. Giving nothing makes him feel like a web sandwiched between mirrors.

You know this, but I'll say it again: Silence can be an empty white room with closed windows or it can be a rock dropped through a canyon's shadow.

The middle finger of his right hand was lost in The War of Oak Terrace Trailerpark, drinking in Max Garden's trailer, his hand on a cutting board, pulling cards from a tarot deck. At 2am he pulled the Ace of Swords. Max did what he had to do.

He lost the ring finger on his left hand in The War of Trumpet Vine Road, sitting cross legged in the middle of his kitchen with a butcher knife, holding a note from his wife that read "No more."

In The War of the Red Mesa he lost the top joint of his left-hand pinkie. He woke surrounded by ravens. They made no move when he shooed them away. Wind rustled their feathers. It was the smell of their beaks, not their eyes, that gave him the idea. Sweet rot. He offered his pinkie.

He plays Satie like no one before. Gardens and tombs exchange clothes inside each missed note. Petty thievery nestles its beak in the down of that silence. Each space, a sandstone mouth with no face.

There are so many wars to choose from. The war between the plasma donor and the face-paint jar is just beginning. The war between a roll of lost dimes and last night's desire is yawning, going to bed. The war between the candle and the lily can always be found somewhere inside the jukebox at Carmen's.

Sometimes You Should Look, Sometimes You Should Look Away Christien Gholson

I thought I was done with crows. They used to roost in the trees outside my apartment window, fill the twilight with nasty laughter. The noise was so frightening it spooked my cat. She'd crawl under the bed, stay there all night. Come morning, they'd follow me to work, down 19th to the Lingam Avenue bus stop. They leapt branch to branch and heckled me.

I moved to a place surrounded by parking lots. No trees. The crows hung on the phone wires outside my kitchen window. They barked and cackled and called out my name. I kept thinking, "Who told them my name?"

Last fall I moved to a sagging blue and white Victorian at the edge of a vast junkyard. Mr. Ed's Assorted, Inc. A sea of bathtubs, rusted washers, stripped cars. The house was big time low rent. The crows left me alone. I could see them landing on the roof of the junkyard office at dusk. They'd finally found someone else to torture.

Two days ago I was walking across Sandler Avenue, saw a crow lift off the road, fly to the top of a streetlight pole with a dead squirrel in its beak. I stared up at the crow for a couple of minutes, waiting to see what would happen. The crow sat there, black-eyed, and never moved. I must have waited under that light pole fifteen minutes, waiting for something. Nothing. Not even a feather-rustle in the wind. Yesterday, the crows were back. They landed on my roof, shit over the gutters, onto the windows, doors, my car, my cat, everything.

I called up a friend who's recently divorced (let's call him Joe), told him to bring over some fireworks. He has a lot of free time on his hands. I thought maybe we could scare the crows away with some loud explosions. He laughed, told me this story: "Seven years ago me and Liv rode these rickety ten speeds down the west coast. From Astoria to San Francisco. It drizzled the whole time so we spent most of our time in the bike camps drying our clothes, hanging them above a fire. One night we camped in this place full of laurel, somewhere in the middle of the Oregon coast. The only other person in the camp was a guy in his mid-fifties with a German accent. You know Liv and her conspiracy theories, well she thought he was a spy. I invited him over to our camp. I guess to prove he wasn't. Don't know. We found out he was from San Diego. Austria, originally. Said he was a retiree from some defense industry plant. Liv thought he was an ex-nazi rocket scientist. He was too young for that. Probably a machinist. Either way, he was pretty vague about his work, so it added to the mystery. He hung out at our

camp the whole first night, talked about a book he'd read the last time he'd bicycled down the coast. The biography of some logging magnate. We were reading poetry. A little book of poems by John Haines we found in a used bookstore in Astoria. He listened for awhile and then said that he preferred 'Facts.'

"Anyway, we were sick of him by the next day, so we hiked down to the beach. There was this trail that wound down through a laurel grove. Ferns and laurel. You know bay leaves? Think of a tree filled with bay leaves. The salt in the ocean mist permeated everything, turned everything inside out. Really brought out the scent of the leaves. You could taste the smell.

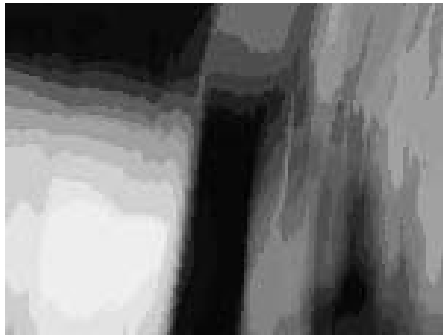
"The trail ended at a crescent of sand. There was a cliff rising up to the left and a long stretch of beach to the right. We wandered down to the water. In the sand at the foot of the cliff someone had written a message in huge letters. Foot long letters. A long message. Further down the beach there was a lone figure—so small—walking away. It was exciting, like finding a message in a bottle. The tide was just beginning to wash the letters away at the bottom of the message so we started to read it. After a few words we realized it was a prayer - a message of hope and promise - from an expectant mother to the baby inside her. Liv held up her hand and said, 'We can't read this, this isn't for us.' I agreed.

"I think if we'd read the whole message before it dissolved into the sea, the baby might not have heard it. Or the sea wouldn't have absorbed it. Something would have come between the words and where the words were supposed to go..."

I stopped him right there and said, "So what are you saying? I'm stuck with the crows again because I watched a crow with a squirrel in its beak?" I wanted sympathy. I wanted firecrackers.

"I'm just trying to help," he said.

Since Liv left him everything's become a parable. I ended up calling Uncle Carlos. He brought over some roman candles leftover from the Fourth. It didn't work.



14

even in cities

R. Yurman

earth places exist
where the dark animals lie hidden

secret forbidden full of demons
empty lots backyard bushes
water-filled construction sites

the last lone stand of trees
halfway between man-made lake and cemetery
calls even to city children

alert to the danger
they hide in the branches
eyes peering from among the leaves



59

Poetry Is a Subversive Activity

R. Yurman

even poets who set out
to defend
the *status quo*
can't

each poem carries
a shovel
strapped to its back

every few lines
it stops
to dig

under
the metallic blue
Mercedes
in the drive

under
the bright new fence
protecting the yard

under
the horse-rearing statue
in the city square

verses and tunnels
spreading
everywhere

Fashion Statement

R. Yurman

If you don't like your body,
you haven't worn the right clothes.
—Melissa Scott, Image Consultant'

Cinches for the short-waisted
birkenstock sandals
for the spavined or splay-toed
a bright scarf to cover
neck wrinkles or the curve of scar
where the thyroid's been removed

halter tops sports bras jockey shorts
loose pants wide skirts
gold chains for hairy-chested men
long sleeves for hairy-armed women
not fad or fashion
a matter of disguise

brights for the pale
darks for the dark
a beret a seacap
tie-dyed t-shirts
flaunting ribbons of color
a jaunty strip of cloth to hold a pony-tail

You stand naked before the glass
your father's dull face
lumpish and jowly staring back
and whisper to your sagging waist
I'd love you I really would
if only you knew how to dress

You Accept What You Get When You're Eating With Death

Christien Gholson

Memory is an empty Greek restaurant on a Tuesday night. The cook and his brother, the lone waiter, are about to close when a group of five cousins walk through the door. The cousins haven't seen each other in years. They are all in town for a family reunion. They live in huge cities that have so many Greek restaurants they never bother to eat Greek. Now they desperately want Greek food and this was the only place they could find in the phonebook.

They all have fantastically loud staccato laughter. It makes the waiter wince. He wants to go home, talk to his wife. Five years in the Midwest and listening to English all day still exhausts him.

The cousins don't bother catching up on each other's lives. They've heard the news. One's recently divorced. The one who used to dance is now a nurse. One has a child graduating from highschool. Some of them haven't seen each other since highschool. The one who used to be so serious - always writing about loneliness, forgetting & Buddhist concepts of the void - her husband died in a car accident last year. Now she has no time to be serious. One's a raving alcoholic, though he thinks that part of his life has been kept a brilliant secret. Everyone else knows and doesn't care. Instead, they tell jokes. They are telling death jokes. Which is appropriate because Death himself is sitting at the table with them, invisible as usual. It's not as heavy as you might think. None of them are going to die in the near future. It's just that Death loves Greek food. Especially dolmathes that have soaked in a tin of brine so long they taste like paint thinner. He loves Greek food and good death jokes.

The cousins order saganaki because they want the waiter to come out and light the cheese, shouting "Oopah!" They want something as dramatic and absurd as telling death jokes while sitting next to Death himself. Death orders a whole bottle of retsina. He looks around the restaurant. There's curling airline posters of Greece on the walls. A deep blue Aegean sea, clear skies. Tiny roads wind up rocky hillsides lined with brilliant white stucco houses. Death laughs. It's the Greece you remember if you've never been there. The Acropolis, ruins of Apollo's gorgeous body, youths leaping over bull horns on the side of a vase. The cradle of a vacationing civilization.

It takes a long time for the food to arrive. The cousins don't notice the time. They're with Death and he doesn't wear a watch. After seven cigarettes by the back dumpster the waiter returns with the saganaki. They watch him

fumble with his lighter, his fingers stained yellow from years of rolling a blend of Turkish tobacco. He smells of nicotine. He snaps the lighter four times before it ignites. He mutters a tired "oopah" as he lights the cheese. No emotion. A bored monotone. As if he was responding to his brother's endless nagging about his smoking with his usual "whatever" - the only English word he's found useful.

The flame dies before he puts the platter on the table. He shrugs, walks off. Dead silence from the cousins. They look at one another. Raised eyebrows, tilted heads. They smile, dumb-founded. Before the waiter even hits the kitchen door Death and the cousins burst out laughing.

The cousins love the waiter. The waiter hates the cousins. Death drinks his retsina and looks around, content. He likes the place. It's the kind of place that really just wants to go sit outside on the front steps, watch traffic at the end of the day. Like a grandmother who's finished washing all the clean windows in her daughter's house. Her granddaughter finds her on the stoop, puts her small head in the old woman's lap. The old woman strokes the girl's hair. Time begins for the girl. Time stops for the old woman. Her hand smells of washrags and pickles.



16

New Year's Day, 2000

Ken Meisel

Today we drove through the haze of the New Year down South 1-75 from Detroit to Luna Pier. The barren fields and the empty weeds were yellowed by sunlight and the highway was mostly empty except a few stragglers from Ohio making their passage home to Toledo. The world had not ended and no real computer glitches had occurred. Even the utility companies and Fermi 2 were in normal synchronicity. We drove into Luna Pier expecting something big or lovely. The largesse of the moon sitting heavily in the shallows of Lake Erie. As if it had fallen from the sky due to moisture or some erratic change in the gravity. Perhaps we were also expecting some large plastic moon, or some ice cream parlor

offering an ice cream cone called the Luna Pier cone. Or the Luna Pier burger. Or the great Luna Pier cookie. What we saw was the cracked ice of the harbor splintered with sunlight. And a handful of couples wandering out on the cement breakwater. As if they were searching every place formerly familiar to them for signs that the world was still stable. Unchanged from what it had been before the fears of the previous year had colored peoples' lives and visions. Ducks chased each other through blotches of open water. Gulls squawked. We joined the couples, arm-in-arm to the edge of the pier. And the world, unpredictable as if ever was, felt hopeful and safe.



57

Spring Rain

Ken Meisel

Water
falling down
a gutter

and the sincerity
of drenched
apple blossoms

the sky
exploding itself—
wet cars
wet grass,

two cats
crouched
by a door—
a man

smoking
underneath an
ivy trellis,

a woman,
listening.

That Day on Mt. Mitchell

Ken Meisel

That day on Mt. Mitchell, Tennessee,
frigid mountain winds and juncos
flying through the camp site.
Hemlock and flowering mountain laurel.
A lush garden full of rhododendron.
I was reading John Steinbeck's
Travels With Charlie and wishing
I had a poodle to keep me company.
And the nighttime wind passed over a peak.
At the camp site I saw a steep gully
falling two hundred feet into pure green foliage.
I felt dizzy and too full of thin air.
I needed a message that I was still flesh.
A message to help me use my brain.
I kept staring at a caravan of purple clouds
passing over the blue ridge parkway—
I nearly lost my tent to the wind
because my eyes were looking upward.

Small Change

—For Margo

Ken Meisel

Quarters, silver nickels, small change.
Fragments of the bigger badder currency.
Handfuls at the Vegas slot machines
jingling like a man's ambition, externalized.
A roll of dimes for the parking meter.
Pennies for a nephew, or for a silly card game
where the stakes aren't high, amusing only.
Quarters for the laundry mat, back when we were
bored and restless on a Saturday evening.
She'd drag the sack from the car and I'd unload it
with a four year old girl in floppy pigtails
who called me daddy. Dimes for the toy
machine, and nickels for spinning on the table.
God she'd get so dazzled, her eyes blazing.

56

Sometimes the Wind

Ken Meisel

Sometimes the wind like a kettle
sings to itself—
madness, confusion, holy matrimony
sometimes just tea.
Tonight I'm sipping a bag
right here on this rock—
far up the Mt. Mitchell Parkway,
now I hear me.

Late October

Ken Meisel

Delightful, the dead asters,
crusty soiled leaves like unwanted souls,
men are like that too, old men.
Perhaps everything before its death
gives one last try for beauty,
mixing life with a kind of quaint horror.
A cat tip-toes through the flower bed,
her body grazing low to the earth,
her legs trembling, taut.
The path through the rotten tomatoes
is marred now with collapsed leaves
where the pumpkin stalks once roamed.
Beneath a leaning cleome
a cat pounces quickly on a shivering chipmunk.
The old man in me is startled.
The cat lifts it, runs.

17

232

Simon Perchik

He sets up staves
then pours —it's natural
to build the foundation

from a stream, it clings
never forgets how even the sun
flows toward its dark sea, how once

from one cascading star
and rain now everywhere
never dries —his truck

as if some crucible and your heart
empties into place —you too
are called, you hear
a rippling, a great light
empties into both your hands
and you lift each board

by its root, by the sea
that carries us all into rock
that never recedes —the cement

smelling from shells still underwater
from galaxies, rafters and windows
caulked, already shrinking and the shades.

175

Simon Perchik

A stain that never heals —at the
wound
this bowl taking on water, dead
flowers

—I lean —my lips so close

is already a flower
split down the middle
—with the same warm water

softly toward the water that can't
leave
—behind this great stone my back
bending more when the sun is full

rolled tight —it's natural your grave
should be round, talking
always about a journey

or dragging back another stone
each night heavier and stars
are growing on the sun —maybe it is
Spring.

Maybe this sky, fading, yellow,
weakened
side to side so close
leans on your hand and the melting.

204

Simon Perchik

That tree must be lost —standing
alone
—you can tell from the way it leans
and though this window is closed its
glass
lets in the soft cries :these leaves

convinced they're looking up
—it's easy to lose your way in the air
and everything in motion —its roots
must have heard your eyes

filling with dirt as if the dead
still hold hands in a circle —you can
see
—all by itself —it's tired
as sometimes birds till your tears

warm one another and the sky
rest in your arms —you will carry it
back
counting the leaves, around and
around
for leaves and closer.



Gift Wrapped Philip A. Waterhouse

Cafe counter tricks for anyone.
#1. Interslide the tines
of two matching forks like trail herd
longhorns, set the linkup rocking.
Makes kibitzers confess they wish
they'd been doing it after
I claim the world rocking record
of 3 minutes, 19 seconds.

#2. Stand the linked forks
on their tips like fingers laced,
ask the disciples —Let us pray.

#3. Stand a coffee spoon upright
unsupported in a cup of coffee.

A young cafes' drinker hearing
that was my full bag of tricks, did
a balancing act with fork, spoon
and table knife still escapes me
that's how, just like that,
I got my third if unofficial
granddaughter, man can't have too
many
granddaughters, smart ones, too.

PS: The secret to
the rocking record is the heft
of the forks, heavier the better.

Topping Off Philip A. Waterhouse

Roadside signs,
stickers on vehicles.
Keeping America up to date.

This Business CLOSED—
for None of Anybody's Business

Come on in—
have some Chili that Kills
Germs

Hungry's Deli
We Cater
Earthworm Growers Wanted

Family van
rear window stickers -
Life Is Terrific
People Are Wonderful
You Iz GOD

Pickup tailgate sticker -
My Kid Beats Up Yer
Honor Student

Banner across fuel pumps canopy
at cafe—
KIDS WITH GAS EAT FREE

Jasmine Philip A. Waterhouse

She has
a smiling body, smile
of a body.

Holds herself out
like that
for openers, or,
something she just saw, just
heard, or is considering
to say.

Beams, striding
across the boulevard
to a friend;
over breasts

riding the Priest River;
through candle light
nimbus

the tiny table Tagus Ranch
night club;
opening her door—

Thank you,
for the wine.— Creamy pleasure
cheek to cheek a friend, I,
dare dive into.

Someone, she says,
she finally found
to smile
all over about, grinning—

Here I am,
keep me if you can.—
Only way to go,

hanging out with Jaz.

Cave Walls Philip A. Waterhouse

It was a time
everything seemed dark,
it was dark,
and cold, the people
huddling,
a cockroach, always congenial
and never
one to waste anything
including words,
said, In as
few words as possible
to make sure you comprenez—
c'mon, people,
don't sweat it,
cheer up,
when I get back, we'll dance.



Haiku for *Imbolc*

Scott Fray

Before it was known as Groundhog Day our ancestors knew the day as *Imbolc* or *Crone Wake*, a day that the ancient Earth Mother would begin to stir under her blanket of white and prepare for the oncoming spring. Later it was appropriated by the Catholic Church as Candlemas, the mass of candles. These are haiku written to celebrate Imbolc.

Skeletons of oak.
Clouds of mist swallow all but
the ghosts of the trees.

Seed pods crack and burst,
giving their hard-won meat
to the waiting squirrel.

Naked willows hang
over a frozen river,
caught in winters sleep.

Geese stand on the ice.
The flock has yet to depart—
Still remembering.

One last fallen leaf.
One last stream voyage before
the ice holds it still.

A cracked earthen pot.
It is all the soul requires
to linger awhile.

Hat brims tip downward
against the driving rainfall.
No one sees the crow.

Gold beads of honey
drip down from the window sill.
Sun through melting ice.

Breath billows in clouds.
The wind steals beneath the door
reddening the cheeks.

Stars glow and cluster
Like sparks from a distant fire
mirrored in the lake.

Quiet quintessence.
Neither grasping nor release
turns the sky westward.

Awaiting Awakening

Scott Fray

Snow geese gather into snow forms. Gather as the white wind coils over the open mouth of Winter Woman's hollow ululation. Whistling, wailing, carrying the hoary voice. Imprinting the cold, glassy dome of the white heavens.

Before fires lit the hilltops, before hearts beat in syncopation with the great herds, before the syllables of mind separated by gazing at an open hand, before all of these, snow geese gathered. Snow curves blew currents sculpting banks to hold them; they became as snow themselves.

Grandmother birch has a word for this time. She has seen this in the steam over her cooking cauldron, leaning over the still lake waters on crisp, early mornings. Between breaths, a moment that has no sisters, no sons. Only a quiet, unseen fire, awaiting awakening. Place before remembering, before we were, snow geese gather there as now. Snow shapes over, wind rushes over.

Snow geese gather, waiting under white. Their silent soul eyes behold release—the pulse of the living spring within the rib cage of winter.



Mannequins Stephen S. Power

With some small ceremony,
the couple undressed.

First their pants
in the strangest of dances.
His shirt, hers.
She wore no bra;
this stalled him.
So, laughing, she
grabbed for his shorts,
and he for his balance.
Her panties she
removed herself.

Then off snapped his arm
at the shoulder, followed by
her nipples, tits, toes.
His cock and balls and other
arm,
all found their way to the floor.
He snipped at her wrists
and elbows and armpits, one,
two, three,
with a scissor of his thighs.
She then fell back on the
mattress
with him so they could kick
each other's legs loose.

After some playful squirming,
and once the sheets had settled,
that's when the biting began.

Scrazz: A Definition Stephen S. Power

It's the lost body of smoke;
bastard son of car exhaust and cat
hair;
molt of baseboards, dung of dust
bunnies,
simple rust;
food pollen, scabs, superfluous
flesh;
the yeasty loaf rising through the
floorboards
and the gritty crust atop it;
black spores pouring from the air
vents
and blacker seeds atop the fridge;
nuts and sprouts between the table
leaves;
a pale worm wending
through the screw cuts in the
faucets;
all that makes your pillow moist,
your eyelids stuck,
your nostrils thick and stiff;
the web of gray spun through my
broom
and prey cacooned inside my rag.

It's where the fly steps.

Touch Stephen S. Power

His touch is not enough. There are
his cautious hands, if ever rough.
There are her thoughts of jacks and
bolts,
which made them so. There is that
lost
sensation right before his touch,
the fall of night just after, then
the wandering of water up
her arm, gravity all reversed.
But these are not enough. She wants,
she says, her heart to come unstuck,
to find it roving through her breast,
as if she were hysterical,
but watching with amusement. She
would rend herself to tatters for
a man with such effect. And by
her pulling free just then, I know
I'm not him either.

So we dress.

We toss the bed together. She
will pay the bill. Although I want
her still while driving back to work,
I swear this time that's it: No more.



Icing at Midnight Stephen S. Power

Her icing will be white.

She asks me
what color
her roses should be.

Red, I say.

But red is
too difficult, she says.
It always comes out
too dark
or too pink.
It's hard to make
a good, true red.

There's your problem,
I think. Perhaps
it's hard to make
anything good
or true.

So I say,
What about blue?
Be a bit different.

Roses aren't blue,
she says flatly.
At this point,
I go to bed.

In the morning
I see she's gone
with red.

You're right, I say.
This one *is* too pink.
These, too dark.

The *Fleischman*

Stephen S. Power

The deck is stained Nantucket Grey,
weathered by Hispanic brushes.
Every night my father mounts
it, stands at his suburban prow,
and whips his eyes along his ken:
a stockade fence painted Brown.
He would sail beyond it if
he could, take the *Fleischman*, take
her yard, fly his Roger from
her roof, and rule the seaway farther
on. I've seen the way he looks
at sheets the wife has hung to dry.
He'll roll his tongue around his mouth.
He'll probe the flesh where teeth once were.
And when the wind begins to stiffen,
when the sheets start to snap,
he'll plant a slipper on a bench
or lean against the rail, shoulders
straight out like a yardarm. I
can almost hear him think, *I'll come
up on her stern. I'll run out all
my guns. And when the Fleischman's ripe...*
Once the *Fleischman* saw him and
I wondered what he'd do, but he
just waved and called *Ahoy!* He asked
where she was bound. *India*,
she said and got into her car.
My father pumped his nostrils like
a bellows, watching her depart,
and even in the wheelhouse I
could smell all that entranced him: salt
from the southern seas, the spices in
her wake, the promise of her journey.

Clock Stopped or Running Wild

Walt McDonald

Some days, rest comes easy,
enough logs and matches handy,
kindling inside to build a fire
at dawn. Coffee's almost gone,
grounds in the pot, the canister low.

I fill both mugs at the urn,
turn out the lights and saunter back
brash as I was decades ago,
knowing how far before I turn
to the bedroom, to St. Elmo's fire

on the nightstand—green digits
that glow, an azimuth to steer by
in the dark. I pass last Sunday's paper
on the floor where we stacked it,
the rocking chair, a magazine rack.

Often, when we were young
our rooms were a jumble at dawn
and midnight, and nothing troubled us—
furnace turned back, clock stopped
or running wild, it didn't matter.

Even now, we lie wide-eyed,
holding hands under blankets,
listening to wind in the pine trees.
With both spare bedrooms closed,
we heat the house for ourselves,

now that our last child's gone.
What matters at times is not order—
plates in the sink, wine glasses
from last night dry, each
with a hardened silver star.

After the Madness of Saigon

Walt McDonald

We're taught as children, God is good.
Bad beats us on the school ground,
hard knocks taught every day. Bullies
punch us in the gut at carnivals,

grab our tinsel toys and run.
Who wouldn't choose heaven
against this squalor? In Saigon,
children taught me dogs taste good.

I watched them grab our junk
and run from scraps heaped
high as heaven, the sick, the starving.
I asked a Vietnamese policeman

about them. He ignored me
as if I spoke in tongues,
swinging his baton, beating the crowd
back from an accident, a truck

and motorbike. Dozens glanced
and rushed by, shoved by hundreds,
millions I never met. I saw a car
run down a child. Basket scattered

in the street and mashed,
the child's two loaves of bread.
A monk kneeled down in saffron robe
with begging bowl, a carnival of cars

and motorbikes. The crowd rushed by
like refugees from tanks. *Poof!*
the bread loaves vanished,
and then the child.

Passing Through Town Walt McDonald

Lights this late mean someone working late
or trouble, maybe a teenager missing.
By now, they've called police

or friends who cruise the back streets,
the hangouts of hoodlums.
Or debts tumbled down like Jericho,

added seven times, but still won't balance.
Maybe someone the far side of forty
who fell into bed at eleven, but leans now

under the lampshade, afraid of heartbeats
he fears will fail if his eyes are closed.
Or someone nursing a cup of coffee, exhausted

after changing a feeble parent who sobbed
and called out childlike in darkness,
holding bony hands up high and crying.



50



Trailer Park Daryl Rogers

It wasn't about me.
It's was them from the get-go.

I lived here for two years
with no trouble.

But from the minute they arrived
things went wrong.

That little girl
she liked me right off the bat.

Her mother saw her talking to me
the day they moved in

and about jerked the poor little thing's
arm out of the socket

snatching her away
and slapping the backs of her legs.

The child never played outside.
Her mother stayed in too,

except once in awhile she'd
hang clothes on the line.

But if anybody moved
or made like they were going to

come over she'd scurry inside
leaving the wash in the basket.

One night the father's voice
woke me up from a nightmare.

Then I heard the girl
making these sounds

like two cats fighting.
But it was no fight.

I had to do it.
I had no choice.



23

Trespassing w/Intent Daryl Rogers

It's just her car in the driveway.
That's good.
The Gods are with me.
I cut the lights, kill the engine
and coast into the driveway.
I gathered most of my things
off the yard
the night she threw me out.
But there are still
papers scattered here and there,
the odd sock or cassette tape.
Opening the door carefully
I listen for her dog
and watch for lights to come on.
I feel like a panther stalking prey
here in the dark misty rain.
I move across the yard
toward her bedroom window.
There it is behind the bushes
in the dry dirt below the awning:
my only slightly soiled copy
of *Love Is a Dog From Hell*.

Reprieve Daryl Rogers

In essence my heart is fixed. At my follow-up, when I ask the surgeon what activities I can resume, he says, "Run, jump, dance, play and sing."

the moon,
 a peeled egg too white,
a blind eye
cut from its socket,
 floating in the dark,

pulsars singing,
 the harmonics of solar wind,
dark matter that only
 mathematical equations
 can testify to,

local AM stations,
 choked with stupid
paranoid voices
 babbling conspiracies
and petty, viral hatred.

I flick off the radio,
steer the car
 into dry weeds,
cut the lights
 and kill the engine.

Big Cat, June and Little Man No Talk Daryl Rogers

Big Cat picked June up
outside a Laundromat
in Odessa Texas,
her and the boy.

Their old wagon had overheated,
in fact it was smoking
along with the hissing steam.
"Think it'll catch fire," she asked.

He drove them to his motel,
got some burgers on the way,
let them shower and change,
got beer and ice on the way back.

It drove all right in the evening
once they filled the radiator.
She parked beside his truck
back at the motel.

He put his sleeping bag down
for the boy and cranked up the
 A/C.
When the kid fell asleep
she repaid his kindness.

The boy could smile and laugh
but more often sulked in silence.
He took the two of them bowling
and on long beery picnics.

Come to find out she was running
from her old man Charlie.
She and the boy were anonymous
as flies in the outback

but she couldn't relax.
Old Charlie would smell her out.
She was suffering with that certainty.
The boy pretended it wasn't so.

Big Cat went to get coffee one
 morning,
paid up the room for a week
and mailed her a hundred dollars
on his way out of town.

Heart Surgery Daryl Rogers

When the operation is over
my family is told
I have done wonderfully
and they can relax.

I start bleeding inside
arid have to be opened again.
I'm sedated with a drug
that induces amnesia.

I remember numb movement
down a blurred hallway,
and a cartoon fire hose
shooting black blood clots.

When I wake up in I.C.U.
it's four hours later
than it should be.
Morphine is good.

The nurse milks
watery blood and piss
from clear hoses
into calibrated cylinders.

We talk until sunup
like nighthawks in some bar.
She has domestic problems.
She doesn't get enough sleep.

Gardener Poem Joanne Lowery

What to plant what to pull
the color the shape of beauty
is this poem's labor.

Loam and a spade.
Sun, water, enough days
for seeds to make themselves known.
Soon certain dicots are significant,
and it is a kind of magic—
earth's green alchemy—
that makes their handiwork bloom.

Meanwhile huge forests persist
in random piecework, untended,
an alphabet soup of greens.
Oh the white word for the yellow flower,
Oh the blue sound of something pink.
We do this on our knees
so astilbe and zinnias will answer.



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And Afterward, Thunder Joanne Lowery

Lightning strikes earth
100 times a second
coming from nowhere.
And we live anyway,
madly dodging.
The sun shines.
Moon rises.
For most of us
the stories of near misses
are as boring as we are
boring, never separating air,
unseen and unexplained.

Like last Friday
while driving to Chicago
100 times a second
I saw how someone would walk
to the toolshed and by the corner
where black-eyed susans struggle
from a pile of broken bricks
everything would disappear,

the back hunching like a heron
waiting for some eternal fish,
the brain black and empty
of what I planned to say
when the clippers struck rock
and sparks flew through gold petals.

For an instant my last words
ran a ragged line
above the highway
too far to hear
too fast to read
in a green-white ink
that left me disembodied
and faint to think
of all my life has missed—

those other near-deaths,
and the world a stranger
taking taking taking to no purpose
every flower from my charred hands.



25

Meander: River

Joanne Lowery

Low is what it wants. Low
then lower. Water of its own weight
spills somersaults slides sustains its course
where the bottom drops then widens.
There it releases its brown and green cargo
to fill in the lowness so what follows
will dodge off to the side to new depth.
Every day its route is different
just as every day your journey takes
a variant route on the way to where
everything falls away in enormous blue:
no matter how crooked the river
no matter how convoluted the life
the end is there to receive more water
and the lessening of your last day.

There Is Always a Tree in the Yard That Looks Like Spring

Julie Lechevsky

Everyone is under a spell,
given a name and a color.
I turned out white and Julie,
my best friend's Aisha, black.

This is our Paris, our Sorbonne,
the Austrian boys unapproachable,
the Tuileries recovering from Rodin.

The paper arrives, the sweets are washed,
a bakery truck goes by.

Didn't we know our one knack
was rejoicing?

He squats by the spilled garbage horrified by the man's muddy feet
advancing toward him, and scrambles away.

"Go!"

"I'm trying to sell my boots for gas money," the man says, pulling a pair
of soiled work boots from his duffel bag.

"I don't want your boots! Put them on! Christ! Get away from me!"

Harold kicks past the garbage and runs into the house. The man follows
him to the door hopping on the balls of his feet.

"Go away!" Harold shouts his voice shaking. "Get out of here!"

He slams the door shut and rushes into the kitchen to wash his hands.
He hears a knock at the door. He lets the water run, presses his back against
the wall and creeps toward the door holding a rolling pin. A street light shines
through the grilled window above the hall. Carpenter ants swarm over the
baseboards. Harold holds his breath and yanks the door open gripping the
rolling pin above his head.

The truck is gone. Sparrows bunch together on telephone lines sagging
beneath a bruised sky. Harold listens to himself breathe.

"Adrienne," he whispers.



Did You Hear That?

J. Malcolm Garcia

Harold looks up from his book, glances at the front door.

When he and Adrienne watched television or read the evening newspaper together, she sometimes paused and asked, "Did you hear that?"

Even as she lugged out boxes of her clothes this morning she hesitated before getting into her car.

"Did you hear that?"

"What?" Harold had said.

"Nothing. I guess I have everything."

"I'm sure you do. I'm sure I'll hear about it if you don't"

Harold closes his book and shuts the curtains in the living room and kitchen. A light rain falls spackling the windows with jagged lines of water. He places a pan of leftover spaghetti sauce on the stove and decides to take out the garbage, collecting scraps of paper, discarded pen caps and other odds and ends to throw away.

Picking up the garbage bag from beneath the kitchen sink, Harold opens the front door to a bald man whose right hand is raised as if he is about to knock.

"Damn!" Harold says, stepping back. "Jesus!"

The man's face is smudged with grease, and he tugs the collar of his jacket around his neck running a hand over his scalp. He holds a duffel bag over his shoulders. He doesn't have shoes. He smells of mildew.

"Sorry. Didn't mean to scare you. Can I help you with that?"

"I got it."

Harold pulls the garbage bag away from the man's outstretched hand, looks at his bare and blistered feet.

"What is it you want?"

"I came over this way to do some lawn jobs but got rained out," the man says. "I need a few dollars for gas to get back on the freeway."

Harold notices a yellow pickup across the street. A tarp is folded around an object he thinks might be a lawnmower. But he's not sure.

"I can't help you," Harold says. "Sorry."

"How about some coffee? Cigarette? Sure smells good in there. You cooking?"

Harold turns to close the door when the garbage bag snaps in his hand tumbling down the steps of the patio.

"I'll get it," the man says.

"I'll get it," Harold says pushing him aside.

Snow in August

J. Malcolm Garcia

Father and Mother drive down a brown-dirt road on the last day of their honeymoon stopping for lunch at a peeling taco stand outside Sante Fe.

It's August, 1945. Mother is wearing a light blue skirt and a brightly painted necklace of wood-carved bananas, pineapples, oranges and apples. Father has on a crisp polo shirt, Bermuda shorts and a stiff-rimmed Panama hat to deflect the sun. He unfolds a road map and drags a finger down the page and takes the hat off to fan his face. A bare foot boy wipes their table, staring at the scattered white hairs combed across Father's head.

"How can it be snowing?" the boy asks looking up.

The sun burns yellow rings across the sky blinding him. When he looks at Father again he can not see him.

Mother laughs. Father looks at the boy forcing a smile. Flies drone above him groggy from the heat. He puts his hat back on and squints against the glare bouncing off the map.

Black clouds obscure the horizon in the direction they are headed. Father leans over the map beneath the heat worried by the rumble of distant thunder, and measures the drive ahead.

"Maybe it would be better to wait out the rain?" he says.

The boy stands in the angular shade of the taco stand rubbing his eyes. Mother folds her hands over her stomach tumbling ice with her tongue from a sweating glass of lemonade.

"Imagine," she says looking at Father. "Snow in August."

Dust from the road sucks at the sun screen smeared on his legs, arms and face.

He was already turning gray. Even then. It seems like ages ago.

Carmela's Dream

Irene Eberling Marsh

Your old apartment house.
You have climbed up the
chute, the hurtling garbage.
You push a panel at the top,
you are on the roof.
You can jump.
It is a way to die.

There is no weather.
You feel calm, you dangle
from the rail, you can see
your parents getting drunk
on expensive brandy,
the decorator dining room.
The cook has gone home.

You swing, kick your feet.
Your arms do not tire.
You try a few chin-ups
then a one-hand vault back
to safety but you are
locked out, your parents dead,
the roof turning to slush.



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Reds

Irene Eberling Marsh

You are drinking
living out your
private
winter where she
would not follow.

Something scrabbles
under the ice
if you go to sleep.
You flail yourself
to stay awake.

The only time you
ever punched her hard
you came home
from work next
day, and just a little
post-it note, bye-
bye, empty hangers,
half the money.

Her anger is stored
in bags off to
the side in your
mind's eye.
You do not look.

Umu's Dream

Irene Eberling Marsh

Your dream is usurped.
It is the Captain's voice
the 3am re-run
the same lines that
always make you think
she knows what to do.

You follow directions
in a maze of shafts
with tensile ladders.
You are not afraid
begin to climb past
hatches like aneurysms.

Not long into this dream
rungs begin to crack, fall
further than you can hear.
Light is snapped away
air seeps from discarded lungs.
The Captain is gone.

The ladder is pulling free
losing its shape.
You are groping for
your original dream
but miss, are left
stranded in deep water.

Qin's Dream

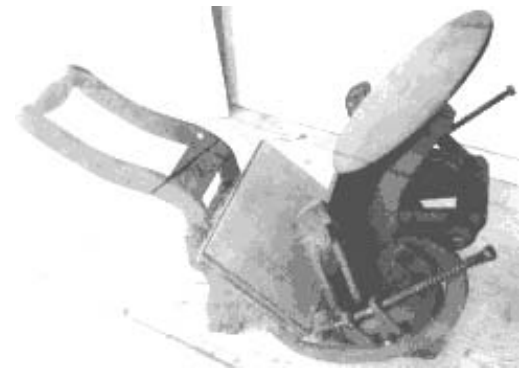
Irene Eberling Marsh

You walk into the deep sweet
night, the glossed-over path
beside the dump, bodies under
honeysuckle long ago.

Switchbacks dangle to
the river, the swivel of
lopsided current, a catch
in the bank, a rubble of nests.

Mosquitos whisper, nag, flashes
of déjà-vu you ignore
and then rocks snap away, earth
crumbles in clear moonlight

no wavering, no ravel. You
begin your fall, grapple for
roots misplaced from other dreams
watch your shadow ink the water.



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Zhan's Dream Irene Eberling Marsh

You wander room to room
doorways framed in
damaged wood, windows
with narrow ledges.

Fearless, you lean out.
You are tethered to
a radiator, your rope
scoring the mottled paint.

Far below, traffic
boils, rages all night.
You try to read license
tags, try to make a game

of it, binoculars
in the dark, wind-rise
against your body just
before your line fails.

The Hand Beneath My Nipple Wrote This Letter Julie Lechevsky

We have not long
to walk the spring,
go gaga
over everything.
Bells toll
from the farthest land.
The song is here,
sit near.

Wanted! B. Z. Niditch

So you want
to be a soldier;
it's better to be mute
when putting on
your uniform.

So you want
to be a beggar;
it's better to dream
beside the grave diggers,
than ask for help.

So you want
to be a poet;
it's better to be
a soldier or beggar,
than surprised by words,
unredeemed by life.

Shakespeare in Paris, My Eyes Burn Blue Julie Lechevsky

In April my neighbors round the corner,
skip past the stoops in the sunshine,
laugh at their keys and the awkward door,
run up the stairs to the bedroom
while I read "King Richard III."

Could you not find the steps
to climb to me?

I can put down this book.

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A Political Man—1966 B. Z. Niditch

I hear
Kiril Kondrashin
is conducting Swan Lake
but who is the red flame
next to you
whose dad went to Spain
to fascist fight
and came home
crippled in silence
but writes memoirs
made from Havana cigar smoke
with his new arms and legs
and with rage
at the strength
which left the body
the city's dusty disappointments
which turns into Picasso
sheets of Guernica paints
it's said
that the police
are still after him
for his politics
with his new Russian
newspaper clippings
downstairs
he is pacing like Pablo, the cat.



It's Always the Water Colors That Sell, Never the Serious Oils Julie Lechevsky

We do not look for love,
for then the gods will start in on us,
and what is home
but a story of departures?

People pass in their wooden frames
like paintings by the Masters,
dice thrown by Picasso,
a roulette of fans by Renoir.

So long as the heart beats we have
all that makes the heart rise.
The dearest ones never leave us,
they are still sharp in our laughter.

At a Point John Grey

The sound of nothing else.
Wind stops, trees still,
air stiff as glass.
Words dissolve into sighs,
sighs into silence.
Light wide as sky,
sun, clouds glued into place,
everything too vast to move.

29

A Can of Copenhagen

Robert Cooperman

You place a can
of Copenhagen
in his burial suit,
what your father wanted;
and for you, a weight
to keep him out of your dreams,
your pillow a pillar of guilt.

Before he died,
he'd chew and spit,
his eyes agile at blaming you
for every indignity
of old age and the cold
approach of infinite night.

Now you must accompany
the casket back to Miami:
his last demand.
The second the funeral's over,
you're going to the Keys,
let the sun and sea
wash you clean of him,
if they can.

"Just one time,"
you confided once,
"I wanted him to say,
'I love you.'"
He died in his sleep;
by then, you hoped only
that his eyes wouldn't
spring open—a trapdoor
to a dungeon—
his last words,

"Damn you forever!"

Geography

Robert Cooperman

On car trips to our bungalow colony,
we'd play "Geography"
to stop the miles from crawling
like an earthworm or tortoise.
My mother would start with
"Nebraska," because she liked the
 sound,
and my father would think of a place
that began with "A";
then my brother's turn, then mine:
names flowing like water over Niagara.

Inevitably, our answers trickled more
 slowly,
until we'd all agree, silently, to stop,
dried up of strange places we'd never
 see,
all of us withdrawing into staring at
farms, ice cream stands, or lakes
where we'd want to jump out
of our hot, whining car and take a dip,
but it wasn't the right lake.

Finally, we'd be there,
summer vacation starting at last,
in a tree shaded compound
that always seemed so strange
it teetered for a few days,
like an earthquake zone:
the night bigger than any mountain,
more exotic than the rivers
and countries we had named too fast
to imagine what they looked like.

As the Shallop of the *Discovery* Floats, John Hudson Recalls Henry Green's First Betrayal

Robert Cooperman

The son of one of Father's friends,
Green had no business on a ship:
couldn't tell mainsail from masthead;
nor the least care that one man's
 captain,
and the rest serve.

He hinted that Father and he
were unacknowledged parent and
 son;
I threatened the liar with a thrashing,
but he unsheathed his dagger,
 whistled,
and swaggered off, to waste more
 time.

He performed fewer and fewer tasks;
instead, grumbled and whined,
and when we were forced to winter
on the hard northern shore
Father mistook for the Passage,
Green filled ears with mutiny,

"If we all stick together."

But when the chance arose—
Father and I off exploring—
whoreson Green and bear-mad
 Wilson
forsook their cabal-mates
and stole the shallop.

Had we not stumbled on them,
they'd have perished in the cold.
A good day's work, that, saving us
from mutiny, famine and thirst
on this same drifting shallop.

If he is Father's bastard get?
The thought pecks away—like a
 crow
landing on carrion—and will not fly
 off,
though the carcass be picked clean.



First Love, First Town John Grey

Returning home, first thing I find
is a dead bird on the stoop,
cradled in melting ice.

Only I would identify spring
in its first winged corpse.
No mountains, no aspens,
I've sunk as low as the poet,
threatening this creature's death
with unchecked obscurity
and the allure of rambling.

Thankfully, a mob of young
 schoolgirls
jolt me out of my
metaphoric note-taking.
It's a noisy, many-legged heartbeat,
arms entwined, lurching out
of the distant school-house
toward the usual brief freedom.

It occurs to me
I used to love one of these,
a tomboy in a pretty body,

barefoot, trailer park poor,
a slouch so pronounced
her shoulders almost scraped her
 knees,
but a boy's own love of
sport and rough—house.

Odd how the past takes
me over in its way,
occupies me so completely
that what I am now
must move out to the edge.
And funny how the intrusion
of just about anything
in my small world
makes me feel a stinging loss.

I pick up the bird,
sheathe it in my trembling palm,
its colors almost coming off
in my hand,
its life revived briefly
by my living.

North Wind John Grey

North wind brings the news
it's even worse up there.
It kills our longings.

It makes the outside
its rabid noise and
our cowering silence.

It rattles the inside
more than enough to shudder
our hearts and bones.

Then it snows. Then the
mounds, the drifts pile up,
block all exits.

The farm is gray and frozen.
Light creeps across the day.
We try to leave, it knocks us back.

North wind is a catapult
fired from some dark place
with winter as its stone.



In a Perfect World Issam Zineh

The Christ would have been born in 375.
That way, I could sculpt him tomorrow,
The terracotta son of God, dying
In his mother's palms. And instead of "Pieta"
I would call it: "The Terracotta Son of God,
Dying in His Mother's Palms." And I would
Make Mary with one arm, half a nose,
And the terror of art in her throat. My art
Would be old. Or I could avant-garde it:
Jesus as a slab of museum glass.
For the wounds, an explosion of hand-blown
Orchids; for the face, the pucker
Of a bullet hole. In a world like this,
I could say I work the seam that holds you
Together. Every idea would be mine to give.
Instead of the hackneyed artist, I could
Be the half-naked Orpheus in my own
Canvas, charming the animals. I
Could sign my work oxox and tear
Up the commission checks before I make
Your bed. I could sign my work oxox
And tear up the commission checks
Before I make your bed.



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The Day I Die Issam Zineh

For it to be truly pure, we must be manual,
Take it back, our love of the automatic,
Holy things and the wholly emotional;
In quiet rooms, clear our throats of the phlegmatic.

The quiet city, quiet streetlights of the insipid.
Death will come to me in a spicy
Dish, alone in our restaurant, brick diabolic
Missing you like a man missing eyes, or the pious.

I wish you could walk me home. Hayseed,
We are close like hicks and not, like city slickers.
To make it truly pure I must be between your knees
And abandon God's grace, goodness, dicking

Around in the name of life, the need to express
That I am going down like any other, to repress
The knowing of going. I wish you would dress,
Undress, dress, undress, dress, undress.



Psyche Issam Zineh

Five parts is almost always enough to allow—
For exploring—it seems sections, what the Greeks
Call tragedy? The limbs—two arms and legs,
And one, vilest of organs, lights up flesh
In the dark. An interview in five parts. What
Sometimes, two hearts are, co-arc'd, half-lit,
In what we have so many times called the human
Blunder. We have been reckless, again.
Allowed to be fragmented. Here: allowed to be
Fragments. Wagered, wary. Set down before self.
You have given me what little is left of your body.
And it is more beautiful now than ever, like parts
Of a split faun, the hemispheres of the brain
We use against each other without knowing.



41

Bright Revealing Face of Love

Scott Fray

What is this mysterious pain?

Ancient blood, black and pooling, left over from child days or back through the womb hall into days before remembering?

Insistent proddings, longings proddings. Messages of my love and fear, want and retraction. Say the word—"relationship."

The moon is bright tonight and I'm missing it. I'm always missing it. I see it from my car and hurry inside to make the call, the one to my sweetheart. I consider that any invested pagan would be careening in lunar traction, suckled hard against that strange current of occult electrons. Sailing, cutting into those swelling waves of milky phosphorescence, in wonder. Awe. Expectancy.

I know a little something about the moon. Her lover is always hidden. A real back door man. He radiates great and golden solar beneficence all the hours of day, and, just as he falls red and smoldering, retreating into the gloaming and black shadowed earth, she appears. She too is a hidden one, and keeps her hands before her. Were it not for the swooning glow upon her face, which she reveals only partially at first, she would be completely invisible even in clear view, set against an embroidered cape of star dots. Still, she hums lumen light—the evidence of her amour.

O, black blooded sky, show the hidden lunar crescent tucked within your folds. Deep heart sun, fall red to earth if only to illuminate through love shining strong from dark halls, bringing me back to now. Hand on heart, inner sun, moon, the bright revealing face of love.



The Survivalist

Jeff Vande Zande

My father-in-law and I stand
in the Mosquito river sweating
inside our waders,
the cool current
swirling around our legs.
Mid-July sun cooks the afternoon,
too hot to fish, but we fish.
We have just three days.

Later, just before dusk,
we walk down a two-track road
and check his tree stand.
He points through the branches
to an old shack. It leans—
gravity stronger than the rusted nails,
boards fading back to wood.

*A survivalist built that place
my father-in-law says. Came out here
to live alone. Nobody told him
he had to treat the wood. He canned
his own meat—muskrat I think.
Used to walk over when we were up
for deer season, said he could see
our lights through the trees.
He wore camouflage, talked for
hours.*

*Two years ago, a DNR officer,
heard a rumor about illegal traps,
stumbled across this place and found
the body thawing on the bed.*

*Sometimes
the winters up here just don't end.*

A sign planted in the shoulder reads:
Seasonal road, not snow plowed.

I ask my father-in-law:
*They're just old logging routes.
When the cutting's done, the men
leave
behind miles of stumps and dying
roads.*

He points to the edge
where the grass and brush spread
out slowly over the scattered dirt.
*Some of the lumber they cut
still stands in houses in Detroit.*

The next morning a heavy rainstorm
muddies the local rivers
and washes feed in off the banks.
It pours all day, and we don't fish.

Downstate, on Saturdays like this,
my wife and I drive to the big
bookstore,
thumb through thousands of words,
wait for the waitress to refill our
coffees.

Up North, we don't even have a
radio.

We come to escape the noise.
When it rains, we pace the floors.

Sunday, while packing up the truck,
my father-in-law snaps
an inch of siding off our camp.
*No fishing next month he says.
We'll have to take a weekend
and paint this place.*

Somewhere in the Neighborhood

Jeff Vande Zande

Somewhere in the neighborhood
tonight,
the report of a rifle coughs
through the after-television silence.
My wife doesn't roll over.
She doesn't even hear the train
anymore, the howl that used to
startle
us during our first nights here,
woke us into dark conversations,
sleepy whispers lamenting
how living could be so loud and
sudden.

But tonight, I wonder if anyone
stirred.
A rifle. A small bedroom town near
Flint.
Though most sleepers are still
sleeping,
I listen for awhile, echo of a firearm
recalling memories of the Upper
Peninsula,
my father and I in the woods
hunting partridge,
an early October snow squall
blinding us.
Taking cover, my father told me
about the signals,
the rules I slept through in Hunter's

Safety.

*If a sudden blizzard buries you
in your blind or, while hunting,
you get lost among the trees,
fire three shots into the air.
It's a distress call. Tells others
you can't find your way out.
If you're lucky, they fire a three
shot answer, and you shout with guns
back and forth while they search.
Or, they come across your body
some time later, found and lost.*

The words still ring in my head
years later, resonating like the waves
of that gunshot tonight still trembling.
I listen for a second.

Or, are signals different downstate,
pinned here between Flint and
Detroit?

Maybe one shot's all we have time
to squeeze off. Kneeling on the bed,
I look through the window
into the darkness. Dim light glows
from a few scattered streetlights,
and beyond the houses, like a storm,
the train roars through.



34

position, not two inches from the TV screen, and concentrated mightily on the goings-on. They'd certainly miss Chairman Wellington. He was so alive.

From the nearby room, the woman screamed: "I can't come anymore."

"She should have gone this week," one muttered under her breath.

She'd mention her to the Mister next week.

Drive By

Jeff Vande Zande

Morning commute into Detroit,
racing the highways
coiling toward that jagged city,

someone from the neighborhood
spins off a patch of black ice,
over the guard rail, and out

of the dashes and lines.
Brake lights flash — just gawkers.
Witnesses slide away,

splintering off the exits.
Mapping dead-end streets,
cracks spread silently

through the windshield
upside-down in the snowy ditch.



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As he reentered the lounge he was bombarded with suggestions, "Take the Chairman—he zooms up and down the hall all day. We're in danger of being struck by his wheels. And look at that one over there, not two inches from the screen, she's gonna ruin her eyes. That'll make two. How many do you need this week?"

"Yes," the others joined in. "Take the TV lady. She has already said what to do with her bones after cremation." She turns and looks at them sightlessly as she fingered the bubbles between her lips from the mucous rising in her throat. "Look at her legs, turning blue and dark."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that the circulation of her blood moves like sludge." The woman stared at them warily. "Do I have a choice between night and day.", (She preferred night.) "You go cause you're ruining your eyes so close to the screen."

"Go when death crooks his finger," another said. Sometimes Death had to throw his weight around but still the scheme worked best in the long haul. Death moved closer to the lady and spoke:

"Lean back in your chair. My hands are caressing your body, beginning with your toes, feeling each one as I move to the other. Blink your eyes and smile.

Franey felt his hands and could even see him a little. "Your hands are warm. It's not what I expected; it's most pleasant."

"It's not meant to be cruel—just as life has possessed you, Death takes you in the end. You will be mine forever."

"I will be yours forever," Franey said.

At that moment Chairman Wellington zoomed up and screeched to a halt before Mister Death.

"He's next," the ladies screamed. "We can get another one next week who won't drive so recklessly."

The Chairman seemed unaware of what was going on although he should have known. He commenced yelling: "I have millions-millions and I'm taking them with me."

"It's agreed then the quota has been filled."

"Can he take those millions with him?"

"Yes. We don't restrict things you can take with you. It's not a burden. We know what to do with the things." His job was done so he had to move on. Lots of choices to be made before the day was done. "See you next week, ladies."

As he stepped on the elevator with his new companions, the ladies resumed their previous positions. Dandelion puffs floated above the lady whose head was again on the folded towel.

The one who had laughed behind her hands at Mr. Death took a new

Snowfall

Jeff Vande Zande

Over night, a lake effect blizzard
piled snowbanks up above

real estate signs, left nothing
moving until morning and the digging out.

Behind a snow blower, a man carves
a path down his driveway. His son
watches

through a window, squints after the
familiar
silhouette nearly dissolved in the squalls.

Later, the father stomps his big boots
into the kitchen, his beard heavy with ice.

Lets go, your mom needs milk and bread,
he says, tucking his last cigarette

behind his ear. *Forecast calls for more*
snow
The son gets ready to follow.

City snowplows, busy exhuming
the main highways, abandon side streets,

and the father steers through the tracks
someone risked at first light.

His son lounges dumbly in the warm
breath
of the dashboard, doesn't notice the
houses

hunched beneath the heavy snow.
The father edges past a stranded pick-up

wedged into a drift, no driver,
one taillight blinking, mile long walk

of footprints long since buried.
Two people could have pushed him out,

he says, his words fading with the smoke.
Ahead, the hazy outline of the grocery

store fades in through the whiteout,
but in front, no parking lot, just

high drifts swept across the spaces,
even the wheelchair spots are taken.

Out in the storm, he and his son run
for the doors but, turning his head

from the cold, the father spots a set
of headlights in the employee parking lot

illuminating nothing. *Battery'll be dead*
before his shift ends, he shouts into the
wind

and trudges to the rusted door. He lifts
the handle as though a hand he would
kiss.

The dull lights blink off, and he
gently slams the door. Jogging back

to his son, he flicks his cigarette
and the ember, a small flame, begins to
thaw

the entombed town before it hisses out.

The Visitor

Darlene Yarbrough

Moving at a steady pace down the corridor Mr. Death sidestepped the woman shuffling in his path. Over to the right, an oversized man slouched in a wheel chair, jammed against the hall wall, watched them as he smoked a cigarette held in a dignified silver holder.

A woman's voice was screaming at a high decibel from a room nearby, repeating endlessly; "I can't come anymore, please come! I can't come anymore, please come!"

Another scratchy sound entered Mr. Death's ear. "Who do you wanna see?" He turned to the speaker, not two inches from his face, and looked into a pair of ancient eyes searching his own.

"I'm gonna see Shirley in Room 315."

"Is that her name? They don't tell us anything. One day they're here—the next—vanished. What's wrong with her?"

"Dying."

"That's what's wrong with all of us," the woman toddled away soundlessly in her booties.

In his black suit, Mr. Death was often mistaken for a man of the cloth. He visited twice weekly for his selection, but professed indifference as to which ones. He had learned from experience on the job that the attitudes and opinions of the others worked more efficiently in the long haul.

When the elevator he was coming up on stopped at the third floor, he had heard a snicker at his back and when he turned, realized that the door had opened behind him. A wizened woman stuffed in a wheel chair sitting in the lounge laughed at him behind the hand covering her mouth.

Three women sat at a table in the lounge, one of the woman rested her head on a folded towel as strands of hair whirled above her head like dandelion puffs. A woman with bright eyes under a white mane, crumpled in a heap in a wheel chair, and strapped in had worked her way downward so that her head rested between the back of the chair and the seat. No one seemed to notice, most of all, her.

Mr. Death crooked a finger of greeting at the potential travelers. Startled at the gesture, one woman crooked back a misshapen finger. He shook his head.

An endless TV announced world-wide catastrophes in a tension-filled voice. A frail woman sat two inches from the screen, her legs like peppermint sticks stuffed in men's socks.

"Who's dying did you say?" The man in the blue suite and white shirt,

zoomed his chair forward. "Used to handle millions of dollars for a billion dollar company until I broke my hip. Now they hold me prisoner here. I have to get word to the outside. Can you help me?" Death turned at the rustling sound behind him "Now Chairman Wellington, we're doing all we can to see that word gets out. This isn't your visitor."

"What's your name—one of the vice-presidents, huh? I'm the legal advisor."

"Isn't it tea time, Chairman?"

"God dammit, I don't have time for female nonsense. Where's my CEO?"

"In your room."

The chairman's eyebrows contracted as he gave a hard push to his wheels and zipped down the hall, bellowing: "I control millions—millions."

"We're going to have the selection process unless someone volunteers to accompany me," Death said as he surveyed the contenders.

Leaving them for a moment to visit Shirley, he crushed his cigarette in the hail ashtray, donned a mask and gown at the direction of the nurse. "Infection in the wound that won't heal, you know?" she said and bustled off in her squishy pants.

Suppressing his squeamishness, Death sat unobtrusively in shadows away from Shirley's bed as friends stood about speaking with Doctor Est, who advised Shirley that her time was brief and upon admitting the fact of that nearness, permitted hospice care.

"I'm Hospice Ann," a woman said standing next to the bedside. "We help you die."

"Death needs your help?"

"Our philosophy rests upon the value of truth. Dying is made acceptable to the living."

"I'm not a Buddhist."

"Do you want prayer or knowledge?"

"Neither."

Death shook his head in despair. Occasionally he gets one of these.

Staying close to the shadows he moved slowly out onto the balcony where the air was fresh. The room was stuffy and smelled familiar to him. Shirley should be held in abeyance until maybe next week, but nothing was for sure.

The awkward silence in that room had reminded him of a tomb but for the hiss of the oxygen tank. He really couldn't fault Shirley for the grief she felt for her dog. Her friends had had him put down. Besides, she had blatantly expressed the desire for heroic measures to be taken to preserve her. He recognized his helplessness in the face of some human desires.