THE ALEMBIC
2007
THE ALEMBIC
2007
PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

THE ALEMBIC

2007

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Franz Kafka more aptly says what we, as editors, cannot say about the work contained in this year’s issue of *The Alembic*: “I write differently from the way I speak, I speak differently from the way I think, I think differently from the way I should think - and so it goes on into the darkest depths of infinity.” This issue of *The Alembic* strives to transcend this disparity between writing, speaking, and thinking. So please, continue to read on and enjoy the vastness of creative communication, the ancient art of story-telling, and the unending desire to make sense of the modern world.

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Dedication

We dedicate this issue of *The Alembic* to Peter Johnson and Jason Stumpf, who have guided and inspired us.
Poetry
These winter nights, every act seems dire. Cars bite the pavement, their headlights like eyes of yellow knives. A lone walker stumbles on the cusp of perdition. Glass stars shatter in a black ice sky. The moon stares down, unforgiving.

I am cold in my own skin.
Sidewalks shimmer with rain-soaked neon.
Coffee shop philosophers
are long gone,
their laptops snapped shut,
the books they never read
put away for the next pose.

Two tattered sentinels keep midnight watch:

A haunted prophet paces a fetid alley.
Amphetamine staccato
overspills his cracked lips.
A paint-flecked shirt
hangs on his gaunt chest;
brushes stiffen
in his breast pocket.
He stinks of empty canvases
and wasted genius.
Approach him,
and he’ll fix his red-rimmed eyes on you,
only to stumble away,
snapping a palette knife underfoot,
like dry bone.

A listless siren huddles on a muddy curb.
Her hair spills in
a tangled gypsy wave.
Crouched at the corner
in a skirt threadbare at the hem,
she scans the pavement
for scraps and broken glass,
keening a tremulous lullaby.
Passersby avoid her
as she picks at her ragged dress,
for she takes no notice of herself,
of anyone.
She waits, eyes downcast,
for the next exodus of cars
to cast her fortunes, read
in the scattered refuse of the street.
You complain about them
to the busboy at the all-night diner,
to the cop on the corner.
But you know the city
could not clock its way to dawn,
without their stations
kept at their peculiar posts.
So again tonight,
you'll watch
for the ghosts of their arrival.
Lia Armatas

*October Indeed*

The orange glow in morning light
Lies evenly across my linen bed.
Asleep, October,
I feel like the pumpkins cut and spilling over.
I wake, perch myself up to etched marble
And blow out the candle inside.

I see myself scurry and gather candy.
I watch the child
Through slots in a wooden fence.
I scythe every memory.
Catch a nail and fall into the wet grass.
Peggy Aylsworth

Carnage at the Common Place

Through a doorway,
light from behind, objects
on the high wall barely seen.
Are they potted plants or skulls?
Something has happened
that hasn’t yet reached the ears,
though windows, cups on saucers shiver.
An enormous bang reverberates
as evidence that beyond the wall
are the remains of a city.
People at coffee, blown to debris
& ire this time everywhere.
Thin sounds of music, a woman
keens, but the overlay of silence
distorts. Not even the tears
of a solitary man, an AK-47 slung
over his shoulder, bring solace. Too late.
Blood thickens on sidewalks, sticking
to the feet of children. Streets
have nothing left to be recognized.
Food & water go to the dead. Far off
someone insists on the coming
of one terrible blade of grass.
Peggy Aylsworth

Where Do Dead Birds Go?

That flock of swallows,
just there, over the chimney pots,
a swoop for all to follow,
sure in their split-tail aerodynamics.
A cardinal, an oriole
streak red & yellow across
this sudden moment. Nothing stops
the twilight. The end of one day’s round
rehearses for the next. Yesterday’s
pigeons, close as kin, perched
on the wire, vanished, but the ground
performs no rites for far-flung bodies
without a trace among the fallen leaves.
Ryan Baker

We Shared September

A quiet kind of love
we proclaimed in the way
we brushed stray eyelashes
from each other's cheekbones.
We were blue eyes and photographs,
green tea and hip bones.
We drove too fast and stood too close:
senseless and beautiful,
like sweaters in July.
Barry Ballard

*The Night of the Immediate Hour (The Tablecloth)*

Taking the night out of the hall closet
is no easy feat. Spreading out all your fear
like the folded weight of crumpled tablecloth,
running your fingers through the eroding
valleys and bridges till the expectant breath
of hope drops off the edge of the world. It's here
that light dissolves in the mind's checkered pathos,
like scattered leaves of knowing and unknowing.

And yet the urge to start again props its
wrinkled elbows at a brief arrangement, yet
undisturbed. And even the shining forks
have nothing to say, as the sacred folds
a pressed thought of self-awareness into
the immediate hour - that has just chimed.
At first, we thought it was an empty garbage bag
pinned down by broken concrete:
a whiff of wind
puffing up the sack with air.

But when we took a closer look
we noticed its wings
flapping like pinwheels,
feathers clustered together

like spools of soaked thread.
Its leg, like a broken twig,
twitched a bit. It blinked,
its glossy eyes like wet night.

We imagined it stripped off rooftops,
criss-crossing through currents of air,
landing in sharp gravel
alongside cardboard boxes

and spilt trash cans.
Hours before,
we cursed the damn birds,
called them rats with wings.

Later, you stood shocked and silent,
angry with its dying.
You tried to guess its fate:
a collision with another pigeon,

sharp glass from a broken window
slicing its body just right.
You asked me if I thought it would go on like this,
told me you wished it would just die,

remembering how-when you were young-
you caught a rat beneath a glass cup,
thought up a plan to release it
in a field so it could hide
in amongst corn stubble and empty husks.
You watched it breathe,
it its ribs like an accordion. To calm you,
your father told you he'd release it
in a field behind your house.
And when you were convinced
and had left the room,
he let it claw and crawl
its way out from beneath
the open mouth, crushing its head
with his boot heel.
And when he was finished
he swept it into a dust pan:
it its gray body like a ball
of steel wool, its tail like a wet
shoe string, its eyes discernibly vacant.
He is full of first grade sass,
some say class clown. Long lashes wave
at us when he winks and grins
and fake-drinks gin. He doesn't shave
yet, but acts like a grown man.
First Batman, now Fifty-Cent.
He flings arms out like goose wings,
yo, I'm straight up gangster...sent
from the hood, he tells us, throws
down his brand-new blue backpack.
It's packed with pencil stubs, books,
child-safe scissors, gucked glue sticks.
He picks leaves from worn blue-jeans.
Wet lips gleam. He brags about
his slick bathtub: big with jets.
Few months back, he threatened to lout
our son. We think he meant clout.
Today he shouts in the hall
with wall to wall kids back for school.
They are way too cool to scrawl
cursive, do countless hundreds charts.
They all hunt for answers when
you ask about Thanksgiving.
But he tugs your arm, clings, and then
tells you to ask what he wants
for Christmas. So you ask him.
Lots of money. You laugh, ask why.
Dimples dot his wide smile, slim
limbs peel off coat and scrim cap.
He claps, slaps his pants to brush
off snow. Then words rush and whir.
Each syllable surreal, plush.
I want lots and lots of cash
to build a mansion and buy
lots and lots of wives. He nods
at you. You nod back, ask why-

ask about true love. I want
lots of girls, not just one. He trills vroom,
vroom -his words trailing off as
he skips and zings to his classroom.
I stand in night grass. It is the wetness of adolescence. It bristles with the ridiculous things I asked God for in all the bedrooms of my life. The bed sheets of my friends curl off of mattresses, caught in a quiet wind, and twist into the sky, body-scented clouds. All the bodies I asked for. Too high up to smell. Soon they’re replaced with actual clouds, what the sky meant. They move slow as cougars among jags. Do you feel the eyes, the starving yellow of their dreams? It’s what they’re good at: struggling not to die, then dying. It’s what we are good at. Cows shaking flies off, rippling our skins.
Helen Beecher

*five cat whiskers from my grandmother’s button box*

cats drop whiskers like strays
   i find them

i.
louisiana bayou stopped by local police men
who mistook the rented baby blue lincoln
   soft baby blue leather and carpets
they were out of economy i tried to explain
get out of the car one in blue slapped his baton in his palm
i look up and down the bayou two lane
not a car a light or a breeze
i can’t i stalled

ii.
photo safari zimbabwe my horse had never
seen itself in a window
spooked in the car park
zoomed past the zebra herd in flight raced past grazing gazelles
   nearly ran under the giraffe family
reared
tried to scrape me off in the u-turn under the marula tree
fear speckled horse hide white flecks
reckless speed back to camp
camera bouncing
the ostrich not far behind

iii.
drownings too numerous to count
the first at the bottom of the santiam river
three months before my birth

killed by a wave in oregon a child whose knowledge of drowning
based on adult lore when water goes over your head
building sandcastles back to the water
i’m dead i’m dead
a closer step to god  my stepmother
shoved a mixing spoon of flour at me
i inhaled  thinking
it was sugar  she was sincere when she said  here
her frantic efforts with water to save my life
before dad came home from work  would not be
the last time i drowned

iv.
i nearly married the right man once was saved
the little voice said  don’t
that way i missed having children  the silver anniversary party
someone to memorize me

v.
central africa  i tricked death
by the african orange spider once  malaria twice
the train came for me  i saw who was smiling me aboard
why not go  why not go  why not go

the french teacher tried too  slap
i was out of my body before his hand
could emphasize his point  you are nothing but a woman
i can still smell that scream
Helen Beecher

*send me no ants*

along the zambezi river
inside the safari lodge
cameras hot to the touch

surrounded by strangers
  chattering yammering
listen for the lion sleuthing
listen for the dry scraping branches
hear the clang of city voices
beer bottles bags of chips

safari slut i chide myself
i take a book and go outside

thirst
october heat
animals closest to humans
in the year’s orbit

the last murky water holes
hypnotise them to stomach
  our smell
  to get to the water
i sit under the acacia tree
watch listen wait

elephant rumblings
  startle me awake
elephant feet kick dust

I jump up grab
acacia bark
falls
bare toes grip
red dirt
send me no ants
  i breathe
wrong prayer
i meant to say
please
send the elephant
to the river

on the upstairs verandah
six cameras    click
strangers
    used the time for warning
    threw grapes
to get the postcard photo

large ears push against
    thick heat
tattoo fear rhythm
    into my heart

elephant breath
    my breath
i press into the tree
    and wait

elephant trunk
    tosses    agatha christie
    crumples    grass mat
    caresses    indented pillow
    warm with sleep

my scent elephant memory

belly fills
acacia pods
    rain
    contentment
elephant hide
    fills my eye

overhead a cloud appears

never go on safari with strangers
never throw grapes at elephants
J.E. Bennett

tinsel

in late march it was maddening, juxtaposed with winter’s end, the ides, a sense of presentiment.

in wind, whining, snow glinted in the air, a millefiori, thereafter blue glitter intensified.

but in dead wind it was so still, it seemed to be hiding up there amid pine needles, barely a glint.
Sharon Black

The Map Reader

Before the rain tied your hands
you had a talent with maps.

When you opened one
it would billow before you
like a sail and then you’d fold
and fold it down
into a fat little square
you could really pore over.

We never went anywhere.

That’s what was so
interesting about us.

But you really had a way
with those unwieldy maps.
What remains of us
Is left behind in rooms
Darkened by shadows,
Stilled tableaus of ordinary
Possessions from which
The living conjure our presence
In the dim light of memory.
They stand in passing before
The worn threshold, knowing
That to enter will cost them,
Will change the distance necessary
For visitation and perspective: forsythia
Wavering in sunlight beyond
The long windows, a short stack
Of books by the brass reading lamp
On the pine stand, a small shelf
Of jazz recordings and the sleek black player,
Postcards of Miles, Monk and Billie
Pinned to the wall before the desk,
The faded pattern of a threadbare
Oriental beneath the turned
Oak chair: how absence defines
What lives in the stillness, becomes
The emptiness of things, the preserved
Order necessary for the living, what the soul
Must leave behind.
Two boys cast out into the sky
That stills the pond. They are learning
The patience of old men;
They are practicing longing.
The tenderness of their voices
Across the water is distinct,
As if they understand the only truth
Of joy is what is temporary:
Bare feet lodged in black mud,
Hands sticky with worms, the sweet
Memory of one girl’s dark laughter
Before she turned and disappeared
Into the shadows of twilight, the suddenness of fireflies
As night rose from the pastures above the cabin.
Their brotherhood is ancient and deep.
The stillness powerful between them
Until one's line goes taut with struggle
And they are awakened again
To the violence we are
Sometimes capable of,
Holding a mystery neither man nor boy
Can ever transcend. What gleams
In the late August sunlight is a sadness
Pulled from the pond they will never forget -
The difficult understanding of the deeply
Swallowed hook, the slow,
Terrible wings of the gills,
The dark eye open forever
As the blood begins to soak
Their hands -

The sky as it begins to darken
Before the rain.
Those women,
fatigued by bakelite TV dreams,
craved wax wings to carry us to the sun.

Now we've all splashed into the ocean,
singed,
and the spring buds,
hair sticky with scorched wax freedom
swim back to the tower
to cower under their skirts.

We all can't hide under satin.
Some of us women tore the soft cloth from our hips
to kick to the surface
and tread water
with all the tired men.

*Based on the myth of Icarus
Mark Brazaitis

The Flammable Poem

This poem will be gone
as soon as you’ve finished it.
It’s set to burst into flames
like tracing paper under a magnifying glass
on a blazing day.
You may recall parts of it
as you’re desperate to whisper
something healing into your lover’s ear,
something kind and true and felt as deeply
as your first wound, your first ecstasy.
You may recall the rest after your lover is gone,
when you’ll need words cacophonous and profane
to shout down the empty street
and at the unromantic sky.
Yet even remembered whole,
this poem can be no more than the blue prayer
of someone desperate to hold on
to what is about to explode.
Les Moules

from Irlande -- vacuum packed,
night blue closed crustacean

suspended in a liquid mattress,
plastic-wrapped skipper's catch

garlic sizzles in the royal blue cast
over a medium propane flame

on an unseasonably warm winter's eve
all glowing: television, computer

rose sky streaked with red
on this night the man prepares the feast

adding white wine and thyme over sealed secrets
creating soup for his eager kin

who will sit round the rectangular table
sipping cru -- pulling coral meat
from a credit card supermarket take.
So I fell, I slipped on hard ice concealed under snow in a distant place of trees.

I slipped, straight backward as though the bones in my body suddenly decided to soar and I were watching.

I opened my arms and flew along my old street suddenly as wide as a river. I sailed across, close to waves, the houses ecstatic below with their lucid chimneys.

Then a treetop was swaying with clouds, a creek pouring miniature waterfalls into invisible buckets. This was where some part of myself always stayed, alone.

And then off I slammed to a time of ice meeting skull and bones. Pain by waking degrees pulsed with that strange, distinct quality of me.

But what was me? Before I could even wonder the scud of clouds, the burbling laps of water, the crystalloid snow became my mothers, my fathers.
Please forgive
my exhausted, unrepentant
memory. We are not only,
only what occurs in reverie,

but muscular, taut
bodies inspired and in flux,
one old mysterious
theater, stage for all exchange

every touch and murmur
connecting youth with age.
One warm breath
along your bare shoulder,

gloss of moisture
down your pale neck,
scent of jasmine
dabbed on your thin wrist.
“Good morning,” he muttered smugly over his cereal. I glanced before me, at my place at the table, and saw nothing but a bowl of soup. A cold bowl of soup. I dug my nails deep into the skin of the fist I was making as I sat myself down and glared at this bowl before me. I glanced at the clock. 8:30. I glanced at him. “No more cereal left. You have to eat something,” he patted my head. The blood from my tongue as my teeth bashed down tasted sweet in my mouth. I attempted to slow down my breathing as best I could.

8:30 A.M. Cold alphabet soup. I picked up my spoon and swirled the little letters around for a while. He was able to divert his attention from his own breakfast long enough to raise his eyebrows. Eventually I was able to spell “bullshit” and I smirked to myself. How symbolic. “Do you need me to feed you?” he offered. Am I two? “If you don’t like it stop at the deli on your way to work.” I smiled, lovingly, “No honey, this is just fine.” I shoveled the letters into my mouth.
“Two Figures:”
almost Japanese,
trace splashes of fresh pink and olive green,
roil of cloud and foaming white water,
browns of path, footbridge, resting bench.

It is a simple palette:
bunched brush colors,
painter and patron,
the lyric drift from street era
to rose spots and an island’s ocean echo.

(after Willem de Kooning)
From the ceiling-
suspended, planed round,
red resin poles:
base shadows like stick feet;
thick,
thin,
faint shadows of a downpour;
and one line-
four lines, factored upon wall and ground
plainly warped in the falling.

after Yves Klein “Pluie rouge” (Red Rain)
Before dawn, after dusk
I cross a farm road bridge
beneath a painter’s sky,
the blending of storied stars and indigo.
Country cooling to autumn’s barren stalks,
the Asimack River ripples between soft banks,
ice vapors coiling in clouds, in loose white tendrils.
Moonlit lanes of lengthening shadows spread
across wading shallows, across depths of fishing pools.
Day’s motion dissipates half-tone stillness.
Beyond this bridge is macadam.
Beyond that:
highway, freeway, a Plainsman’s wages,
the ground rising to glass,
the sun a bladed sheen in my mirrors.
Twelve Months, Motionless

R.T. Castleberry

In the year I stood still-
no lover, no loss,
I watched working Sundays slip,
like abacus beads on a line.
I watched each day interred,
debased as a calendar of crows.
I saw the poets
get fat, go dry.
The deaths that year-
hundreds in book burning accidents,
hundreds more in circus riots,
the raising of the mountain bells,
became the logical expression
of full moon elections,
a monsoon every quarter.

For 12 months, motionless,
I heard the talk around me-
dreamy satires of bliss and destruction,
diet regimens and dinner chat.
I registered the repetition
as ex-wives returned to remarry,
ex-girlfriends named their children
for the mood in our months together.
From June to January
I slept three times a day,
I learned five new phrases for “Hesitation.”
From the frieze of an aching, anxious night,
livid with gaunt moon, hissing rain,
I memorized this warning:
“Don’t fight. I’ll hurt you if you fight.”
Phillip Corwin

*The Old Bridge at Mostar*

Picture a wedge of fire rising from the river, dividing the air between now and before. And at its core tens of thousands of refugees cursing, sobbing, in prayer, frozen as if on a frieze, elders, children, orphans escaping their coffins, soaring high into the apostate sky in an irregular arc over the humpbacked Old Bridge, their voices a choral dirge sung in the dark--then diving back naked into the water, agonized by slaughter, but unable to forget the calm that once circumscribed desire long before the wedge of fire, the balm, the antique faith in church and minaret that soothed all pain.

*City in Bosnia where a historic stone bridge was destroyed in 1993 during war.*
Allen Ginsberg
I miss you:
psychedelic
clown-faced
bardic old
man boy:
crawling like cockroach
in & out of
Lower East Side
bodegas
that are immortalized
in your verse
and flourish
like a permanently
rent-controlled
*Manahatta*
that exists only on paper
with Peter Orlovsky still raving
about your cock
roach
ghost.

The cops call Peter
captain
as they haul him away
as if locking up
every last trace
of your wondrous
bed bug
splendor.
The trees shivered with a contrived passion and tossed aside their clothes; I assumed it was the wind. The leaves collected in a yellow heap with a touch of red - another reminder of the wine-stained dress that seems to have made a home of my bedroom floor.

How did we get here? You had another tough week, we'd both been lonely. Only the guilty need excuses. When it was over you faked a smile and I said it wouldn't have happened otherwise. 'En vino, veritas' doesn't always apply - I wanted it too.

The next morning you left without a word, silent to keep from waking me. It's okay. I was only pretending to be asleep; the apologies and ridiculous promises make it even more uncomfortable. But we should talk about it, not let it ferment. Not everything gets better with time.

I brought your dress to the dry-cleaner today. It's been weeks; I thought maybe you forgot about it. They said, *we can try to fix this, but it might be permanent.* I hope it isn't.
I strike a match, and it taunts me like the swerving Lexus I see every time I close my eyes: I can forget you with its touch. “Three inches, either way…” the surgeon mumbled, his head shaking mechanically like the figurine you kept on the back dash. His icy metal table must have felt like an angel’s hands to your pale skin.

I lift a frame from the mantle and imagine: the last picture of the three of us together, edges burned and blackened. For an instant the fire frames your smiling face just like your sculpture-bronze hair, then it consumes your motionless figure and you vanish like smoke into an already cloudy sky.

The way the ocean-blue flame ripples across the once-glossy surface of this paper memory reminds me of one day at the lake: we were skipping stones and teasing the trout with our toes, and you promised, “Until I’m buried with a picture of you, so even then we won’t really be apart.” I wasn’t ready.

Rachel said she knew exactly which picture you would have wanted; she said the snow brings out your hazel eyes. She starts the seventh grade tomorrow, and I swear she looks more like you every day.
You move into my white rooms
and start flinging paint around:
“We need colour, colour, colour,” you say.
You buy flowers that light up
the rooms like gasoline flames,
and when they lose their blooms
you buy more and I can’t stop
sneezing. “Aversion therapy!” you say.
You wake up at 5 and turn up music,
Iggy Pop and the Clash,
and throw yourself around
in a spastic dance.
“Get happy! Don’t be so down all the time!”
I go outside for a cigarette
and I don’t even smoke.
Corrine De Winter

Skin

Do you know how much
The feel
Of a lover’s skin
Is missed when it’s gone,
How mysterious touch can be.
How it pulls you in,
Forces you to seek its shelter,
Brings you to war torn rooms
Seeking it like Scarlett O’Hara
Stepping over wounded,
Dying and dead soldiers.

This is what the feel
Of a lover’s skin can do.
Leaves you heartless,
Makes a starving animal out of you.
I started calling them
At nine in the morning
Which is a respectable time
To wake up those lazy
People who owed me money
I was dialing for dollars
I collected over six million one year
Six point five million in fact
I was nice to people
That tricked them into paying
Most people are liars
Lying, cheating, stealing
Christ like, I had the power
Of forgiveness
One time a young black girl
Owed us money, but it had been so long
That her debt had been written off
She called me out of the blue
I told her not to worry about it
I got in trouble for that
One time I had an old lady
Mail me two dimes
Because that is what her balance was
And if you consider the price of the stamp
I tricked her into paying me
One hundred and ninety five percent interest
I did this for a living
I did this for nine years
At the end of it all I got a bonus
A fifty dollar gift card to Target.
Robert Dunn

On Building the Pyramids

Oh, sure, the local Hardware Hut has kits,
But you don’t want that-
That’s cheating. Besides,
This is supposed to be a personal statement.
And I myself do know of at least one Pharaoh
Who opted for a line of rubber goods, instead.
We prefer to take the mud, the sand, the gravel,
The river reeds, the sesame seeds, and the papyrus
They wrap the fish in, and mold them together
Into the building blocks-big building blocks.
We let ’em dry in the sun for a couple of months;
Oh, but keep ’em away from the graffiti artists, though.
Having the slaves shove them around is so old-fashioned.
These days, we prefer to drop the blocks
Off some Nile River Valley escarpment, and hope
They land in the right place. The stars tell us when;
You can’t miss if you have a good astrologer.
Avoid the ones who sniff that imported hibiscus-
 Probably smuggled in, y’see.
That’s what the Surgeon General says …
Come to think of it, he is Athenian,
So he was probably smuggled in himself.
And most important-pointy side up, kids.
This is the keystone (no pun intended) to keeping
Your flow of a Pharaoh’s dineros, if you get my drift.
Robert Dunn

*Scoffin’ at Coffins Perhaps Once too Often*

If you have ever tap danced on a coffin
As it was being lowered into the ground,
I hope you had the consideration to restrict
Your repertoire to the “Old Soft Shoe,”
So as not to scuff or scratch the knotty pine
Or mahogany or even the balsawood-
Said balsawood being the easiest material
To smash out of by customers expecting
A quick resurrection. Now you know why
These boxes are marked “close coffin before
Striking …” and, if there are no further
Questions, we can move on to the organ solo.
Paul asked, in one of his Epistles, if, perchance, I knew how to whistle. I replied, “seems that the Second Coming might be better served by harmonious humming.”
He perches on the city street, his haunted eyes peering over his colorless beard. His shapeless body adorns itself with a tattered, worn overcoat. A pale, grimy hand rhythmically shakes a battered cup at me. “Spare dreams? Can you spare some dreams?” I deposit one of mine in his cup. It was an old one, anyway, that I'd given up on. He won't know the difference.
Rod Farmer

One can sit and sense
the passion of
the fragment
for the whole,
this mystical monism
is in our bones,
you sit and sense
all that is finite
seeking and sinking
into the infinite.
Who would have
thought you could
tavel so far
by sitting?
Dean Faulwell

For Now

It’s impossible to know
in advance what will
or will not bring happiness.
Tumbling into a deep hole
unexpectedly will trigger
ecstasy in some, while in others
it may be a sunset
decorated with strips of rotting meat.
All that’s really known
is that being
bangs itself
against our heads each morning
in search of what continues.
Dean Faulwell

The Nature of Things

We want what we want when we want it, but time sprints ahead and leaves us waiting in an empty bordello with jam on our lips and feathers up our nostrils. Each individual thing bulges with its own happiness, and the supernatural glow of heaven locks itself up in some closet no one has the key to. There is not much for us to do then but wait in unbridled anticipation of what some would call a reply, while others simply spit into the wind without any thought of unforeseen consequences, such as a sudden flood of emotions pouring from the heart into someone else’s helpless idea of what time actually is.

I know now that I am no longer waiting. A thread I picked up has somehow led me to the way I always wanted you to be here without any clothes on.
Edward Fisher

The Days Go Dancing Round the Poles

At castle bridge and barbican
A bearded, two-faced god stands guard,
Deploying boisterous armies north
As ice storms slam his iron gate;
The wind cries out, an orphan sound,
As hungry wolves come back to town;
Under an arching, single star,
Swing wide the bolted doors of war!
Warm days are but an old man’s dream:
He rocks his chair and stokes the coals,
Like chimney smoke, his memories
Dance with the days around the poles.

This is the month the world began!
Its borrowed days still lengthen, and
Awakening on drowsy lids
With light regrets, renews its buds;
Young lovers blow a morning kiss,
Their foreheads wreathed in silhouettes,
While those homebound in wedded bliss
Wish they were free of vows instead.
Ring bells of angels! Storied bowers!
Uncertain glories in the flower!
Wet wings of butterflies unfold
As dancing days go round the poles.

With noisy robins on the lawn,
Propitious gods, baptismal fonts,
Bouquet of faces, dewy locks,
Prelude to beauty’s music box-
All praise his name with food and drink,
Imperial fruit, majestic grain,
The spectacle of ancient kings,
The Sun in triumph rules and reigns;
Cast off your garments, mend your mood,
Let harvest brew and dregs take hold,
Nor spare the claret’s blushing rude-
The dance of days around the poles.
A faded leaf faints with the year,
Its russet colors all distilled
On sunset walks, in haygold tincts,
From meadow moon to bobolink;
A dismal sky fills up with gray,
Stark widow-makers etch the earth,
Chill rain and melancholy mist
Forsake me in my changed estate;
My winter palace under siege,
Its frosty solstice in revolt,
Passed Saturn’s throne and outer rings
The days go dancing round the poles.
Brent Fisk

Fatigues

My brother does not want to go
to the beach with the family,
says he's still shaking
sand from his belongings, his dreams.

We stow his gear in the rafters of the garage
with all the old toys and books, the garbage brought home
from school. He eats as much as ever, but quicker -
sleeps too fast, burning through a night
in a few white-hot dreams.
I hear him creaking down the hall, the moon still high,
listen to his lighter ignite cigarette after cigarette.
He wets the butts under the kitchen faucet.

He's thinking of looking for work,
he says over scrambled eggs,
something in construction…
there's a trace of a tremor in the muscles
of his jaw. He won't look up.
He's like a broken robot toy,
if we wind him any tighter,
he may never move again.
Miracles of Sleep

Brent Fisk

When Jesus slept, what miracles slipped out?
Were whole armies drafted from the dead
with the restless sweep of his arm?
Did dishwater transform to wine and fish become
loaves of bread mid-leap?
Did he wake, troubled and scared, to hover over Joseph's
stubbled face. Did he find his likeness there?
Did he bend his halo on the pillows
or hear the boom of God's voice dying
away as he woke, just an echo of rumbling thunder?

Did his stomach grumble with hunger? Did he snore?
Dream of his various Marys, those strange visions in a burning fever?
Did the thought of death keep him staring at the ceiling?
Did he float above his bed, rise above it all?
What of lullabies hummed to beasts of the valley?
To the louse, the bed bug, the mice?
What lulled him to sleep: the soft sound of crickets? Rain? A purring cat?
Could he hear the lonely wail of trains yet to come,
or see the silver trail of uninvented jets?

Did he sleep too long, rise late for work,
wake groggy so his parables came garbled?
Did he confuse the names of apostles sleeping at his feet,
forget where he kicked off his sandals?
Was there ever that perfect dream, a nightmare immaculate in horror?
Did he cry out then for Joseph or bottle up his fear,
that doubtful voice saved
for later and another, absent father?
Lost in a sea of campers near the ocean,
we listen to waves roar like wind in the shells of our ears.
A full moon shines on a drunken man
naked in his cramped trailer. We roost nearby
on a picnic table, so many crying gulls.

He's blow-drying his curly hair,
and with his back to us, can’t hear even the ocean.
A stiff breeze’s driven our parents inland like whining mosquitoes.
We are laughing at this man, an edge to it we’re hiding.
We pretend to know so much more than we do,
act tougher than we are.

When finally, he hears sees feels us,
he crashes through his flimsy door,
a gust of strong wind, surge from a storm.
His roar drives us inland too and he breaks
like a wave, does not rise again.
The outline of toes is visible when looking from an angle, the overhead lamp hides this sojourn over a freshly waxed floor, an individual’s record kept, swirls on foot pads blend with obscure rays. There is only one impression to see, one giant leap someone made to leave their mark on the smooth clean tile surface, no wax underneath, the space a dead dull area, pocket absent of visual stimuli. It should be studied, the phantom gait measured, male or female, child or adult, destination determined to ascribe significance so one can publish a paper on a new find, new species that will be lost when summer arrives, and the floor is stripped and waxed anew.
Jeff Friedman

Chooch at the Cheetah

As orange moons dangle over the Cheetah
and vibrations rumble along fault lines,
spotted salamanders crawl toward vernal pools
smelling of Scotch. I lift a fork,
flashing under the skirt of a crimson rose.

Tattoos twitch. Coco’s jewels
tinkle. As she bends over,
Brandi tastes fur
with her long striped tongue.
Silks ripple. I flash my bills.

I give in to Kidra slinking
along the delta, singing like a thousand peepers,
shedding her gritty silt.
I give in to one with a dimple,
one ticking like a heart, one whose

cheeks kiss, one handing me a ticket,
one spreading her love, tipped with fuzz.
Blue smoke curls around a dagger,
two snakes coil toward a bird,
the wild asses bray.
Let's say
it was his propensity
for speed
that led him to apply

to roar
in the left lane
whistles and sirens

spewing
fear for the one
on the stretcher

feel that fear and do it
at a hundred miles an hour
red and blue lasers
gas on someone else's dime

a driver propelled
through time
while the soul on the stretcher

bobbles along
with
a random thought

the ambulance
could become
a hearse

for both of them
When the asteroid provisionally named 2002 MN
passed us closer than the moon,
the scientist quoted in the papers said
it was “About the size of a soccer field,”
before even mentioning it was also the closest-
near-miss recorded in decades-
closer than the mileage
on the odometer of my truck.

This because America was still in
contention for the World Cup,
because the moon was just a dime of light
in the reserves of the night sky,
and who but physicists and astronomers
can comprehend magnetic-pull applied
to the calculated trajectory of celestial bodies,
near-earth-orbits and atmospheric co-axials.
Soccer, after all, is universal.

The scientist, who didn’t want
to give his real name, said,
“We didn’t even see it till three days after
it whizzed past.” Then, he recounted
the last big crash, “Tunguska, Siberia, 1908:
the blast radii ten-thousand soccer fields across”-
as another big rock goes hurtling past the moon,
a corner kick just high and wide-right.
Lindsey Gosma

*A Polemic on Weight*

I sat to the computer,
stretched my hand to the mouse,
I caught
    your glasses, instead.
Rimless, barely
gray, and “feather-light,”
but to me they are less:
    hair-on-your-nape-light
    first-you-in-the-morning-light
    agitation-lost-to-kisses
like last night
how, in frustration,
you slipped the frames from your face,
rans your broad palm though your hair
and paced the floor with your eyes
    (bull gesturings in a corner)

I find I need
to slide the frames
    to my nose, I see
my face with a part of you,
    imposed.
Too square I say
like my jaw (you think
    it’s a shame I say so).
The compliment not adequate,
like your late arrival
last night to dinner
    (not chicken, again)
    put off since Sunday.

And now, thinking back
I remember little,
    (you drive me crazy,
    but I love it)
realize the night was postured
for a kind of delicacy,
    a surrendering
smile at our haughty banter,
ease of lightly dropping to your arms.
The little girl from the back apartment
wants my necklace.

It's blue,
a plastic forget-me-not. She
especially likes
the pearls in the center.

To me,
it's kitschy, a thrift shop find,
something I'd be satisfied with
if I just wore it once.

The little girl touches
the flower as I bend over
leashing my dog tighter.

She's begging
to pet him as we're on our way
to the mailbox.

On my way back, she waits,
(Shes wants to come to my house to play.)
waiting every time I get the mail.
But I don't still know
her name (I
never ask her name.)

She's just

little girl from the back apartment
and that's the way I keep it
and my cheap, gaudy necklace
(rough silver string for a chain) that
my hands
won't unclasp.
Kevin Griffith

Let There Be Light

We must remember that life is canned laughter but that the laughs we hear are those of the dead.

So, my son, smile. Happiness grows softer, though, as the world grows older than the god who made it-who knew that just one L hides after.
Kevin Griffith

_Love is Slow to Anger_

For so long I was married to myself:
With this ring, I... but the ring was a blindfold.
I walked the planks of day; swallowed bullets
from my own gun. I was a button pulled
from a corpse’s jacket. Then you told
me who I was. Like the toy on the shelf
I felt you wind me tight, then let me go.
Droplets cascade in rattle-tat rhythm, kaleidoscoping my window haphazardly. Sky half-hazy rather than seamless black - June rain has a way of trapping heat (greenhouse-like) - air so drenched you wish for gills. The drumming hum has a peace about it. A needed break from ceaseless rays. It’s not quite a spring rain - cool with vibrant zest - It’s more like the earth rushing upward gasping for air.
Mark Harshman

_A Bird_

-- after Leonardo da Vinci

Sun blisters through the green sky and suddenly a bird cries out a triolet of notes. That he has heard this, he reflects, must mean something, something more hopeful than this can of warm beer and the sweat stinging his eyes, something more than this pile of bills stained with jam and ketchup that lie before him on the card table, a card table set outdoors because his bedroom has reached the boiling point, liquefied his tubes of color. It must. Mean more. And now the sun has gone behind the clouds behind the trees behind the house. And now the lawn-mower down the street has gone silent. And now a breeze has sprung up. And now he thinks again about that bird. Were those words it was singing? Did they spell out her name, telling him in code that he should try calling her again? It had been three years. Wasn’t that long enough? Long enough for the one miracle he persists in believing? Mona Lisa, too, must have relented - how else explain the way she follows us around the room? The way she sings?
He flinches at the sight of his mother's bra and panties strung along the still clothesline. No wind to enliven this afternoon. A truck is grinding its gears up inside the green shade of the mountain. Where the lawn meets the road the grass is brown with dust. A small garden snake slithers out onto the hot asphalt. His mother sleeps in front of the TV where John Wayne charges downhill, bugles blaring, sabers slicing the heavy air into thin wafers of breeze. Ahead, white flags surrender both pride and virtue. A change in the weather? The truck will reach Cumberland in time for supper. As he digs a grave for the snake, the boy will wonder again what it takes to become a man.
John Hazard

Dexter City, 1959

One crow chasing off a turkey buzzard
from a dead thing out of sight—
I swear that’s what I saw today
in Ruby’s pasture (and the beagle
crazy—sniffing at air, not brush
along the fence and gravel road).

I’d ask Tom—he knows birds—
but he goes on and on. And it was Tom
that Verna put out back-a pup tent
and her red scarf atop a six-foot wooden cross
where she’d carved across the arms,
and painted black: “Thou Shalt Not.”
(She’d found a Playboy in the pickup). So,
in the wee hours, Tom slipped ten to Grady
at The Trumpet to headline the story:
“Farmer’s Wife Scarecrows Hubby.”
But Verna gave him twenty, and more,
and got more words—“One Wife’s Sorrow:
Hubby Spills His Seed on Truck.”
All that ran side by side awhile, made good talk.
But Tom and Verna are back at church,
six months now.

And my big time with birds
today is done. Here on the porch I watch
the maple, nuthatches—already August,
but they’re just now here, bobbing down the tree,
bury little heads, poking here, poking there.
You know, that crow worked harder, by a lot, to chase,
than the buzzard did to float away.
I keep wondering what the dead thing was.
Michael Hettich

Like a Man

I was helping her fold the laundry
down in the basement, listening to her talk
about the way snow fell in the city at dusk
in her childhood, how she'd watched from the window
that looked out on the gated courtyard she yearned
to play in, a garden some old man tended
that no one ever used but him, where a birdbath
in summer attracted vivid birds
you'd never expect. I'd stand at the gate
and look in on them—not just pigeons like you see now
but all sorts of colors and songs.
The laundry smelled fresher down in the basement
than it did when we got upstairs, and I loved
pushing my face into bath towels and sheets
and breathing deeply while she talked, wanting
to tell her I'd done this or that, yearning
to ask her what she knew, what she really believed
about anything, what she could tell me for sure
was true. The basement was dusky. We'd carry
the clean laundry upstairs, tiptoe past the bedroom
where my brother napped, and put it carefully away
while she talked about climbing that garden fence
or of walking with her father through the snow while he talked
on and on about things she promised
to tell me someday. When you're bigger, pretty soon...
So I hunched up my shoulders, puffed my chest out
and tried to lower my voice, which wouldn't
naturally happen for a decade, and waited
for her to notice. I wanted her to notice me
standing that way, like a man.
You wake beside someone you don’t recognize, 
a dark woman who snarls beside you in her sleep. 
You’re drawn to the shape of her ears, to her neck, 
the way her long hair drapes the pillow, and you nudge her 
to make her move, so you can observe 
her features more closely. But the room is nearly dark 

so you listen for the ticking of your wind-up alarm clock 
to ascertain this is indeed the bedroom 
you’ve slept in for years, winding that silly 
contraption this woman presented to you 
the day you were married-so you would remember 
her love every evening, when you wound it and set 
the alarm. *Or else it will run down, she’d said, 
and you’ll just keep sleeping.* Could this be your wife? 
She’s beautiful—maybe as lovely as your wife is—
so you get up to ascertain you are indeed 
in your bedroom. Yes: the old dog snoring 
in the corner is the mutt you brought home for your children 

when they were just children; the house is full 
of your children’s absence as you wander, picking up 
books and notebooks, small things they left behind, 
and putting them back. Then you go back to bed, 
lie down beside this beautiful woman, 
this stranger. You hold her, and wait for the alarm.
Lowell Jaeger

Don't tell me any more lies

she breathed in my ear,
still holding me over her,
our flesh washed with sex,
as she dug her nails
either side of my spine,
only a moment, then massaged
the slack muscles
where she might have drawn blood.
If she wanted to.

This was long ago,
but it's stuck with me,
the way she let herself cry
and kissed my neck twisted
on the pillow beside her
where I'd turned to face
our candle on the nightstand,
just a wick barely lit
afloat in a puddle of wax.

I couldn't say sorry
because I wasn't. Because I wanted the flame
to catch the papers nearby
and the tablecloth, curtains,
our clothes in heaps.
I'd never felt so naked,
blazing with shame, or so completely
happy to be kissed and touched
and loved for being less than she'd expected.
Alex Johnson

*Again*

There’s a metal bar
Between my bed and
An alarm clock radio.
First, static and some music
Hit my head,
And then my head hits
The cast iron bar.
My head, being made of an alloy
That is conspicuously inferior to that of
The cast iron bar
Recoils like a rifle butt.

If only it weren’t so
Irregular.
The first man to circumnavigate
The globe on a pogo stick
Without aid of an oxygen tank or polarized goggles
Stared at the sun anyway. He knew
It was bad for his retinas but he did it anyway.
When the reporters asked the man on the stick
"Why did you stare into the sun?"
He, and all those who had done the same
Replied simply:
Because it was there
And because it still is
And they wore that black spot in their eye
Like a badge of honor
Why is that man so bald, Father?
He probably has a son, my son.
What do you mean, Father?
When a man has a son, it is his duty to worry.
But why does that make him bald?
A man’s hairs stand about on his head like children squinching their toes in soft spring mud. But when the head becomes worried, its scalp contracts, pinching the delicate feet of the hairs. *Ow, ow*, say the hairs, and they run off to the heads of the young and carefree.

But, Father, you have a son, and you still have hair. Don’t you care about me?
The father removes his toupee.
Of course I care, my son.
Father, why have you hidden your love?
The cowboys ride into Sunset on their piebald ponies, their rangy geldings, their mangy mustangs, ready to sluice their dusty throats with redeye. “Yip, yip, yip,” they cry with boyish glee as they head for the saloon and the bleached-out fancy girls. Through the endless afternoon their horses switch their tails at flies as they discuss existentialism and the problematic merits of DDT. In the saloon someone honks on a trail-battered harmonica, and whiskey dances in the skinny, bowed legs of the cowboys. Some of them canter upstairs, rowels ringing, eager to purchase a new disease. “Wahoo!” they shout, as they caper on sawdust floors, sawdust mattresses.

Wild with corn and cactus squeezings, the reeyed buckaroos break knuckles and bottles on each other’s stubborn skulls. Flying bodies shatter the fly-specked windows and battered batwings. Gouged eyeballs and ragged fragments of tooth-torn ears and noses litter the bloody shavings.

In the morning the clanging sun ambushes the cowpokes in the cowshit where they lie. They load the mangled parts of partners on their patient packmules and ride back to the ranch on their sun-shrunken ponies with their pointed toes dragging in the dust.

Off in the flourishing sagebrush, coyotes are gnawing the bones of a ’52 Ford pickup. The cowboys pass on without noticing. The coyotes chuckle quietly to themselves. Tonight is their night to howl.
Through gritted teeth he says happiness isn’t important, that what matters is trying to be happy. The teeth reopen only to pull and slash at thick pieces of steak. Outside birds chirp but I know they must be sad, shitting on Fords and balancing on tree limbs all day. They never get what they want, chittering and spitting out horny onomatopoeia. He struts out to his car and his boots are worn down in the front but the backs are immaculate. He never takes time to put the heel down and I hate him for it. Summer is coming in shaky thrusts, a newbie on prom night, and ice cream drips off your hand before you know it. I never saw life coming. He drove off with me in the passenger seat. Sticky leather, the rumble of a tearing engine. The sun moved slower those days.
Craig Malesra

And here's the best thing about it-- I can make you happy by just being happy to have you near me. Sometimes you look up at me and when your eyes shake so controllably you make me shiver inside, a slow peeling-off, like a snake wriggling from its old skin. Touch renders me unconscious within my own body and when you turn to grab the pen that has dropped your skin breathes past me, and I into it. Skies open with the flexibility of a cracked finger and your humble walk inspires me. I tell myself I will be more modest, more ascetic, more needy and less needful. You are headphones on my ears and I will never walk in the forest again if you leave. I did not need you but now the jackhammers and shiny loud cars have faded. With the trees around me, I pull the music from my head and stare into the darkening shelf of sky, staccato hope: cracked and lucid, profuse and flowing.
I know that, if I wanted to, I could walk right across the top of our in-ground pool. I could do it in my wingtip shoes; they wouldn’t gather a drop. My little brother was daring me.

A wasp stings me above the knee. Somewhere nearby a rabbit is heavy with quintuplets. My brother glides just under the water’s surface. I remember what Jesus told me in the silence. “This is not an ambush.”
I found a yellow apple rudded red
on one side, like as a farmer's daughter blushes
as she walks down the flowered aisle,
dressed in white but dyed vermilion,
ashamed to be so praised who always dressed in jeans.
Its smell was sweet and when it passed my lips
and teeth and touched my tongue I failed for words.

It healed my body of all
its bruises; my mind
could only hold its unchanging image:
forgot pain, forgot want,
forgiven.

I threw away the silly core, on a path
where children walk and dogs elope.
I know the seeds will all remain arranged into a ring
to cut the sky and strew the ground with flowers in the spring.
Hey, do you remember when
   Gold and crimson, teal and tangerine,
we jumped the fence
   Circumscribed by inky lines,
to the backyard of the big house
   Some of the lines drawn by men
up the street?
   Some by the seas and time;
I kept shushing you
   The beauty of a map is freedom,
cause I was afraid
   By which a finger’s careful path
of the cleaning lady,
   Can trace across the lines of men
even though we knew
   And pass the lines of God.
no one was watching.

I remember complete joy
when the rock left my hand,
and forgetting to breathe
when the window broke
into shivers.
I used to take the train 
from the 22nd Street Station in San Francisco 
and ride south to Santa Clara, 
where every day I saw some things from the window, like:

1. a chained pitbull someone had kicked into meanness

2. a full-sized shopping cart painted red abandoned on its side near the tracks

3. a small boy walking through weeds wearing a green bucket on his head

4. a billboard sign saying "Smile God loves you Rev" and a saloon sign that read "Welcome to Red’s Recovery Room"

I kept trying to put it all together, 
these bits and pieces. 
The world, I thought, goes on around me 
like the woman seated across the aisle reading aloud 
in Chinese.

It was like watching TV, it really was.
Alyce Miller

*Heirlooms*

Sometimes language knows
what we don’t,
the rough stones handed down
    for the next generation to polish,
and then you have
    counterfeiters like Kanzi and Koko
grasping at human syntax
    with their opposable thumbs,
accused of being loved by women
who believe too much in words.
Too many flies and mosquitoes above the burgers
And the manager had just invested
In a bug spray can the size of a fire extinguisher
So just before busy time on Sunday
He asks me to fire away and I refuse
My college course in Ecology playing in my head.
He gets Eddie just out of reform school
To take my place and Eddie loves it.
Suddenly, the burger labels
Papa, Mama, Teen, and Baby
And customer toxic dose meet.

When the place begins to buzz with activity
I am too slow for the grill and shift to the fryer.
And I stay until big Bob shows up
Lean and tall and short on talk.
An ex-con, the manager said.
Big Bob tells me to step aside
Sit, relax and take care of supplies.
Big Bob did it all
Set the burgers, the rolls,
Timed the fries, ran the drinks
Wraps the deal faster than
Any four of us college guys.

I left to wonder about the world
And why it seemed so difficult?
In school even philosophy was simple
You learned that there were no answers
You told the prof as much, and you got an A.
But here the bugs land on the burgers
The best worker is an ex-con and
There are answers everywhere
And I know none of them.
The draft board excuses me from service
A science teacher I am part of national home defense
With the good news I’m off to my fiance’s home
At the door of my Pontiac I feel a pull
As if strings extend from my shoulders
Remember how a college buddy poked fun
By doing a puppet walk and cackling
*Study nerd! Study nerd!*

Two hundred kids die every week
But this letter from strangers and I live
All I have to do is avoid getting tangled
Just be careful I told myself
Never march, never threaten
Never take a stand, never sign,
Never politic, be the in-between
Among friends speak your piece,
Among strangers a silence

Marriage, family, home, teacher
Reach a balance
One year the principal
In my year-end report

*Does his job so well*
*You don’t know he’s there*
Outlasted

All around us, we are outlasted. -John Updike

Unfair! My death to come and all that
At the playground these little creatures with so many years

I need more time to live the days when I knew no time.
The college kid me makes the catch as my teammates cheer

With Carly on the balcony and how long did she smile?
On tiptoe at the broken footbridge and the fear that brought a kiss

A school trip, Carly’s touch food for a hundred gossips
That night a tumble into her bed

An outdoor wait for the best pizza in New Haven
With four Red Sox fans who share a beer

Young men who will love, have children
Share a beer forty, fifty years from this day

While beneath the grass at their feet
Carly and I will look on
Elizabeth Murawski

Madeline is Melancholy

The sky is rare today
and cruel, tossing back
my black balloons,

pulling from its sleeve
rabbits of cloud.
Dawn laughs, a carping

mother. I sink into a ship
on the ocean floor,
swim through velvet

staterooms with stopped
marble clocks.
Dark-eyed swords

pierce a heart
addicted to remorse.
I'm stuck

with breath, playing
dead to be safe,
my hunger to be sad

a plutonium force
outwitting
the promise of the pearl.
Thumb like the stub
of a votive candle,
he reached to shake
my hand,

   The one
I gave up, slow
boy hand extended
only for manners.

Fingers and palm
so hard the callouses
felt like stones,
as though soft touch
and kindness were not
possibly held there.

His wife, though, dying
in the room behind
reached for his touch
when we entered in,
his right cupping hers,
his left stroking her brow.

I had never seen
so gentle a contact,
nor felt it...almost wished
to be in her place,
to feel almost safe.
As shadows began in their slow way
to push things around until they go left,
sounds changed too: as though the edges sharp
in sunlight were rubbed smooth by its velvet absence.
The angular game of "tag" and "it"
played by these slow bullies who steal the light
changes for children the mysteries
of hiding places from absence into darkened horror,
shapes no longer square or shared, nor clear
the way goodness claims to be, church raised, with parents.
But evening, having stuffed the dead body of dusk
in a place we'll never find it, sends cicada and cricket
out to cover up with noisy distraction,
while, ready or not, the moon bleeds in plain view.
Robert L. Penick

Blues

Tolstoy was born on a day just like today, all blue sky and light breeze all birdsong and butterflies. The servants gazed outside at God’s magnificent afternoon and thought, "Yes, some good will come from today’s production."

And yet Tolstoy died, anyway.
Let the blooms lift up
our sorrow
let the lilies
lift up our grief
let the Irish lift up their glasses
and give we bastards some relief.
Let the Queen
lift up her skirt
and dance an
improper jig.
Let the Irish become free,
let the Tories
remain pigs.
Alice Pero

*Heat*

The day sweats
Cicadas wrinkle the air
with vibrations
Trees lie drunk
in pond’s rippling surface
Young birches lean toward each other
whispering like thin women gossiping
Over water lilies a white moth flies
pushed in abstract patterns
by some erratic hidden hand
Pond turns to green glass
Only a few birds are left singing
while we curl up hot and dripping
salty in late summer sun
No one had summoned the storm
It came on suddenly in the early evening,
surprising strollers in the park
The wind sent ripples on the water
The surface worried and curdled
Trees’ colored leaves, flying like gypsies
running for cover,
branches bending and complaining
A scatter of birds fluttering into hidden corners
before the pelting downpour

Shivering in thin coverings,
we stood drenched in a doorway,
wondering at lights on the Twin Towers
coming on like clockwork
The two skyscrapers
rising up with a thousand blinkless eyes
Tall and mute
never moving in the storm’s gasp
The silent towers
like thin silver paper,
cutting edges in the darkening sky
Monuments to regularity
and this morning’s sunny memos
Many people tried to hatch me, provided warmth, kept me safe, yet I refused to hatch, feared the outside world. My egg had a stereo and shelves stuffed with books. My 25th summer I read *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman said, *It’s all clear; you can come out now.* I busted my shell and saw my first blue bellflower. At first my wings ached after years cramped in a rounded space. Soon I flew, dodging chimneys, Sunzilla sunflowers and roofs, returned home to see half a dozen eggs on the counter, uncracked, a bowl beside them.
Kenneth Pobo

*Old Hyacinths*

return—thin purple blossoms
expose a spindly stalk. By April,
only leaves. We toss yanked bulbs

in compost—like them, our own colors
weaken—a shadow
slides over us, hand extended.
Colleen Powderly

Driving

You drive down the road and an old
song comes on the radio. You
think how you never really listen
to the radio but today, this day, you do,
and a silly song, drums like popcorn,
guitars picking like a kid with peas, idiotic
boy singer zipping through your car,
spitting throwaway words yellowed
like leaves blighted with spots, their warts
parched like the skin over your heart,
skin that reddens, throbs, reminds you
under your cracked, wary surface, skin that
strains with sutures, leaks scarlet on the boy’s
words. Spilling, mixing scarlet and yellow,
rivers down the front of your shirt, the seat,
your jeans, your clean new sneakers. They
slip on the pedals. The boy zips to the end,
even sillier, spits out forever as rivers
seep under the doors, slip out into the wind,
orange ribbons flying behind the car, catching,
crushing under the wheels, leaving their
threads on the highway.
We call to one another, beckon, oblique
notes and nights spin through the screen
from next door into vague dawns
we lay the length of bodies
with sleep that barely holds
or delivers its promise of respite
like a letter addressed from Los Angeles
to Santa Cruz left unsent, skirted
under a table in a studio
where an object with weight is made.
It will always be that chine of limestone
along Route 40 as I headed to graduate school-
for the first time responsible
for paying all my bills. I chain-smoked Merits,
driving west at 80 miles an hour,
wanting to stand on that precise knife-edge
and see both sides at once:
the unjammed highway speeding in both directions
between small and smaller cities,
and the wilderness I imagined
just over that limestone ridge,
its copperheads and wind,
its hidden ponds amazing as mercury
there in the polished sun. The possibilities were
more interesting than Eliot, the history
of the semicolon, the criticism of poems
I would never learn to like. I couldn’t admit that then.
I crossed the Mississippi into Arkansas-
surprised by the evenness of the land,
the wideness of it, the things a flood could flatten
and how the people kept on coming.
Georgia Ressmeyer

Mind

In Thunder—Sun and Rain—
the grumblings of a vast,
unsettled Mind—my own
is restless while I watch
white petals from a Crab
Tree flee, as if a rain of
terror had begun.

A City bus makes thunder
of its own and children
shriek at drenchings from
a bruised but unassuming
cloud, as bound for school
they scuttle by in streaks
of gentle, unretreating Sun.

Is this to be a gloomy or
a Sun-glanced day? At last
the verdict is announced
in dusk-ness and in thunder-
shouts. That Crab Tree knew,
as I did not, a Mind more
unforgiving than I thought.
Georgia Ressmeyer

*Wind-Lover’s Lament*

Why can’t I store
the wind in bottles,
blue and green,
save excess ripples
from the ocean’s
skin, the snapping
flap of shirrtails,
sheets, and sails,
the ping of rigging
on a metal mast,
the restless, forward­
leaning dash of
grasses in the fields,
the whistlings
of the pines? How
can I live without
wind’s swirling
breath and songs
when I am shut
inside a room?
After a chain whirls through its track in a blur of tooth and claw
smoke drifts low against long-fallen leaves.

After the slow crash and curl through upper reaches, broken limbs,
there is a sound of coming home to soil as if to sleep.

After the swinging maul severs air, the sting of a blunt blade
strikes knots and gnarls in the leveled grain.

After blows to the wedge levered in, a ten pound sledge
sings its sharp spray to opposing steel against the forces.

After driving forces down through the muscle of the tree
prying apart strands woven tightly in rings and years.

After gathered sleeves of bark thatched precisely over
the woodpile shield it from rain and clinging snow.

After ash forms from the wood,
after heat escapes the tree.

After life there is no fire
but there is burning.
You get lost on vacation to nowhere in particular -
a wrong exit through Saint Louis, a left turn of advice
heeded from the confused guy back at the last gas stop.
Your colorblind ineptness at map-reading didn’t help.
Nor the illegible signs in peeled paint and bullet holes.

So night falls as darkness overcomes you. Tired,
you think your destination should be the music here.
That is, your senses are dimmed as a tuning fork
with a thumb on it. You pull into this rank motel
that flashes vacancy like a sweet salvation beacon.

The clerk has a scar on his cheek in the shape of Idaho.
But you believe you’re nowhere near Boise, as he states,
“There’s clean sheets, towels, a flyswatter in every room.
And every room’s a color, you can choose your pigment.”
Which you misunderstand as pig meat, thinking
there’s a free barbecue come morning.

The room looks clean but looks can be deceiving.
The TV’s cracked. Even if you leave it off, it appears
fibrous sitcom fungi could leak out and seep into
the more porous portions of your brain. You throw
a reflective space blanket over it you always carry on vacation,
though reflection may not be what you want or need here.

A smashed roach in the drawer lies under the Gideons.
You note the Book has certain passages and pages removed
with what appears to be a dull but serrated instrument.
You doze off, not realizing the presence under your pillow -
a dream fragment left behind by the last transient patron.
The stranger’s sliver of sub-consciousness slides into your skull.
You begin these staccato dreams of flowers, lust, and tentacles.
Stephen R. Roberts

One Trillionth of a Turnip

“A report released Thursday shows the universe went through extremely rapid expansion in the moments after the big bang, growing from the size of a marble to a volume larger than all of observable space in less than a trillionth of a second. Earlier studies have determined that the universe is 13.7 billion years old, give or take a few hundred thousand years.”

So why am I worried about being charged ninety-nine cents a pound for yams when I actually purchased turnips priced at seventy-nine cents a pound - a difference for the pound and a half purchased of thirty cents which calculates to another $30/79^{1/2}$ of a turnip based on a one pound turnip which is a good sized one, not the best for eating, yet what else would a turnip of any size be used for. Some folks today won’t consider them even for that, that is, a diet staple like a potato or an apple.

The problem is not the size or the arbitrary numbers associated with these purple and white globular roots with the pepper flair but with the confusion, the accidental or incidental misidentification. Or possibly a malformed, underground ignorance by the one at the keys, the one striking the digits that flash green onto the screen at perhaps a thousandth of a second after the fingertip touches possibly a wrong pad. Though this is conjecture, an educated guess at best, an estimation that cannot be measured by the naked yam.
Andrés Rodríguez

*Self-Portrait*

Still unused candleholders of dust,  
flaked gold leaf among glassware stems  
in tiny piles of hush, and clothes  
upon clothes flung into a dark corner,  
slain by the tears of many a hard week—
these, and more, are the wholesale goods  
once meant to bring you joy,  
joy that sags before me as I  
step into your cramped and silent walk-up  
in perfect isolation.

I see the grief in things. I see you,  
my first loved one, staring back at me  
from the glow of the bathroom door  
that reaches with its dingy light  
into the recesses of your disarray.  
Then a small voice asks me,  
Who are you? What do you want?  
I turn toward the sound,  
and what catches my eye is a painting,  
your self-portrait lying on the floor.

Here is an imaginary street  
with a BAR sign over the sidewalk,  
on a night dark as a jeweler’s cloth.  
You’ve placed yourself in the center  
from where you walk forward,  
a sixteen-year-old beauty in a red dress.  
The wind slips between your legs  
and lifts the hem as you smile.  
The longer I stare, the greater the beauty  
that gleams against that black cloth of night.

But there is more here. On a bench sits a man,  
elbows on knees, face in hands,  
a frozen agony formed by the sinew of weeping.  
Coming up the street behind you,  
a one-legged man on crutches  
leans into the wind that flays his clothes and hair.  
In the center of all you seem  
completely removed, untouched,
or tingling with some knowledge
that plays upon the scene.

Sobs from the television downstairs
or somebody’s dreamtime begun.
You stare at me still, lost in the light,
and I remember wanting love
to spring from the pages of books,
to make the starry lights of this city
lift off the ground, bound for other worlds,
lifting me out of this life as well.

What happened to that girl I knew?
Did you leave her behind with those others
to gather imperfect lives to herself;
queen of the skid row fairies?
Or did she refuse the living stream
to wander the night, leaving you
stranded in a few cluttered rooms,
bereft of something only the night knows?

Here in your self-portrait,
her smile says nothing I’d recognize at all,
even if I could compose the missing stories of you.
She merely steps her way over the sidewalk,
moving against the harsh or weepy air,
always coming forward in time,
always drawing nearer,
yet never arriving.
Judi Rypma

Tenacity

Sometimes I’m the lone tree
in a farmer’s field—a sturdy elm
or sprawling pecan, even
a split birch
wrapped in papery bark
that unpeels too easily

year after year
buffeted
by storms, targeted
by backhoes and those who crave change,
forced to withstand snarling winds.

Nobody knows why I was planted here—
perhaps to deflect lightning
mark boundaries
maybe to shade and shelter
those seeking nourishment

beneath trembling boughs.

Either way, I must stand strong
and straight. Carry the burden
of overlooking empty fields
even alone
continue decade by decade
to branch out
in all directions
knowing I’ll be chopped down
before reaching the sky.
Faithful

You hear them arguing on the cold street in front of the deli or bodega about whose spiritual god won’t eat shit.

about whose god is better on his feet and whose god’s in heaven or Nirvana. You see them arguing on the lit street before a mosque or church or temple’s seat.

They miscommunicate each other’s dogma about their spiritual god who won’t eat shit.

In the human skull 22 bones fit to ease the brain, not the soul, from trauma. They stubbornly argue on disturbed streets why only their prophets deflect defeat, why only their gods fill stadiums with drama about a spiritual god who won’t eat shit.

They fragment the world to become complete and faithful. They repeat the propaganda. You hear them arguing on burning streets about whose spiritual god won’t eat shit.
Damn Arcadia

David Sapp

Damn crazy architect!
We are a pair, precariously erected,
the only two stone columns
lifting this meager temple skyward.
Perched at cliff’s edge,
drab pastures at our backs, we gaze
over an obscure and lusterless sea.

What aesthetic lunacy!
One capital is Doric, the other Ionic,
one smooth, one fluted,
masculine and feminine.
Together we grasp the lintel,
an obligation to be inert.
One misstep and all stones
tumble upon our heads.

Aphrodite was once worshiped here.
Pure passion, a brilliant flame burned
before her sensual marble image
and warmed the cella walls.
We danced like naked, nymph and faun,
delirious in the stupor of love.

When did Love’s quickening figure vanish?
When did that harpy appear?
I missed the stony switch:
frigid Hera, sanctimonious bitch,
goddess of servitude, queen of shrews.

Now, the crone must whisper in your ear.
You’re content - damn content -
to stand apart. When the fog slides in,
impenetrable stone rolling off the water,
I barely discern your form.
I call out. Do you hear?
Damn Arcadia.
Our old metaphor is misplaced:
two tall trees planted so near
that as the wind jostled us,
disheveling our bed,
our outstretched limbs
were a constant interlace of caresses.

Or, I was the moon, you the sky.
My broad hand moved across
your thigh, your hovering skin,
in a throaty summer's night,
and in the pale of dawn,
your firmament quivered.
The stars jangled, jumbling
bangles on your belly.

Damn this temple with the sharp,
honed corners and crushing weight.
I’m afraid my stone is feeble
and will not weather indifference well.
The mortar crumbles.
I am chipped from the vandals’ rocks,
bruised from lack of touch.
Where are your fingertips?

Will we become merely quaint
when the present is dubbed *Archaic,*
and lovers wander heedlessly
among our overgrown ruins,
when all other stones are toppled:
entablature cracked, pediment lost,
sculpture plundered, the altar defiled?
In my grandmother's kitchen,
the day was spread upon the drop leaf table,
a dizzying kaleidoscope, turning in texture and color:
mason jars gorged with green beans, shelly beans, lima beans,
peaches, pears, cherries, plums,
and quince honey from the trees that tangled in the clothesline;
pies for Grange and the funeral of some distant kin;
the sweet, sticky smell of a cake for a birthday, wedding or shower;
noodles, dusted with flower, laid out to dry
like girls sunning skinny legs on dish towels;
baskets of eggs, warm from the hens' bellies,
with shells as brown as my grandfather's neck;
pails of frothy milk and thick, heady cream,
squeezed from the line of obliging gals in the barn;
sweet corn smeared with the Guernseys' butter as yellow as the ear; and tomatoes, radishes, and onions,
plump, blushing cherubs plucked from Cythera's garden.

Life spun around the drop leaf table;
with no dining room and the front door painted shut,
everyone came through the kitchen, caught
by a rickety, whirling ride at the fair;
grandchildren circled the table, their eyes waiting for another
scoop of ice cream, churned continuously through the summer;
Grandpa and his sons spun a bit at Christmas, sipping
hard cider and homemade wine after the plates were cleared;
Grandma and her daughters dipped and rolled their hair
in an acrid aroma of gossip and home perms;
my aunts played Uno, Flinch, or Rook
as if they were in Vegas, the cards skimming across the table
like kids skating on a pond;
Bessie wore a hair net and no teeth;
Mabel had wild, wiry hairs springing from a big bosom;
Martha and Isabelle prattled like two nervous chickens
scratching and clucking;
and Edie laughed, and everyone laughed at Edie
until the spinning stopped,
until the kitchen grew dark.
Winter Parthenos brushes
her chaste, white lips,
her first breath, a caress,
a hesitant sprinkling of delicate snow,
against earth and firmament.

A naïve lover discovering arousal,
her infinite, shy, little kisses
fall quickening
upon the last few crimson apples
clutching empty boughs;
upon the remaining brittle autumn leaves
clinging to their raucous troupe of color;

upon the fields of corn stalks
rattling lanky, loose bones;
upon each blade of grass,
still green, still dreaming of spring,
still cleaving to the warm,
humid taste of summer;
and upon the wings of bleating geese,
a meandering, hopelessly aimless flock
seeking escape from her fervor.

When her zephyr carries her ardor
in swirling gusts of flurry,
all succumb with weary sighs
to her inevitable, audacious passion.
As I left the darkened apartment—
his cast elevated with my bed pillow,
his cheeks flushed with sleep—
he looked more like a little boy.
I walked to find someplace warmer
than our bedroom, than my sweater,
like a small café, the lights on, sidewalk
tables already pulled out into the cold.

I sat down inside, behind a pair of girls
taking pictures of their toothy smiles, giant
porcelain mugs of cocoa. An older man
outside read a newspaper in the wind.
He wore a flannel shirt, a leather coat.
He looked in through the glass, past
the girls with their camera and cocoa,
at me. I blushed, continued to study
a book. I looked again; the man gone.

I thought of my husband, his humidity
still warming the covers. Despite comfort
in that truth, that sweeping flutter of being
single lasted a few minutes more.
These days our tongues shift with the years, as 'give me a call' slowly gives way to 'give me a shout' and then 'a holla' and then simply 'hit me up.' Our bodies tan and lean as stubble fills in and our cars get exhausts and subs and cold airs. Our stories get taller only a little faster than reality. We can put names and dates to the dreams of sex on the beach and triple digit speeds. But the signs are already there.

The feeling we had that first time we watched night turn to day as we turned our key in our front door, the feeling of the now, of continuity and limitless possibility, sours less than we expected as it distills into the acceptance of the Fallout. Pick one: night or day. You're out till 5, you sleep till 1. The sun has already passed overhead. Slowly the days that we have wasted nursing ourselves with sunglasses and ginger ale begin to wear on us, and we resign to planning our nights accordingly. We round corners too fast and smell airbags. Our brains, sooner or later, connect things, make patterns, steer us away from what has burnt us in the past. We Normalize. I would bet, if we could live to be few hundred years old, it would all be like a dream. Or maybe a movie. But in any case a life without texture, without freedom, for we have given up Choice.

You can call this many things. Fear. Growing up. Boredom. Reality. Or nothing. But it is there, whether or not you see it, and it will kill you if you let it. So name it, and watch it, and kill it instead. For my own struggle I will call it Normalization. And I will never forget its name. With a name you can pick it out of the gray of days at the office and the bills on the kitchen counter, realize when it has seized you, and fight it back.

If nothing else, hear this: The next time you decide not to go to the beach because of the sand in your car or your shoes or your hair, slap yourself across the face and run into the water with your clothes on. Or don’t, and give the free a good name.
Kevin Shea

As I Drove Into the Houghs Neck Peninsula

I saw a hanging icicle swaying on the power line,
just above the sign that said “Welcome to God’s Country,”
rows of rustic summer cottages on either side of Sea Street. As I passed
the site of my past car crash, I thanked Divine Providence for my broken vertebrae
and my twelve thousand dollars. As I passed the house where my little sister baby-sat a boy named Bruno,
I remembered how Bruno’s dad borrowed the neighbor’s Sawzall,
and butchered his wife in the baby’s bedroom. As I drove past
my childhood home I remembered fighting with my parents and punching
my older brother. He wore sunglasses for a week after, claimed his face smacked the pool’s plastic ladder. I parked my car on the side of the road,
walked across the street
to the beach. Then came
a vivid memory: Phil

and I laid a devious trap
for some unsuspecting seagulls.
We left some crumbs

on the seawall, waited for the birds
to swoop down, struck them
with stones. Phil threw one

that tore the wing
right from its side.
The bird lay there bleeding

as we both laughed, until
Phil suddenly got serious
and punted the bird

into the bay.
“Let it die in peace,”
he said. We watched it struggle

to swim with one wing,
to swim in circles,
to sink below the waves.
And so I was on my way
to some hockey game,
the wind biting my upper lip

when a fireburnt page
of newsprint blew
toward my foot. The head­
line read, “Living it up
on Spring Break ’06!”
I thought of some bum burning

the printed word for heat
in a “breezeway”
as my mother once called it

if memory serves me at all.
We filed into a train
station and swam through

seas of people,
breathing in the urine­
soaked air.

On our way, Aunt
what’s-her-name talked
about some TV show

where people with glasses,
average jobs and luck
win money by jumping

into unmarked cabs
and answering questions.
We passed a homeless man

who looked like he had been
torso-toppled over, as if
the wind had crushed him
only from the chest up.
His legs folded intricately
beneath him, his eyes
between sleep and death, his chest
unshaken, deflated,
frozen in the Spring
Break air. Out of reverence
for the bum, who had no chance
of jumping into any sort of luck-
filled cab, Auntie hushed herself
for an eternity
of four to five
seconds.
And so I picked up the bum
by his listless legs and heaved him
into the back of a cab
only to realize that I forgot
to open the door.

I thought I might try
to bring him luck,
you know, as always,
so that he might live
it up, an exotic Spring Break!
After all, at least he was trying
new things.
I watched another bum
taking a piss in
front of the Holocaust Memorial
and knew that
this was paradise.

He, too, was trying new things,
trying to leave
his mark.
Kevin Smith

This is So Us

My sister used to drink to forget about men. Inspired, I pasted my picture over the label of your vodka. When the reverse psychology failed, I hid my guitar pick in your sheets (your roommate left the door unlocked). Lucky for you, it was the same pick I used to write your newest song, “Keyhole Lovers.” The band went in a different direction when you stopped taking my calls.
Blind Man Goes on a Whale Watch

He will hear as someone calls out one o'clock, another three o'clock, the directions with the bow as twelve that whales have first been seen, and the chatter of awe if what they do amazes those who see. He will hear, too, if they are near enough, the sound as they blow, rising from deep below and exhaling a long-held breath. He may even, if they are near enough, feel the mist of their breath on his skin, or, if he is lucky, though those who see may cringe and complain, smell the breath they have held deep within.
Skaidrite Stelzer

Ode on Illness

Ripples of nausea
Turn the room olive gray,
Bleach the sun
To a neon skeleton.
Eyeing my page,
Word flow
From a temporary brain,
Tempered,
Now, by screens
Of pretense.

No words
Of illness,
Need immortality.
Which is after all
A placement in mortal
Eyes.
Who think at the moment
They know the past.
Who think they know
Me
And feel their judgment
Of my voice
Is what matters.

They forget entirely
The moment
The face of a drunk
Leaned on their windshield
One night.
A purple hand
Reached
And ripped
The wiper off.
Elzbieta Descending a Hospital Staircase

The afternoon light cuts her into pieces, reiterating the angles of a descent
to that end of the ward where old medical devices are enshrouded in cloudy plastic,
muted guardians and failed redeemers huddled against the wall like stowaways.

Descending, she is sliced into selves, each with a stranger’s voice, each afraid.

She lingers at the last step, a glass shattering, its shards and daggers suspended in the air.
Right after the TB ward had become the polio ward there she was: dying of TB, sitting at the long windows with the sun in her eyes. She had come to this country to live on a farm in Long Island, her head filled with promises of fruit trees extending to the hem of the sea; but the promises were replaced by blows to the head and body, which she accepted with unflinching silence.

It was something else that was killing her, something in the organ that produced the sounds she refused to make.

When she noticed Gienka on the street, she waved her hand in a strict semicircle like the roadside farmer whose tireless mechanical arm had invited her to pick strawberries each June and green and purple cabbages and fat blushing Macouns before the cold set in. Gienka looked up and waved back and for the longest time neither of them stopped waving, afraid to let the other go.
We are all bumper to bumper, crawling
Through the square, where lane lines have faded
And cars permanently double park.
A white Buick jerks to a halt—behind him,
A woman, like you might see in pump class
Or dropping her kids off at the rink,
Honks her horn. Not once, not twice, but three
Hearty leans, her face quickly blistering.
What she can’t see is the dopey young man
Clutching a scratch ticket, zigzagging his way
Across the street. And when she does,
Her lips mouth words I dare not repeat.
Nancy Wakeman

*Fall*

I love autumn
tumbling amber leaves
apples fall from trees
smell of rotting leaf and fruit
leaving their separate names
sinking softly into the earth

Passions of presidents and kings
fast fall from power into a lover’s arms
Your hand slips between my legs
hallelujah rolls from my mouth
one incandescent moment

My mother’s head
lolling on my shoulder
the first time I held her
last breath rising from her body
a star falling through space
They must have descended from the night sky
so like that Ramadan thirty years ago
ear against the earth
we hear bears shake themselves
and learn the craft of killing for sustenance

so like that Ramadan thirty years ago
the voice that calls us wants us
to learn the craft of killing for sustenance
lumbering through the best neighborhoods

The voice that wants us calls us
goddess that I am take me down
lumbering through the best neighborhoods
bold as a berry

I stared so hard I thought
my body would follow my gaze
float up and out into the bears' world
goddess that I am take me down
prisoner of splendor and travail of the earth

Do not think about bears, the voice says
you took thirty of my kind last season.
To learn the magic that turns stone to berries
sit by the river and watch from the willows
you shot and skinned thirty of my kind last season

Narrow eyes squeezed a little in pleasure
I stare so hard my body floats
up and out into the bears world

I sit by the river, they watch from the willows
so like that Ramadan thirty years ago
my narrow eyes squeeze together
body shudders with pleasure
That there is a god is a big question
so like that Ramadan thirty years ago
when I descended from the night sky
the divine lover told me not to look

My feet feel the throbbing earth
narrow eyes squeezed a little in pleasure
I follow bears through the best neighborhoods
like a scraggly drunk
I hear an old friend in the distance
rumbling through town  8:52 as usual
writing stories  other people’s
stories now  lovers with hands
just miles apart and closing
in on tall glass cities  the single sun
reflected 10,000 times  lighting
up Boston Common like red fireworks
While I slept I fear
my words dislodged
from the page-
scrambling
like
anxious
cockroaches
perhaps all night
trying every conceivable pattern
until finally re-arraigning themselves
just before I pulled the lamp chain
of a new day
into a poem with a different meaning
than it had
    yesterday.
color-sick; n, adj:
If boring was a color, it would be the color of the living room carpet in the house that I grew up in. The rug was a lifeless beige that spread the entire space of the dull rectangular room. The unhealthy carpet was often scattered with various toys which covered the lameness of the color. Unfortunately, this rug was like the smell of rancid meat— it could be covered, but it would always come creeping back, gradually reclaiming the territory. Once it came slithering back in, the color-sick carpet would repossess everything. It would be re-covered again, and the cycle would continue, but the carpet always won.

opportunity; n:
I couldn’t decide whether to use pink or red for the meat of the fruit. I went with the red. It was more drastic. It was a sticky summer day and the sun poured through the glass window spout into my wide lonely room as it always did, tempting me to look out but knowing that I’d never be able to see. A stream of light hit the finished piano, and due to the angle of the sun, created a dazzling laser reflection that nearly blinded me. The cats swayed around me as I pressed hard on my book, using the ugly carpeted floor for a surface. They brushed up against me, tickling my exposed arms and legs with their fine hairs and then finally settled in the glowing square of sun which was close by.

Note: The above are selected excerpts from the short story Definition.
Arlene Zide

*re-Forming the Past*

Not the memories of light slanting along the night ceiling
Not the patches of poison ivy in which you sat
your 9-year old self
Not fishhooks in fingers or ice cream
(or your gentle grandfather’s alarm)
which never took away the pain
Not trying to climb six flights of marble stairs in roller skates
Your uncle’s time -
out locked in your bedroom
memorable for its non-violent exasperation

Not even
refusing to go in a roadside café because it called itself a tavern
Your mother’s protective warnings
taken as risible gospel by aunt and uncle
None of these
though they too shimmer
in the half-remembered comfort of retelling
timeworn secrets, the re-sharing of what you thought
was known
was so - remembered
the world recast
into an unseen form

here a line redrawn, the curve of a limb there
turned so, and so
sharpened here, gentled here
stilled there.

Your grandmother’s snub-nosed blue-eyed countenance
re-formed
before your very eyes
her true shape masked/
unmasked anew, redrawn

unknown.
Arlene Zide

Seeking Asylum

The staccato chatter of the radio pricks at her dream life. She doesn't get up and switch it off. She huddles, under the patchwork quilt. Covers her ears. Clenches her eyes - tight.

Mornings, she stretches her hands taut under the scald of the tap; lets the burn of water squeeze away at the pain settled in her palms, till the pain-pleasure permeates her fingers, throbbing purple, luminous with blood. For a short while at least, she can feel through this persistent numbness.

In the remotest room of the snowbound house, her Swedish granduncle swoons in his dry drunk rant, rails against disloyal subjects, chokes on a pretzel; laments the impolite litany of complaints of unpatriotic refugees from the latest hurricane; decries the lack of appreciation for his blue-eyed forbears who, he believes, built this version of the nation he is so afraid of losing.

Elsewhere, reporters drape themselves in smoke along the bar, sip absinthe.

She curls up - a coiled planet, rocking beneath the warmth of the covers.
TRANSLATIONS
By Serge Delaive

Translated by Jean-Baptiste Mournier

Patagonie

A debacle of clouds
clutters the wide-angle sky
and the westerly wind the crazy wind
stretches the picture’s frame
and the westerly wind the crazy wind
frays the cirrus’ veil
the Pacific bathes in blood
the whole sky fits in the eye of a fish.
By Serge Delaive

Translated by Jean-Baptiste Mournier

Watertown, Massachusetts

Le ciel trempe dans le bleu
Les pavillons de banlieue
Près de Boston où les écureuils
Saccagent le jardin de mon ami
Je suis venu seul ici
Auprès de mon ami comme avant
Admettre que nous sommes fatigués
Et ceci et cela mais c’est bon
De regarder ce qui nous échappe
Monter en tourbillons avec le vent d’avril.

Je photographie un oiseau rouge sang
Seul sur l’arbre encore nu un cardinal
Qui chante avec le rire des enfants.

Watertown, Massachusetts

The sky soaks in blue
The suburban houses
Near Boston where the squirrels
Vandalize my friend’s yard
I came here alone
By my friend’s side like before
To admit that we are tired
And this and that but it is good
To gaze at what eludes us
Climbs in whirls with the April wind.

I take a picture of a bird red as blood
Alone on the still naked tree a cardinal
Which sings with the children’s laughter.
By Alejandra Pizarnik

Translated by Jason Stumpf

Reconocimiento

Tú haces el silencio de las lilas que aletean
en mi tragedia del viento en el corazón.
Tú hiciste de mi vida un cuento para niños
en donde naufragios y muertes
son pretextos de ceremonias adorables.

Acknowledgement

You make silence from the lilacs that shake
in my tragedy of the wind in my heart.
You made my life a story for children
in which shipwrecks and deaths
are pretextos for adorable ceremonies.
By Alejandra Pizarnik

Translated by Jason Stumpf

Comunicaciones

El viento me había comido
parte de la cara y las manos.
Me llamaban ángel harapiento.
Yo esperaba.

Communications

Wind had eaten
part of my face and hands.
They called me ragged angel.
I waited.
Alguien entra en el silencio y me abandona.
Ahora la soledad no está sola.
Tú hablas como la noche.
Te anuncias como la sed.

Encuentro

Someone enters silence and abandons me.
Now solitude is not alone.
You speak like the night.
Announce yourself like thirst.
Nombrarte

No el poema de tu ausencia,
sólo un dibujo, una grieta en un muro,
algo en el viento, un sabor amargo.

Naming You

Not the poem of your absence,
but a drawing, a crack in a wall,
something in the wind, a bitter taste.
Fiction
Consider the husband and wife who are each other's first readers. It has been that way since their beginning, the creation of their safe harbor, twenty-six years of living, teaching and writing together, moderately comfortable in their small Brooklyn brownstone, raising two reasonable children along the way. Then consider what Virginia Woolf says about reading: how like love it is so physical, how it can fulfill a desire for a perpetual marriage, a perpetual union. What you have is a couple whose intimacy is deepened with the first reading of each new poem, another entry into the free union of their spirits. The discourse is nearly sexual, an arousal of the nerves of language, a carefully critical and honest appraisal of what the husband or wife offers as a naked truth, to the spouse first. Their exclusivity is an extension of the daily ritual that no random thought of significance is complete till told to the other. One might even say that this soulful bond has served as a modest hedge against life's trials, a regenerative force in the face of the losses that accumulate with aging and the inevitable hardships of family and friends. The marriage vow taken in silence but no less binding. So, consider the husband's surprise, then dismay, then explosion of hurt when, in an impulsive, wrongheaded search for his wife's hidden cigarettes (he hadn't smoked in four months), he discovers beneath the folders in her desk's bottom drawer a loose leaf sheet with a poem in his wife's hand (blue ink her first draft choice) with an unfamiliar title (Fire Sale), and lightly penciled comments scribbled in the margins. Feel the corkscrew twisting in the husband's heart as he tries to focus on the poem while his mind is hell bent on deciphering the stranger's annotations, an eye on the poem, an eye in the margins, as if he had, indeed, walked in on his wife and her lover in their bedroom. See his hand shake as he lights the cigarette, listen to him cough as he spits out the smoke over the page. See his gray-blonde stubble burn with anxiety, and his warm brown eyes go cold when he finally manages to conjoin, then separate, the comments from the text: that the metaphorical fire sale in the poem is everything valuable the speaker, in her recognizable voice, is willing to sell for a little breathing room in mid-life. Hear his barely audible sigh. And consider, finally, my dearest reader, that even as the husband wonders whether he will be included some day among the upright piano, the original Dali print, the heirloom quilt—if he will be next in line—the final, shamefully transparent pain that brings him to his knees, drains the color from his face as he heeds the reader's astute comments, is the recognition that his wife's choice to begin with someone else was the right one.
The boy stands at attention in the Knights of Columbus parking lot. The marbled red drum, sparkling like lighted flecks of fresh blood in the intense noon sun, hangs loosely on his thigh. He is sweating profusely, wearing two uniforms, his baggy Little League uniform the heavy wool layer under the satiny, blue Marching Band church issue. He keeps the drum rolling to the Star Spangled Banner, sweat loosening his grip and clouding his vision. He is thinking of lepers. His head swims with a swirl of faces riddled with lesions, limbs dangling from their sockets, shriveled fingers. His legs begin to itch unmercifully, the baseball pants his hair shirt. He's afraid. He's a sinner. A loser. A jerker offer. He doesn't want to be banished from Brooklyn to some far off land where Father Damien cares for the sick. He begins to pray, ripping through Hail Mary's faster than he beats his drum. More furiously than he shoots the load that blisters his soul. He needs God's forgiveness. His mercy. He needs to scratch his legs with his drumsticks.

"What's a colony like?" he managed to eke out in the confessional, before donning his first uniform of the day to serve the 7:00 am Mass. "Think Chinatown," the priest answered. "Maybe even Little Italy."

The boy tears off his band uniform and runs to the baseball diamond across the street. He's got three rosaries under his belt by the time he takes his position in center field. Maybe at five, he muses, lightheaded, God will forgive him and grant him a base hit, sort of like extra credit. But, by the sixth inning he's grounded out feebly twice, and is hanging his sorry head in the outfield when, like a bolt of heat lightning, his penis comes erect and presses hard against the button fly of his uniform. "God no! no, no," he yelps and works fast to will himself down, thinking of lepers, Roy Campanella, and Sister Natalia with the mustache, who does the trick. He's all but given up on himself when he enters the batter's box for the last time, making a shamefully weak sign of the cross. But, lo and behold, he rips a liner to left center which rolls blessedly to the outfield wall. God is good, God is great, he chants, rounding second for a sure triple when the relay gets by the third baseman and the boy charges home, sliding head first into the plate as the catcher hammer tags him on the noggin, the umpire's call ringing like a chorus in the boy's helmet. And hallelujah it is, the boy rising shakily but proudly to his feet, God steadfastly by his side he is sure, and smiling broadly when the irate catcher turns around from the umpire, slams his mask into the dirt, gets squarely in the boy's face, the disgust written on his acne-scarred brow, deeply pockmarked and spotted with white-capped pustules, dropping the boy to his knees.
I woke up on a bus in Syria. My eyes opened to meet the darkness of the window, darkness broken by dabs of white light. The darkness of open poverty wasn’t like the darkness back home. Opening my eyes didn’t feel like opening them at all, but like someone sprinkling sugar on my darkness. Good sugar too, not the kind you put in your coffee, but the kind you sprinkle on your fried dough. It tasted like baking soda.

I looked onto the horizon to see the sun rolling over the line of sand. I couldn’t see the sun very well. It was shining through the windshield, blocked by the dark grizzly head of the bus driver.

As the bus approached the lonely city, incoherent cries leaked through the open windows. We were a bus full of over privileged fucks. Annoyed by the lack of any decent air conditioning, and frustrated by the heat of the wind rushing through our hair. I was embarrassed for us, embarrassed for the two nuns sitting three rows in front of me.

They were proud of their conviction, of their humility. They were sweltering beneath those heavy habits without breaking their Christian smile as sweat poured off their faces. They only got worse as the city approached. The distant cries had now grown with intensity and audibility. They were cries desperately shrill and feminine. The cries of four thousand tortured old ladies and starving infant children. The smiles soon faded from the nuns’ faces. A look of deep concern overtook their godly faces, as the cries became clear.

“Food... please... hungry,” they cried over and over again in broken English. The only three words they know. The nuns were thrilled, though they’d never admit it. Thrilled to put their compassion, their humility, into action. They eagerly rummaged through their bags, retrieving four sandwiches. As the bus slowed around a corner, the nuns instinctively reached out their windows, passing their charity to a young, weathered woman and her three hungry children.

“Those bastards!” I thought, amazed at how they could be so cruel, so selfish, so naïve. Did they honestly believe that a small assortment of tuna fish and dried vegetables would help these people? What kind of nourishment could that bring? It’s a tease, it’s a goddamned tease and they’re too proud to even see past their own selfish humility. I wanted to get up. I wanted to walk over there and beat the two of them senseless. I wanted to kill them with my own hands.

“No,” I thought, “Fuck them, I’ll show those motherfuckers how to save these impoverished souls.” I reached into my money belt and quickly grabbed a wad of bills. I flipped through the wad to get a rough count, nearly $2000 of cold, hard, American currency. I looked out the window to find my target, the object of my charity.

I see her up ahead, a middle aged looking woman who’s probably only pushing 19. In her arms is her crying baby and at her feet is her raggedly dressed son. He
looked like he was 13 years old and barely 40 pounds. As the bus approaches my
eyes meet hers. I can see, no, I can feel the desperation in her hardened eyes peering
through her dark veil. The bus passes as I extend my arm to pass her my money.
Time moves at a fraction of its standard speed and all eyes dart to the green gold.

Three other women, three other mothers of starving infant babies dive for the
shimmering paper like starving wolves for a morsel of raw meat. The mothers dive
as the babies fly, tiny bodies soaring through the air. The three of them crash to the
street and are instantly sucked under the wheels of my slowly speeding bus. Blood
spurts everywhere, much of which lands on the bus’s windows, with a drop hitting
the bridge of my nose.

The bundle of green explodes as hands reach to the air, neglecting all previous
duties. It’s a shower of red and green and my bus drives on, leaving behind pov­er­ty’s carnage. I turn my head as my bus speeds off, following the frenzy with my eyes
until it is clear out of sight.

Time resumes and the nuns pray.
“Kevin, did my DVD come in yet?”

It was the sixth time she had asked him in the last hour and a half. Kevin knew that she was old, she probably even had some early signs of Alzheimers, but it was getting beyond annoying. Her quick and choppy accented speech had become all too familiar to him.

“No Annalise, it should be here in three to four days. We just sent it out last Friday and it takes a while to copy the tape to the DVD.”

“Well, I just wanted to thank you again...For sending out my tape...We can watch it when it gets here...It is such a wonderful tape...and the singing is all in German. It has such good things in it.”

“Okay Annalise, I’ll be sure to tell you when it gets here.”

“God bless you...Thank you again...You’re a good person...Bye now.”

Kevin sat back in his chair in front of the computer, and wondered when the next senior citizen at the activity center would come to him with a question. He knew that he was doing something good for the community, and getting paid well for it, but it was so boring that he wished he had gotten an internship instead.

Hours fluttered by until he got up to go get some lunch. He watched Annalise as she hurried out of the bathroom soaked from the waist up. She went into another room and sat in a chair, dripping water into a large puddle beneath her. He went to find the director Maria.

“She does this everyday Kevin,” Maria said. “You never noticed? She goes into the bathroom and keeps throwing water in her face until she is soaked. She has had a hard life. She grew up as a child in World War II Germany. She still has these panic attacks about her childhood.”

Four days later the DVD came. Kevin promptly went to inform Annalise that it had arrived.

“Oh, God Bless you...for being so kind to me...I am so happy that it came...Can we watch it now?”

Kevin set up the DVD in the player in the arts and crafts room. He sat down next to Annalise and watched as a choir of German schoolchildren began to sing Christmas carols.

“Isn’t this wonderful...Deutsche Weihnacht means German Christmas you know...The singing is so beautiful...God Bless these beautiful things...There are so many evil things now...”

“Yes it is Annalise,” he said. He left Annalise to her video and walked back to the computer lab to get ready to teach yet another tedious lesson on what email is and how exactly to use it. But he felt proud that he had offered something of value to her.

An hour or so later he left the room to go to the cafeteria. He stopped halfway there and stared at Annalise as she rushed out of the bathroom, leaving a trail of water behind her.
Joan Fagan

*Down and Out Behind the Blue Wooden Letters*

My father leans toward the mirror in our tiny bathroom on Willow Street. The tops of his legs are pressed against the edge of the sink. His left cheek and part of his chin are still covered with shaving cream that will leave his skin smelling like a mixture of soap and pine. The razor, flashing silver in the early morning light, scratches against his cheek. It leaves smooth, even trails of pale winter skin in its wake. He rinses the razor in the filled sink - wishka wishka whoosk - and raises it back to his cheek, dripping with cloudy water. I sit on the lid of the cool toilet and watch him, as I do every morning before school.

“Better get ready to go, honey,” he says, his mouth struggling to work itself into a smile. A trickle of shaving cream drips down over his lip. “Your bus will be here any minute. Give your mom a kiss before you go.”

I nod and smile up at him. He rumples my head, his gold wedding ring catching a strand of my hair, plucking it out. It dangles now, caught on his hand, and I can see the little bulb on the end. Hair follicle, I remember from science class last week.

“Scram,” he says, turning back toward the mirror to inspect his face.

I slip out of the bathroom, and race into my room. I used to love my room. It is painted pale pink with white hearts etched around the entire border. My mother told me once that when we moved in, it took her three whole days just to hand-stencil those hearts around the room. I asked her if we could paint it yellow for my eleventh birthday last spring, but she never got around to it after my brother Nick died.

I select a purple turtleneck and a pair of jeans from the clean-laundry basket in my room. From the old shoebox under my bed, I pull out my bra. It’s not really a real bra, not yet, but it does have a size - 32AAA. A few months ago, I read an article in one of my mom’s old copies of *Redbook* that somewhere between fifty and seventy-five percent of women wear the wrong size bra. When I’m older, I plan to get measured regularly. I don’t want to have breast cancer or backaches or anything. The bra is the same soft pink color as my walls, but it has a yellow cartoon duck embroidered on it above my left armpit. I hate the duck. I saved up my allowance for three weeks this summer and finally bought it at Macy’s with my friend Jill. She already wears a real bra because her boobs are a 32A. She’s twelve.

After I’m ready, I grab my backpack and leave my room. I walk exactly six steps down the hall and stand in front of the door to Nick’s room. The faded Boston Bruins team poster on the door greets me, still taped below the blue wooden letters that spell “N-I-C-H-O-L-A-S.” I have matching pink ones on my door that spell out “K-A-T-I-E.” I tap lightly on the door and let myself in.

My father is already in there with my mom. “Hey, Katie Lady,” he says. “Mom’s a little down and out this morning.” When my father says that my mother is “down and out” that means that she is drunk. I am not allowed to say that she is drunk or
tell other people, even Jill, that she is drunk. Instead, I have to pretend that she is just sad.

Mom is lying in Nick's bed. She hasn't let my dad change the sheets since Nick died six months ago. The only time that she ever gets up is to go to the bathroom. I watch her sometimes, padding unsteadily down the hallway. Her legs - the legs that used to be so tan and strong, the legs that used to run with me outside - are now rail-thin, worm-white and covered with dark tufts of hair. The places where her muscles used to be are filled with jelly. Nick's room smells dank and a little bit sour, like my armpits after soccer practice. I think that she looks ridiculous lying underneath Nick's Spiderman blanket. When I told my dad that, he went in his room and shut the door.

She shifts her gaze on me. "Hi, honey," she breathes. Her breath smells like the rubbing alcohol that I had to put on my ears for six weeks after they got pierced to prevent infection. I lean down to kiss her on the cheek. I have to please my father. Her eyes, red and weepy, are not her own.

"Be a good girl today," she slurs. I nod, unable to answer. My dad signals to me that it's time to go.

"Bye," I mumble, backing out of the room. I race out of the house, swallowing the lump that is lodged in my throat.

* * *

Every day, as soon as I get home from school, I throw up in the downstairs bathroom. Jill's mom always drives us home because she's the school nurse and we are the last stop on the bus. They wait outside and watch me walk in the door, and then I run to the bathroom and retch quietly into the toilet. I usually turn on the faucet to drown out any noise that I make, not that my mother would bother me.

Today, after I'm done, I tiptoe down the stairs into the basement. One side of the basement was going to be finished for Nick and I to have friends over, but my dad wouldn't finish it after he died. One on wall, there's still light blue streaks where my dad was testing out paint colors. Our old couch and chair are in the middle of the basement, draped in one of my parent's old sheets. I reach for the dirty string above my head and flick the light on. I lug a heavy box of my mother's old magazines from the storage side of the basement over to the couch.

In my shoebox upstairs, I keep a three-ring binder is full of clippings from my mother's old issues of Redbook, Glamour, and Cosmopolitan. I flip past the ads to the first article in a 1997 issue of Glamour magazine. I pause at the article "50 Ways to Make Him Feel Hot!" Last week I found "101 Ways to Make Him Sizzle," so I don't need that one. I continue through the magazine carefully, poring over each article: "Five Health Risks You Shouldn't be Taking," "Nip that Hunger in the Butt," and "Beauty Secrets Your Mother Never Told You." I snip out the last one for my binder.

Last year, at my school's annual fifth grade Mother-Daughter Night, a woman from some teenage health program answered all of our questions about things like periods, boys, and bras. When I was there, I felt bad for this girl Jackie, because her
mother died a few years ago and her older sister had to take her. Right before the
meeting ended, the woman encouraged us to ask our mothers any other questions
that we might have about “other sensitive subjects.” Two nights later, my brother
Nick was dead, and I haven’t had a real conversation with my mom since.

It’s getting late, so I head upstairs to set the table for dinner. I pour myself a glass
of milk and set aside a gold can of Coors for my dad. The phone rings, and I drop
my glass of milk in surprise. It shatters all over the tile, leaving a white, crunchy puddle in the middle of the floor. I check the phone and see that it’s my Uncle Manny calling.

“Hi, Uncle Manny,” I say.

“Hey, kiddo! How’s it going? Is Dad there? I better be seeing you this weekend,”
he says, all in one breath. Uncle Manny is my dad’s younger brother, and my dad
used to say that he opened his mouth when he was born and never shut it.

“It’s going okay. Dad should be home soon. What are we doing this weekend?”
I ask, not listening for his reply. Instead, I am watching the puddle of milk spread.
I am surprised at how quickly it has reached the island in the middle of the kitchen.
The glass is in three big pieces and about a hundred little ones.

“... your mother doing?” he’s saying. I snap back to the conversation.

“She’s good. We just went shopping,” I say hurriedly. “I gotta go, Uncle Manny.
I just broke a glass. I’ll tell Dad you called.” I hang up and survey the mess.

My dad walks in the kitchen, clutching his briefcase in one hand and balancing
a pizza box in the other. I can see a dark stain of grease on the bottom of the cardboard. He glances down at the milk.

“Uncle Manny called,” I said. “I’m just cleaning this up.”

“Right,” he says tiredly. “How was your day, Katie Lady?”

I shrug. “It was okay.” I bend down to pick up the bigger pieces of glass. One of
them bites at the palm of my hand, red welling up almost instantly.

“Let me see that,” my dad says. He inspects my hand, much like the way he
inspected his face for nicks this morning. “Does it hurt?”

“No,” I answer, but almost as soon as I say it, it does. My eyes well up with tears.

“Oh, Katie,” he sighs. “Go get the gauze and the medical tape from the cabinet.
I’ll clean the rest of this up.”

I nod, sniffing, and run to the cabinet. I open it and it creaks, sticking on the
carpet. My hand is throbbing. I’m probably not going to be able to write in school
tomorrow. Maybe I won’t go.

* * *

After I get ready for bed, I go back to Nick’s room to say goodnight to my mother. I haven’t been in there since this morning, even though I’m supposed to check on her after school. I take a deep breath and twist the doorknob.

The red numbers from Nick’s Buzz Lightyear alarm clock glow faintly in the dark room. She is lying on her side, facing me. The light from the hallway bathes her in a yellow square. She squints up at me from the bed.

“Goodnight, Mom,” I whisper. I want to get out of here, the smell makes me
“’Night, baby,” she croaks, her voice stale. I can see the paths of dried tears on her cheeks. “Be a good girl today.”

I close the door behind me and go to my room. I slip under the covers, shutting my eyes. I sleep with all of my lights on now. I think of the day last spring that Nick died, just like I do every night before I go to sleep.

It was an unseasonably warm Saturday in April. Saturdays were Dad's landscaping days, Nick's T-ball days, and Mom's lunch date days. My dad had just lugged his old cranky lawnmower out of the garage. Beads of sweat were dripping down his face, staining the neck of his gray T-shirt. Dad used to say that landscaping made him feel like a college kid on summer break again.

Nick was playing with his T-ball stand in the yard. He'd hit the plastic ball off the stand with a bat, and squeal, “He shoots, he scores!” Nick couldn't distinguish what language was for which sport yet. Then, he'd run in a backwards circle around the yard, collapsing in giggles at the end. I remember rolling my eyes, watching him.

Mom and I were in the kitchen. Nick's fifth birthday was in a week, and she was heading out to do shopping for him with my aunt Tracy.

“You're sure you don't want to come,” she'd said.

“Yeah, Jill's coming over,” I'd replied.

Mom kissed me on the cheek and left. I watched her walk out to the car, wave to my dad, and blow a kiss to Nick. She started the car, and swiveled around in her seat to look out the rear window.

Nick was standing in front of the car, yelling to my mom about what he wanted for his birthday. He was waving and laughing good-bye.

Mom rolled her eyes, shifted the car into gear, and swiveled back around to leave. But the car didn't back out - it shot forward.

I slammed through the screen door, hollering my little brother's name. Nick was pinned between the car and the garage door. “Mommy?” he half whimpered, half asked. Then he sort of closed his eyes, and his body folded into itself. My mom was sitting in the driver's seat of the car, her mouth forming words that I couldn't hear over the motor of the lawnmower. Finally, my mom put the car in reverse. Nick's body slid down the garage wall, leaving a reddish smear. I crouched down beside him, watching streaks of tears dry on his cheeks.
Karen E. and David A. had been dating for almost 3 months. On Saturday, August 2, they had dinner at a Thai restaurant and went for a walk along the Portland waterfront. After some passionate kissing, they both returned to their homes with bruised and swollen lips. The next day Karen E. called David A. and said:

"I think maybe you should get a blood test for STD's."

"Sure," he said.

Three days later before the results were in Karen E. called David A. and said:

"I think we should go our separate ways."

She hung up.

The next day David A. found a crumpled paper wedged between the driver's seat and console of his car. It was Karen E.'s to-do list which follows: (David A. has added footnotes to the to-do list for the benefit of the reader.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>To Do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| July 1 | Fruits & veggies/sardine  ✔  
Garden - bark dust   ✔  
Arlington beauty appt.1 ✔  
*LIPS*²               ✔ Ow/ouch |
| July 10| Call David ✔  
Wash underwear ✔  
Buy new underwear¹ ✔  
Kayak - can you lift one?³ ✔  |
| July 17| Call Jane, Pam, etc. David? ✔  
Throw out old underwear ✔  
Tell David you ♥ him No! not yet |
| July 23| Talk with Kyle³ re: David ? ? ?  
Move bark dust ✔  
Tell David: ♥ Damn! |
| July 29| Check out churches Ugh!  
Call Jane ✔  
Throw out old underwear ✔  
Buy wine ✔  
Surrender to David⁶  
Buy more new underwear |
Postscript

One year after their last conversation, David A. wrote to Karen E.
Once I thought I loved you. You have become a short story.

David A. never heard from Karen E. again, but it is believed she never again dated a writer.
David A.'s blood test came back positive for herpes.*

* He would like to point out that 22% of Americans over age 12 test positive for herpes

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1 Arlington is a 2-year old Schnauzer which David A. nicknamed Spot.
2 Karen E. had her lips tattooed so that they appeared to have permanent lipstick. David A. had never heard of this process before.
3 They were red . . . according to Karen E.
4 This was a purchase.
5 Kyle is the 19-year old son of Karen. His father had died in an auto accident 4 years prior. He did not know his mother dated.
6 Karen E. lived on 3 acres in "the country" and bought a gun for self-protection.
When you were three and he was six he ripped the heads off all your Barbies and flushed them down the toilet. Your father managed to rescue one sodden, solemn Barbie face from a watery grave, but there wasn’t enough money to keep you from playing with headless dolls until your next birthday.

When you were six and he was nine he pretended to trip you in the hallway, making it look like he was just trying to catch his fall when he pushed you down half a flight of stairs in the raised ranch house you lived in before your little sister was born and you had to share a small room with a wriggling, shrieking bundle and he still had all the space in the world for his Legos and dinosaurs and plastic swords.

When you were ten and he was thirteen he made you play catch to practice for little league, handing you a battered glove to hold up and then intentionally pegging the ball at your stomach or face until you ran inside screaming to your mother who told you to shush, the little one was sleeping.

When you were fourteen and he was seventeen he made fun of you for having a crush on the goalie of the soccer team, chiding you about the fact that you didn’t even have boobs yet, not even close to boobs like the captain of the field hockey team, boobs that the goalie of the soccer team could actually touch and hold and pinch because the captain of the field hockey team was his girlfriend and you would never be anyone’s girlfriend.

When you were seventeen and he was twenty you visited him at college and got too drunk, too drunk to see or speak or stand, and even though he let you throw up in his garbage can until you could taste the acid from your stomach he still told your parents about it and they grounded you for two weeks because you should have known better than to drink alcohol at your age.

When you were twenty-one and he was twenty-four he died in a car accident coming home for Thanksgiving. You go into the boxes of old toys in the old house’s garage to find your younger sister’s Barbies, still intact years later, and you rip off the heads, one by one, and you stand over the toilet watching them swirl around and around until finally, they are gone.
The hills above Salzburg rise and fall like the ebb and flow of an ocean tide frozen in stone. From the other side of the river the Geisburg looks deceptively close, but it took us quite some time to arrive at the base. The mountain was seductive in its height and breadth, the immensity of the dark rock face checkered with white houses amongst the green pastures and forests. The wind grazed the river against the current, licking at the surface made emerald from mountain minerals.

“This water flows from the glaciers,” he said as we crossed the footbridge.

Close to the mountain we stopped to fill our packs with water for the hike and champagne for the summit. “Do we need food?” I asked of him.

“No, she packed something for you,” he replied, placing the water next to the tinfoil packages of ham and butter sandwiches.

The slow incline of the mountain rose before us. In the absence of a path we traipsed through the backyards of opulent houses far removed from those of the Geisberg above. Slimy rocks provided the stepping stones through the brooks and streams that refreshed the hillside.

“Think it’s safe to drink?” I asked, stooping over the stream and splashing some onto my face.

“Nature has a way of keeping itself clean,” he said, shrugging. We drank from the stream despite the water in our packs.

In the jagged rocky paths my feet began to blister. The unique silence of the mountain was mediated by the rise and fall of my breath. I pressed on my feet harder, strangely eager for the friction of skin and sole. My toe and heel burned in response to the path, which we soon left to make our own way.

I fell behind him at one point, though I could see the broken path he had created before me. I found him again in the pasture with the sun on his face. It was at its highest point in the pastel sky.

“The clouds burned off,” I said to him.

Nodding in agreement, he shared a sip of the still cool water and led us into the forest that shrouded the mid-mountain rock face. A climb is slow and tedious but so is birth.

The steep rock face was a dark grey splashed with bone-colored veins. With a rhythmic clenching of quadriceps we closed on the summit. The streaks of light through the treetops enjoyed a clarity that cut through the shadows. As we left the forest the leaves of low-growing plants reflected the light to keep it free from the dark and fertile soil.

There were others on the summit. The drone of cars betrayed the silence of the mountain. On the other side of the mountain is a winding road that culminates in a parking lot, crowned by a faded cell phone tower. We stood on the high rise that graciously separated the parking lot from the redeeming open faced cliffs of the other side.
“Let’s go over there,” I said.

Out of parking lot view we removed our shirts in the shining sun that sculpted the hillside. People with hanggliders trusted themselves to the wind as they leapt from the suspended cliffs. We removed the sandwiches from our packs and lay on the moss that comforted the summit.

“It’s still cold,” he said, inaugurating the meal with the pop of a champagne cork.

Looking below we saw the white walls of the Hohensalzburg, seat of princes and archbishops. The fortress had never been conquered. Below were the steeples and spires of the town, cut in two by the fast-moving river, a gift from the mountains. The sights greeted me like a prophecy.

“What comes after this?” I asked.

“We go down.”

“Yeah, we go down. That means we go back.”

“No, we came up, and now we go down,” he said, looking away.

“We go back down, we go home, we go here and there, but never back here,” I replied, driving my finger into the soil.

“No, I don’t suppose so.”

“But how will I tell them?”

“Who?”

“How will I tell it to my mother or my father, to a woman, to another pair of piercing eyes that I will always be here, always here and nowhere else because I can’t understand anywhere else.”

“You will never be with them until you understand it all yourself,” he said, looking at me in the eye now. Never had I noticed his eyes. One of them was the color of the mountain, the other the river.

“How will I laugh and walk and speak out there when I have done it on this mountain. Only this mountain makes sense, only the rivers have clarity. I will go home and live and die like everyone else. I will die a little bit every day out there. I have owned things but they have never belonged to me. The glances of women, tinges of love and sorrow and everything in between have drifted in and out of my life, but they have never been my own. I have lived a life, but I have not lived my life. I have seen better and I have seen worse, but they always just happened. I waited, but they were never mine. This mountain belongs to me.”

He still glared at me, and I returned his stare in earnest. He turned away and began to throw pebbles over the side. The champagne was finished.

“Don’t look for better or worse,” he sighed. “It’s all yours. It’s all good because it belongs to you. All that you will ever see is contained in this mountain. Everything that you will hear is contained in the rustling of the grass. All that you will love comes to you in the horizon of everyday. Whether you are down there or up here, when you run and jump or take out the trash or lay next to a woman, when you die in bed an old man, it’s all here right now just like it will be there. If you let this mountain echo in everything you do, it will belong to you. It will all belong to you.”

He lay back on the grass and looked up at the sky. “The stars are always there, you just can’t see them all the time.”
Later on when I woke up from my nap on the cool mountain grass I saw the wing of a hanglider above me. I sat up just in time to see him catch a gust of wind and jump off the cliff into the valley below.
“It’s Friday, Bri, you know what that means?” Marie asked me.

“Of course I know, stupid,” I said. “Friday’s presents day. Daddy’s going to come over and give me a new Ninja Turtle.”

“Don’t call him Daddy. Mom said we should call him Paul.”

Before presents time I played with my old Ninja Turtles. I had at least a hundred of them, but most of them were starting to get all worn and faded. My sister always wanted me to play Barbies and Ninja Turtles with her, but it seemed kind of silly to think that the Turtles would want to drive around in Barbie’s car, sit around at her dream house and go shopping. Marie said that none of her Barbies should ever be single so that way if they had kids someday Barbie would be able to raise the kids while daddy Ninja Turtle went to work. I don’t know how the Ninja Turtles make money, since all they ever do on TV is beat up the bad guys. I just pictured them wearing ties and suit jackets and working in some newspaper office, maybe with that April O’Neil girl from the TV show. Marie finally convinced me, and I let every single one of her Barbies marry one of my Ninja Turtles. But the married Turtles would get bored with their lives with the Barbies (they had to go shopping all the time!) so they would just have battles with the Barbies and beat them up.

“Mom said that you shouldn’t make your Turtles hit my Barbies,” Marie said. “It’s not nice.” I didn’t really know why Mommy would say that. I thought it was pretty amazing that the Turtles could walk and talk, never mind get married. I thought that I should go talk to her.

“Mommy, why can’t my Ninja Turtles hit Barbies?” She wouldn’t pay attention to me. “Mom!” I yelped, tugging on her sweater. She finally turned around and knelt down.

“You know that it’s not OK for boys to hit girls, Brian,” Mommy said. I don’t really know why she said that. I just went back down to the basement and played Ninja Turtles. I let Marie take over control of the ones that I married off to her Barbies and just had battles between my favorites.

After a while Dad came home from work and walked down the creaky basement stairs. He was so big that whenever he walked down them, dust would fly out of the bottom of the steps; I always thought he was going to fall through. I’m glad he didn’t, he’s the best Dad I have. We put down our toys and ran over to the stairs.

“Dad, I don’t know if your Mom told you guys, but Paul’s coming to see you again today,” Dad said. “He’s probably going to bring you something nice to play with again.” I couldn’t help but think of the huge Ninja Turtle Technodrome he said he was going to bring me. Finally I’d have a place for Shredder and the bad guys to live!

Dad turned away, knelt down and whispered to Marie, “You know the drill. Watch out for Brian and the ‘Daddy’ thing. Whenever he says that, tell him to call
the guy Paul. I don’t care if it’s right in front of him.”

“OK, Dad,” Marie said. Just because Marie was two years older than me, Dad always let her tell me what to do when Daddy was around.

Dad knelt down, rubbed my hair and gave me a high-five. “Dad,” I asked him, “why can’t I call Daddy Daddy? Why should I call him Paul? Isn’t that mean for a kid to say to a grown-up?”

Dad pulled my ear, wiggled it, smiled and laughed. “You’ve got a good set of ears there buddy,” he said. “You’re too young to get it now. In a few years you’ll get it.”

He turned around to head back upstairs to the only floor of our one floor house and instead of reaching the stairs he smacked his head on one of the huge black pipes hanging from the ceiling. Marie and I laughed really hard, but Dad looked kind of hurt. He put his hand on his forehead and sat on the old beat-up white and lime green striped couch.

“Are you OK?” I asked. He didn’t answer for a few minutes, but then all the sudden he jumped up and grabbed me by the waist. He was smiling and laughing as he said to me, “You little mushkin, you think that’s funny, huh?”

“Well, it was. You hit your head really hard.”

Dad carried me to the center of the room and started to spin me around in circles. I loved the washing machine game, but I was so dizzy when he finally put me down that I thought I was going to throw up. I could barely walk and I almost walked into one of the huge metal poles that held up our house. Dad came over and rubbed my head again. I wasn’t dizzy anymore.

The front door upstairs slammed. I looked over at Marie confusedly as Dad got up from his knees and ran towards the stairs, nearly hitting his big head on the pipe again. He wasn’t smiling or laughing.

I could hear his footsteps pounding through the floor. “Why is Dad running upstairs?” I asked my sister.

“Because Paul’s here. Mom said that she and Paul can’t be in the same room together by themselves because the judge said they couldn’t.”

Dad peered his head down the stairs and yelled, “Kids, Paul’s here to see you.” He looked like he tried to smile but he still looked mean.

I ran upstairs ahead of Marie, who stomped up the stairs in no hurry. I didn’t really know why she wasn’t excited; Daddy always had two brand new Barbies for her.

“Daddy!” I yelled as I finally reached the back room in the house, which was our kitchen, dining room, living room, and where Mommy and Dad slept on a mattress on the floor at night.

Mommy was in the next room over, which was where my little sister, Jenna, slept. Just because she was a baby she got her own room. I didn’t like her. Marie and I had to share a room with bunk beds, but we had a really big closet and I could hide in there and read as much as I wanted. But Mommy was crying in Jenna’s room, and nobody was with Mommy except for that stupid baby.

Daddy sat in the biggest chair at our kitchen table. He looked different than he usually did. He still had his huge beard, though, and it looked like a skunk
wrapped itself around his face. And even though he smelled pretty bad, he didn’t smell as bad as a skunk.

“Hey there, pal,” Daddy said to me, rubbing my hair. “Look at what I got for you!” He pulled a huge, colorful box out of a Toys-R-Us bag. The box was so huge that Marie and I glanced at each other and wondered if we could fit in it. We would try later. I ripped it open and took out the Technodrome. It was awesome.

“Thanks Daddy!” I screamed.

Marie elbowed me and whispered, “He’s Paul!”

“This is so awesome, I want to play with it right now,” I said to Daddy. “Can you help me put it together?” There were so many little stickers to decorate the outside of it that I knew I would mess it up. And Mommy was usually too busy for that kind of stuff.

Daddy shifted in his chair a little and stopped smiling. He stood up, put the Technodrome back in the box, and sat back down. “How about we just sit and talk for a while?” he said. “George can help you put it together later tonight.” He pointed at Dad.

“Who’s George?” I asked.

“I am, mushkin,” Dad said while laughing hard. He leaned over and gave me a noogie.

“No, you’re Dad,” I said.

“Yeah, well he’s George, too, stupid,” Marie said. I punched her in the arm.

“Heck, Daddy said to Dad, “you have them every other day of the week. So when it’s four o’clock on Friday, it’s my turn, OK? Go have yourself another drink.” Daddy laughed to himself. His beard shook and I kept waiting for something to fall out of it - maybe a bird, or a bird’s egg.

Dad got up out of his chair in the corner of the room and nearly knocked over the huge red cabinet. “Don’t knock that over,” I said, “I just cleaned out that whole thing yesterday.”

“At least I when I do have a drink,” Dad said to Daddy “I can handle myself.”

“What’s wrong with having a drink?” I whispered to Marie. She shrugged. I hoped that I could still have apple juice with my supper later.

Mommy came in from the other room. Her eyes and face were all red and she was sniffing like she was really sick. “George, stop it,” she said. “He gets his one hour.”

Daddy put his head down and looked sad. He looked back up and said, “No Carol, I’m tired of this guy coming here every week and taking over our family. I won’t stand for it.”

“I like when Daddy comes to visit,” I said. Marie looked at me and put her finger over her mouth, telling me to be quiet. Daddy reached his hand toward me and was going to pull me closer and give me a hug.

“I swear to God,” Dad said to Daddy, “if you lay a hand on him, I’m going to lay one on you.”

Daddy stood up and said, “I’ll give my own kid a hug if I want to, pal.”

“We all know what happened last time you laid a hand on your own kid. Too bad Marie’s too young to remember or we’d probably have your sorry ass in jail.” I
looked at Marie, who looked confused.

“You asshole, you can’t prove that anything happened.”

“Well, we sure have proof of what else you did. It takes a really big man to hit a kid, Paul, but it takes an even bigger man to hit his wife, doesn’t it?”

Now Mommy started to cry really, really hard and left the room. The baby started to cry too. Dad turned around to look at Mommy walking out of the room. All the yelling made me want to go into the other room with Mommy.

Daddy walked toward me and gently grabbed my arm. He still smelled bad. “Brian,” he whispered in my ear, “if you want, I can take you home with me and you’ll never have to listen to that mean man say bad words ever again. I have an extra room in my apartment with lots and lots of shelves; you could put all of your Ninja Turtles there.”

Dad turned back and grabbed Daddy’s arm. “Paul,” Dad said, “I swear on all that is holy, if you touch him one more time you’re going to leave here by ambulance.” Now Marie was crying and sitting in the corner with our dog, Cocoa. She wrapped her arms around him and cried lots of tears into his dark brown fur.

Mommy walked back into the room and yelled at Daddy, “Just leave Paul, just leave.”

Dad put his nose right against Daddy’s and said, “Maybe you should do what she says this time around if you ever want to see your kids again. You come here every week and pretend like this is your house, your family. Well, it’s not. You gave up that privilege when you did what you did.”

Daddy backed up from Dad and looked really scared. Dad was a lot bigger. Daddy went over to the big chair and got his long black jacket and put it on. Behind his beard I could see him smiling a little. “I know what I’m entitled to,” he said. “Make sure not to tie up the phone line; you’ll be getting a call from my lawyer soon enough.”

As he was walking out to the main room of the house he whispered to me, “I’ll be back next week, pal.”

“Paul,” Dad said to him in the same voice that he used when he showed me how to train Cocoa to sit down. Daddy smiled again, put his head down and walked into the main room. Marie ran into Jenna’s room to cry with Mommy. Dad wasn’t crying so I didn’t cry. He was just sitting in the big chair with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands. He kept shaking his head and saying things under his breath. I couldn’t understand him.

I tapped him on the top of his head. “Dad,” I asked, “what’s wrong?” He looked up and his face was bright red and he wasn’t smiling. I jumped up on his lap.

“Nothing’s wrong, buddy.” Dad patted me on the head and messed up my hair on purpose. He knew that I hated that.

“Stop it Dad!” I yelled. I couldn’t stop myself from smiling. I jumped off his lap and ran around the table to the other side, sat in the chair opposite from him and stuck out my tongue. He stood up really fast and started to run toward me, so I ducked under the table where he was too big to fit. Cocoa followed me under there and started to lick my face.
“Gross!” I yelled. My feet were sticking out from underneath the table so Dad knelt down and tickled them. I kicked and kicked until he finally caught hold of my legs and pulled me out, rug-burning my knees.

Dad picked me up and swung me around. The washing machine game again. After his arms got tired he put me back down and sat in the chair. He softly kicked the box that Daddy brought for me and said, “Why don’t you go downstairs and try out your new toy?”

“I want to play the washing machine game again.”

“Sorry buddy, I have to go talk to your Mom. Go play with your Turtles for a while.”

Dad went into the baby’s room and I slid the big heavy box across the floor. It was almost as big as me. I walked backwards down the stairs, dragging the box behind me. The dirt and dust from the creaky wooden stairs flew all over the place every time the box hit a new step.

I finally got it down the stairs and reopened it. I took the Technodrome out and put Shredder and the other bad guys inside, on the little ledges where they were supposed to stand, and closed them in.

I jumped up to go get my Ninja Turtles. Marie must have followed me downstairs because when I turned around she was right in front of my face.

“What are you doing, stupid?” she asked me. “Don’t you realize what just happened? You shouldn’t even touch that stupid toy. It made Mom cry a lot, and you hurt Dad’s feelings.”

“Leave me alone,” I said. “Go play shopping games with your stupid Barbies. You’re just jealous because Daddy left before he gave you your presents, and because I’m his favorite.” Marie frowned, turned around and stomped up the stairs. The dust flew everywhere.

“And you can’t play wedding games with my Turtles anymore, either!” I yelled to her as she went upstairs.

I got my Ninja Turtles and they used their weapons to invade the Technodrome. I used my four favorite Turtles, the special ones that Daddy brought me a few weeks ago. They were brand new and they looked exactly like the Turtles from the new movie. I thought I would never get tired of playing with them. But after a few minutes of battling the bad guys in the Technodrome, I heard Mommy and Dad talking upstairs. Mommy was still crying a lot.

I put down my movie Ninja Turtles and decided to play with two of my older ones instead. I never played with them at the same time, since they were the exact same Turtle: both of them were Sewer Samurai Leonardoes. Daddy gave me one of them on the very first presents day, and Dad gave me the other one for my birthday a few weeks after that. Mommy probably didn’t tell him I already had one.

I wanted them to battle, to see which one would win. They battled and battled and I banged them against each other until they both broke. I just sat there, looking at the two Turtles all broken and twisted together like a green and blue Ninja Turtle pretzel. There were heads and samurai hats and swords all jumbled together in a big pile of plastic. I couldn’t even tell which one was which anymore.

The crying from upstairs kept echoing down the stairs and into my playroom.
in the hollow basement. Marie tried to come downstairs.

“Brian,” she said from the staircase, “go upstairs and see Mom. Try to cheer her up.”

“I don’t want to make her cry more than she already is. Leave me alone,” I said. Marie started to cry again and ran back upstairs.

I didn’t even want to play Ninja Turtles anymore. I just wanted to play with the empty box. I dragged it behind the old white and lime green striped couch and climbed inside. It was harder to hear all the crying in there, so I stayed in there for a while.
David liked the two by two thing, but he needed a mate. Enter Jezebel who, despite her name, was really rather tame. On their first date, he brought her roses. She complained that they were too red, too angry, and they made her nervous. He hid them under the couch, but she said she could still hear them screaming.

She wrapped herself in a shawl, which he begged her not to wear. “People will think I’m dating my mother,” he said.

She ignored him, and when they got to the restaurant, she ordered pale green pea soup. In contrast, he ordered a lobster.

“You know,” she said when he cracked open the claw, “right now, there is a lady lobster waiting for her phone to ring.”

He had never thought of food that way. He had always enjoyed it, and never thought of it having a social life. “What about the peas it took to make your soup?” he countered.

“Vegetables are different,” she said, picking up the bowl and slurping the remains. “They don’t have an ark life. They don’t travel two by two.”

“What about the two peas in the pod you always hear about?” he said. “I’ll bet you just broke up a lot of homes.”

She had no answer for that. And as the evening went on, he noticed more. The uneven part in her hair, one earring higher than the other, the whole imbalance of her. She was suddenly like a project to him. And he always had enjoyed fixing things. He paid the bill and decided that from now on, he would learn to enjoy all of her flaws.

But first, he would find that lady lobster and send her the roses that were still screaming under the couch.
Laura Wolfson

Climbing Montmartre

I am recently post-op, having just risen after over a month spent on my back, and almost every day my steps turn toward Montmartre. I am living temporarily in Paris, while Dominic, my husband-to-be, does graduate work at one of the Universities of Paris (there are about ten of them; they are numbered; he is enrolled at number four), and Sacré Coeur is visible from the end of our block. A hideous whitehead protruding from the highest point in Paris is how one guidebook, aimed at the backpacker segment of the travel book market, describes it, pointing out that when you are on top of the hill with your back to the aesthetically offensive cathedral, not only is all of Paris spread before you, but also the banlieux, or suburbs, France’s answer to the inner city, with concrete housing projects that, again I am quoting the guidebook from memory, were built to establish a safe distance between the immigrant working classes and the Parisian bourgeoisie and that resemble immense gray tombstones.

I have just received a diagnosis of a degenerative lung disease whose name I am unable to pronounce. I am reduced to placing a Post-It note on the wall over my desk with the 11-syllable name printed across it in block letters. It runs to several lines. I leave the Post-It note up for a week so that it catches my eye each time I look up from my computer screen, and finally the name, lymphangioleiomyomatosis, begins to roll off my tongue much as Mary Poppins’ supercalifragilisticexpialidocious did when I was nine. Someone who thinks nothing of hopping a flight to Siberia or Thailand, if that is what my peripatetic livelihood requires, I have now been told that plane travel is contraindicated, as the pressurized air in the cabin may cause my lungs to collapse during landing, leading, as I already know, to a stabbing or cramping sensation in the chest, followed by an inability to breathe. Funny how our bodies have such an intense need for the substances that surround us in nature. Oxygen depletion makes the heart flutter, makes the muscles weak, makes the voice drop to an involuntary whisper.

And so almost every day my steps turn toward Montmartre. I descend the three flights from our temporary digs to the courtyard. (When I returned from the hospital in a taxi, I was too weak to climb these stairs, and Dominic, thin but surprisingly muscular, carried me up in his arms, ignoring my protests. I bared my teeth and prepared to nip his shoulder, the handiest line of attack, but after a moment found the ride anything but precarious, and my fighting spirit subsided.) Now I pass through the courtyard, which is usually empty except for the Portuguese concierge compulsively hosing down the cobblestones, and, in the evening, a trench-coated man in his sixties, grumbling through a blue haze about his wife, who turns him outdoors when he smokes. I turn right, passing our neighborhood bistro, called A L’Affiche (Now Playing), decorated with posters of Yul Brynner, Clark Gable, and Vivien Leigh. Next, a corner store, the sort of place that sells pot holders, athletic socks, and towel racks at prices so low they hint at child labor in countries just over
the horizon, then past two bakeries, whose proprietors set out baguettes in the
morning and chocolate truffles at evening rush hour, past the most famous couscous
house in town (a recent poll declares couscous the favorite food of a majority of the
French, demonstrating vividly the extent to which Arab ways are striking at the very
heart of French culture, i.e., gastronomy), numberless cafes, a bookstore, and the
beginnings of the porn strip on the Rue Pigalle. (Poor Pigalle. He was a minor sculp-
tor whose name is now linked with streetwalkers and the trade in red patent leather
zipper-covered dominatrix outfits, with which, as far as I know, he had absolutely
nothing to do.)

Now I am at the foot of the mountain, facing it, head tilted back, taking in its
shops and narrow, zigzagging streets, preparing for the assault. Later it will occur to
me how odd it is that having been laid low by a lung ailment, I am pulled inexorably
toward the highest hill in town and walk up it with the longest stride I can muster.
But now I think instead of the many times I have found myself standing right here
over the last 20 years. My visits to Montmartre mark off the decades with an irreg-
ular ticking.

The first time I came to Paris, I was 18 years old. I was running away from
home, although I did not recognize it at the time. I have no recollection of coming
to Montmartre during that flight to Paris, but I am sure now that I did, because
when I walk down a certain street from the bottom of the funicular to the metro, a
street lined with fabric stores, I think always of the friend with whom I came to Paris
that time. She was one of my closest friends for almost 20 years, starting that
October when we came to Paris together. We were in London for a semester. I was
living with my parents; it was, in fact, more their semester abroad than mine.
Tuition charges at the school in London where my father was teaching being waived
for faculty children, I was taken along, although I had begun college back home the
year before.

My friend and I took the ferry across the Channel (there was no Channel then)
and stayed in a decaying Latin Quarter hotel for a week. (It is still there, still doing
a brisk business, still decaying.) With my high school French, I was our interpreter.
I spent the week in love with place, in the same way that one can be in love with a
person, in a state of pure joy, future unheeded and past forgotten, conscious only of
the light hitting the Seine, of the buskers playing a repeating loop of Paganini and
Bach warhorses for solo guitar, and of the fact that when I dipped into my limited
store of French words, people responded. It is now over a year and a half since I have
spoken to the friend who accompanied me then; we quarreled. But when I walk
down that narrow street lined with bolts of cloth, I have the impression that we have
just spoken, much as you may think momentarily upon waking that someone long
gone from your life has just paid you a short visit, an impression that is merely a ves-
tige of the night’s dreaming.

Another time in Montmartre, a decade and a half later, I was in Paris for a few
months, studying French. I was renting a room from a fiftyish woman named
Marie-Laure. She slept on the living room sofa, giving me her bed, talked to me
about an Italian she was sorry she didn’t marry. She took me to a Beaujolais nou-
veau party (a sort of latter-day Parisian harvest festival) and introduced me as a
friend visiting from America, whispering to me over her shoulder as we crossed the threshold not to tell people that I was, in fact, her boarder, as people "would not understand."

One morning, I went into the bathroom and took a shower around eight, while she slept. When I emerged, she raged at me for waking her. I apologized hastily and fled down the stairs and up the nearby hill, as if her voice at my back was propelling me up, past the butcher and the fromager, past immobile windmills and boutiques not yet open for the day, to the kitschiest café on the kitschiest square (later in the afternoon, artists in berets, yes, berets, would be seated in front of their easels, daubing likenesses of tourists), where I ordered hot chocolate and felt more alone than at any other time I can remember. (Why was I so affected by this tongue-lashing from a woman who meant nothing to me?) Hours later, I descended the hill, looking desultorily at hand-lettered notices stapled to telephone poles, expecting to be told to seek lodgings elsewhere. She greeted me as if nothing had happened.

I was freshly divorced then, unmoored, and learning French in a bid for professional advancement and financial security, a job opportunity that had presented itself at an international organization. At that point, my newly upgraded French had brought me little I could point to except the ability to comprehend almost every word of my landlady’s outburst. I had recently moved out of the apartment I had shared with my first husband back in the States, and now I had been catapulted out of this rented room on a geyser-jet of rage.

Another scene from Montmartre: a year later I am back, still studying French, still working toward that goal of the secure job that requires perfect comprehension of French. Now my parents have come to visit for a week. I have arranged a hotel room for them, not far from where I am staying, again, by sheer coincidence, near the foot of Montmartre. My father has always been an ace at reading maps and finding his way around foreign cities. In London that year when I ran away temporarily (they pulled me back from Paris using a formula consisting of two parts love and one part guilt, or maybe I have gotten the proportions reversed), I always tried to duck out of the apartment before he saw me putting on my coat and asked where I was going. If I was imprudent enough to tell him, he would pull out London A to Z, with its pages and pages of minutely detailed maps, and begin explaining which bus to take, where to get off, the correct British pronunciation of the neighborhood where I was headed, and what anarchist publisher or illustrator of children’s books had lived there during the inter-war period. I would invariably arrive late to wherever I was going.

Now, seated with my parents on a bench in front of Sacré Coeur with Paris spread out before us (including those tomb-like apartment buildings constructed for the proletariat), I see how my parents are aging. The Eiffel Tower just barely concealed behind a tree off to our right, my father gestures 180 degrees behind us, behind Sacré Coeur, completely in the wrong direction, and says offhandedly, as if confirming something he already knows, "The Tower is behind us, right?" I am startled. "Which tower?"

That was the last time I ascended Montmartre before I received my lung diagnosis.
A few weeks after I came out of the hospital last spring, I was sitting across from my thoracic surgeon, Chantal Bonmot. She looked to be just a few years my senior, with creamy, freckled skin, dark blue eyeliner, and glossy, dark blond hair held back by a black velvet headband.

“Well,” she said, leafing through a file, “the lab has sent us your biopsy results.” I waited.

“As we thought, you have lymphangioleiomyomatosis. It is called LAM for short. It usually affects women in their thirties and often presents with collapsed lungs.”

I fished a little notepad and a pen from my purse and started taking down, in a mixture of English and French, what she was saying.

She waved a hand toward my pen. “No need to write this down. We’ll give you all your records.”

I kept writing. “How do you spell the name of the disease?”

The question went unanswered; I asked another. “Does it have other symptoms?”

She furrowed her brows for a moment. “Shortness of breath, collapsed lungs, that’s about it,” she said.

I nodded. I could handle it. I had experienced both. I had just undergone an operation to ward off further pneumothoraces on my left side. I could have the same surgery on the right side. I tried to visualize my datebook and to think about when I could spare the five weeks that convalescence would require. “Is that all?”

“Oh, and perhaps une greffe de poumons,” she said. I remembered that we were speaking French.

“Greffé! What is that?”

“It means that you’ll have to get a new pair of lungs,” she said. I noted her ease in explaining the word. I had spent much time learning languages, and most people, I knew, were hopeless at explaining their language to foreigners.

“Une greffe de poumons?” I mastered my new word with great rapidity, even getting the gender right.

“Oh, really,” she said, “it’s no big deal. It wouldn’t be for another fifteen or twenty years. Many women with this condition don’t live that long.”

“Twenty years!” My exclamation overlapped with her last words, as if erasing them. “Mais ça passe vite!” [That goes by quickly!]

Twenty years was precisely the interval that had passed since I had first seen— and scaled—Montmartre.

It was the week I received the diagnosis that I began making those obsessive daily treks from our sublet over to Montmartre. I went alone. The semester was ending, and Dominic was writing term papers. At his desk surrounded by open volumes of Heidegger and Husserl, he looked very small.

Tourist trap that it is, I came to know Montmartre intimately and to love it. The house with a plaque indicating that Erik Satie had lived there. (In his tiny apartment, I read somewhere, there were dozens of tightly furled gray umbrellas and two pianos, one stacked on top of the other, giving new meaning to the word “upright,” although in my image of the place, the one on top is, in fact, upside down, pedals
waving gently overhead like the fronds of some giant houseplant.) A building on a small square where Picasso and Braque had collaborated to invent Cubism. The house where Bizet had lived while composing *Carmen. Le Lapin Agile*, a cabaret frequented by Picasso, Renoir, Utrillo, its name illustrated by a picture on the wall depicting a rabbit bounding out of a skillet. A pink house containing a restaurant called, sensibly enough, *La Maison Rose*. The Montmartre Historical Museum, which grants equal space to a gruesomely detailed exhibit about a mass murder committed in the neighborhood in the mid-19th century, including an artist’s depiction of the event, and to the Paris Commune, that epoch-making uprising of the poor and the oppressed, which culminated in the establishment of a short-lived egalitarian governing committee centered on Montmartre. (The ugly white basilica had been built by the powers-that-be when the popular government was crushed and order reestablished, for the express purpose of driving home who was in charge.) A plaque outside a café noting that in the 14th century, the building had housed the sole grocery store in all of Montmartre, which, whenever I laid eyes on it, quite often now, made me smile and wonder why the tourist commission considered this fact worthy of note. Narrow, steep staircases that allowed the pedestrian to mount from one level of the hill to the next, circumventing the switchbacks that cars had to take. A mansion with a sign in front explaining that in the days when Montmartre was a rural retreat, this place had been an asylum for those afflicted with nervous complaints and mental disorders.

But these are mere guidebook tidbits. What intrigues me most of all about Montmartre is how, in spite of daily, unceasing violation by tourists, the exhaust from their immense buses, their flashing cameras, the place manages to maintain its dignity and sense of the past, its Cubist, unexpected views of the city below, caught between buildings, its still alleys, as if soundproofed from the hordes just half a block away. Often, instead of marching directly to the top of the hill, I take a circuitous route, emerging around corners to glimpse familiar windmills from surprising angles, the funicular from a promontory jutting next to it about halfway up, steep, unbelievably long flights of stairs slicing up and down the butte between closely-placed apartment buildings, tiny restaurants glowing red at the windows, with talk spilling out the doors, each one like a private party, also a mysterious shop, all closed up, with a hand-lettered sign that reads “*Le Toit du Monde*” [The Roof of the World], as if Montmartre aspired unselfconsciously to be on a level with the Himalayas.

When I wonder why I come here day after day, I tell myself that it is impossible to spend too much time roaming such a place as Montmartre. It defies logic, the fact that you can walk the length and breadth of this tiny patch of land, trace the same hairpin turns again and again, and find an infinity of food for thought. How can so much picturesqueness and invisible wonder, so unplumbable, be packed into such small spaces? Scraps of time and history get trapped in the interstices of the alleys and buildings, and slowly they yield up their fragrance. It is a place whose vastness is temporal rather than spatial. How is it possible, if you are privileged to reside in one of the world’s charmed places, to lead a normal life, go to work, sleep in on weekends, get yourself to the post office and the dry cleaner, and still reserve the
time and the capacity for wonder that you must retain to merit living there?

I have never known the world without myself in it. If only I could take some of the wisps of time lingering in Montmartre’s crevices and alleys and tack them on to the end of my life. Hemingway called Paris a moveable feast, which, once visited, remained with a person forever. It’s a lie; as departure approaches, I visit and revisit these places, trying to absorb them so I can carry them away with me, knowing that it is a doomed enterprise. Because I have lived here for months at a time, I will always be slightly blasé when I am here, near Montmartre, thinking with part of my mind of errands and quotidian things. Yet when I go away from Paris, I will miss Montmartre terribly. I will experience the place only via differing degrees of absence, yearning, an inability to be fully there.
Contributors
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Peter Clarke studies broadcasting at the New England Institute of Art. You can listen to his radio show and podcast, The Adventures of Pat and Pete, online at www.neialive.com. His favorite animal is the giraffe. His favorite Beatle is George. He prefers rain to snow. This is his first publication.

Kerri Cornelissen is a senior at Providence College. She has a major in Social Science, a minor in Theology and she would like to pursue a career in clinical Social Work.

Between 1992 and 1997, Phillip Corwin spent most of his time in former Yugoslavia as a diplomatic official for the United Nations and the OSCE. He is the author of Dubious Mandate: A Memoir of the UN in Bosnia, Summer 1995 (Duke University Press), and Doomed In Afghanistan: A UN Officer’s Memoir of the Fall of Kabul and Najibullah's Failed Escape, 1992 (Rutgers University Press). He has been a fellow at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and has taught writing at New York University and City University of New York (CUNY).

Rob Couteau is a painter and writer from Brooklyn, and is the author of the novel, Doctor Pluss, and the epistolary memoir, Letters from Paris. His poetry, fiction, essays, and interviews have appeared in numerous publications. After expatriating to Paris for twelve years, he currently resides in New York State.

Robbie D’Alfonso is a junior English major at Providence College. His passion for poetry and fiction is equaled only by that for the games of softball and beirut; if his prowess as a writer was equal to that of either sport, this would not be his first publication. He currently resides in Wickford, Rhode Island.
Brian Daldorph teaches at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. He is the editor of Coal City Review. His most recent book is Senegal Blues (219 Press).


Serge Delaive, a Walloon (French-speaking) poet and novelist, was born in Liège (Belgium) in 1965. After studying literature and journalism, he co-founded the magazine and publishing house Le Fram, which he runs along with the poets Karel Logist, Carl Norac, and Carino Bucciarelli. His latest published work is Les Jours (La Différence, 2006) from which these poems were excerpted. About 'Les Jours', Jeannine Paque writes: “One scarcely imagines that a poem can easily lend itself to the photographic modus operandi. Even so, yes: according to Delaive, a poem can do everything.”

John Dismukes is a writer of poetry, short stories, and novels. John currently lives in Clayton, North Carolina and is a graduate from North Carolina Wesleyan College. Quote "Being a writer is really unfair, because a good writer bares his or her soul in the most permanent form, the written word."

Chris DuBee is a senior at Providence College and will graduate with a major in English and a minor in Business Studies. This is his first published work.

Writer/artist Robert Dunn is quite possibly the most censored poet in New York. He doesn’t do anything dirty; he merely has an unfortunate tendency to make jokes. He’s had poems accepted in 40 states and 7 foreign countries (Canada, England, Ireland, Australia, Belgium, Bangladesh, Finland). His books include Zen Yentas in Bondage, Horse Latitudes, and Baffled in Baloneyville, from iUniverse.com. His comic strip, Knish & Carob, currently appears in Street News. In ancient folklore, there is a story about how, in every generation, there are 36 individuals whose very existence persuades the Almighty not to destroy the world. Among these 36 individuals, Robert Dunn is definitely #37.

Joan Fagan is a senior at Providence College. She double majors in English and Social Science. She is also a member of the Providence College Dance Company. This is the first journal she has edited. You can contact her at fagan.joan@gmail.com.

Rod Farmer has had over 800 poems published in over 150 journals, including Ellipsis, Webster Review, Pleiades, Off The Coast, Thorny Locust, The Kerf, Haight Ashbury Literary Journal, Rattle, Urthona, Words of Wisdom, Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review, Abbey, Phantasmagoria and Main Street Rag.
Dean Faulwell's poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review, Chelsea, Paris Review, Poetry Now*, et al., fiction in *Conduit, Happy, Knocked*. He was one of the founding editors of the little Chicago poetry mag from the 1970's, *Oink*.

Jenna Fegreus is a humanities major at Providence College. She is from Cohasset, MA.

Edward Fisher has taught English in Uganda as a Peace Corps volunteer, and worked 30 years as a play-therapist and adventure-based counselor with handicapped children. He holds a bachelors in Literature and a doctorate in Psychology. Published credits include *The Writer, The Lyric, Star-Line, Blue Collar Review & Poetry Motel*, as well as *Telescope and Play & Culture*.

Brent Fisk has had over 100 of his poems accepted in the past two years. Last year, *Rattle* and *White Pelican* both nominated a poem of his for a Pushcart Prize. He has also helped to edit *Steel Toe Books* for the past three years. He has four poems forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner* and you can find more of his work in recent issues of *Rattle, Rhino*, and *Bitter Oleander*, among others.

S. P. Flannery was born in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and now resides in Madison. His poetry has appeared most recently in *Poetry Salzburg Review, Hummingbird, Free Verse, Merge*, *Wild Goose Poetry Review, The Onion Union*, and *Tipton Poetry Journal*.


Kathryn Gahl of Wisconsin loves red lipstick, the tango, and vintage clothing. She has navigated nurse management and single parenthood. Now, she writes. Her stories and poems are widely published in many journals, including *Eclipse, Green Hills Literary Lantern, Notre Dame Review, Permafrost*, and *Porcupine Literary Arts Magazine*. She was a finalist for Glimmer Train’s Open Fiction and Very Short Fiction awards and also a finalist for the Marjorie J. Wilson Award from Margie. All this because five twenty-something children are now on their own-and, so is she.

Timothy Geiger is the author of the poetry collection *Blue Light Factory*, (Spoon River Poetry Press, 1999) and six chapbooks, most recently *Four Windows* (Brandenburg Press, 2006). His work has appeared in such journals as *Poetry, America, Quarterly West, Sou’wester & Mid-American Review*. He lives in Toledo, Ohio with his wife and son, where he is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at The University of Toledo teaching poetry writing workshops and letterpress printing.
David Goldstein has more than 30 short stories published in 5 countries as well as two (bad) poems. Before writing full time, he was the First Deputy Defender for the State of Michigan where he argued and won more than 20 appellate cases before the Michigan Supreme Court as well as California and federal courts. He is also a graduate of the Wharton School of Finance.

Lindsey Gosma teaches creative writing and composition at Arizona State University where she is finishing her MFA in poetry. Her work has recently been published in *Crab Orchard Review, Painted Bride Quarterly*, and as a part of the "Moving Poems" public arts project at ASU. Lindsey is currently co-directing The Visual Text Project 3: Triptych, connecting artists and writers through the process of collaboration.


Austin Grigg is a poet and web designer from South Carolina. He is also an editor for the *Clemson Poetry Review*.

Born and raised in Indiana, Marc Harshman has lived for nearly thirty years in West Virginia where he taught sixth grade. Publication of his poems include *The Georgia Review, Wilderness, 5 AM, Shenandoah, Anemone Sidecar, Tusculum Review*, and *The Progressive*. His third chapbook of poems, *Local Journeys* was published by Finishing Line in 2004. He is also the author of ten children's books including *The Storm*, a Smithsonian Notable Book for Children. His eleventh title is forthcoming from Dutton/Penguin in 2007.

John Hazard has taught English for three decades at the University of Memphis and the Cranbrook Kingswood School. His poems have recently appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Poetry, Ploughshares, Bryant Literary Review, Cream City Review, Faultline, Front Range Review, Jabberwock Review*, and *South Dakota Review*.

Michael Hettich's two most recent books, both published in 2005, are *Swimmer Dreams* (Turning Point) and *Flock and Shadow: New and Selected Poems* (New Rivers Press), which was named a "Tope Ten" in poetry from Book Sense. He lives in Miami and teaches at Miami Dade College.

Lowell Jaeger has taught creative writing at Flathead Valley Community College for the past 25 years. He is a 1981 graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop. Two collections of his poems (*War On War and Hope Against Hope*) were published by Utah State University Press. He has also published numerous chapbooks, including *The Banana Man, Star-Crossed, Black Ice*, and *Nobody Special*, which were published by Pudding House Press during the past year. Currently Jaeger is editing (with an edi-
Contributors

Caleen Jaeger is a member of the editorial board of nine other Montana poets) Poems Across the Big Sky, an anthology of more than 100 poets from all corners of the state. Jaeger is also a self-employed silversmith/goldsmith. He and his wife, Amy, and their three teenagers live in Bigfork.

Alex Johnson is a senior at Providence College and an editor for the 2007 Alembic. A man of imposing stature, he is 6'1" on a good day and is an occasionally avid reader, writer, and self-proclaimed artist and musician. This is his first publication.

David Lunde is a poet and translator whose work has appeared in such journals as Poetry, The Iowa Review, TriQuarterly, Kansas Quarterly, Chelsea, Confrontation, Hawaii Review, Chicago Review, Seneca Review, Cottonwood, The Literary Review, Renditions, and Northwest Review. Most recent books: Blues for Port City, Heart Transplants & Other Misappropriations, Nightfishing in Great Sky River, and The Carving of Insects, a translation of Bian Zhilin’s collected poems co-translated with Mary M.Y. Fung.

Craig Malesra is a Junior at Providence College, and is an English major. The preceding poems are his first published works.

Jess McCauley is a senior English major and writing minor from Cheshire, CT. She enjoys reading, writing, reading about writing, writing about reading, and sarcasm. Her favorite literary works include her mother Paula’s frequent emails, her father Jim’s notes that were included in her grade school lunchbox, and Gulliver’s Travels by Jonathan Swift. If God is just, she will make money after she graduates by writing about music for a major magazine.

Joseph McCormack is a senior English major and Writing minor at PC. His understanding of the English language owes many debts of gratitude to Professors Tony Esolen, Steven Lynch, Jason Stumpf, and Peter Johnson.

Alyce Miller is the author of three books of fiction, a collection of stories, The Nature of Longing (Flannery O’Connor Award for Short Fiction) W.W. Norton, 1995; a novel, Stopping for Green Lights, Anchor Doubleday, 1999; and a collection of stories, Water (Mary McCarthy Prize), Sarabande Press, forthcoming 2007, as well as more than 120 short stories, poems, and essays published in literary magazines. Alyce Miller leads a double life as an attorney specializing in animal law, and a professor of literature and creative writing in the graduate writing program at Indiana University in Bloomington.

Greg Moglia’s work has appeared in over 90 journals in the U.S., Canada and England as well as five poetry anthologies including Earth Shattering Poems and Roots and Flowers, each edited by Liz Rosenberg from Henry Holt and Co. He is a four time winner of the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award offered by the Passaic County Community College. His poem “Why Do Lovers Whisper” was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2005. Recently, he has been nominated by the College of William and Mary for the University of Virginia anthology of Best New Poets 2006.
Jean-Baptiste Mounier, a free-lance technical translator and interpreter, was born in Paris (France) in 1956 and has resided in New England since 1990. While living in Paris, he was active in the theater.


Robert Parham’s work has been published by Southern Review, Texas Review, Georgia Review, Shenandoah, Connecticut Review, Northwest Review, and South Carolina Review. His chapbook What Part Motion Plays in the Equation of Love won the Palanquin Competition. A collection of his poetry was a finalist for the Richard Snyder and the Marianne Moore poetry competitions. He edits the Southern Poetry Review and serves as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Augusta State University.

Robert L. Penick lives in Louisville, KY, where he has six toes on each foot and the locals call him "Webby."

Alejandra Pizarnik (1936-1972) was born in Buenos Aires into a family of Eastern European immigrants to Argentina. She studied philosophy and literature at the University of Buenos Aires. Pizarnik’s many books of poems include Árbol de Diana (Diana’s Tree), Los trabajos y las noches (Works and Nights), and El infierno musical (The Musical Inferno). In 1969 she was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship, and in 1971 a Fulbright scholarship. On September 25, 1972, while on weekend leave from the psychiatric clinic where she was a patient, Pizarnik died of a self-induced overdose of prescription drugs.

Alice Pero’s first book of poetry, Thawed Stars, was hailed by Kenneth Koch as having “clarity and surprises.” She has won two prizes from the National League of American Pen Women as well as an award from the California State Poetry Society. Pero has taught poetry to grade school children in private and public schools for 16 years. Her poetry reading series, Moonday, (www.moondaypoetry.com), takes place monthly at Village Books in Pacific Palisades, CA. Pero is also an accomplished flutist.

Kenneth Pobo’s book, Introductions, came out in 2003 from Pearl’s Book'Em Press. In addition to an earlier issue of The Alembic, his work appears in Nimrod, Mudfish, Indiana Review, and elsewhere. Catch his “Obscure Oldies” radio show at WDNR.com on Saturdays from 6-8pm EDT.

Colleen Powderly tries to live poetically, write dangerously, and dream impractical-ly of living in Ireland. She keeps writing poems because she simply cannot stop and she believes that the work of a life is to use the gifts given it for the good of others as well as the care of the self. Her work has also appeared in such journals as Fox Cry Review, Sanskrit, Palo Alto Review, and The California Quarterly, among others.
Andrea Quaid is a graduate of Antioch University’s MFA Creative Writing Program and California State University Los Angeles’ graduate program in literature. For the past six years she has been the associate coordinator of Spoken Interludes, a non-profit arts organization that brings writing programs to underserved teenagers. She has taught creative writing to high school students in traditional high schools and incarceration facilities as well as composition at CSULA.

Charles Rafferty is the author of four full-length collections of poetry: *The Man on the Tower* (University of Arkansas Press), *Where the Glories of April Lead* (Mitki/Mitki Press), *During the Beauty Shortage* (M2 Press), and most recently *A Less Fabulous Infinity* (Louisiana Literature Press). He currently teaches American literature and writing at Albertus Magnus College and works as an editor for a technology consulting firm. He lives in Sandy Hook, Connecticut, with his wife and two daughters.

Andrew Rein is a history and philosophy student at Providence College. He enjoys writing, literature, and traveling to the far reaches of the globe. His plans for the future change daily.

Georgia Ressmeyer is the author of *Bernice: A Comedy in Letters*, a short novel published by Metis Press in 1984. Her poems have recently appeared in *The Lyric* and *Westview*, with new work forthcoming in *Illuminations*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *Wisconsin People & Ideas*. She lives in Sheboygan, WI.

Stephen R. Roberts has recently retired from 35 years in the insurance claims business. He is the father of four fine children, no known poets. He has had poems published in *Borderlands, New Laurel Review, The Briar Cliff Review, Willow Springs, Karamu & Blueline*. He has five published chapbooks, the latest is *Rhubarb DeSoto*, published in 2004 by Pudding Publications.

Andrés Rodríguez is the author of a collection of poetry, *Night Song* (Tia Chucha Press), and a work of literary criticism, *Book of the Heart: The Poetics, Letters, and Life of John Keats* (Lindisfarne Press). His poems and essays have appeared in *Americas Review, Art & Academe, Bilingual Review, Blue Mesa Review, Lucero, Quarry West, Sagetrieb, and Wilderness*. His poems have also been published in the anthologies *Currents from the Dancing River* (Harcourt Brace), *Dream of a Word* (Tia Chucha Press), *New Chicano/Chicana Writing* (University of Arizona Press), and *Wild Song* (University of Georgia Press). Rodríguez has degrees in English from the University of Iowa, Stanford University, and the University of California, Santa Cruz. He presently lives in Kansas City.

**Yvonne V. Sapia** is the author of two books of poetry and a novel. She is an NEA Fellow who is Resident Poet at Lake City Community College in Florida. Her work appears in numerous journals, textbooks, and anthologies, including the yearly *The Best American Poetry* series.

**David Sapp** is a writer and artist living near Lake Erie. He teaches at Firelands College in Huron, Ohio. His poems have appeared in *The Chattahoochee Review*, *The Cape Rock*, *The Licking River Review*, *The Hurricane Review*, *Sidewalks*, *The Bad Henry Review*, *Meat Whistle Quarterly*, *Limestone*, *Red Cedar Review*, and elsewhere. His articles have appeared in the *Journal of Creative Behavior*. His chapbook, *Close to Home*, and his novel, *Flying Over Erie*, have been published.

**Amy L. Sargent** is an English instructor at a small community college in Steubenville, Ohio. She lives in a lopsided house near Pittsburgh, PA with her husband and their four cats. Her work has recently appeared in *The Dalhousie Review* and *The Apple Valley Review*, among other journals. Amy is currently completing her MFA at Chatham College.

**Tim Sennott** is a Mechanical Engineer at Santa Clara University in California. He hopes to soon apply his skills to the impending clash between humanity’s current ways of living and the physical laws of our humble planet. He hails from Cape Cod, MA, and is an avid photographer, wandering soul, and believer in the power of Words, especially meaningfully-capitalized ones.

**Kevin Shea** is a senior at Providence College. He is an English major, Technical Computer Science minor, and a Mathematics minor. This issue of *The Alembic* is his first attempt at being an editor. He hopes to go into editorial work in the future. This is also his first publication. You may contact him at kevinwshea@gmail.com.

**Kevin Smith** is a senior at Providence College and will be graduating in May 2007. He is a history major but is interested in the development of the prose poem. He especially loves anti-love poetry that excuses obsessive tendencies, neuroses and voyeurism as rational behavior within the framework of the prose poem.

**Matthew J. Spireng**’s full-length book manuscript *Out of Body* won the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award and was published in 2006 by Bluestem Press at Emporia State University. His chapbook *Young Farmer* is due out in 2007 from Finishing Line Press. Previous chapbooks are: *Encounters*, 2005, Finishing Line Press; *Inspiration Point*, 2002, winner of the 2000 Bright Hill Press Poetry Chapbook Competition; and *Just This*, signed and numbered limited-edition chapbook of his poems and photographs by Trey Price on which the poems are based, Hampden-Sydney College, 2003.
Skaidrite Stelzer is currently teaching in the English Department at The University of Toledo. Her work has appeared in *The Third Coast: An Anthology of Michigan Poets*, *The River City Review*, and *The Georgetown Review*. Recently, she has had work accepted for publication in *Eclipse*, *Fourth River*, and *Poetry Motel*.

Jason Stumpf’s translation of Pura López-Colomé’s *Aurora* will be published by Shearsman Books this fall. His poems and translations have recently appeared in *Diagram*, *New American Writing*, *Mantis*, and other journals.


Jason Tandon is the author of two chapbooks of poetry, *Flight* (Finishing Line Press, forthcoming June 2007) and *Rumble Strip* (sunnyoutside). His first full-length collection *Give over the Heckler and Everyone Gets Hurt* was a finalist for the 2006 Kinereth Gensler Award from Alice James Books. His poems have appeared in many journals including *Columbia Poetry Review, Red Cedar Review, Euphony, and Poet Lore*.

Nancy Wakeman lives in San Francisco. Her poetry and prose have been published in various journals. She is the author of *BABE DIDRIKSON ZAHARIAS: Driven to Win*, a biography of the famous golfer, and *Shooting Arrows at the Moon*, a collection of poetry.

Recently receiving his Master of Arts in Writing, John Williams calls Massachusetts home, when not abroad, and is compiling a book of poetry and art, as well as beginning his first novel. John has won the Best Fiction Story in *Voices* and 2nd place in the California State Poetry Society’s haiku contest. His other previous publications include: *Black Rock and Sage, Language and Culture, Red Hawk Review, Samizdada, Raving Dove, The Leaflet, Main Channel Voices, The Lowell Sun, Collected Stories, Poetry Motel, Typically Unusual, The Campus Report, and The International Library of Poetry*.

Francine Witte is a poet, playwright and fiction writer. Her poetry chapbook *Magic in the Streets* was published by Owl Creek Press. Her flash fiction chapbook *The Wind Twirls Everything* is forthcoming from Musclehead Press. She lives in New York City and is a high school English teacher.
Laura Esther Wolfson lives in New York City, where she works as a translator of Russian and French.

Emily Wood is a senior at Providence College studying English and Secondary Education. Her creative outlets include writing, dancing and teaching.

Arlene Zide's work has been published in many journals and anthologies in the U.S., Canada and in India such as *Meridians* (Smith College), *Xanadu*, *Rattapallax*, *Primavera*, *Colorado Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Women's Review of Books*, *Ekphrasis*, *A Room of Her Own*, *Oyez*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Rhino*, *Kiss Me Goodnight*, etc. and online in *ChicagoPoetry.com*, *RedRiverReview.com*, *ThePedestalMagazine.com* and *R-K-Vry.com*. 
PHOTOGRAPHY
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*Shield With Nothing to Protect*
Taylor Baybutt

*Roll*
Taylor Baybutt

Dirty Water
Taylor Baybutt

Untitled
Taylor Baybutt

At Rest
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*Singularity*
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Before Us
Kerri Cornelissen

*Tango*
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Simplicity
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*Eden*
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*Before the Fall*
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Untitled
Jenna Fegreus

Untitled
Jenna Fegreus

Untitled
Jenna Fegreus

Untitled
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