

# 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday



## Spring 2022

**Third Wednesday Magazine**  
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Third Wednesday is a quarterly journal of literary and visual arts. Though we manage the magazine from Michigan, we welcome submissions from all over the world. Digital issues of the magazine are completely free to anyone and print issues can be purchased at Amazon.com.

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David Chorlton / Phoenix, Arizona

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## ***Editor's Note***

Here is the annual spring contest issue of 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday.

Our judge this year is poet and writer Keith Taylor who recently retired from the University of Michigan where he taught in the undergraduate and graduate programs in creative writing. Keith is the author of sixteen collections of poetry. The most recent is *Let Them Be Left*, poems from Isle Royale published by Alice Greene & Co.

As always, the winning poems in this contest are “co-winners”. We don’t award 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> places so the three poems receive the same prize of \$100.

Keith has graciously provided three of his own poems for this issue. Those follow the three winning poems and four honorable mentions that he selected from the hundreds of poems that were entered this year.

Some other poems in this issue also came to us via contest entries. They are poems of considerable merit that are published with the permission of the authors who chose to give their poems a “second chance” at publication, by going through our regular editors.

There is plenty of fine art in our pages by some visual artists with whom we have become familiar from past issues. Ann Privateer, Gary Wadley, Denny Marshall, David Chorlton, Lisa Yount and Gary Bloom have all contributed their talents in the past.



## *Annual Poetry Contest*

### *Judge's comments on the winning poems and honorable mentions:*

***Praise Song for Perry...*** “A big ambitious poem that looks for the sacredness of the world but keeps everything tied to the real, the lived world. And it sings. I felt honored to be one of the first readers of this poem. “

***When Harvesting the Hog:*** “Not unlike the poem above in theme [I realized after I'd made the selection], but does it all very quickly. It is a kind of sacrifice, and honors the beast.”

***Story:*** “A big talky poem that is about the idea of writing, even writing past our inabilities to write. This poet loves his words and wants to spend them.”

#### Honorable Mentions:

***The Summer We Saved the World:*** “A good story told succinctly and beautifully. I almost believed it at the end -- maybe they did save the world!”

***Missing Buddha:*** “Loved the strong spoken language of this poem. Laughed, and then realized it wasn't just a joke but was so much more.”

***Flames:*** “How could I not like this poem?! I was a teacher and am aging and still understand desire! All of that is here without getting preachy.”

***Beginning:*** “Had to have one very short poem here and this one was able to capture desire and the things of this world, all in vivid suggestions.”

:

*Praise Song for Perry Just Before the Season's End* / Virginia Shank

Saturday is holy in its own way here  
peepers cheeping muddrugged hymns  
while turkey vultures stitch the sky's silk robes  
every inch dressed in azure—oh mother Mary

bless these buntings weaving the gold grass  
gathering seeds, an offering made on the plate  
of the loosegraveled road where the garter snake  
suns itself, the body elastic ekphrastic epiphany.

How could we move so smooth?  
When we turn to the lake, the lily pads lifting  
their palms in praise of the sun, the beavers cleaving  
the wetlands in v after v, we can't help but hallow

the heron, statue still snake-necked and waiting  
to pierce the ribs of the fish that rise, tempted  
to touch the cloud-broidered sky, silver-scaled sacrifice  
offered on altars of duckweed and cattails and shale.

What can we give but every last lick of love  
for the furrows of farmfields, the long dirt lanes  
the oak trees releasing, relieved of the creatures  
that culled their spring green, for the streams

cutting gullies and gorge grain by grain  
and the willow trees rustle in taffeta rain,  
for the lap of the lake, the arms of the drumlins  
linked each to each and all of us singing

holy holy waterskater floating snail  
summer's last strawberry raspberry  
days dissolved on the tongue  
a sacrament, shifting but safe?

Virginia Shank / Irvine, California

*When Harvesting the Hog* / Matthew Burns

let it be in snow.  
Know the cold

keeps and holds  
everything.

Blood, as blood is  
wont to do,

will flow; it must;  
there is no discussion.

But the cloud of breath  
that escapes your lungs

when you make that first rich cut  
between jowl and blade,

like a hare bursting from a hedge,  
will be a shock, every time.

Pray it is when your hands,  
cold, accept

the emptying body's warmth  
around them and steam

against the early dark.  
Touch your lips and cheeks

to mark a blessing.  
Look up to the sky that holds your flesh.

Cut with a clean, true stroke.

Matthew Burns / Schenectady, New York



## *Story* / Adam D. Weeks

There's this boy—been swimming out into the ocean every day since June, farther out each time. You've been watching, been working from home since *The Times* decided you weren't writing anything with the world really in it. So yes, you've been watching the boy and the waves, the way they crash together. They get so tall this time of year, and sometimes you have to sit up to see his head still bobbing like a log in the water when they overtake him. Each day you say he won't be coming because of the cold and each day he seems to be there earlier. Swimming out. Being pushed in. Swimming out. Being pushed in. Some days you swear he turns and sees you sitting on the patio, laptop balanced on your leg, hair a perfect picture of your tangled head in the wind, cheeks somehow warm against it. Not sure when you first noticed him, you wonder how long it's taken, if he started with just his ankles in the icy swash and had to work his way up to his knees. You wonder what he's swimming for. You walk down one day and sit in the dunes near the fence that separates the beach from the few houses along the strip. Blanket wrapped around you, you wait for anything other than wind, any sign of the boy or what may be singing him out into the crisp whitecaps. You watch the water for any flash of tentacles, any sign of some squid to pull down his body, your body. The boy doesn't see you when he steps onto the shore and you're gone by the time he washes in with the tide, but he sees the shape of you in the sand when he leaves. Soon you're waiting for him. Checking the time more often as it approaches noon. Soon he doesn't show up and that day you wait by the window for hours. The sun is setting when you swear you see a twisted shape tossed briefly between two waves and step quickly out to the patio railing, voice cracking the evening birdsong into silence, arms flung open in the wind with nothing

but the sky between them. You can't believe  
your own body, can't believe how much  
some driftwood moved you, some skin you'd never  
even touched, never really seen. You spend three days sitting  
through the cold draft of that window. You remember  
the eastern shore bull shark sightings you'd heard about,  
the fact that a bull's bite is worse than a great white.  
You even remember the lusca you'd once read about, giant  
octopus with the head of a shark, sharp teeth and a mess  
of sticky limbs to pull you under. You imagine the boy  
warm in bed, wanting to spend the day inside  
watching scary movies rather than in the tide.  
Finally, you have to walk out to the water. You have to  
look for any sets of footsteps in the sand, see if any have left.  
After a short time circling the shore, you have to  
step into the water and feel the draw of the backwash,  
imagine the way it could hug you, could pull you  
to bed. By the time you make it up to your waist  
the whole sea lays in front of you and doesn't say  
what you want to hear, just keeps singing its cold chorus.  
You feel the tug of a single pale hand pulling you down,  
the light of an alien ship lifting you from the water and flying  
you away. Then, once the ocean is finally kissing your neck,  
you look back and see the whole sky staring right at you.

Adam D. Weeks / Baltimore, Maryland

## *The Summer We Saved the World* / Lisa Bledsoe

We lived in a gas station that year.  
The farmer offered to let us live there free  
but we paid rent because we had clipped the coupons  
and taken classes, learning to breathe & push  
at appropriate times, absolute believers.

People wear instruments of torture as jewelry.  
Or this, last week: a woman with a large dead  
& dried seahorse—I mean, Jesus! But that summer  
we were the charms, having successfully  
memorized the correct lists & passed exams.  
I bought cotton skirts and white canvas shoes  
in a Walmart half an hour away, along with  
an enormous silver bowl for rising bread.  
The farmer's wife sent over sourdough starter  
& half runners, so we sat in lawn chairs  
on the cracked blacktop out front & snapped beans  
in the sun, believing absolutely.

Days later the septic system began to fail.  
We watched backhoes churn the hay field to slop  
out back, & bought cheap towels  
to blot the ruined carpet. Our shoes made  
terrible sticking sounds, walking across.  
Still. We sang, rested the dead, decried cancers,  
picked cherries, talked about having children. Soon  
I took down the sheets I had stapled across the windows  
& we left.

That may have been the moment, with the hot sun  
and scent of bread baking. Yes. The world  
was definitively saved: the parking lot,  
the fresh beans, the gas station.  
Six hundred square feet, give or take  
while the light blazed. Yes.

Lisa Bledsoe / Creston, North Carolina

## *Flames* / David Sloan

Today the classroom was a cauldron hissing me  
towards a dark edge. Teenagers busily fabricated  
their own precipices and wax wings, preened  
and pawed each other. They wondered aloud  
how old people like Hamlet's mother—relics  
the age of their teacher—could still feel  
the compulsion of desire.

It's not their fault. Blinded by their own beauty,  
they are like bucket-bearers asked to wade  
into a clear-bottomed pond, their own footfall  
stirring up the muck that clouds the water.

Sometimes they cannot bear to look at us,  
so they build bonfires, admire each other's glowing  
faces and tease the flames with their leaping.  
Above their heads, sprays of sparks wink out

against the night sky. They can't imagine us  
now lying in candlelight—our best camouflage—  
unhurried fingers tracing well-worn trails  
along ridges and riverbeds to a pool in a canyon  
known only to us, where we still love  
to bend down, cup our hands and bring water  
dripping to each other's lips.

David Sloan / Brunswick, Maine

*Beginning* / Amanda Hartzell

Birds are pieces cut out of morning  
the arch of your body still in my palm

is it really so simple

a windstorm downing power  
the crumbs on a knife

the storm  
the appetite  
a way we revise the beginning

until the soap you leave on the towel  
is a fortune and  
the toothpaste in the sink  
ocean foam  
for us, the glowing animals

no one has seen yet  
no one has named.

Amanda Hartzell

*Missing Buddha* / Terry Allen

Hey, I don't know, man.  
You know, I just grabbed it  
on the way out of that place  
cuz it felt like it was a charm,  
like it had some juju going on.  
I didn't know it was valuable.  
It's an eight-inch wood carving  
of a Buddha. I know that much.  
But just to rub that piece,  
it kind of warms up and feels like  
there's some power in it.  
What I really think happened  
is I didn't take it, man.  
No sir. It took me.  
I mean, it chose me somehow,  
which I've never felt before.  
I mean, it wanted to go with me,  
like I was its new master.  
Maybe it's like those lamps  
that have genies in 'em,  
that give out some wishes  
and that kinda shit.  
You know. I'm keeping it.  
That's all there is about.  
I think it likes me.  
Look, it's smiling, man.  
It's smiling at me.  
Hi there, big guy.  
You got a new home, my man.  
I'm already feeling it,  
all that positive energy  
and good luck, man.  
Here, I'll rub your belly.  
That feels good, don't it?

Terry Allen / Columbia, Missouri

*Out of the Attic*

I don't mind it *in* the attic,  
hearing it scurry above me at night  
or seeing it sneak out of the cracks in the roof  
  
when I'm sitting outside,  
then watching it fly  
  
like some crazed and jerky swallow  
between the oaks.

But this one came *out* of the attic.  
Upstairs! In our house!

Now it's flying around my study  
dipping behind the books on the top shelves—  
  
my boxed Dickinson,  
my two volume hardcover Williams *Collected*—  
  
making its ugly little sounds  
like a bald mouse with sharp teeth.

I have no idea how to get it back in.

## *The Things We Do*

We've done real work,  
spent real money to drain

the water away from the foundation  
and keep our basement dry.

We send it to the street  
or run it underground

so it can filter  
down to the aquifer.

We haven't stopped for years,  
decades now, and still

I check almost daily  
for thin streams running

across the floor  
toward my books

or into the closet  
where we keep our winter coats.



### *Three Springs*

Up where forests have pushed  
back through fences, belief  
comes more easily, comes  
sometimes, for us, despite  
all our learning, even  
as it comes for that man  
we both love. Remember  
the day he took us  
away from the lake,  
from the roads, far  
into a valley, fern-covered  
and filled with the high calls  
of warblers ready to mate.  
Remember and this might help  
you when, shaking,  
you stand outlined before  
our window, drawing from its blank  
chill what comfort you can  
against the fear mounting at night.  
He showed us the stream  
overgrown in watercress,  
kept fresh, he assured us,  
even in the heart  
of the harshest winter  
by the three springs he led  
us to. Water rising,  
unbidden, always rising,  
spreading in an arc of green.  
Remember and this might help  
you as it helps that man,  
our friend, who knows more  
than I know of fear's  
hard presence. Remember this:  
we pushed our hands into them,  
down through water and sand  
until we could bury our shoulders  
in that pulse of cold water.

***One Day Bloom*** / Ann Privateer  
Photograph



***I Dreamt You And Your Hands Were Full of Fire* / Mary  
Carroll-Hackett**

and what I recognized as my body  
burned like light, pinpricks turned  
stars, and we stood, still, some sacred  
conflagration, transformed, unformed,  
like bodies illuminated in a window  
at night. Together, just for now, accelerated  
and as bright and as dark as space,  
as grace, and I swam toward you, in light  
as liquid as love, as if nothing had ever  
changed, as if you were still here.

When I woke this morning, ten years  
from your going, I thought about how  
you smiled that hot day when I stumbled  
then slid my way down the steep bank, skirt  
hiked up in my fist, to stand barefoot  
in the warm Suwanee, river dark as  
coffee, how you'd found just the right side  
road in so I could, how I asked if you minded,  
and you laughed, saying, Oh girl, I insist.  
I'm swimming still, forward, toward  
you, slowly through time and matter, solace  
in knowing it's all, in the end, fire and water.

Mary Carroll-Hackett / *Rice, Virginia*

***Delivery* / Warren Woessner**

The snow has just begun  
and each flake is falling straight down  
when Achmed calls my name  
and hands me a warm shopping bag  
of food. And for a moment  
I am happy for the snow  
for the food and for Achmed  
Already vanished into the night

Warren Woessner / Minneapolis, Minnesota

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***Missing the Last Train* / Eric Blanchard**

The last train came and went,  
and I waited for you. I must have  
missed your phone call  
last night. I waited,  
    and the human shadows  
dispersed. I was sleeping  
on the subway bench all night.  
The morning air turned cool,  
and the damp was like a kiss  
    to wake me.  
The first train came and went,  
and your smile is like the sun.

Eric Blanchard / Houston, Texas

*Dances with Dogs* / Eric Blanchard

It is barely six a.m.,  
and he dons his coat and boots  
in silence. He tries, but  
the dogs are not having  
the silence.

He's a sidewalk rhythmic gymnast,  
wielding leashes wildly.  
Like computer-cable spaghetti,  
they intertwine  
and twist and tango.

There is no open field,  
where a pack can run free.  
The lots are edged with curbs.  
There are doggy-bag dispensers  
in the park.

He dances with dogs,  
come rainy day or shine. Neighbors  
cross the street,  
but smile when they see him,  
hands indisposed.

They give hesitant waves  
and, sometimes, a sympathetic  
greeting, knowing that he  
has himself a handful  
or two.

Eric Blanchard / Houston, Texas

*Bird on a Wire* / Ann Privateer  
Photograph



Ann Privateer / Davis, California

***A Widow on The Empire Builder Looks Out the Window  
All the Way Through North Dakota / Joan Wiese Johannes***

On a day as gray as her hair,  
sunflowers with heavy heads  
look down at the ground  
as far as she can see,

sunflowers with heavy heads  
in fields flooded into marsh land.  
As far as she can see,  
hay bales sunk in pools of water

in fields flooded into marsh land  
and hawks always flying alone.  
Hay bales sunk in pools of water.  
Another sweep of dark birds

and hawks always flying alone,  
a small herd of grazing cattle,  
another sweep of dark birds.  
Cranes stand still as saplings.

A small herd of grazing cattle  
look down at the ground.  
Cranes stand still as saplings  
on a day as gray as her hair.

Joan Wiese Johannes / Port Edwards, Wisconsin

*Away from Water* / John Muro

Wanting for the flop of tides  
Or the guttural cries  
Of black-back gulls –

Decibels beyond the fountain's  
Patter and listless rain.  
Here, ears can't bother

To work for sound.  
All is latticed shade, rounding  
To languor.

Colors scatter then reappear  
In brief intervals. Little to fear  
Or love

In this curated silence –  
Something far less  
Whole than the fervor

Of ocean;  
There, calm is motion;  
The deft erosion of shores

By delirious waves.  
Surely her garden wants  
For this or something more:

The thrum and sensual wash  
Of tides; silt's bronzed varnish  
And arcade-bright allure.

Now, day's softly drawing  
Down, ornamental grasses flowing  
Like gowns across an ocean floor.

John Muro / Guilford, Connecticut



## *Splinter* / John Muro

Easy enough to blame  
the summer storm that  
blew apart the upper  
rows of shakes, or the  
sweet relief of wind  
and updraft of cedar  
that lifted me into  
a second-story musing  
for the long tooth  
of wood that bit  
hard and settled deep  
within a knoll of  
muscle. Difficult  
to tease out, a crude  
and hasty excavation  
left it well-embedded,  
eventually forming a  
blue-black puddle  
not unlike the icy  
glaze one might find  
at the bottom of an  
inkwell – my first  
tattoo, a tiny rosette,  
that I'll house for safe-  
keeping and turn to  
each time I bend to my  
work and know, full-  
stop, that this is a gift  
from the world of  
wounds, crooks and  
edges that I've fallen  
hard against.

John Muro / Guilford, Connecticut



*Only Human* / Jesse Holwitz

Born a mailman, delivering daisy chains and  
blossoms in time for spring, delivering plastic  
ledgers filled with blood, delivering love birds and  
terrapins, leaving notes, leaving the station step by  
step, leaving each day as parcel on the doorstep of  
the next, and today I've decided to open your letter  
again, to read each word in your voice, and  
no, I am not a mailman, I am not yours anymore, I am  
not silver, none of this is true — I'm only human, beneath  
scorching memory, only human, delivering myself the bad  
news of what we had, delivering myself from abandon, leaving  
metaphor and simile, leaving all the figurative elements of your  
body,  
replacing them with madness, replacing them with the helplessly  
abstract, meeting patrons of despair, meeting emptiness in  
dawnlight, meeting myself in the mirror, and no, I am not a  
mailman, not a forgotten hair on your pillow, not an  
inkblot in your day, not a fragment of speech in your mouth.

Jesse Holwitz / San Francisco, California

## *Rainfall* / Donna Pucciani

Water from the sky!  
In little pieces!  
A broken-hearted story of love and loss  
blows in from the northeast,  
then back again in the tragic circle  
of desperate weather.

Lamentations for cancelled golf,  
a rain date for picnics,  
the invisible yearning for sunshine  
to warm arthritic bones,  
raise an unfortunate ruckus,  
the response of children needing  
the yellow blanket of earth's hot star.

Amazing that the heavens  
can cry, shed human-like tears  
scoring the earth's cheeks,  
creating rivulets of sorrow or joy  
amid dessicated Iowa cornfields.

A hurricane lambasts the Gulf coast  
like a mad wizard raising ghosts  
of magical ruination, spewing  
roof-high floods, tipping cars  
and cattle afloat.

Where is the ark awaiting animals  
two by two? Trolls have come out to play.  
Elves gather berries in a bucket of silver,  
conjuring the sound of raindrops  
smelling of ozone.

A steady drizzle wakes me tonight.  
The roof doesn't leak, the flowerpots  
in the backyard lap up shreds  
of cloud-borne darkness. I slip back  
into the small hands of liquid slumber  
holding me close to a bursting sky.

Donna Pucciani / Wheaton, Illinois

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### ***Sunset*** / Maryann Lawrence

a dark-skinned beauty  
falls beneath the blue sky  
blood streams through the street,  
passes through neighborhoods, flows  
into the sea, blends with the crimson horizon,  
and washes away like a thousand other sunsets before it.

Maryann Lawrence / South Lyon, Michigan

***Black Lives Matter*** / Lisa Yount  
Digital Collage



Lisa Yount / El Cerrito, California

## *Avery Street Notes* / Maura Faulise

I could tell you about growing up there,  
the scent of onions caramelized to tissue,  
family packs of bone-in pork chops  
on cookie sheets, Shake 'n Bake style,  
eaten with forks or fingers, standing  
at the stove, greasy hood vent clattering  
over our heads,  
or how we used a sock  
or someone's dirty shirt from the laundry  
for napkins. I might mention  
the water balloons, filled and knotted  
by my two younger brothers  
in their Sears Toughskins at the sink,  
held with precision  
as they Spiderman-scaled  
the thresholds of rooms in bare feet  
that suctioned them  
high on the wall  
where they'd wait  
to pummel unsuspecting guests—  
like the boy I'd just met  
from a "good" family.  
Drove all the way from Fall River  
to take me out, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's  
*Sonnets from the Portuguese* cradled  
in the tweed elbow  
of his blazer.  
My father tried speaking to him  
in Spanish,  
spit out two dirty jokes  
while I averted my face,  
and the water brigade squealed,  
released their gelid surprise

on my date who, dripping in his blazer,  
called them animals  
who needed the belt.

Or a fist. So I shoved him to the porch,  
and my feral kin  
pelted his back—errant shoe, frisbee, cluster  
of plastic grapes from a chipped bowl  
in the living room—and followed him to the street.

You might think it strange  
that I'm nostalgic for this life,  
given the chaos, the many hours  
my older brother spent  
not being one, bolted  
in his room, Blue Oyster Cult  
razing the scratchy stereo speakers,  
or the epic New England blizzards of the '70s,  
how our mother's good moods  
moved in with them,

and out  
when our father sat at the kitchen table spilling  
Green Beret tales in his "skivvies,"  
rum-Coke cubes jangling against the glass  
for most of the night.

Sometimes we all got along.  
Like that one spring  
when it poured and poured,  
and the popcorn ceiling sprouted  
a constellation of leaks  
we tried to catch in scattered pots,  
and it wasn't so horrifying  
to witness

the sky pouring in  
because we knew our father  
would fix it in the morning,  
So we put on raincoats

and gathered around the sound  
of water dancing on metal.  
That's what we heard.  
It's what I still hear:  
the tambourine of rain.

Maura Faulise / East Lyme, Connecticut

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### *A Common Story* / Jeffrey Zable

The thing about living is that it's also about dying.  
What you do with the time while you wait.  
Whether you can laugh a little, do something you enjoy,  
eat your favorite meal without thinking about the fact  
that one day you won't be putting anything into your mouth  
for all eternity. And maybe you'll be one of the fortunate ones  
who will find someone you can really love,  
and if it's not another human, maybe it'll be a cat, a dog,  
or a lamb that you saved from the slaughterhouse.  
It's a common story that is all about you.  
What you do along the way while you try not to think about it.

Jeffrey Zable / San Francisco, California



## *Easy to Say* / Jeffrey Zable

So I dropped the taco and got in the car,  
but in seconds the driver was moving so fast  
that everything became a blur.

“Is the world really like this? I asked, and he replied,  
“You should know. . . you just came from there!”

“I probably should. . . yet it’s all been confusing  
for as long as I can remember. . .”

“Then you may as well sit back and enjoy the ride!”  
he responded.

“Easy to say!” I was going to say...

Jeffrey Zable / San Francisco, California

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***To My Son On His 23<sup>rd</sup> Birthday*** / Susanna Lang

*Fly me to the moon!* you called,  
and I tossed you far beyond that first

white stepping stone till you could play  
catch with an asteroid, crawl

through the red dust of Mars and swim  
in Europa's submerged oceans, before

hopscotching from star to scintillating  
star down the spiral of the Milky Way.

And from that sky-high vantage point  
look down to where I'm still standing,

arms outstretched among the long arms  
of the maple, humming an old love song

and thinking about cake with chocolate icing  
and of course candles for when you return.

Susanna Lang / Chicago, Illinois

## *When You Turn Into Your Mother* / Maggie Walcott

it happens bit by bit. You don't awaken in the night to find your jowl has grown twelve spikey hairs. It started out with one or two – spare thicket of thorns where none should be. Uproot them with tweezers or garden spade, while you think you can. It begins with a child, who casually left five kitchen cupboard doors ajar and said, *when I am a mother they'll stay that way*. Lo and behold the snick of latch as it kisses pine wood now pleases the senses. A child no more, you walk around with purpose, to grumble each panel in place. It begins with a fight, your spouse crying out, *you sound just like your mother*. It's true, but you may not concede these points, these words of war to him. Some seeds were sown before the dawn. They've taken root and multiplied, each bitter fruit familiar. Now they are yours to share. It begins with a glance in aisle thirteen, among paper box penne, glass jarred Prego. A voice, recognition, piercing the fog, *you look just like your mother*. It's true, but you had always hoped a better version, perhaps. Now the face that once was yours is tired, tempered. A softened stick of margarine left out for far too long. What begins with a cry in a hospital bed, ends with a phone call at noon. To tell you that she has slipped away. We're all slipping away – but she more than most. While you remain – a remnant, a scrap. The patch- worked sum of all her parts. The threads that bind you, loosen up, but manage still to hold.

Maggie Walcott / Hersey, Michigan

*Chicago Walkway* / Gary Bloom  
Photograph



Gary Bloom / Pass Christian, Mississippi

There's a stillness looking out over  
the hostess station as shortly after 5 am the sun  
readies for its daily debut.

I spray oil on the side grill and scrub one more time,  
looking for the shine that will disappear  
as soon as the first row of sausages start their dance.

I am the only cook, Natalie the lone waitress.  
We're both new enough to have this shift,  
good enough to be trusted. I catch myself

watching her compact movements  
as she prepares the coffee, straightens the menus,  
readies the waitress station for morning.

There's a lightness, a feeling of making it through  
although we don't speak of it,  
this is a time for silent reflection.

A trucker comes in and sits at the counter,  
orders rye toast, hash browns, and a western omelet.  
For me, he spoils the mood,

but maybe this is his time to ruminate,  
a gathering of strength before grinding gears  
and diesel fumes fog his dreams.

The morning shift comes in and I punch out,  
take off my apron and hair net, a more  
industrious mood taking hold in the kitchen.

I walk out with Natalie, think about asking  
if she wants to grab breakfast, but she looks tired  
in the sunlight, her work personality tucked away,

so we say goodbye, say see you again tonight.  
I'll think of her, of possibilities, as I try to sleep,  
my nocturnal self out of cycle with the world.

David Mihalyov / Webster, New York

## *Centipede in the Kitchen Sink* / Joseph Chelius

— For my daughter Sarah, who shares my birthday

Because it was our birthday  
and I felt kindly toward the world,  
I shut off the faucet to save it  
from capsizing in its little boat,  
the thin oars of its limbs  
in rowing away  
almost caught in a swirl  
down the rapids of the drain  
until in my great magnanimity—  
a god in a flannel robe—  
I gathered it in a paper towel  
so I could set it adrift  
on the pond of the lawn.  
It paused as if to set its course—  
uncertain but surely filled with wonder—  
before its oars began to stir,  
and with tentative strokes  
that grew pronounced  
it steadied the wobbly freight of itself  
and crested the waves of silvery dew.

Joseph Chelius / Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania



## *Market Me* / Kyle Heger

Design a jaw-dropping website  
for my blog. Make people  
follow me on Facebook and  
Twitter. Share me on YouTube.  
I wanna go viral. Dye my hair  
and cut it just right. Give me  
drop-dead gorgeous eyeglasses.  
Dress me for success. Accessorize  
the hell out of me. Slap on the  
makeup. Pierce me. Tattoo me.  
Enlarge my breasts. Suck out  
some of this fat. Stick me on the  
right diets and exercise regimens.  
Sculpt my muscles. Pump me  
full of steroids and nutritional  
supplements. Change my voice.  
Provide me with a vocabulary  
of buzz words, puns and rhymes.  
Tell me how to dress and stand  
and feel, what to say and do and  
be to get my own fan base. Brand  
me. Sponsor me. Embed me. I  
want to be instantly recognizable  
from coast to coast, my image in  
every home, on every lap top  
and cell phone. Wrap me in a  
corporate identity. Transform me  
into a meme, a cultural icon. Build  
an appetite for me. Encourage them  
to binge. For the love of god, please

Kyle Heger / Albany, California

*Azalea, Dogwood, Maple, Boxwood* / Ann Hudson

A week home from the hospital,  
my father stands, stooped and grinning  
in his front yard, an eight-inch-long scab

across his scalp, thirty stitches bristling  
through his thinning hair. My son crouches  
with a jumbo yellow bat, waiting for my father's pitch.

I've made some bad choices in my time  
but this one takes the cake: letting my father,  
with his momentum and the small power

his wiry weight provides, stagger past me  
to play baseball. His hands are bruised from the IVs,  
his eyes are ringed and worn. I try to tell him

he has little strength and lousy balance,  
and my boy doesn't understand how to be  
cautious. The best I can do is stand out by first,

mute and furious. My father lurches, tosses  
a slow pitch which my son line-drives to left field,  
then runs the bases: azalea, dogwood, maple, boxwood,

throwing his arms up in delight at his run,  
then doubling back to hunt for the ball in the ivy,  
the glossy leaves shirring against his ankles.

Ann Hudson / Evanston, Illinois



*Homemade (Wood and Clay)* / Gary Wadley  
Photograph



Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky

## *All This Time* / Carolyn Wilsey

When we wake, birds pulverizing air, the plumes  
of night still purple the sky. Everywhere, these birds voice  
themselves, knowing something we don't.  
It's spring, they say. It's spring.

Cherry blossoms must live on our tongues now,  
and our brows furrow with flowers. We open our mouths  
and sunshine pours out, sepia glass yawns of it.

O, but what has time done to us? This caved life,  
the deep seeping unseen of it, the gnarled banks  
twisting with twigs, the expanse of universe pinned  
to my living room walls, drawn on navy architectural paper.

What if everything is true? That we are becoming birds  
again,  
that our skin shines with whisked gull feathers  
and brightest green seaweed.

Carolyn Wilsey / San Jose, California

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## *Dead Man's Bowling Shoes* / Steven M. Smith

*Give us a call if you have junk to haul!*  
*The Scrap Boys: two hungry college students and a van*

The lazy phone brought us to work once the summer of 1981.  
A lady's husband died. When she opened her garage, I tripped  
into an indoor landfill. "All this crap has to go," she squeaked,  
tears leaking from behind her crystal ball-like bifocals.  
Strands of white hair boiled from her purple turban.  
She brandished a red pencil. Then she waved it—

a fairy godmother's wand—across the card tables stacked  
with men's pants and shirts and vests—baggy costume-style  
clothing like the Gypsies wear in werewolf movies.  
I saw travel trailer parts shrouded in greasy tarps and cauldrons  
of cardboard boxes bubbling over with scrap planks seasoned  
with plywood splinters and bent nails. I saw dozens of rusty  
paint cans—their ancient labels streaked with the drool  
of hypnotic paint colors—stacked in pyramids.

“Keep what you want,” the lady whispered. “Toss the rest.”  
Then my eyes rolled across the alley of debris to a pair  
of red, white, and blue bowling shoes. I picked them up. My size!  
“They're yours!” the lady called out. “My husband bowled a 300 in  
those!”

I tied the laces together and hung the bowling shoes  
from my rearview mirror. Each time I started the engine  
I tapped their heels together three times—then a moment of silence.  
When I went over railroad tracks, they thumped the windshield.

Strike!

When I hit potholes, they pummeled the passengers.

Strike!

When I slammed on the brakes, they rocked the roof.

Strike!

My luck started to change: I got a job in the library.

I passed math classes. Smart girls asked me out.

My old man started talking to me.

Passengers blurted, “Jesus!” “What the hell?” “That's friggin' weird!”

Oh, where are you now, bowling shoes?

Forty years of tenth frames have passed.

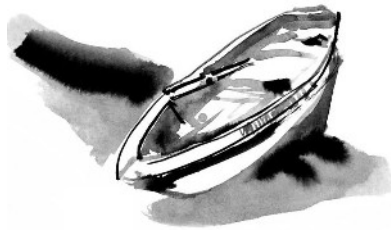
And still strike! Strike! Strike!

Steven M. Smith / North Syracuse, New York

## *Iris* / Emily Updegraff

The crocus gets a lot of credit  
for being spring's vanguard.  
But I noticed you, iris, your leaves  
piercing the hard soil before  
any other green thing. Slowly expanding.  
It takes time to ready your purple  
flounces, your offering to high summer.  
So, an early start. Your muted  
chevron blades feel for March's  
cold light, synthesizing, preparing.  
You are no daffodil, with its  
race to turn a bright face skyward.  
Though I love it for this,  
I do not kneel to admire its clarion  
bloom. But for you, iris, when you  
finally arrive, I will climb inside  
your indigo chambers and kiss your  
tender parts like a patient, devoted lover.

Emily Updegraff / Wilmette, Illinois



*Another Exodus* / Margaret Ingraham

Whether it is the mist rising over the ridges  
or the clouds settling into the valley's seam  
that makes sheer morning as manna  
spread for me when once again I leave  
these Tennessee hills, I cannot say.  
But I do know that while the light plays  
its way across them, it changes the shape  
of things, alters what I see and how I see.  
Even the color of corn stalks holds brighter  
green in this dawning beside the ochre field—  
wheat or hay, I guess—already harvested,  
cut too short and straight to bend  
in the bluster of any midsummer wind.  
Yet at this still hour when I turn eastward,  
I find the Sequatchie River a mirror,  
its surface a double take of the arch of trees  
above it, again beckoning me to stay.  
But just as its undercurrents I must keep  
on my way, certain that each breaking day  
will bring fresh manna for me to gather,  
even if it only falls as small as coriander seed.

Margaret Ingraham / Alexandria, Virginia

## ***Falling Down in Five Chapters* / Buff Whitman-Bradley**

### **Chapter 1. Quick recovery**

In the first millisecond  
Of your sudden descent  
You believe  
That you can still right yourself  
And carry on as you were,  
Making your way down the stream bank  
Before your untimely misstep.

### **Chapter 2. Calculating options**

When you realize  
That a quick recovery of vertical stability  
Is not a viable possibility  
You consider various alternatives  
For effecting a safe landing, e.g.  
Curling into a ball,  
Covering your head with your arms,  
Twisting your body somehow  
To re-aim it  
At that patch of mud  
And away from the large rock  
That is glowering at you  
From the terminus of your trajectory.

### **Chapter 3. Surrendering to reality**

It soon becomes clear to you  
That a body in freefall  
Has limited options,  
“Oh, fuck,”  
You explain to yourself  
Just before your corpus and the Earth  
Encounter each other  
In what could not be described  
As a tender embrace.

## **Chapter 4. Assessment**

You lie perfectly still  
On the wet, stony ground  
Noticing that your glasses  
Were smart enough  
To abandon your face before impact  
And are lying in a puddle  
Close to your left ear,  
Apparently undamaged.  
Good for them.  
Your wife rushes to your side  
And requests a quick self-triage.  
Everything hurts a little,  
Nothing hurts a lot.  
You stand up slowly  
And find you are able  
To continue on your way  
Around the lake,  
Limping only slightly,  
While you monitor your interior workings  
For any malfunctions,  
Any new pangs and throbs.

## **Chapter 5. Aftermath**

Back at home  
You call the advice nurse  
Who reads off a list of symptoms:  
Dizziness, severe headache, nausea,  
Blood or other fluids  
Pouring out of your cranial orifices.  
No, no, no, and no, you reply,  
Relieved that one more time  
You seem to have escaped serious injury  
And wondering if this may have been  
Your last free pass.

## Coda

Next morning  
You wake up hurting  
In no place in particular  
But everywhere in general.  
You feel a kind of exhausted aching  
Of the soul,  
And are deeply pessimistic  
About your chances of landing that job  
With Cirque du Soleil.

Buff Whitman-Bradley / Fairfax, California

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## *The Cage* / Andy Roberts

Someone has mounted a speaker in a wire cage  
and attached it to the brick wall  
twenty feet above the sidewalk  
over the entrance to the downtown YMCA.  
The cage is sturdy, though badly dented  
from rocks and bottles thrown  
in attempts to stop the 24/7  
classical music broadcast at high volume  
to deter loitering.

I enter the building.  
Cigarettes, sweat and urine.  
All surfaces smooth:  
vinyl and plastic seating to facilitate  
easy cleanup of bodily fluids.



I'm buzzed through a series of doors  
to the elevator. Hit 6 for Sam's room.

I'm here for my annual follow-up.  
Sam's in a good mood.  
Better than last year,  
when the only word he uttered was  
*Why?*  
We both know the routine.  
I ask the questions and Sam answers.  
Yes, he's doing fine.  
Yes, he's clean, going to his meetings.  
I'm out in five minutes,  
with a promise to return in one year.

Sometimes it gets to me.  
How do people live this way?  
Why don't they shut this place down?  
Seven floors of eighty rooms.  
Five hundred sixty Sams.

Outside, a woman is wailing in Italian  
from the caged speaker.  
A guy in dreadlocks, dirty white Nikes,  
claps his hands over his ears,  
looks for something to throw.

Andy Roberts / Columbus, Ohio



## ***1962 Ford Galaxie 500 (Kelly's Car)* / Ken Meisel**

He roams it through the lilies,  
this scale model that resembles

the real 62' Ford, the actual car.  
The model is beige. It's perfect.

Once we saw a real one, a sedan  
parked in the church's lot.

We walked up to it together, to  
run our fingers down the long

panel groove where the rear of it  
rolled and curved into red taillights.

Oh, and that song, *Day After Day*:  
so ardent and so intense that year.

It made me cry while kissing a girl  
in the side bushes. The song –

so fervent – so charged with life.  
That boy looked into me, his eyes

so blue. His eyes made of tears –  
or like the sky's perennial soul.

I *love* him in those days like a bird,  
or like a pet, but he's my kid brother.

So young, so blonde, so innocent  
as he frees the gerbil to slip away

from him through the verdant  
summer grass. His simple life,

so tender, so fragile. On the verge.  
And he dies in December,

while the snows fly forceful, wild;  
it buries the cars, entombs me there.

Ken Meisel / Dearborn, Michigan

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## ***Club Mix (Bert's Warehouse)* / Ken Meisel**

On the turntable, the DJ mixes  
Unc, by Trombone Shorty,  
Ring My Bell by Anita Ward,  
Cupid Shuffle by Cupid, and  
Freakbeat Hustle by DJ Maestro  
and he torments things by spinning  
Last Two Dollars by Johnnie Taylor,  
and the sweaty crowd, smothering

the tiny dance floor at Bert's  
pulses together in a tandem line –  
doing the Detroit Hustle.  
This is club mix, Detroit style  
on a humid summer night  
while at the ball park, the Tigers  
dust and spray the Yankees.  
My wife and her friend squeeze  
in to add a white corolla  
to the pecan mix of women seeding  
the floor with their perfume.  
Every woman in this place is a  
pollination of hothouse beauty,  
and the men here, me included,  
sawdust the rootstock here by  
jumping beside them – wiggling,  
dipping – web-worming our way in.  
Finally – worn out – I take a break.  
Outside, parked alongside the  
curb where the summer night's  
horticulture of convertible cars  
lines up, I see, parked here,  
a 1961 Dodge Polaris, Snow-  
colored, its silver grill, open-faced –  
so roguish – and its cardinal red  
taillights escaping the deep  
chrome pocket settings they  
were stuffed and rooted in  
and, crowding it, in front of a  
66' two-toned Black and Red  
Plymouth Fury, I catch a 71'  
Cadillac Eldorado – Almond –  
as long as the summer night  
and as bright, and, inside it –  
a pair of lovers, club mixing.

Ken Meisel / Dearborn, Michigan

*I'm Just Gonna Trim the Bangs* / John Jeffire

Fell for it every time.  
A Kool 100 menthol cocked  
One way, her head another  
As she held the gleaming  
Crocodile jaws.  
*Just take a minute*  
Was of course  
Never a minute.  
Swip, swip, swip...  
Setting the cigarette  
In an ashtray,  
Leaning back to survey  
Her work, one eye  
Winking, the other  
Siting the sniper strike,  
She tipped her head  
Some more as if  
That might even out  
The over and underbites  
Adorning my forehead.  
There, *there*, she said,  
Shifting her perspective,  
Tilting the globe  
Just so to balance out  
What so obviously lacked  
All sense of balance.  
Done, she sent me skewed,  
Tilted, lopsided, asymmetrical  
Into the skewed, tilted,  
Lopsided, asymmetrical world—  
Mother now long passed, hair  
Shaved, clipped, styled, trimmed,  
Parted only to part over the decades,  
The bristle of sacrificed clippings  
Still scratching at my neck.

John Jeffire / Macomb, Michigan

## *I Am Not Joan Didion* / Brianna Di Monda

but when I heard she died I drove the San Diego to the Harbor, the Harbor up to the Hollywood, the Hollywood to the Golden State, the Santa Monica to the Santa Ana, the Ventura. I thought of Maria when I drove those intricate stretches of freeway where successful passage requires a diagonal change across four lanes of traffic. When I merged the Century to the Pasadena, I took the curved on-ramp that stretches miles above the earth. And there it was below me. Los Angeles. A sparkling grey stretch of glitter on rubber. This is it, our country's Manifest Destiny: a city in denial of its earthquakes, its forest fires, its drought, its full ICU beds. I always thought Joan's death would mean the city would stop humming, just for a day, stilled by the pause of one collective gasp. But this didn't happen. Perhaps we forgot about her when she moved to New York. Perhaps she was not enough of a scoundrel for the city to cherish as its own, so we let the east coast claim her. No, the city will only quiet when the Pacific Ocean opens its dark, wide mouth and swallows the basin whole. We may live on stolen water, but one day the water will steal us back. I drive on and wonder if Joan longed for California when she passed in her New York apartment.

Brianna Di Monda / Manhattan Beach, California

*A Case for Reincarnation* / David James

I'm thinking of coming back  
as a blue jay—arrogant and loud, able to fly

anywhere I damn well please. Or maybe a tree,  
marking my place on the earth, yellow leaves, a black

trunk four or five feet in circumference.  
Perhaps I'll be a fish

and explore the depths of Silver Lake,  
course up a river or two, find a hidden hot spring.

There's deer, a fox, a horse, or maybe I should focus on B-list  
animals: a mouse or mole, a woodchuck, a gopher.

I glance out the window and catch my lucky break:  
I'll be a squirrel, climbing trees, leaping from branch

to branch. I'll feast on birds' eggs, chase my friends  
across lawns, hunt and dig and make

a whole life out of playing with my nuts.

David James / Linden, Michigan

*Somedays the Bear* / David James  
*for Preacher Roe*

Sometimes you eat the bear and sometimes  
the bear eats you. Either way, it's a bloody mess.

The snow's falling—four inches or more—  
and there you are, skinning a bear like a crime  
scene, hacking away  
at the fur, slicing the carcass,  
searching for bear sirloin and ribs. Next week,

it could be you sprawled on the ground,  
torn apart, chewed, digested.  
If only you knew when it was going to be your day.

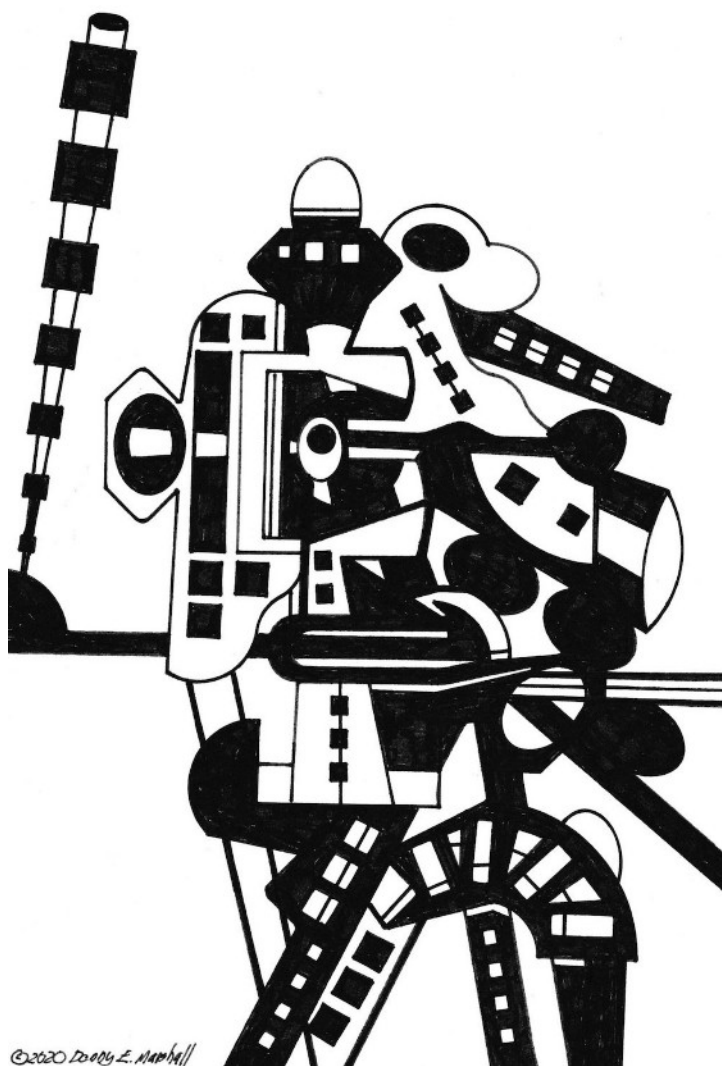
You could wake up and head out like a Greek  
god, fearless and beautiful. You could grab the sun,  
throw a dozen stars in your mouth,  
climb to the peak  
of any mountain. There will be bear fillets

on the grill tonight. Tomorrow, no one  
knows. And that's the point: you win some,  
lose some, tie some. Then you order dim sum  
and enjoy the hot mustard and plum  
sauce, savor the tea, before it all goes away.

David James / Linden, Michigan



*Shift* / Denny Marshall  
Drawing



Denny Marshall / Lincoln, Nebraska



*When Love's in the Kitchen* / Gary Wadley

Don't need no riot  
Just peace and quiet  
Ain't nobody bitchin'  
When love's in the kitchen

Postman bring you bills  
Doctor give you pills  
Politician make you ill  
Whiskey make you still

Pot cloud you head  
Cocaine make you dead  
Computer make you lazy  
Cell phone make you crazy

But nobody bitchin'  
When love's in the kitchen

Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky



## *Land of Skyscrapers and Palm Trees* / Shakiba Hashemi

When I was a kid, I heard of a land  
across the ocean where dreams could come true.  
Where boys could be girls and girls  
could be anything: superhero, Barbie  
and everything in between. This world  
was my black and white movie,  
my Norman Rockwell painting. Somewhere  
between “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn”  
and “We’ll always have Paris,” this new world shimmered  
surrounded by skyscrapers and palm trees.  
I pictured it on nights when I couldn’t sleep.  
Scared of Iraqi bombs hitting our house,  
I imagined myself on the beach, clenching  
moist sand in my fists,  
next to a guy with Clark Gable’s eyes  
and Errol Flynn’s physique.  
“Happy Fourth,” he whispered.  
“Ignore the sirens and watch the fireworks.”  
He wiped away my tears with his blue handkerchief.  
Each morning when I couldn’t bear the choking weight of my hijab,  
I pretended I was a character in a never-ending Halloween.  
I visited my friend in jail before I left Iran.  
Omid was a journalist, caged like a dog that barked too much.  
He had five more years left on his sentence,  
five grueling years of goulash,  
haunted holes and cobwebbed ceilings.  
It has been years since I crossed the ocean.  
Last week I went on a date with a guy  
who posted on his Facebook twice during lunch,  
and only talked about his hot, reality star crush.  
By the end of the date I realized,  
sadder than a caged man is a free one  
who stops dreaming.

Shakiba Hashemi / Aliso Viejo, California

## *Into The Future* / Jude Dippold

The man moving  
into the house down the street  
where Charlie and his family lived  
is busily erecting a fence  
to close off his new backyard.

The pregnant young woman  
who works as a barista  
at the town coffee shack  
has started keeping a journal  
for the unborn child she carries.  
And in the ravaged forests  
burned by the Goodell Creek Fire,  
tendrils of green curl around  
charred remains of cedars.

Jude Dippold / Concrete, Washington

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## *Visits* / Ed Gold

The story is that each cardinal  
is someone you loved who died.  
They want you to know  
they will always be with you.  
Look for them, the story says,  
and they will appear.

But cardinals visit us every day  
in the branches of the loquat tree,  
popcorn tree, live oak, and chinaberry,  
along the telephone wire,  
on the red tin roof  
of the apartment next door—

every day, every day.

Ed Gold / Charleston, South Carolina

*She Was Going By Fancy Deal* / Mark James Andrews

I crashed through the rain  
to the alley door knocked  
the Shave and a Haircut riff  
waited for the Two Bits reply  
ever heard that one? Sometimes  
it goes Match in the Gas Tank  
Boom Boom a quick seven beats  
a sting to end a jazz improv  
so it got me inside again and I told them  
Sheik sent me and climbed  
the stairs to the red velvet drapery edge  
stage right where the strippers  
passed through to hit it  
stage lit up in the right spots  
hardwood saw dusted to perfection  
empty orchestra pit below lonesome  
ladies dancing to hit records now  
I peered out to the front of the house  
usual cast of characters scattered  
like buck shot but a number of posse  
wolves packed together tight  
in clutches clear back to the vomitorium  
and there was my man Sheik  
I slipped him a ten spot, he winked  
did his tricks with curtain ropes  
my girl passed by ignored me  
decked out in a birdcage veil  
fish netted prancing on spikes  
she was going by Fancy Deal  
but I heard her name was Melba  
and she started up high stepping  
to Stevie Wonder for once  
in my life I have someone  
someone who needs me.

Mark James Andrews / Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan

## *Shallow Breath* / Connie Post

I am reading about palliative care  
on the hospice web site

I study the notes  
on the rally before death

also known as  
“terminal lucidity”

I think about the earth

the countless flash floods  
the fires that burn  
all throughout fall and summer

I watch the eye of the hurricane  
widen  
and destroy a town  
like it was nothing

I ponder  
how many barrels of oil  
it takes  
to ruin an ecosystem

I wonder how  
all the species of animals  
have hung on this long

I ponder  
how many barrels of oil  
it takes  
to ruin an ecosystem

I wonder how  
all the species of animals  
have hung on this long

Who will hold the hand  
of a dying planet  
when its finally time

how will the universe  
know its pulse is gone

who will put a thin cover  
over all of the oceans

who will stand there  
keep a celestial vigil  
after time of death  
has been called

Connie Post / Livermore, California

**ON THE HISTORY OF POETRY** / Iris Dunkle  
*for Ella*

The history of poetry  
is heliac; meaning,  
it is filled with helium;  
meaning, it is weighted  
in gold dust measure-hinged  
against a child's small shoe;  
meaning , it is ice brought down  
from heavens or carried down  
from mountains in the heft  
of ceramic vessels; meaning,  
it is the blur of melt and material  
haloed with honey; meaning,  
it is ancient words mechanized  
from under surface. *See their slur  
up from the depths?* Meaning,  
it is the far-off pines and how they tilt  
toward indecision. *Is it wind or substance  
that weighs them down?* Under the sea,  
the ever-churning sea, is a stone silence.  
If you stand on it and look up  
you'll see poetry: the world, refracted.

Iris Dunkle / Sebastopol, California



***THE GRAVE BLOOMS UPWARDS AND WALKS THE ROAD /***  
IRIS DUNKLE

Here, soil is more telling than a zip code:  
limestone, sea salt, the rotting of oak leaves.  
As a child, I ate handfuls. Sun-baked  
mudpies on flat rocks at the creek. Dugout  
my own grave to crawl into. On the other side  
of our telling (our *before*): wind carried  
the topsoil from our first home (dugout)  
to our next (shack). The net of loss we wrapped  
ourselves in was gossamer. Somedays I  
lay my body onto the earth because  
I'm too tired to carry it, root, be  
  
uprooted, to another location.

Iris Dunkle / Sebastopol, California

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***Una Clase de Inglés en el Borde /*** Rachel Baum

*(An English lesson on the border)*

the word for word is *palabra* the written word  
the spoken word my word He is the Word  
a word to the wise

don't say a word

runaway is the word for *huir*  
carried away castaway go away  
fade away far and away

slip away

*agua* is water *sed* thirst the word  
for dry mouth dry spell  
drywall wash and dry

lips are dry

a well is just a *paso* step from here  
take a step step lively step up  
step in time one step at a time

watch your step

wait at the barbed wire *valla* fence  
lie in wait couldn't wait  
wait list wait around

wait your turn

this is a *jaula* cage call it *casa* home  
home run close to home nobody home  
homegrown bring it home come home

*lejos de casa*  
away from home.

Rachel Baum / Saratoga Springs, New York





## *Smitty's* / Mark Madigan

It's just a small family run shop  
with maybe a dozen booths by the wall

and a few square tables  
with easy to wipe-down Formica tops

but I always feel as if coming home  
when, after six hours of highway traffic,

I peel myself free from the seat of my Chevy  
wobbling a bit as I stand up

then walk through the doors  
of this my favorite barbeque joint,

the scent of pit-cooked chicken and pork  
mixing in the air with fresh coleslaw,

cold potato salad and hush puppies fried  
in something deep as a Mother's love.

All this, suddenly, rushing to greet me  
like family I haven't seen for a while

quickly reaching out, hugging me now,  
tangled in all their embraceable arms.

Mark Madigan / Springfield, Virginia

*Here, in April* / Robert Claps

A green haze haloes our hills,  
and in the yard, spring's first  
red-wing flies from feeder  
to fence post, singing and calling.

Five years have passed; soon,  
You will place a lavender wreath  
by your oldest daughter's stone.  
What meaning could we assign

to this blackbird refueling on bits  
of oat and corn, flashing its shoulder  
patch in a month of promise when  
the loss of a child seems more out of time?

Green rises in shoots and sharp blades,  
wands of forsythia spark yellow,  
but you want to wrap yourself  
in dull tweeds, coats as drab

as the ones winter finches wear.  
The redwing keeps trilling its three-  
note riff our thermal panes cannot  
keep out. Days from now,

the nesting will start: if we learn  
to sing in voices of pure joy and  
pure pain, April might take hold,  
and we could unlatch the windows,

leaving ourselves open to the yard  
that right now is filling with so much life,  
you have to look away.

Robert Claps / East Hampton, Connecticut

## *Unpacking the Hours* / Katherine Edgren

### **I. Stowing**

I pack my hours  
till the sides bulge  
and the zipper splits.  
But an overbooked hour  
is a nuisance,  
wreaks back pain.

Tempted to squeeze in more,  
I winnow to essentials:  
singing, laughter,  
snapping photographs,  
drafty words on paper  
rolled up like socks  
tucked in the toes of shoes.

In the main compartment  
layered around a central core  
of kids-grandkids-friends—  
I bundle melodies of nature,  
movement,  
my dog, beside  
all my communities.

And within  
the zippered compartment,  
I'll stow stillness,  
solitude,  
rest.  
Dark chocolate.  
Scotch.

In the front pocket  
beside the raincoat  
that shelters me from  
what's wet and windswept:  
productive work,  
freedom to choose  
what I want to do.

And gently folded on top,  
my favorite possession:  
the long silk underwear  
of my days—elegant  
and immensely useful—  
for this trip to the end of the road.

## II. Slowing

Careening hours knock me over and trample me.  
Their progress in me is toward disorganization and dust.  
They flaunt the cruel irony: hours shrink  
as energy lessens. Everything takes longer to do.

I'll slam the brakes on speeding hours,  
linger in the hammock of what is left  
savoring morning toast the color of wheat fields,  
hot tea that's a bracing thump on the back.

I'll lie on the floor pressed up to the length of my dog  
scratch her ruff and butt, chanting the words *good* and *love*.  
On ambling walks, I'll detect places she stops to sniff,  
grin when she growls at other dogs: she's top bitch.

I'll wrap myself in the blanket of a show about animal lovers,  
take small bites of a memoir about growing up in New Orleans,  
sip dry martinis with friends, slumber beside my husband,  
listen to his breathing, stroke his cool skin.

Katherine Edgren / Dexter, Michigan

## *Before the Guests Arrive* / Michael Hanner

I was trying to remember the woman and the poem I was going to write, but I had to turn off the grill and put the pork I had cut for dinner back into its plastic bag and put it in the refrigerator and now upstairs I have no idea what I was going to say. I was waiting for friends in my back yard. The wind came up and cold passed over me. I wish I could remember what I was going to tell you of this woman. She lived through the bombing of Dresden and now is a retired piano teacher in Ypsilanti or she was my father's secretary who died of cancer in 1956, could she have been the woman who did my mother's ironing and smoked Kools on the screen porch? Whoever you were, I'm sorry. I meant to hold you in my arms a little, tell you it was going to be OK.

Michael Hanner / Eugene, Oregon

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## *Aslant* / Becky Boling

When you look at me, do it from the side.  
A quick glance, from the corner of your eye  
will do, better if you turn perpendicular,  
your left shoulder pointed in my direction.

This slicing glimpse will catch me as I  
am, that shimmer of me-ness that exists  
in secret, slips around the couch edge,  
over the threshold between rooms, melts

into seams of wallpaper, hides in the crack  
of the door before you lean into it so it clicks  
shut. I am the there that is not  
there when you look at me.

Becky Boling / Northfield, Minnesota

## *Salt* / Susan Landgraf

In broken English, sometimes using Hungarian  
when he couldn't remember the English words, my grandfather  
told me about the wise king who wanted a wise prince for his  
daughter—

a father for his grandchildren and heir. I kept my questions to myself:  
Why couldn't the princess choose her own husband? Why did every  
princess  
or scullery maid or stepdaughter need to be saved by a prince?

And why always the magic three before the happy-ever after?  
Three wise men. Three days  
from Christ's death to his resurrection. Three-ring circus.

In the tale my grandfather told, the king sent out a decree  
and they came—a prince who brought gold, another carrying  
a finely tuned saddle and the white horse to put it on.

Last, the stable boy from the king's own stable who brought a bag of  
salt.

I'd loved the picture of a girl under an umbrella  
on a round blue box with an easy-pour spout

not knowing then about the salt trade, people who gave  
their lives in the mines and on the road, how kingdoms were made  
and lost over salt—or lack of it. It was all about power.

When I eloped, my stepfather  
lost his lordship over me. It had nothing  
to do with salt.

Susan Landgraf / Auburn, Washington

*Surrealist Composition 12* / Lisa Yount  
Digital Collage



Lisa Yount / El Cerrito, California

*Today's Ghosts* / Susan Landgraf

If there's an invisible side of darkness,  
is there an invisible side of light?  
My desk lamp shines on the calendar boxes  
of birthdays crossed out and an envelope,  
its letter lost. The dead cast their shadows  
far away in a cosmos that grows larger  
the longer I live, the more powerful  
telescopes become.

It is two nights past the full moon  
and orange stones catch fire in the sun.  
I don't need a therapist to tell me  
that open door was not my imagination.  
That other side is as real as reading a novel  
on a train, the landscape and its history  
embedded there, real as it was and is.

On the third night past the full moon  
I don't question my needs. Don't talk  
with my aunt but remember the cemetery –  
her in a lawn chair talking to my uncle,  
my father, my grandmother while I walked  
on the path under the trees spreading  
their shadows.

I hear those shadows and the moon  
moving through its quarters in a cosmos  
larger than I once had imagined.

Susan Landgraf / Auburn, Washington



## *The Roadrunner* / Jerry Kopec

Mr. Coffee sputters brown liquid into the carafe as I stare out the kitchen window, my tattered robe hanging off me like the cloak of a ghost, translucent, no longer able to survive another trip through the washing machine.

“When are you going to get rid of that old thing?” My wife grabs two mugs from the drainboard.

I slide my right hand into the robe pocket, my fingers poking through the holes in the bottom. Then, shrugging, I pull it closer, its cloth worn down by years of use, caressing my skin like a security blanket.

“Never,” I mumble as I pour coffee into the mismatched mugs, mine with a brown Denny’s logo that I stole when I was much younger, my wife’s with a faded rainbow across it.

“C’mon, it’s an eyesore, and I’m sure it’s got a rat’s nest.” My wife grabs her mug from the counter.

Rat’s nest? I look in the robe’s left pocket. A wadded-up tissue and some dental floss. Nest-ish, but that was me, not a rat.

My wife peers at me over the rim of her mug as she takes a sip like she thinks I have early-onset Alzheimer’s. “The Dodge Caravan. Weren’t you just staring at it out the window?” There’s a tinge of annoyance in her voice.

It’s been there so long I don’t even notice it anymore.

“It’s such an eyesore.” She gazes out the window and curls her lip at it—the tires cracked and flat, the muffler having long ago succumbed to rust, now lying on the ground wrapped in a grave of weeds, a haven for bugs and vermin.

“Yeah, but that’s Dodge’s fault.” I grin, proud of my ability to joke before I’ve sipped a drop of coffee.

“Did Dodge leave it in the backyard forever, letting the weeds overtake it?” The tinge is now a full-blown undertone.

“No, that would’ve been dear old dad.” I run my finger over the edge of the Denny’s mug, the steam warming my hand.

“Yeah, but he’s been gone for two years now. Time to let it go.”

“Has it been that long?” I look up at the ceiling, the water spot having grown since I last checked.

“Yes. It’s been that long.” She drops the mug onto the countertop, and it rattles, emphasizing her point.

“I’ll deal with it after my coffee.”

“You promise?” She peers at me, her face soft.

I swig a hot sip of coffee as I nod and walk out the back door. A ripping sound alters me as I’m tugged back by my bathrobe hooked on the door handle. The pocket hangs off, a useless square of cloth.

I’m going to miss resting my hand in that pocket.

Tugging my robe free, I step onto the dried-out crabgrass, only to jerk my foot up, annoyed at the pricks of grass. But I have nowhere else to put them, so I just repeat the process until I hop/jerk my way to the faded maroon Caravan—waist-high weeds partially obscuring its faux wooden paneling. I stop short and spill coffee onto the top of my foot.

Damn, that hurts.

I shake the hot liquid off and rub the burn mark on my opposite calf, making it sting worse.

Sighing, I walk around to the passenger door, grab the silver door handle, and tug. You’d expect it to be stuck and difficult to budge, but instead, it glides open like it has thousands of times before.

I slide in, relieved to have my feet off the unforgiving ground, and lay the mug on the dashboard, darkened foam visible through its cracks, a tiny plant sprouting from it.

“You’re gonna ruin the dash with that.”

“Give me a second.” I shut the door, grab the mug, and turn to my dad sitting in the driver’s seat. He’s got his right palm resting on the top of the steering wheel, his left arm along the door’s window. He reaches down and adjusts the volume knob as if the radio worked.

“I could use some coffee. You bring your old man some?”

“You can have some of mine.” I push the mug towards him, knowing he can never grab it.

“Maybe when we stop for gas.”

“Dad?”

“Yes, son?”

“Jill wants the car gone. It’s been two years.”

“Gone? Where will *I* go?”

“I don’t know. Where does one in your condition go?”

“You know your old man. I live for the road. Can’t keep me from it.”

I raise my eyebrow as if I have a chance of convincing him this isn’t the road, and he’s not going anywhere.

He grins at me. “We’ve been doing this since you could sit on your own—our Sunday drive. Why don’t you have Jill hop in?”

Not sure why, but it was the only time it was the two of us, no siblings to fight with, no idea where we were going, the road and the flip of a coin directing us.

I can still smell the Brut aftershave he’d bathe in, not sure if its memory or if it has seeped into the fabric of the driver’s seat, worn and threadbare, surrounding him like a security blanket. Dad and the road. Where he was most at ease with life. With himself. With me.

I flick the plastic roadrunner hanging from the rearview mirror—my dad personified, happier in constant motion.

“Let me explain it to her son. She’ll understand.”

I’m not sure I understand.

Dad furrows his brow. He looks tired. Concerned. “Do you want to stop these drives of ours?”

Never.

Jerry Kopec / Seattle, Washington

## **Jack Soo (born Goro Suzuki) / Richard Weaver**

You still know me as Nick. Nick Yemana. All my partners liked me, and like me were stereotypes. Each his own running gag. All flawed but not fatally. Episodes after episode we drank. Not the hard stuff. No, we were Caffeines. Java hounds. Perked pigs. Caffeinated Cops. You get the idea. Always a cop with a cup in the precinct scenes, and somehow my coffee was always horrible. The muddy grunge of Greenwich Village. That was the gagging gag. I was always the guilty one. Grounds against humanity. Killer coffee. Each week a new joke, or two: the cop who murdered Mrs. Folger. Who brewed the brew the 3 witches of Macbeth avoided. Fresh or day old, it etched glass and stained Styrofoam cups, took the silver plate off spoons, and removed tooth enamel enough to bankrupt the company dental plan. Good days they were, except for the joke that would not die. Even now, safely dead, but not yet buried. I can hear Captain Miller (he was never Barney to me) quoting *me* after a hospital visit: "It must have been the coffee." Sweet creams I say. As a survivor of the American internment camp I can honestly say I *have* tasted worse. I'd rather be remembered as the Motown singer who recorded *For once in my life* BEFORE Stevie Wonder. My last wish would be they'd release my version of the damn song.

Richard Weaver / Baltimore, Maryland

## *Dressing Mother* / Stephen Ruffus

At one hundred three  
this may be her last fitting.

The daughters set about the business  
of deciding whether a pink blouse

with lilies on it may be too sheer  
or if she would choose that color,

a task that suddenly appears  
achingly quotidian, disturbing,

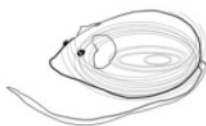
unbearably somber and sweet.  
They gently hold up the garments

to the sunlight scanning each one  
as she naps in this life

deciding what she should wear  
in the next, as though dressing her

for breakfast on any ordinary spring  
morning in the middle of Kansas.

Stephen Ruffus / Salt Lake City, Utah



## *Viceroy* / David Chorlton

For moments every morning there's a wave  
across the sky: the earth  
displays its soul,  
the ridgeline crackles and the saguaros  
on the upper slopes reach

another inch toward the passing clouds.  
The highest peak marks the time  
of day until

the minutes burn and the light  
returns to the sun. The darkness  
in the mountain's heart  
releases a cry so desperate for flight

it turns into a thousand  
viceroys, each one of which appears  
as a smile that trembles.

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## *The Search* / David Chorlton

The lost Monarchs have gathered  
in an arroyo where  
they are the only light  
along the path that seeks a way  
out from this world.

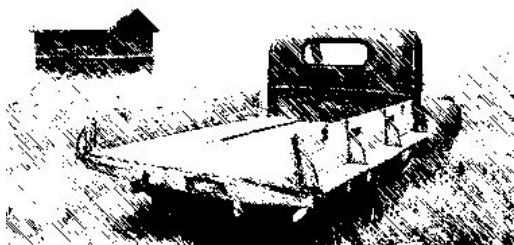
It is so cold here,  
so filled with rancor, with so few  
words describing souls. There's a wind  
without a name that searches  
for its origins. It blows, but gently, and  
turns every pair of wings into  
a paper heart that beats  
at compassion's tired pace.

David Chorlton / Phoenix, Arizona

*In Which I Consider My Ancestors* / Peter Schireson

How they bowed their heads to pray,  
how they bowed their heads to blend in,  
how, robbed of their rings, they sang  
and drummed upon their own skin,  
until they were robbed of their skin,  
how they lived in shelters of bark,  
how they lived in buildings with chickens and knife fights,  
how they endorsed heaven  
and enclosed themselves with a wire <sup>2</sup>  
and made with the wire a province of inside,  
wheels inside wheels, water in water,  
fish inside men, lakes inside women,  
how they pulled the wire taut  
around all they cherished—babies and medicines,  
canes and keys, the laws and their songs—  
all saved by the strength of the wire,  
all in accord with their god's scalding judgment.

Peter Schireson / Palm Springs, California



*After The Funeral* / Joy Gaines-Friedler

No regret for the suitcases  
I shoved the past into

or the one a lover took off with  
filled with what could be stolen—

not my dignity but my Moody Blues Album  
and a biography of Malcom X

The *what if's & could haves*  
are now the new-moon of the past.

Chain letters? End repeat signs?  
There is no return to the beginning.

It's amazing how quickly sparrows  
develop down in the flaming cold,

yet, down-less woodpeckers  
stick around all winter.

By what do we measure success?

Soon, all will be covered in the golden  
rain of leaves,

the kind that spend the winter  
covering the earth's graves.

Even the periwinkle sky is nothing but reflection.

Joy Gaines-Friedler / Farmington Hills, Michigan



*Static Switch Off* / Denny Marshall  
Drawing



Denny Marshall / Lincoln, Nebraska