

3rd Wednesday



Winter 2024

Fiori
6" x 8"
(152,4 mm x 228,6 mm)

Third Wednesday Magazine
Volume XVII, No. 1
Winter 2024

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.

Find us on the web at **thirdwednesdaymagazine.org** where you can download free digital issues, read the fine poems we have published in the past and find the link to our portal at *Submittable* where you can submit your work and subscribe to the magazine. You can also find us on Facebook, YouTube & Instagram

Masthead

David Jibson, Editor
Laurence W. Thomas, Editor Emeritus
Judith Jacobs, Art Editor
John F. Buckley, Fiction Editor
Dana Louise Johnson, Copy Editor
Marilyn L. Taylor, Associate
Lynn Gilbert, Associate
Carl Fanning, Associate
Phillip Sterling, Associate
Joe Ferrari, Consulting Editor

Cover Art:
“Sing and Rejoice”
iPhone Doodle
Laurence Thomas
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Table of Contents

Editor's note for Winter 2024.....	5
Featured Poet: Buff Whitman-Bradley.....	6
<i>Just Now an Ant</i>	6
<i>Your Name</i>	8
<i>The Cote d'Azur</i>	9
<i>Ghost Petals</i> / Carella Keil.....	10
<i>The Crescent</i> / Robert Nisbet.....	11
<i>On Finding Old Age Unfathomable</i> / Judith Chalmer.....	12
<i>Al Fresco</i> / Sally Nacker.....	13
<i>Yard in August</i> / Sally Nacker.....	13
<i>Juggling Fish</i> / Gary Wadley.....	14
<i>The Cabbie Was a Woman</i> / Steve Sibra.....	15
<i>Ritual</i> / Shutta Crum.....	16
<i>Persimmon</i> / Scott Waters.....	17
<i>Piper Exelsum (Kawakawa)</i> / Rachael Singel.....	18
<i>The Manny</i> / Lorette C. Luzajic.....	19
<i>Rats' Lullaby</i> / Alexey Tarasov.....	22
<i>She Knows</i> / Mark Burke.....	23
<i>Marriage Through Two Planes of Glass</i> / John Arthur.....	24
<i>Swimming</i> / Linda Laderman.....	24
<i>Hurdy Gurdy Man</i> / Gary Wadley.....	25
<i>Dream Lover</i> / Ellie White.....	26
<i>The Spectacle of Craving</i> / Ellie White.....	27
<i>Black Jagger</i> / Tauwan Patterson.....	28
<i>Untitled 2</i> / Nina Kossman.....	29
<i>Is It Possible to Know Enough?</i> / Michael Young.....	30
<i>Mirror Sisters</i> / Lisa Yount.....	31
<i>The Fire Next Time</i> / Richard Schiffman.....	32
<i>Old Dogs</i> / Richard Schiffman.....	33
<i>Fear</i> / Jasna Gugić.....	34
<i>Hummingbird</i> / Milica Mijatović.....	35
<i>Night's Blessing</i> / David Chorlton.....	36
<i>Spiral Stump</i> / Rachel Singel.....	37
<i>this thing</i> / James Lineberger.....	38
<i>Times Thieves</i> / Carella Keil.....	39
<i>Getting Drunk With the Bees</i> / Samuel Spencer.....	40
<i>Raspberries</i> / Emily Tuszynska.....	41

<i>Postpartum</i> / Emily Tuszynska.....	42
<i>Fish on a Hook</i> / Kasha Martin Gauthier.....	43
<i>Sublimity</i> / Donald Pasmore.....	44
<i>Tritina for Euthyphro</i> / Donald Pasmore.....	45
<i>So Here I Am</i> / Raymond Byrnes.....	46
<i>Lake Superior Poplars, 08/19/23</i> / Raymond Byrnes.....	46
<i>Sons</i> / Jamie Kim.....	47
<i>Freedom Bus</i> / William C. Crawford.....	48
<i>Elder Statesmen</i> / Angela Townsend.....	49
<i>I Ask the Universe</i> / Julie Shulman.....	52
<i>leftovers of a revolution</i> / Summer Smith.....	53
<i>Meet Me</i> / Elizabeth Porter.....	54
<i>Nostalgia</i> / James Lilliefors.....	55
<i>Dear Euphrosyne</i> / Joy Gaines-Friedler <i>Goddess of Good Cheer</i>	56
<i>Winter Camp</i> / Gary Finnegan.....	57
<i>Love at 90</i> / Sharon Scholl.....	59
<i>Pumpkins</i> / Marisa P. Clark.....	60
<i>Encounter</i> / Julia Lisella.....	61
<i>Fractured Window on Junked Freedom Bus</i> / William C Crawford	62

Editor's note for Winter 2024

This issue marks a significant milestone for our magazine: we're celebrating our 17th year of publication.

Our journey began as a humble monthly writer's workshop, organized by a group of passionate poets who gathered regularly at an Ann Arbor bookstore.

The secret to our longevity lies in the unwavering support of our contributors, who have graced us with thousands of poems, stories, and artworks over the years.

This issue features one of our long-time contributors, Buff Whitman-Bradley. Buff's dedication to 3rd Wednesday has earned him a well-deserved spot as our featured poet. Our records show that Buff's work has appeared in nine out of the fifteen issues we've published since adopting Submittable a few years ago. We suspect his contributions extend even further back.

To witness Buff's talent in action, visit our website and click on the link to our 3W YouTube page. There, you'll find videos of Buff and many other talented poets sharing their work. And if you have a book on the horizon, we invite you to join our virtual reading series. Use the "Contributor Book Listing" form in our Submittable portal to take advantage of this opportunity.

Looking ahead, our spring issue will showcase the winning poems and honorable mentions from our annual poetry contest. The deadline for submissions is February 28th. Our entry fee is just \$6 for three poems, and we offer an opportunity for poems that don't make the final cut: they can also be considered for regular publication in the contest issue. We believe every contest should offer such a second chance. This year, we're honored to have Ronnie Hess serve as our contest judge.

Thank you for being a part of our literary journey. We look forward to continuing to share the power of words with you for years to come.

Featured Poet: Buff Whitman-Bradley

Buff Whitman-Bradley's poems have been published in many print and online journals. His newest book, *A Friendly Little Tavern Somewhere Near the Pleiades*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press. He podcasts his poems at *thirdactpoems.podbean.com* and lives with his wife, Cynthia, in northern California.

Just Now an Ant

Just now an ant
Was making its way
Down my computer screen
Minding its own business
Doing me no harm,
Probably heading home
After a hard day at the office,
And without thinking
I reached up
And brushed it off
Sending it hurtling down
Toward the floor.
I immediately felt guilty
And I wondered why I had committed
That small, thoughtless act of inhospitality.
Small to me, of course,
But imagine the ant
Strolling quietly down the screen
Maybe humming a little tune to itself
Or wondering what's for dinner
When some cosmic cataclysm
Comes upon it
And overwhelms its entire existence
Flinging it into space

To land somewhere
Far from where it had been
And far from where
It was intending to go.
Imagine the ant
Utterly bewildered
By the mysterious forces
On the loose in the universe,
Forces that seem to have no regard
For the health and well-being of an ant,
Forces that hurl it willy-nilly
Into emptiness
Not caring whether it lives
Or dies.
I am so sorry, little ant.
You and I inhabit the same indifferent universe
And we both could use
All the comfort we can get.
If you ever make it back this way
Rest assured that I will not
Swipe you off my computer screen again,
That I will offer you
Sympathy and support
As you travel
Toward your destination,
That I will acknowledge and appreciate
All we have in common
As fellow beings doing our best
To make it to the checkered flag
In one piece.

Your Name

If you lead an exemplary life
And play your cards right
A distant galaxy
May name one of its constellations
After you,
Or a great river
May bestow your name
On one of the streams
That form its headwaters.
If and when this happens
Your entire life will be
Exactly as it was before.
Astronauts will not map
Interstellar journeys
Using your name as a reference point,
Grammar school children will not
Read your name in their geography books.
And when you die
Your passing will not be noted
By anyone other than those
Who knew you
When you were not yet a flashing rivulet,
A grouping of stars,
And who will miss your presence
Because of how graciously
You flowed among us,
How unfailingly you shone.

The Cote d'Azur

You would not believe
How much time I spend every day
Getting older.
A rough estimate:
100% of my waking and sleeping hours.
Fortunately, I have found ways
Of fitting other endeavors
Into the small cracks
Between episodes of decline.
I manage to read a good book now and then
To take a fine walk in the hills
To play silly games with our granddaughters
And when I do that
I experience a momentary rush of optimism
As everything seems to be going along
Swimmingly --
Bodily deterioration on hold
Mental acuity in peak condition
Reflexes sharp
Pains subsiding in every precinct.
But alas, it is a fleeting instant
Of false hope
For after a bad night's sleep
Aging reappears
In all it's fanged ferocity
Like a steroidal neo-colonialist
Intent upon re-occupying my body and mind
Subduing my spirit
Multiplying my miseries
And reminding me that this bus
Goes in only one direction,
And while it may wind me through
Some gorgeous countryside
With spectacular scenery
I am fully aware

Of its final destination –
And it ain't the Cote d'Azur.

Buff Whitman-Bradley / Fairfax, California

Ghost Petals / Carella Keil



Digital Collage
Carella Keil / Toronto, Ontario Canada

The Crescent / Robert Nisbet

One end of the Crescent, Mrs. Dougie Jones,
evenings, door well open, giving us the classics,
banging out the dance tunes, bits of Strauss,
on her piano's loving shambles.

The other end, some fifteen houses down,
two sets of brothers had their skiffle group.
(You might have to look up skiffle, try
on YouTube, Wiki, whatever you use.)
It came and went, in 1957
and '58, a plonking music from America,
ballads of bums and railroads.
And the great thing was that half the instruments
were home-made stuff, your mother's washboard
scratched on with thimbles for percussion;
the bass a tea-chest and a length of gut. They droned
of pig iron, freight trains, lonesome trails.

I was a lodger in the Crescent then,
a graduate of twenty-two, in social policy.
I was staying with Mrs. Mead mid-Crescent,
so summer evenings I'd take my smoke
to the Meads' front garden and their tiny lawn,
and listen to the headlong shafts of sound,
neither flinching, neither backing down.

And nobody minded much. Along the street,
the children's games, the conkers,
hopscotch, jokes and lies. And the veterans.
(So many of those blokes next door
had fought the Fascists once, and were glad,
so glad, to be back.)

So there it was, in 1957,
and as I looked from Mrs. Mead's front lawn,
the time was young and old and new and classic.
In forty later years in social policy,
I never knew again such harmony.

Robert Nisbet / Haverfordwest, United Kingdom

On Finding Old Age Unfathomable / Judith Chalmer

The old woman who is and isn't me lifts a stick
from the mud in America and calls the shape she has drawn
her mother. It's me, says the continent. It's me,
says the girl who was and wasn't me. You're wrong,
says the woman. There's no mud in my thinking.
Come here, says the girl. There's a house you can enter
but only in a dream, hallway after hallway on your knees.
I'm looking for the samovar, says my mother. I gave it away,
I tell her, and on the spot, my old Dostoevsky, the one
with the mosaic of sadness on the cover that I loved so much
in high school, crumbles like a cough in the unquiet air.
Which continent are we on, asks my mother. Both, I tell her,
each vast and snowy and smelling of hemlock, of thyme
and the ingredients of a thick, starchy soup. I step toward her
but a rock at the bottom slips out from my foot and I'm head down
in the dirt like a buried spoon. Histrionics, rumbles my mother.
I miss you, I say. You forgive me, she asks? A lot, but then
it starts up again, I say. And her, she nods at the girl,
have you abandoned her? It's not her, I say, that's the problem.
It's the twenty-year-old, and the thirty. They don't dare
show their faces. Maybe, says the girl, you're not looking.
Well, says the old woman who is and isn't me, maybe
you should stick to your sandbox. Remind me, I say
I've forgotten the words you were singing to your teapot.

Judith Chalmer / Burlington, Vermont

Al Fresco / Sally Nacker

Tall grass twitches—
now two brown ears
lift and a small nose
wiggles as the wild
rabbit munches over
and over, dipping
into clover.

Yard in August / Sally Nacker

A bobbing of yellow
in the common self-heal:
a goldfinch
pecking seeds
of finished flowers

low in the purple goodness—
and masses of self-heal
blooming still—
and all the lovely
droning.

Sally Nacker / Redding Connecticut

Juggling Fish / Gary Wadley



Drawing
Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky

The Cabbie Was a Woman / Steve Sibra

My brain buzzing like a crazy bee
her cab smelled like polished cedar
she looked sharper than the three of me
past, present, and future fantasy
Where to? she chirped
back seat cushions so tight
like a buck private's bed at inspection
I am in for the entire ride I told her
The blue million miles in your eyes
reflection or rejection
She blew me a kiss, pushed
the pedal through the floor
The best ones are always women
I said, took her picture with my memory
got a tight grip on the door

Steve Sibra / Shoreline, Washington

Ritual / Shutta Crum

I rub liniment
into your shoulders,
hips, knees, and ankles—
lingering over each part of you.

Your eyes
are half open in the pink light
through the bedroom window.

Later, I bring you an egg
and toast.
And in an old spoon
I offer raspberry jam —
thick, seedy,
and scandalously red.

Shutta Crum / Ann Arbor, Michigan

Persimmon / Scott Waters

One bite
through crisp skin

and you're running
in an orchard
hiding from the seeker
with your parents
and grandparents
somewhere out of view
their voices murmur
through the settling dusk
talking of tractors and peat moss

footsteps come near
you climb
into the nearest tree
and wait for the hollering voices
of children
to pass

when they've gone
you notice
the plump little
orange-ocher
pumpkin replica
suspended inches
from your nose

your small fist opens

encloses the smooth sheen

pulls

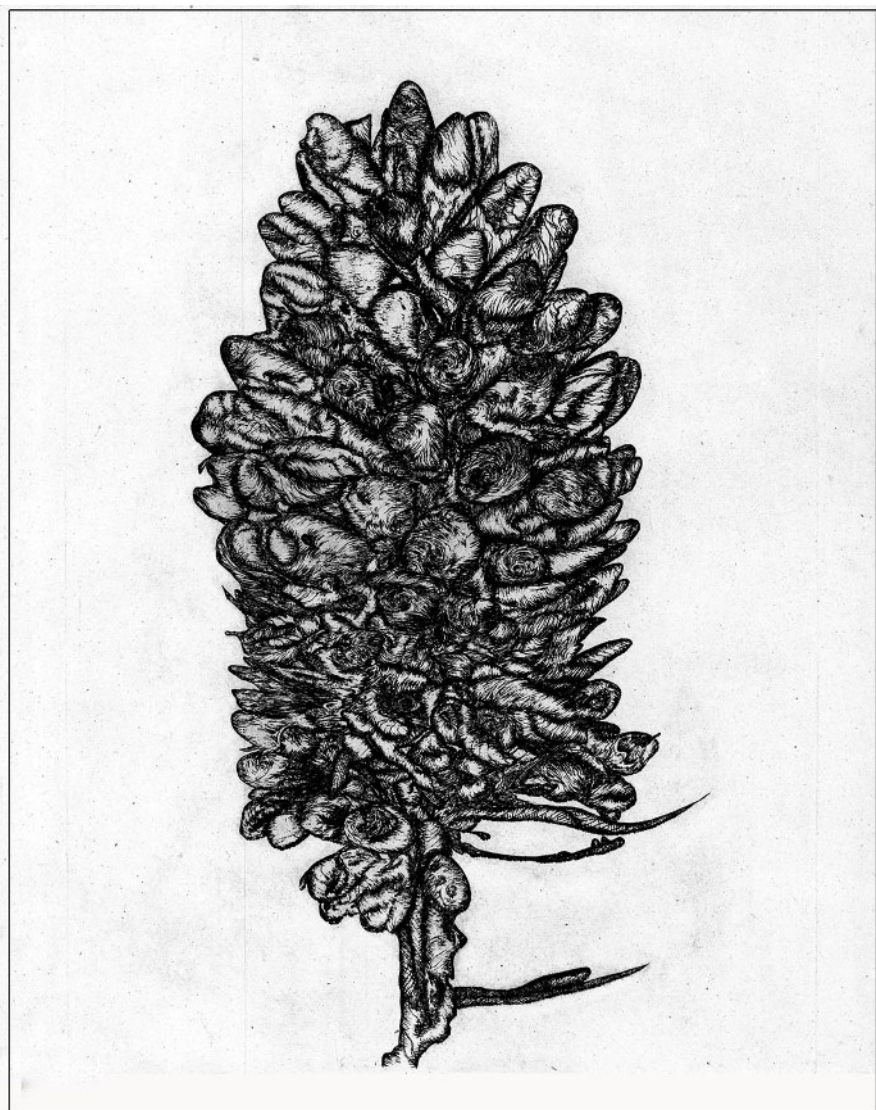
and with one bite
through crisp skin
you're in your kitchen
the kids hollering in the backyard
your parents and grandparents
murmuring in their picture frames

past present and future
bobbing on the river

of your tongue

Scott Waters / Oakland, California

Piper Exelsum (Kawakawa) / Rachael Singel



Intaglio on handmade cotton paper
Rachael Singel / Louisville, Kentucky

The Manny / Lorette C. Luzajic

He was lean and khaki, like a grasshopper. Face flint and sharp, arms almost down to his knees. I needed someone who could carry me, and he could. “Look,” he said, when he came in, “it is very bad for my family back home, I need this.” I explained to him that the job was not caring for children, but for me. I was an artist who needed an assistant, sometimes with my work but mostly as a kind of nurse and janitor.

It wasn’t easy work, and it wasn’t interesting. Sometimes it was ugly. I needed help with my tubes and drains, and getting to the table or toilet. I needed a dishwasher. I needed my pills, organized practically with my meals. I needed air. There was nothing I found as humiliating as getting help into my shoes, or to empty various bags of waste. That, and being pushed in a heap in my wheelchair through the gardens to the pond, then held up like a marionette and maneuvered amicably through the winding shrubs for an encounter with the grass and the ants.

For a long time, Manuel never complained. He said he was grateful. I went to sleep easily and early, and the hours yawned leisurely for him after the china had been washed and put away. He had free reign over my library, all those old books about photography and painters. Sometimes we looked at them together. I shared everything I knew with him about Latin American silver, African masks, German expressionists.

One night after the moon changed hands with the day, the pain in my shriveled legs reached a crescendo, and I called out. In the distant edges of my restlessness, I heard a woman’s laughter. I heard the clinking of crystal in the far room.

Faithfully, as always, his skinny shadow was beside me before I gave in to the panic of pain. Like a lover, he took my frail hand and pierced me with the morphine I had come to depend on. The sweet relief flooding through me was interrupted with the electricity of my petty jealousy. Of Manuel playing backgammon with a chubby barmaid or cashier, a girl I imagined with curling tendrils and a tangle of charms at her throat.

“I’m here at your beck and call,” he said, when eventually he felt the steel blade of my disgust. “I am here for everything you need, without question. But you cannot ask me not to live. I must be able to have visitors since I so seldom get to leave the house. I do not have frequent or rowdy guests, and we make very little noise.”

I only nodded and went on pouting. I constantly imagined him writhing underneath her, her given to arching abandon, plump and youthful and able. She was redheaded and round, although I’d never seen her with my own eyes. Her distant voice was low and warm, and whenever I heard it in the house, I would call him with an invented calamity or need. In retrospect, it was, of course my intention to interrupt them. But that’s not how I saw it, there, then, in my confused emotions and desperation. I was not able to bear that life was taking place without me.

Manuel tried to extricate himself and get away a few times, to say he needed to contend with personal matters. He asked for a few days off and then a leave of absence. Each time I rained down on him with a storm of terrible concerns so that he felt too guilty to go. I was a vortex. He began to see me as a ball and chain, instead of as the old artist he cared for and loved, someone who opened his heart and mind and wings to the world.

“Look,” Manuel finally said, giving me a formal and final letter of resignation. “I have to go home to Mexico, my father is ill.” In the rhythm of the machines that attended to me, I heard a soft tide of ebbing and flowing, followed by a fury of falls, rapids rushing down into an abyss.

I couldn't think of him as a young man with a father or as someone from far away who was homesick. I had made him a lover if only in my mind, and now he was abandoning me. He knew me more intimately than anyone ever had.

"What about her?" I spat viciously through the gummy hose jimmied between my teeth, the thing that brought me air. I felt helpless and naked, as needy as I'd ever been.

"Maria? Yes, yes," he said, "we are both going. Father never stops asking for her, she is the youngest, his favorite."

Lorette C. Luzajic / North York, Ontario, Canada



Rats' Lullaby / Alexey Tarasov

Even if the ninth wave in the sea
Has washed the steersman overboard –
Only rats will be able to flee the sinking ship
While the rest will slowly go down with it.

If a baby can't fall asleep in the house,
If it looks in the corner, afraid to close its eyes –
It's not a brùnaidh, not a cricket or mice,
It's us, the same as we were thousands of years ago.

Poison for breakfast is our bread for dinner,
A trap at night is our bed in the morning.
Fish bones is our coat of arms,
And our blood is as heady as hops.

Why, my friend, has your face turned pale?
Why have you dropped the bread crust?
This is not the tale that ends badly.
There are things in the world that are worse than rats.

Alexey Tarasov / Moscow, Russia

(translated from the Russian by Sergey Gerasimov)

Ed note: brùnaidh is a helpful elf in folklore, a broonie or bownie.

She Knows / Mark Burke

Each morning she finds him
packing the same bag
when nothing will be needed.
The man who once painted
crowds of dahlias reaching for the sun
has forgotten their name.
He leans against her,
fingers of their cramped hands
braid into a cup.
She watches the wrens and chickadees
gather at the feeder, their manners,
how they perch on the vine-maples,
dart quick as a thought,
calls drifting like the echo of bells.
The flutter of their small bodies
has become her first comfort.
She knows that soon
she will turn his body to ash.
They will go to sleep early tonight
and when she helps him dress,
he'll ask again about the bag.
One day in early winter
she'll spread the grey powder
along their path,
hang his name on the air.
On the porch swing
she watches
the light lick the rocks
as the days turn
from plums to frost.

Mark Burke / Everett, Washington

Marriage Through Two Planes of Glass / John Arthur

Both equally struck by the beauty of the other, we were backing out of our parking spaces at the same time when I waved to her, mouthing, “no, you go,” and she waved at me saying, “no, you go.” My car was already in reverse. My foot was on the brake pedal. I switched it briefly from the brake to the accelerator. I almost went, but then I put my foot back on the brake and waved for her to go. It looked like she might go but, no, she was waving for me to go. I waved. She waved. We mouthed. We waved. We waved and mouthed. This went on for fifty-two years. I was the first to go.

John Arthur / Summit, New Jersey

Swimming / Linda Laderman

Some nights I dream I can swim. I flip onto my back and tell myself, movement is meditation, let the current carry you. I keep going and feel my arms sweep the water. My body rises like the tide—a buoy marking its position, moored. A wave washes over my chin. I lick the trace of salt from my lips. My skin tingles from the salt’s sting, but I like it, so I stay afloat. One night, I imagine I’m standing at the edge of a pool. I tip my body toward the deep end and dive. I surface, grab the rope, then use it to move closer to the shallow side. I wake, not knowing if my grasp was enough. When the oncologist says, this won’t kill you, I ask, then what will?

Linda Laderman / Commerce Township, Michigan

Hurdy Gurdy Man / Gary Wadley



Drawing
Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky

Dream Lover / Ellie White

Every night, the moon wraps me
in a space blanket and appoints
a star to tell me a story.

The moon stays awake until
I fall asleep. The moon strokes
my hair, tells me my eyes look like
comets. I can squeeze the moon
as hard as I want. It never complains.

The moon doesn't drift away
from me when I'm sad.
It can withstand my weight
even when I'm heavy as a planet.
The moon teaches me how to
change a tire, fix a dripping sink,
light a campfire. It never asks
about my parents. It just listens.

Ellie White / Garland, Texas

The Spectacle of Craving / Ellie White

I go to the kitchen to fill my glass
of wine and leave my body
along the way. Her feet
make no sound on the rug
except when she stumbles over
a cat toy. It jingles away under
the bookcase. The lights flicker
on the Christmas tree as she passes
or maybe her blood pressure
has dropped. Each silent step:
another line on a graduated
cylinder that is filling with pale
Sauvignon Blanc. The kitchen's
cool linoleum glides beneath
her socks. She's arrived but
the glass has vanished from
my hand. I'm holding a knife.
In my other hand, an orange.

Ellie White / Garland, Texas



Black Jagger / Tauwan Patterson

Up from his nap,
the cornrowed 3-year old burst through the swinging door
to the kitchen like wait staff inquiring about an order.

Appropriate,
as the scene was this:
Me,

cutting boards,
an oven broiling;
wireless speaker putting in work:

Mick and them Stones singing bout those Tumblin' Dice.
Stops the 3-year old nephew
in his tracks.

He vibes;
Closes his eyes;
Nods his head;

Catches the beat.
Food can wait.
He gets it.

Tauwan Patterson / Los Angeles, California

Untitled 2 / Nina Kossman

A semblance of meaning in a meaningless world,
a spire of an old church in the cloudy sky,
ruins of a temple in the desert sand,
a civilization rising from an inchoate thought,
a childhood memory amidst forgetfulness:
this is how I remember a scrawny shrub
on a beach near Miahe, outside of Tallin,
and my parents spreading a thin blanket for us,
and my brother sitting on it in his plavki*,
and me, on my haunches, next to him,
in my wide underpants, red with white dots,
the kind worn by Soviet girls too young for a bathing suit,
and this is how a semblance of meaning
rises in the middle of a meaningless day,
remembering pebbles on a Baltic beach,
and closer to the water, a city we built from sand,
and a spire of a sand church, to be destroyed
by a foot of a vacationer so intent on a quick dip in the sea,
he gives no thought to what he might step on.
Ruins of a temple on an Estonian beach,
a civilization rising from a child's creation,
a childhood memory, meaning in the midst of meaninglessness,
that proverbial feast which is always with you.

Nina Kossman / Ukraine

.....

Plavki (Russian: плавки)– bathing trunks for boys

Is It Possible to Know Enough? / Michael Young

Smoke from the four houses burning
arced over the baseball fields
and basketball courts in the park.
Pigeons fled the telephone wires
where they perched all day
and even clouds toward the horizon
seemed to abandon their lanes.

It was the first alarm to sound
in days of alarming sounds.

The next morning, two men
threatened each other with hammers
while their raging expectation
dimmed, like a stream freezing
to a trickle in the midwinter days
of hibernation.

Later that week, a SWAT truck
parked outside my house,
and ambulances, and cops
carrying ballistic shields.
People took pictures and watched
from the park fences, talking
with the intimacy of gardeners,
those seeding the flowerbeds
with new versions of the
neighborhood mythologies,
what, one day, might help us
understand what it means
to be American.

Michael Young / Jersey City, New Jersey

Mirror Sisters / Lisa Yount



Digital Collage
Lisa Yount / El Cerrito, California

The Fire Next Time / Richard Schiffman

Eventually the grass will banish us,
the two legged self-styled brainiacs,
from this geological era
that we've so grandiloquently named
after ourselves.

The fever dream of the Anthropocene
will break like a losing streak at Vegas
with a fortuitous explosion
of squiggly green fingers squirming up
and out of our civilizational rubble.

A vegetative army suckling solar teats,
licking all the vagrant breezes.
mulching our best laid malls,
meadowing industrial parks
and parking lots. Comrades all!

Boatloads of seeded refugees exiled
from our manicured lawns: neat little hybrid
grasses that we thought we'd tamed ages ago,
plus weeds we never invited to the dance,
a saucy riffraff of genus and species.

Even our cemeteries will grow tangled
with the uncombed hair of the grasses,
derelict with clover and bees.
Life will smother everything,
death declare a busman's holiday.

It's not the meek inheriting the earth.
It's the earth remembering
to paint itself green. Whatever it is
that our sullen grey matter forgot,
whatever we tramped underfoot

and thought that we had paved over will rise
like ballerinas on their webbed ganglia of roots,
unfurl little chlorophylled banners,
poke blades in the eye of the sun, swallow
the planet in a tsunami of emerald flame.

Old Dogs / Richard Schiffman

It was a doggie beauty pageant,
each succeeding pooch more fetching than the last
promenading past our bench in the park.
One white-haired terrier-type hobbled by,
her back-leg pitifully dragging.
“She’s old,”
her person explained.

I glanced at my octogenarian friend,
and she smiled wryly back at me.
For both of us have been learning of late
how a body becomes, with time,
like a regiment after the battle—
the ones that survived hauling the wounded
in wagons behind them.

How did this crew that marched so smartly
and in lock-step down the avenue
become a bedraggled column, a motley parade
of disordered organs and wayward limbs?
I’d ask the dogs, if I could. But the spring
begins today, and the dogs are happy.
And so too, for the moment, are we.

Richard Schiffman / New York, New York

Fear / Jasna Gugić

I'm standing naked
in front of my own fear.
Only him and me
in front of the mirror of
life. And I'm watching him
with wide eyes opened and
I'm asking him, is he
afraid of my ego
and my crazy desire to
win. He looks silently at
me, my fear,
indifferent, without a blink of an eye
without a heart,
and no hugs.
But now I feel like I'm prevailing,
crossing all obstacles of self-pity,
and the curses of the evil men in black.
And I feel my big fear shrinking
as I walk on my toes,
overrunning years of nonsense.
And I was born again
in the glare of the Universe,
free of burdens of the life
free to fly, somewhere where
no one can touch my wings.

Jasna Gugić / Zagreb, Croatia

Hummingbird / Milica Mijatović

November smells exactly like that hidden monastery
I visited last year, somewhere in Pennsylvania, past
the steel cities and unwanted farms, submerged

between two hills and locked in by the sky.
I remember stepping out of the car hesitantly,
wondering if I'd be good enough for God.

That evening, the nuns fed the visitors
bread and honey before bed, as snow
strained from falling too much.

I slept like a hummingbird
filled with nectar. During
morning service I sang.

Milica Mijatović / Akron, Ohio



Night's Blessing / David Chorlton

There is a whisper in the air tonight, a secret
from the mountain down
to where its animals go
to be a part of darkness. No walls
for them, no questions asked

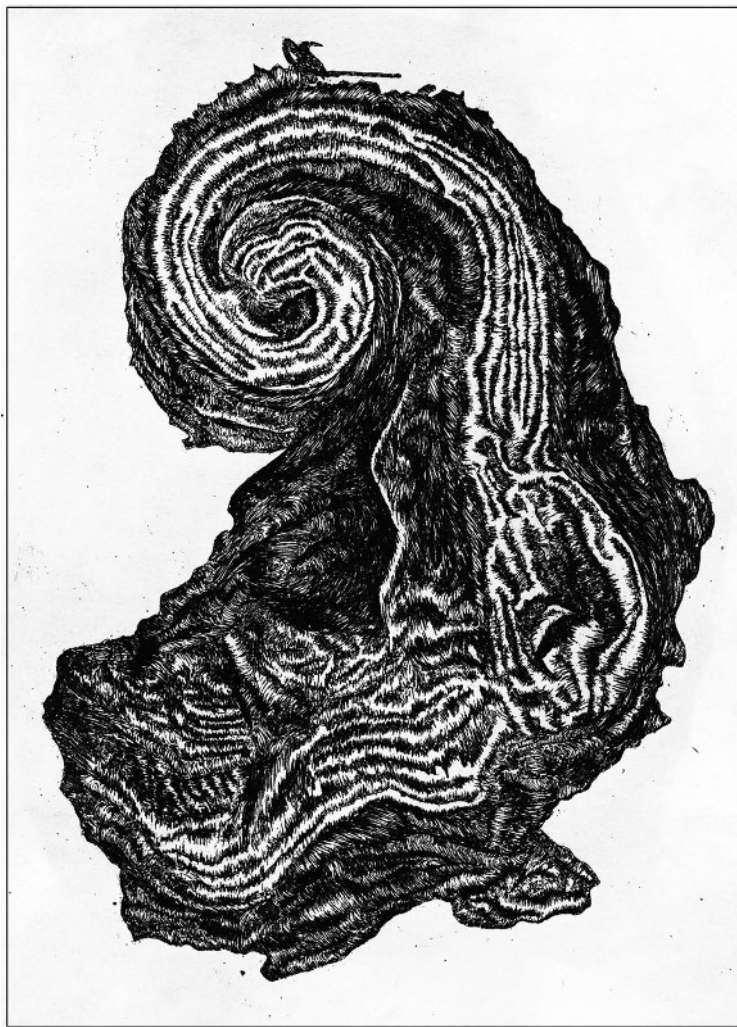
when they go where they go and return
night after night while
the houses are asleep. The sky
after midnight sings with a silver tongue.
Another red eye

flies across Heaven. The universe is open
for business. A garden saint
holds out his hand
to bless the mouse who nibbles shadows.
Run, tiny life,
where moonlight cannot reach you,
and fortune will send

old shoes and empty drawers
to nest in.

David Chorlton / Phoenix, Arizona

Spiral Stump / Rachel Singel



Intaglio on handmade cotton paper
Rachael Singel / Louisville, Kentucky

this thing / James Lineberger

couple days ago
i read this thing about morning glories
and i kept looking for where
it was going but that
was it
just some thoughts the writer had
about morning glories
and how she messed things up by plucking
some of them so that
when somebody else stopped by
it wouldn't be the same
as it was to her blah blah
ahh me hardly seemed worth the effort i thought
but this morning looking back on it again i began to see how a poem
can really be about
just about anything not just how love dies
or age takes over or how
one morning you can't shoot backyard baskets anymore
but all sorts of things that have no narrative
to them at all
like the way jeff's old aggies
looked when we
found them lying in a shallow bowl on his desk
after he died
how the sunlight
was trapped inside like pieces of a story
that would never again
get told

James Lineberger / Kannapolis, North Carolina

Times Thieves / Carella Keil



Digital Collage
Carella Keil / Toronto, Ontario Canada

Getting Drunk With the Bees / Samuel Spencer

When I was 16, I learned that bees
are alcoholics. More like, I should say, sugar-
holics. Bees are loyal, hardworking,
and quite invincible. They'll do
anything for their queen. But put
a half glass of grenadine on the bar
counter, and you can watch them
swear a new allegiance to this
cherry-colored nectar. They will drink
to their heart's content, and then
they will drown, precisely what the bartender
intended. At 16,
I watched the bees die a sunset death
both literally and symbolically sweet, free
from the constraints of the hive,
all for a small taste
of individuality;

and I ordered daiquiri
after daiquiri, pronouncing it 'da-queer-ie'
because (what did I know?) I didn't know how else to
say it.

Samuel Spencer / Tampa, Florida

Raspberries / Emily Tuszynska

In memory of Marek Tuszynski (1939-2023)

Marek picks raspberries one-handed for his granddaughter,
who rides his hip and watches, mouth opening
at his hand's approach. The berries are faintly fuzzed,
so ripe they're almost purple. Maliny, he says.

Kochana. Words in a language she'll never learn.
To ease her teething he lets her gum the stub of his index finger,
squared off at the last knuckle. His own wartime childhood
was full of walking, his father escaping the camps,

walking back to Warsaw, the family walking, looking for safety,
looking for work, for food, for a roof that didn't leak,
for spring air that didn't smell of decay,
his mother taking the children to look for their father,

separated again for a reason he doesn't remember,
or maybe never knew. Because of the war, that's all.
He was young; he doesn't remember the villages
where they stayed, where they slept, what they ate,

how many miles they walked, taking turns with the baby.
He remembers sunshine, a game of pulling a clattering scrap
of tin on a string over pavement; he remembers soldiers
who came to a door at night only to beg for potatoes.

He remembers corpses among brambles, remembers a garden
where his father worked for a season. High in a tree
hung a single untouchable peach; he remembers his longing.
One by one he presses berries into his granddaughter's mouth.

She gives her whole self to the eating, the tasting.
With each berry, she turns deeply inward, as if lost in reverie,
though for her I think the past has not yet begun, and the future
is only the next berry, the one she sees in her grandfather's hand.

Postpartum / Emily Tuszynska

I keep coming back,
keep climbing the stairs
to push the button
that lets the slow notes fall,
keep making my face rise
like the moon over your crib,
keep letting my hand
be the weight to teach
your small body stillness.
Like lilies your fists unfurl.
Dusk obscures the corners
of the room and the walls
expand, the way each day
since you came
has become an ocean,
the sharp pull of your need
through the shapeless hours
the thing that keeps me
from drowning.

Emily Tuszynska / Fairfax, Virginia



***Fish on a Hook* / Kasha Martin Gauthier**

Once, I saw my boss, the CFO,
in the sock section of Bloomingdales.
He followed behind his wife
like a tired dog follows his owner.
She chose black or blue,
handed them to him to hold.

He and those men sat in meetings all day-
playing dress-up, like their fathers before them,
except modern: pressed jeans and t-shirts,
like the second coming of Steve Jobs.
They strutted in to work then paid me
80 cents on their dollar.

For years I copied their ways- crossed
my arms and legs- learned all the unspoken rules.
To get ahead, I became fluent in their language.
I wrote and said what they wanted. But I could not
hide my foreign accent- my voice and breasts
gave me away. They humored me, kept me
hooked with promotions promised:
“Just have it on my desk by noon.”

Finally, I earned an invite to the Boardroom.
I sat in that room when they passed Rachael
over for promotion. A single mother,
she wouldn't be able to dedicate herself.
Still, they made the cover of Forbes magazine
for Best Employer. When I asked questions,
they gave me answers: “That's how we do things.”
“I'd explain, but you wouldn't understand.”

Kasha Martin Gauthier / Newton, Massachusetts

Sublimity / Donald Pasmore

-After Goya's The Third of May 1808

The gentle shine of blood is enough
to penetrate skin and saturate

nerves. A shock as you feel your hands
raised overhead, palms out, wishing

to understand. Or else, covering
your face, cowering into pastoral

visions, final lies. We love every stroke
redoubling our certainty, our distaste

for the violent urge. The sensuous pull
towards ending we negate with paintings

of innocence and brutality. This isn't the third
of May. This isn't 1808. We lift it above

the moment, not by choice, it necessarily
transcends. Forced out of the soft

chair, tiled floor, scented candles
like a bullet fired, a wrecking ball

swung into the inactively settled. A glimpse
transports us into each weathered

face, each position, the infinite pattern imagined
in the violent, the resigned fear. To us, the blood and guns

become meaningless. They cease to be as we dive
past scene and circumstance, as we reason

every emotion into existence. Recognize your lack
of control but look into death as an old master

we are freed from. See something true, expanding
beyond us, unverified, brought into existence

as a dream. We learn to rest within,
hidden behind the painting, the resonance.

Tritina for Euthyphro / Donald Pasmore

God doesn't like Star Wars. He calls it a sub-par fantasy
romp through space. I busy myself carrying groceries from the
shared
minivan so I don't argue—not that I can. Listen to Him decide

what's right for us. I wanted a Honda, He wanted a Kia. Who am I to
decide
over Him? We got a Sedona. I can't complain, my fantasy
was a green suburban yard, two or three kids playing in a house
shared

with a husband. He planted the seed, reshaped organs and shared
creation with my womb. I gave birth to His two blessings. I can't
decide
anymore. I'm shoes broken by unyielding feet. Why can't my
fantasy

match His? The fantasy of shared ideas breaks as glass
predestination—He will decide in me.

Donald Pasmore / Salisbury, Maryland

So Here I Am / Raymond Byrnes

back on the bench beside tall, twin cedars.
The stream slides over slabs and bubbles
through shards of lava stone that spread
and cooled before time was measured.

All winter back East, I pictured being
here again, settling into silence once the
last hiker ambles past, settling into the late
afternoon glow of waxed green cedar fronds.

So here I am, where some would say one's
backpack of anxieties and expectations should
be set aside to pause, inhale forest air
and meditate in shaded stillness, but

it can be important to settle for much less, like
a breeze meandering through treetops, warblers
flitting branch to branch, faint tapping from the
woods, some bench rest for these old bones.

Lake Superior Poplars, 08/19/23 / Raymond Byrnes

Five mergansers paddle to a shoreline ledge, step out
and turn around one by one to twitch wet rumps in
tempo with tambourine jingles flashing in the breeze.

Raymond Byrnes / Leesburg, Virginia

Sons / Jamie Kim

“Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.’”—Genesis 22:2

My mom used to read me this passage
& I held my breath as she prayed for a faith
that mirrored Abraham’s. I never really understood
where I fell on her hierarchy of needs, definitely
under God, maybe a bit under my older brother,
& an inch away from matcha lattes. I think
about you & how your father loved you the same way
Abraham loved Isaac, or maybe a little less.
When I hear the story now, I think about Isaac.
About how he kept asking what they
were sacrificing on that mountain, how by halfway
up, he knew that it was him, and how he walked
himself to the altar and watched as his father
raised the knife to his throat. I wonder what
he was thinking—if he ever loved anyone again.
But maybe that’s all sons were ever meant
to do: carry the weight of their fathers.

Jamie Kim / Paramus, New Jersey



Freedom Bus / William C. Crawford



Photograph

William C. Crawford / Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Elder Statesmen / Angela Townsend

Lyle and Logan will fight until one of them dies, although they will probably go on the same day, like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin.

Lyle will always have the honor of having been here first. He started volunteering for Cat Haven in 2007, when he was seventy and could still carry the stainless-steel litter pans. For three presidential administrations, he has informed every teenage volunteer that he has “the glamour job of scoopin’ poops.” Lyle wears T-shirts that say “Slow Moving Vehicle” and “Wide Load.” Lyle wears his hair as tall as a flame. His white shock always looks surprised, as though the Holy Spirit landed and got overwhelmed.

Logan never crossed the threshold of Cat Haven when his wife volunteered. Pamela represented the shelter at the county Christmas parade. She was repeatedly asked to stop shouting expletives when local politicians rode by. She was the first volunteer ever fired from Cat Haven. She snuck back in to pet cats, and no one kicked her out. For two presidential administrations, she left with the threat, “I’ll be back next week, if the Lord’s willing and the creek don’t rise.” One day, the creek rose, and the next week Logan began volunteering.

Logan is three years younger than Lyle and worries aloud that Lyle is too old to volunteer. Logan wears T-shirts that say, “My Lifeguard Walks On Water” and “United States Prayer Force.” During the pandemic, Logan wanted to see what would happen if he stopped addressing his hair. What happened is that Logan became John the Baptist, and now his beard reaches his belly button. Logan’s beard is wider than his body, and he swings back and forth like bluegrass as he carries five stainless-steel litter boxes on his shoulder.

Lyle unlocks St. Methchild’s Roman Catholic Church every morning and locks it every evening, because he loves the Blessed Sacrament, and no one else will do it. Logan tells Lyle that Martin Luther called the Catholic Church the “synagogue of Satan.” Logan preaches once

a month at the Full Gospel Church. A pew full of Wiccan and agnostic and Episcopalian and Jewish cat people stumbles through hymns and multiple collections to support Logan.

Logan and Lyle drink Diet Cokes and eat Veggie Straws in the Cat Haven lounge while yelling over each other. Logan worries aloud that Lyle eats too many carbs, because diabetes isn't about sugar, it's about carbs. Lyle responds that every long-haired female cat is "my little girl."

Logan works with the mean cats, wiggling like an earthworm under couches and crates. He bursts into the staff lunchroom to shout, "we're making progress!" Logan is not concerned with providing context. Everyone congratulates Logan.

Lyle and Logan compete over who gets to give tours when visitors show up unannounced. Logan says that Cat Haven has saved over ten thousand cats, which is only six thousand more than the truth. Lyle says that Cat Haven adopts fifty cats a week, which is only forty-eight more than the truth.

Logan says that Jesus saved his soul and Cat Haven saved his life. He had Pamela for forty-six years. When she died, that demon alcohol almost took him by the neck again. But when somebody needs you, you can't be selfish anymore.

Lyle says that God likes to laugh, and cats are proof. He has no family east of Iowa, but Cat Haven is open on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Lyle puts turkey baby food in ketchup cups and distributes it to his little girls. When Lyle ends up in the hospital, the nurses get exhausted from all the visitors.

Logan and Lyle agree that the world is changing fast, and it's anyone's guess if it's for the better. Logan still has NO-Bama stickers on his car between the FOP badges, but some of his best friends are tattooed socialists. Lyle says he doesn't believe in enemies, although he thinks Cat Haven should do a background check on that one volunteer, you know the one, no he's not going to

name names.

Lyle is ready to fall in love, which he says will be God's last laugh. He Facetimes with two old girlfriends and just joined St. Methchild's Welcome Wagon. Logan is content, although he plays his numbers every week and has a shaggy little dream about a trip to the Alamo. That's the only thing he'd spend it on, really. What more does he need?

When Lyle ends up in the hospital, Logan turns curmudgeon, snapping at staff and dropping stainless-steel litter boxes. Both things make a terrible sound. Logan says Lyle is throwing dice with the carbs. Logan says Lyle can't think only of himself.

When Lyle says he would move away for the right woman, Logan says he'd wish him bon voyage. Logan wrote this on the Cat Haven Volunteer Facebook page, except he accidentally wrote "Bob Voyage," so now this is his nickname. Logan likes his nickname. Logan likes when the Wiccan and Episcopalian girls say Bob Voyage is an international spy disguised as a litter box attendant.

Lyle says he likes Cat Haven because nobody is disguised at all. Logan agrees. Tomorrow they will make each other angry again.

Angela Townsend / Langhorne, Pennsylvania

I Ask the Universe / Julie Shulman

for a daughter and am given one two three
sons instead, hearty perennials forming in
the alkaline soil of my insides. At first,
their tiny fists, tornado-hearted galaxies,
whorl impotently at the edge of my vision.
But, day by day, they carve me gently
into the shape of my love for them,
which expands like a new universe:
confounding smudges, red specks,
little monsters, human satellites.
While young, their orbits are irregular,
they drag me behind them like stardust
through their hidden months of becoming.
Now, they become messy
adolescent constellations.
I stand in the dark marveling up at them
as they spread across my night sky.

Julie Shulman / Stoneham, Massachusetts

leftovers of a revolution / Summer Smith

“there’s a stairway to heaven, so tell me how the hell we gonna get in?”
- wheelchair sports camp

our bones are different— must have been
contortionists. devil-cursed
body, building up
a maybe. the difficulty leveled
us out. caught us crawling. what if
the elevators stopped working, no more
energy to try; the ramps—
only go to one and i could make
it (maybe), besides the point. get my blood
drawn, get no results, get an aide, get
an animal, call it help
enough— call the wait line (like it’s working),
the medical brew— anti-
baby, psychotic, depressant— nobody cares
until you’re in the hospital / nobody will
care when whatever-war is
over. you christian-call it soft to give a shit,
you’ve never loved the dead before.

Summer Smith / Salisbury, Maryland

Meet Me / Elizabeth Porter

Every hour, I spoon time from today into jars
of the past: milky glass jars, blue lids.
Ferns creep toward the doorway where we'll kiss—
they unfurl their fronds to sweep away
small meteorites still hissing &
sparkling hot. It's not too late to meet
me here in this kitchen, hands dusty
and white. Clapping away the sunrise
onto an apron, printed with stars.

Elizabeth Porter / Carlisle, Pennsylvania



Nostalgia / James Lilliefors

I feel nostalgic already
for yesterday, having sandwiches
with you by the water, in the shade,
not yet knowing how the rain
would invade so unexpectedly,
so spectacularly, glittering
like glass artillery shells falling
through the sunshine.

I feel nostalgic for surprise,
for the bracing ozone breath
of wet earth, petrichor, knowing
the difference now between then
and this. Knowing we'll never
know as little as we knew together
yesterday afternoon, captured
and then briefly captivated,
by an uninvited rain.

James Lilliefors / Naples, Florida

Dear Euphrosyne / Joy Gaines-Friedler

Goddess of Good Cheer

Come on. I know you are out there. I felt your presence early in life – you know, those times you saved me. I remember how you claimed the dark hallways of the hospital, showed me how to be the one to make a game of those wooden wheelchairs left over from the past—us kids that could, did some racing in those old things. And, when I felt frozen & alone, you showed up in the eyes of an orderly offering Graham Crackers & apple juice. And, now? The world is a tsunami; it's a wildfire. It's taloned & blood-thirsty. Stanley Kunitz says we have to learn to live with our own frailties. Thank you for sending me that turkey tom, the hen & her 8 poults. Dear, dear Euphrosyne, I apologize for the Bunsen burner I keep in my back pocket.

Joy Gaines-Friedler / Farmington Hills, Michigan

Winter Camp / Gary Finnegan

The middle distance absorbed her gaze. Her sleeves, her nerves, frayed. Moths had chewed holes in the coats of the children; the children had eaten nothing for days. Days were given to a journey, to the mantra *'things will be better when we get to the camp'*.

Now, her five-lined brow, like sheet music without a note, knew hope was a hollow lie. To be hungry and afraid and uncertain and moving was the second worst state of being. Hungry, afraid, uncertain and still, worse by miles.

'Did you wash those hands,' she said, clawing at the paws of the youngest, fussing at a tap. 'Got to wash those hands every time here, okay? Every time. Or you'll get sick, like her.'

She gestured a nod towards the next tarp, the day-old home of a family nursing a preschooler through the vomiting bug that was pinballing its way through the camp.

Her own youngest child, straw-haired and long-miled, stood passive and slack as the mother worked the gaps between the child's fingers with a cement-coloured flannel.

'Did you change that vest,' the mother asked. 'Gotta change damp vests or you'll go sick.'

She was curt, she knew that, but child management was the only available task and must be done with vigor. It was, she reminded herself, in the children's interests that their mother maintained standards. It's when you slide into apathy that you accept death's call.

The child was silent, and had been since they arrived. The three of them, the father having stayed behind, filed down the line until they reached an unribboned tent. There they tied the piece of cloth collected at the gate around a pole – their claim on 9m² of shelter,

open on one side to the brown dust and ceaseless flow of human anguish.

‘When is food coming, Mom?’

The older child, listless now, spoke for her sibling, spoke for everyone in the camp. The mother changed tack, opting not to lie, not to say ‘soon, love, just wait another while’.

Instead: ‘I don’t know.’

Would it have been better to stay and spend their hope under a familiar roof? As she wondered, an unwelcome competitive instinct surged within her at the sight of more new arrivals. ‘They need to shut the camp,’ she whispered in an exhaled breath, ‘place is full’.

How many could be fed here? How many could make it across the border when it reopens? Who will decide who stays, who goes, who eats, and how much?

She could do nothing. And it killed her to seek help while wishing it were denied to others.

‘Come here to me,’ she barked at the eldest child. ‘Those socks need changing.’

Garry Finnegan / County Kildare, Ireland

Love at 90 / Sharon Scholl

After sixty years love turns to sympathy,
a symmetry of suffering
one breaking body to another.

Lust shrinks to every night's embrace,
a clasp of hands, a shoulder hug,
whispered wish for restful sleep.

No need for entertainment,
just books, a nap, summer afternoons
watching squirrels scamper up the trees.

Days assume the rhythm of a heartbeat,
a comforting facsimile of life
tinged by the shadow of its ending.

Death's dread is nothing mythical
but knowing our twinned lives will cease,
leaving only half a being.

Sharon Scholl / Atlantic Beach, Florida

Pumpkins / Marisa P. Clark

When pumpkins rot, they shrink and wrinkle, grow hard,
but hardly stink. I didn't mean to keep the pumpkin
I brought home to surprise her. I had her close her eyes,
hold out a hand. When she saw the squat little gourd
nestled in her palm, she squealed in delight—then took
a marker, drew swift strokes of sparkling gold all over its rind.
Leaves appeared, and in a ring around its bottom, she wrote
Thank you! three times in cursive. That was in October.
At Thanksgiving she returned to find another pumpkin,
the size of a human head, that I'd decorated with black stripes
and whiskers, slit-pupiled golden eyes. She praised and touched
my face, she traced my tiger's lines. Mine was the first to show
signs of decay, a sunken spot darkening its temple. As a joke,
I saved them both to show what happened in her absence,
after which I planned to throw them away. For years,
I've watched them shrivel. Mine's scaly, black, and wildly
shrunken, slumped, its stem askew. I can wrap my hand
around the small one, squeeze its spiny crown. Long ago,
the words she wrote caved into its puckers, but I remember
what they say. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! It's true: we had
ample cause for gratitude. Sometimes I whisper You're welcome—
by which I mean This door is always open, come in, come home.

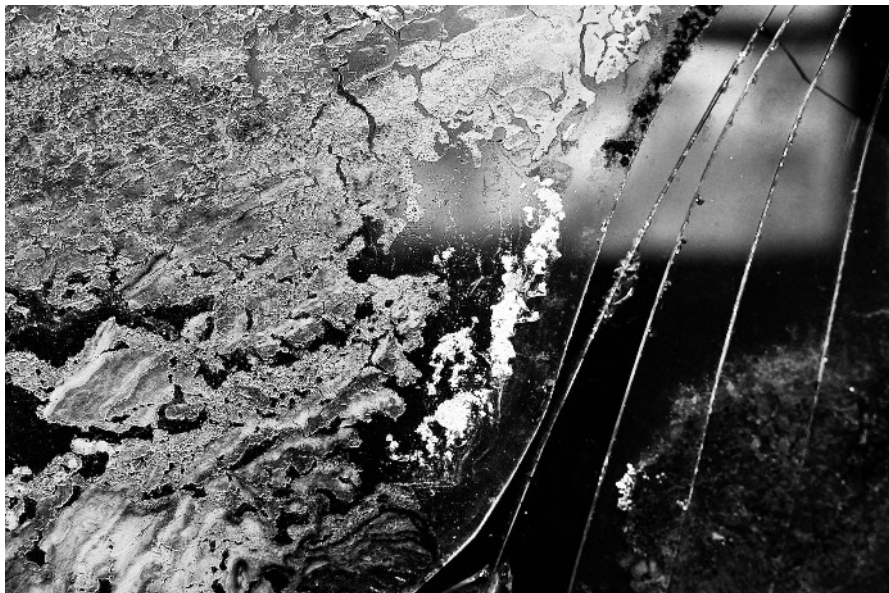
Marisa Clark / Albuquerque, New Mexico

Encounter / Julia Lisella

When she lifted her head to us we saw
she was not an old woman leaning over her walker,
in fact, probably much younger than any of us.
She stood upright, but moved slowly,
her strawberry blonde hair a little coarse,
her body slim and small, her outfit clean.
She wore a badge, something official
we could not understand. Later she said
it was a municipal bus pass. Her voice was coarse, too,
husky, and she looked at all four of us. All women standing together
noticing her face was bleeding. We couldn't see
where the blood came from. She said she was in
a car accident—no it was a week ago—but the glass in her face?
she explained, was emerging from the skin, breaking it at
the bridge of her nose. We gave her tissues. We asked
if we should call a cab to take her to the hospital,
get her help. No, I'm not alone, I'm okay, she said,
and then a man ambled over, tall, white, short-haired
and gestured to us to buy a pair of bejeweled flip flops
from his large trash bag. Only a dollar.
She looked at him, not with fear, but with an oldness in her eyes,
watching him, now steadier on her feet.
We began walking alongside the woman,
flicking the man away like a fly, to ask her,
are you okay? Are you safe? What is that man to you?
We handed her 3 fives for the cab that was waiting on the sidewalk.
One of us walked her to the door of the cab. We walked away
but kept turning to watch. She was crawling into the cab,
alone, with difficulty, and then we turned again and she'd
crawled out, and both were gone.

Julia Lisella / Medford, Massachusetts

Fractured Window on Junked Freedom Bus / William C Crawford



Photograph

William C. Crawford / Winston-Salem, North Carolina