

3rd
Wednesday



Spring 2024

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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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Table of Contents

Editor's note for Spring 2024.....	5
3 rd Wednesday Annual Poetry Contest.....	6
<i>My Grandmother in the Bath</i> / Fran Rose Schumer.....	8
<i>Day After the Death of Queen Elizabeth II</i> / Diana Dinverno.....	9
<i>Interruptions</i> / Stefan Balan.....	11
<i>Carry On</i> / Florence Murry.....	13
<i>Craft Talk</i> / Tori Grant Welhouse.....	14
<i>Learning the Violin Late in Life</i> / Donna Davis.....	16
<i>The Perpetual Tourists</i> / Donna Davis.....	17
<i>Hex of Shapes</i> / Denny Marshall.....	18
<i>The Kiss</i> / Rick Blum.....	19
<i>Becoming Who Dad Was in 1973</i> / Alfred Fournier.....	20
<i>Poem for Pleasures that Never Come Again</i> / Alfred Fournier.....	21
<i>Worst-Case Scenario</i> / Donna Pucciani.....	22
<i>Brindled Night</i> / Sarah Elkins.....	23
<i>Planter Fish</i> / Gary Wadley.....	24
<i>Let's Get You Out of Those Wet Clothes</i> / Jim Daniels.....	25
<i>At Whatnot Pond</i> / Richard Jordan.....	26
<i>The Last Osprey</i> / Richard Jordan.....	26
<i>The Great Fall</i> / David James.....	27
<i>One of the Gods</i> / Amy Sedivy.....	28
<i>Threnody</i> / Cynthia Ventresca.....	28
<i>Pillars to Dream</i> / Carella Keil.....	29
<i>It Wasn't Like Us</i> / Dannye Powell.....	30
<i>Stars in Her Eyes</i> / Andrena Zawinski.....	31
<i>I Trade in My 23-Year-Old Car for Another 23-Year-Old Car</i> / Lana Ayers.....	32
<i>The Ferryman</i> / Agnieszka Tworek.....	33
<i>A Cache of Antique Postcards</i> / Leslie Schultz.....	33
<i>Then Lakshmi</i> / Jean Biegun.....	34
<i>Space Dinosaur</i> / Phillip Temples.....	35
<i>Immigrants</i> / Richard Widerkehr.....	36
<i>The Greatest Catch by Willie Mays</i> / Matthew Johnson.....	37
<i>Sailing Past St. John</i> / David Milley.....	37
<i>Kudum!</i> / Alexander Barr.....	38
<i>Your Place in This World</i> / Jake La Botz.....	39
<i>Stroke of Loneliness</i> / Denny Marshall.....	42

<i>Quaff</i> / Terry Blackhawk.....	43
<i>Jumping the Turnstile</i> / Ryan Harper.....	43
<i>We Should Be In Miami</i> / Salvatore Difalco.....	44
<i>Eyes to See</i> / A. J. Saur.....	45
<i>October in Adams County</i> / Philip Lisi.....	46
<i>Family Photo</i> / Taya Kesslau.....	47
<i>Estate Sale</i> / David Chorlton.....	48
<i>Necessity</i> / Sian Jones.....	49
<i>Black Dress</i> / Lisa Friedman.....	50
<i>Eclipse</i> / Carella Keil.....	52
<i>The DVD</i> / Lawrence Bridges.....	53
<i>Robot Apology with Dahlias, with Mums</i> / Margie Duncan.....	54
<i>Can You See the Moon?</i> / Nan Jackson.....	55
<i>Raining Men</i> / Elisabeth Harrahy.....	56
<i>Tennis</i> / V. P. Loggins.....	57
<i>Ferns</i> / David Southward.....	58
<i>Alive</i> / Katherine Edgren.....	59
<i>Vine Spoiler</i> / Gary Wadley.....	60

Editor's note for Spring 2024

This is the annual poetry contest issue of 3rd Wednesday. Our contests work a little different from most. For one thing, judging begins when the first entry arrives. As they come in, our contest judge sorts them into submissions that are in contention and those which are not, refining her list continuously as new entries come in, always keeping a dozen or so entries for the final judging. After an entry has been identified as not in contention, we check to see if the author/poet has chosen to have their poems considered for inclusion in the magazine as a “regular submission”, a second chance as it were. If they have, the poems are then referred to our regular staff of editors for evaluation. Many of the poems in this issue came to us as contest entries, but ended up being published through the second chance option.

Each of our contest winners receives the same award of \$100 and is identified as a “Contest Winner”. We do not award first, second and third prizes. In addition to the winners, our judge has also awarded two honorable mentions, poems of outstanding merit that did not win one of the three prizes.

Over the next few issues, I'm highlighting the regular editorial staff, all volunteers, who keep this magazine running. For this issue I want to recognize and thank our Art Editor, Judith Jacobs, who fills our pages with an endless stream of gorgeous visual art.

Judith earned a B. S. in Design from the University of Michigan in 1964. She has exhibited her artwork for in regional and national shows and in arts publications. A former collage artist, she now imports photos of graffiti, popular culture images, and her own previous work into her computer, then layers, manipulates and recombines them. Her most recent ink prints reflect her interest in creating the illusion of collage and rough urban walls with their graffiti and peeling posters. Her digital work can be seen on her website, www.judithjacobs.com

3rd Wednesday Annual Poetry Contest

This year's contest judge is Ronnie Hess, writer and poet who grew up in New York City, attended the Lycée Français de New York and Julia Richman High School, and graduated from Hunter College, the City University of New York. She earned a master's degree in history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Ronnie is the author of seven poetry chapbooks as well as two award-winning culinary travel guides, *Eat Smart in Portugal* and *Eat Smart in France*, both from Ginkgo Press. Her poetry is featured in several recent anthologies. Ronnie has contributed to many publications – national, regional and local including, *Saveur*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. She was restaurant critic for several years for *Madison Magazine* and was a freelance arts critic for *The Capital Times*. You can find her on the web at ronniehess.com.

It's not easy judging a poetry contest. Hundreds of entries with a variety of themes, styles, and voices. In other words, a wide range. Can I confess that I thought some of the poets needed to do more work before submitting their poems? Can I admit that I like narrative poems, where poets have stories to tell?

What surprised me most was that many submissions featured long, multi-page poems, and the bigger surprise that they sustained me, stayed with me for days. I was pleased to see the interest in form — rhymed couplets, haibuns, for example — along with experimental poems. While some of the poems disappointed me with what I'll just call ordinary language, many poems showed a real love of words, a fluency and musicality that lifted them (and me) up.

Ronnie Hess

"My Grandmother in the Bath" does what only good poems can — draw portraits of people, their hardscrabble lives, their place in our own family history. Poems to break your heart. Of course we make our own mistakes, realizing our errors too late. The descriptions here are often breathtaking -- "apples she baked until they were soggy, sweet, defeated" -- yet anchored in the everyday places, like a hot bath, where you can be lonely "and have time to think about the pain."

"The Day after the Death of Queen Elizabeth" is a deft and moving haibun that combines family and English history. I was swept along by the two pasts, the two chronologies, which are told in luminous and fine detail. Like the poet, rendezvousing with an 87-year old cousin she's never met, I wanted this meeting, this reading "to stretch into years." We are in "lush countryside," indeed.

"Interruptions" is a location poem that in its tightness and painterliness sets the scene with humor, tenderness, and compassion. Can we catch the moments of our lives, remember them, celebrate them, let them go? Please, yes, yes, yes. Well done!

Honorable Mentions

In "Carry On" there is so much struggle. It's a matter of life and death. The reference to Randall Jarrell suggests perhaps an identification with the poet, the possibility that his despair led him to (disputed) suicide. It's hard to tell. Do we only have two choices — to be predator or prey? In giving one's self up, can prey become one with the sea hawk? The poem offers a haunting series of questions.

"Craft Talk" reminds me of something built, a structure, like the work the poet's spouse and his colleagues do — bricklayers, carpenters "sent home from work in a downpour, on the piss." They're in a pub and the poet has joined them, the only "bird" among them. She listens to their banter, tastes their Scotch. The language is earthy, peppered with slang, and it's wonderful. We are right there for "the taste of wardrobe./mushrooms, tugging at the root. Echo of boots scuffling," and to hear a kind of confession about the men's working class life where "Honesty is not the floorboards these sagas/shuffle on." Talk about a poem of place!

My Grandmother in the Bath / Fran Rose Schumer

Every morning before breakfast
in the dark in winter
in low light in early spring
she took a hot bath.
The heat soothed her arthritis,
loneliness was her disease.
Her husband died young
on the cold bathroom floor
she held him in her arms,
she wouldn't let go.
She wasn't prepared to be a widow —
Children grown and gone.
I ate breakfast with her on Thursdays
her table set days in advance,
with enough white fish, herring, and lox
to feed the Russian army.
I loved the dark, hard pumpernickel,
apples she baked until they were soggy, sweet, defeated.
Once she said she hadn't spoken to anyone in three days.
Once my mother bought her a massage.
Did you like it Grandma?
It's been so long since anyone touched me, she said.
I got busy. I stopped going.
She died, a stick in bed.
All these years later, I sit in a hot bath.
When you are lonely
you have time to think about the pain.
I sit in a hot bath
I write this poem.

Fran Rose Schumer / Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts

Day After the Death of Queen Elizabeth II / Diana Dinverno

I am meeting my 87-year-old first cousin, Frances, for the first time at Hampton Court's empty train station, its platform, open-air. After a long embrace, we study one another for features found in sepia-toned photographs of the long-vanished.

Cross a bridge that spans
the Thames, approach castle walls,
peer into the past.

Frances' mother, as a young woman, a girl, fled her mother's grave, her father's expectation she'd raise her siblings, still downy, full of noise and need. She escaped to London, built a quiet life, never revealed her past. When she died, her fortress — omissions, deceptions — collapsed.

Hampton Court's gilded
gates, closed. Steady morning rain.
Still, the flowers come.

In nearby Richmond, Frances points to her childhood home, a wisteria-covered facade near the remains of Richmond Palace, once home to Elizabeth I, destroyed in 1649 by Oliver Cromwell, that hero or villain who melted crowns, tried to blot out a bloodline, create a clean slate.

Butterfly bush plumes
sprout from every crevice, crack,
they nod, unrestrained.

A dog greets us at a pub's entrance. In the small garden, the sky blossoms, painterly blue. There's tea and talk of the long-ago choices that still sting. I rest my hand on my cousin's forearm, wrist. I want this afternoon to stretch into years.

The gentle, golden-
eyed lab leans against my legs,
rolls onto her back.

At Richmond Terrace, Frances points to a plaque describing the lush countryside, its important chronology authored by her mother, my enigmatic aunt, the town historian. Standing side-by-side, high above the Thames, our shared moments move like a river reshaping the land.

We watch cygnets glide,
meadowlands unfurl into
a Turner landscape.

Diana Dinverno / Troy, Michigan

Interruptions / Stefan Balan

We stepped inside the smell of aioli and thyme
and the sound of sax and Spanish guitar
at the table that became ours we sat
we were gentle with each other
the waitresses and the warmth of the place were smiling
the sangria and the tapas were smiling
the neighbors
the big eye window behind the musicians was white
unblinking with snow and its whiter interruptions
we heard them between conversations
broken
by the waft from the kitchen
by the fitful bites
by the startled aching of the hands
by the gust of the door letting dazed couples in
do you have a reservation no
no worries you don't really need one
just wanted to hear you say your names
a table emptied there in the corner
they looked around
at their table
at us
at the musicians
red and orange against white
smiled
walked to their table
and then we were done
we knew it from the black disk with the check vertical and neat
like a poem
unreadable
we stood and once more we took everything in
for the first time we saw the fanoos and the framed immigrant
founders
who never stood a chance to accustom
to all this
to winter

we looked at the neighbors we didn't
get to know
we looked at each other
at everything we so interruptingly witnessed
and we tipped well the band we really didn't
listen to
they meant something we would have liked to stand for
something they themselves would have liked to stand for
and we inhaled once more the aioli and thyme
and clover
and just before we could remember
the name of the waitress
of the songs
of the food
of the smells of others
if there were flowers on the table
or not
and walked out in the un
intermittent
cold.

Stefan Balen / Andover, Massachusetts

Honorable Mention

Carry On / Florence Murry

—after Randall Jarrell

A sea hawk perches on a high cliff
regal in his feathered cape.

Fearless, he scans the ocean where I swim. The smelt
dodges talons and death today.

And I ...

Do I sway august on the bent tree,
or am I a bare victim to the sea hawk's sweep?
I get through this day more prey
than stalker. It's dusk.

This is the place where despair slumps.
The blue pill fails to clear the dread. The internal critic
still around. My body shed in white mum's
florets—my shroud, my shame.
Unmask me, call me out, show me your noble way.

A part missing, the search still on ...
I am ready. Shower me with plumage.

Osprey

When you come for the bullhead that swims in the sea
take life and run with it. Take my lungs, my bone,
my heart and wrap me in flight. Clutch me fast.

You know me. Stand solid
in the highest bare tree. I am with you. I am with you.

Florence Murry / Orange, California

Craft Talk / Tori Grant Welhouse

The men shake off the rain.
Coarse-fingering hair the color of set concrete—
dim gray, Davy's gray, gray, gray.
Shoulder to shoulder at the bar for a drink.
A pint perhaps, a bottle. Bitter. Ale.
Slick with sweat and condensation. Conversation.
The acoustics of bricklayers and carpenters
sent home from work in a downpour, on the piss.
Maybe they'll return to work tomorrow.
Maybe they'll see where the drinking takes them.
My Scottish husband invites me from a pay phone.
I wonder about the brass knocker. Heraldry of pub names.
The Grant Arms. The Red Lion. The Swan.
My ridiculous American confidence.
The graft of each day. Bodies bending and lifting,
hands calloused as tree bark. Drift of cement powder,
sawdust, stamp of working class. I am three-sided
strange.
Foreign. Classless. Clearly the only bird.
Sipping Scotch and fizz in a bell-shaped glass.
Scotch has the taste of wardrobe,
mushrooms, tugging at the root. Echo of boots scuffling.
Lack of windows on the public side. Not even the flounce of a
curtain.
Dartboards. Beer signs. Rough partitioning.
I meet the Handsome One, the Desert Rat and the Damn
Geordie.
They call him the Scotch Bastard.
Only a mate would dare.
He laughs like a drying machine off level—
a grumbling phenomenon of inches.
Nobody notices the working man.
Story after story of getting away with it.
Chuffed to be British, Irish, Welsh, Scots
with a common allegiance to chancers.
Materials go missing off a job site.

Natural gas gets rerouted from the street.

A chaos of men earning cash in hand.

What my Scottish husband stashed away,
he only confesses when buckled.

Stories teeter, legless, a rocky road of
accents. Claustrophobia of rain without
windows. Honesty is not the floorboards these sagas
shuffle on. He was lucky

he didn't get nicked. Hoi polloi! Hoi polloi!
How they love a singsong.

Virtue is a cul-de-sac for toffs.

A teeming raucousness. They say cobblers
to my veracity. The less-than room is steaming.

Tori Grant Welhouse / Suamico, Wisconsin

Learning the Violin Late in Life / Donna Davis

Artists can only look at their inspiration obliquely, never directly,
or else they risk losing it altogether, the way Orpheus lost his love
Eurydice
by looking at her in the underworld . . . Tom Jokinen, CBC Radio

It's midnight, and I'm alone,
facing the misty window in the den,
tuning my violin with a plastic pitch pipe.
I ride the evening sky as Orpheus with his lyre
crossed the dark waters of the river Styx.

My awkward fingers twist on each string.
Arthritic sticks of bones search
for the hidden sharps and flats
without a chart or map to guide me
down an ebony river of sound.

The mystery unfolds when I pause
and a young man with an unfamiliar accent
emerges from a video screen.
He gently shows me which strings
I should press and how to move the bow.

I tell him it may be way too late for this,
that it may have been too late when I was ten.
But I love this violin's embrace,
the essence of its shining shape,
its russet wood like fire in Hades' halls.

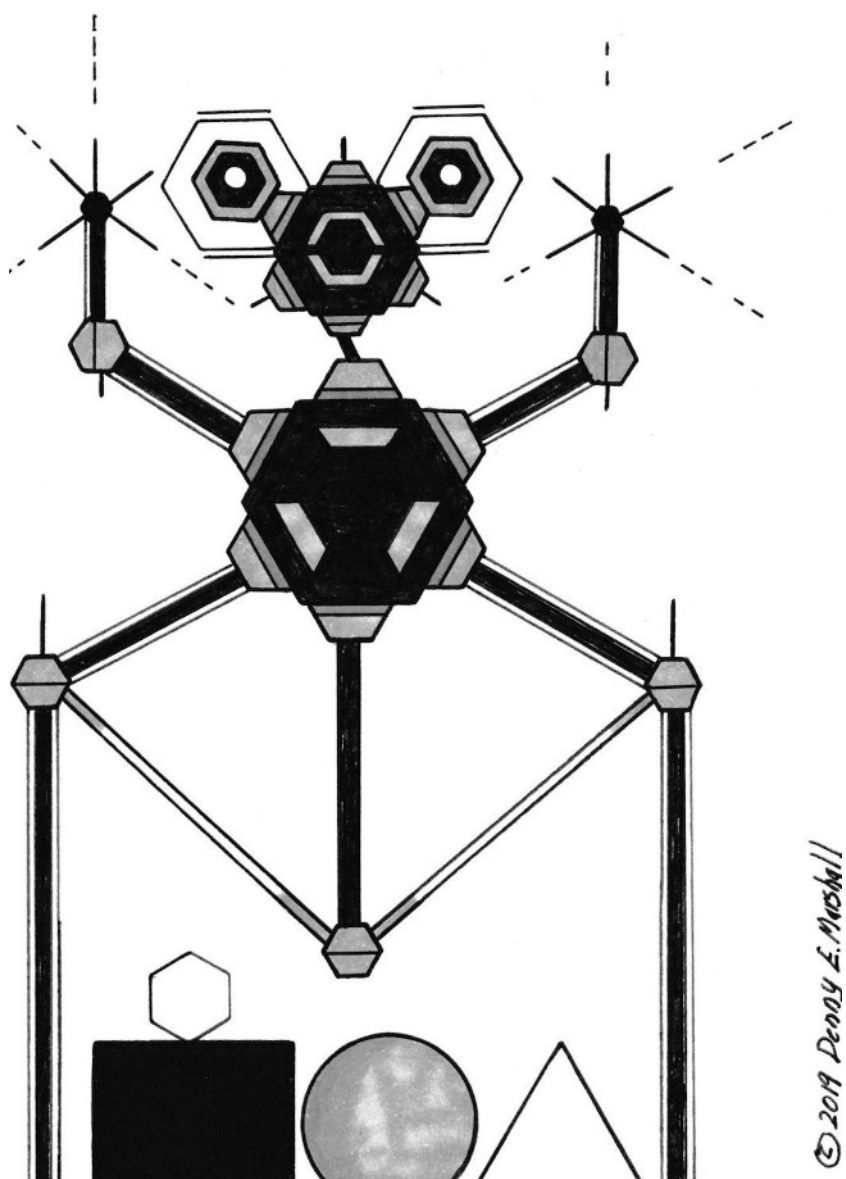
I don't care If I never play that well.
It's enough to find my inspiration in each note
while I still can clearly feel and hear,
to look forward, not back as Orpheus did,
and use what little time I've left to learn.

Donna Davis / Camillus, New York

The Perpetual Tourists / Donna Davis

Avoiding the predictable,
the mortal, binding, everyday same thing,
they have travelled the world together
for more than sixty years.
The wife's had too much Merlot on the plane.
She stumbles and thinks day is night.
Her husband's face is bloodless.
He stabs the cement floor of the airport garage
with two knobby wooden canes.
They have landed in this small city
to visit relatives that they hardly know.
A distant cousin carries their luggage to the car,
and they recount their week in Rio,
the giant statue of Christ the Redeemer
with helicopters circling its 92-foot arm span.
Memories blend together:
Penguins in Antarctica are ornery cusses;
Europe not a favorite destination,
too westernized and familiar.
But Finland is lush and green in summer
with emerald spruce trees shaped like Christmas candles.
The husband can't get into a car without help.
His doctor told them it won't be long.
Next month, they'll cruise the Panama Canal,
make plans to chase the highway, the sky, the five oceans,
the undying arc of the Earth.

Donna Davis / Camillus, New York



Drawing
Denny Marshall / Lincoln, Nebraska

The Kiss / Rick Blum

We hadn't seen each other in awhile, so when we came face to face at a sombre gathering, more than a brief moment clasping each other's hand was called for; this

was clearly a kiss-on-the-cheek occasion, not part of my usual routine when greeting friends, or even relatives – not since my mother declared that

we were not the kissing type when departing a visit with cousins, who demonstrably were kissing (and hugging) people. Thus, it might have been due to inexperience

that when I leaned forward to place a small peck on her left cheek, she was simultaneously leaning in to perform the same action on my right cheek.

Quickly assessing the situation, I deftly switched to her right cheek as the destination for my modest show of affection. But she had also sized-up the pending coupling

of misdirected puckerings, and pivoted along with me, so that we were once again headed on a collision course rather than a gentle docking of lips alongside cheeks.

So, once again I flipped the rudder and headed back to my original destination – her left cheek – just as she, likewise, tacked to her left. Alas, our forward momentum caught

up with us before either one could make a third course correction and, thus, our mouths met squarely in unexpected intimacy – the nondescript, mutual lips-on-cheek expression

of friendship now but a futile aspiration. But she didn't flinch at my faux pas, nor do much more than smile briefly before turning her attention to the next mourner in line

behind me – another friend of her deceased husband (who lay silently in a polished wood casket a few yards away), hopefully for her, one more adept at social niceties than I.

Rick Blum / Bedford, Massachusetts

Becoming Who Dad Was in 1973 / Alfred Fournier

The newspaper folded on the front steps
in morning cold will later over coffee
shout its feverish noise about the world,
and it's always as if everything
you've come to rely on is falling apart.
So you scramble to hold the pieces together,
slip into work boots, pull closed the door.
They're sending young men into war,
the cost of eggs is rising, oil embargo
brings long lines at the pump.

Meanwhile, in 2023, I look away
from the computer screen, remember
shoveling snow with you once. It was deep
and you needed to get to work.
We each started on one side of the car,
met in the middle, leaving a clear path
to the street. We could solve
simple problems like that.

Today, I rise. I shave. Your face
in the mirror reminds me who I am
in a world grown strange since you left.
The news still shouts its mad apocalypse,
but there is work to be done.
I understand you better now. Those hands,
forging a life from the fire inside.
I've kept my eyes on the path.
See you on the other side.

Alfred Fournier / Phoenix, Arizona

Poem for Pleasures that Never Come Again / Alfred Fournier

for Roberta

We didn't know we were rich,
searching the lawn on hands and knees
for the elusive four-leaf clover.
Rich with the sun on our backs.
Rich with the scent of earth and chlorophyll,
the buzz of bees, bending stalks
with their pollen-laden weight.
Rich with each other, Little Sis.

Later there would be a scolding
for the grass stains on our pants,
but scoldings never troubled us much.
How we grinned at each other,
confined to chairs in opposite corners.

We never found our lucky clover that day.
But what did we need with luck anyway?
We'd found something rarer than rare
in each other. On our backs in the grass,
eyeing the blue and infinite sky.

It was time and nature pulled us apart.
You developed breasts and I
found a new friend, and our old games
faded away. Never a harsh word traded
between us. Those days passed as naturally
as summer cools into autumn,
as clover blooms then browns, and the grass
disappears beneath a blanket of snow.

Alfred Fournier / Phoenix, Arizona

Worst-Case Scenario / Donna Pucciani

We are watching television one evening.
Silent snow descends, or rain on the roof,
clattering like flung pebbles.

He holds a tumbler of Scotch.
Suddenly it drops to the carpeted floor,
the ice clinking, the crystal unbroken.

He slumps in his chair, having just changed
channels on the remote control with the other
hand, Nordic noir to British mystery.

He is gone.
We have just filed the taxes,
the other inevitability of mortal existence,

startling yet predictable. Overhead,
the stars blink as if just awakening,
although by the time their light reaches us,

they are already dead. I have rehearsed
this moment, with sirens and flashing lights.
Better for him to enter heaven

sipping Johnny Walker Red, quickly,
sans drama or the dull
lengthy demise inflicted on some.

We still recognize each other, speak of nothing,
up to the last moment. But to explain it all,
there are no subtitles.

Donna Pucciani / Wheaton, Illinois

Brindled Night / Sarah Elkins

Leaves falling in the half-light
of a first quarter moon
at the end of October
sound like the steps of a small dog
wandering in the yellows
beneath a ginkgo.
I cross my neighbor's yard
with the flashlight off
because my ears are sharper
than my eyes.

Each footfall I turn toward
is a dry maple or oak walking
down the air to ground.
All the leaves have saved tonight
for their collapse.

My nose searches, too,
for the corpse flower bouquet
of the old dog's dying mouth—
his purple petal-rot breath,
serrated hangdog lips, one remaining
canine, soft and loose at the gums.

Spine bowed, hips splayed, flailing
to right himself on the kitchen tile,
I held him up around the middle
like a mother teaching a baby to walk.
Then he walked right out the door
on quiet leaf feet into the brindled night.
Now, he's impossible to find—
his dying hidden
against the backdrop
of every other dying thing.

Sarah Elkins / Lewisburg, West Virginia



Drawing
Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky

Let's Get You Out of Those Wet Clothes / Jim Daniels

and into the rest of your life.

Let's get you out of those cute freckles
and into the angry spray of acne.

Let's get you out of that speech
and back into grunts and groans.

Let's pack up our troubles
and lug them around in matching backpacks.

Let's dry those tears
and get you a new phone number.

Let's brush those crumbs off your lap
and get you a new lap.

Let's not cry over spilled milk
lest it become sour grapes.

Let's get you bandaged up
and back into the ring.

Let's hock the ring
and go on a bender.

Let's get you out of that deathbed
and into your coffin.

Let's save your wet clothes
for a rainy day.

Jim Daniels / Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

At Whatnot Pond / Richard Jordan

Not much to look at in the light of day,
this manufactured mill pond by the strip mall,
its once sandy bank now gone to mud

and choked with loosestrife. But come nightfall
it has space to hold the moon, stars pinned
to a shimmering tapestry. Sometimes

I stand here past midnight with only the sound
of a muskrat gnawing reeds, or maybe an owl
off in the distance, just me and always a heron

ghostly on the opposite shore. I'm practicing
to be that still and patient. Already minnow
after minnow slips through my shadow.

The Last Osprey / Richard Jordan

Not even the threat of snow this dark October
morning can drive the osprey from his perch

atop a twisted maple overlooking
Mirror Lake. A few young blue jays dive-bomb

with piercing shrieks, wings flapping wildly,
but soon they fly away defeated. All

the other osprey weeks ago went south,
while this one still plucks pickerel beyond

my casting reach from frigid water. To bring
the bird up close I focus my long lens.

Then, finally, he turns to face me.
The two of us silent, here together,

blinking through the season's first wet flakes.

Richard Jordan / Littleton, Massachusetts

The Great Fall / David James

It's late but I'm awake in my mother's home
after picking her up off the kitchen floor this evening.
She felt dizzy and nauseous and then fell, hitting her head,
a one-inch cut bleeding her white hair pink.

I'm staying overnight as a precaution—she's 89.
She's damn lucky she didn't break a rib bone
or hip, didn't crack a fibula or ankle.
One wrong step at her age can spell disaster.

It's hard not to see my future in her frail body,
if I even live that long. I'm taking notes, learning
what to do, what not to do. It's a known
fact that we all meet our maker to plead

our case, but many refuse to believe it.
My mom sleeps in the next room; my job is to hear
if she falls again. And she will fall, as will I, as will you.
Each little life ripples in the great sea like a pebble thrown.

David James / Linden, Michigan

One of the Gods / Amy Sedivy

One of the gods wanders into my backyard and asks if I have a map. Speechless, I retrieve a map of the world from my house and sit next to the god at the picnic table. We roll it out and then while he studies the map, I study him. I think this god is a man not a god, for he looks old and tired, with long flaxen hair streaked silver. But then I see his impish grin and know he cannot be mortal. Where are we, he asks. I think a god must know where he is but still, I point to California, then slide my finger to Los Angeles. A tiny dot on a world map. Ah, he says. I see where I went wrong. The god quivers like a flame, folds the map very carefully and hands it to me. I bow. The god bows. He turns, walks away into a dense fog that suddenly surrounds the trees in my backyard. He is gone. I open the map and see faint silver traces, like mercury, sliding across the world. For an instant, I hear every heartbeat and my laughter rises like a blue jay into the sky.

Amy Sedivy / Los Angeles, California

Threnody / Cynthia Ventresca

And so she goes. Last night's frying pan on the stove, kitchen drawers cluttered, diaries she meant to burn in a chest at the foot of her bed. When death reaches down it finds her in the lowest room's furthest corner and closes in. All that mattered only mattered because she made it matter. And the curly hair, bad eyes, small scar on the left jaw--gone to ash. Wind chimes sway from the side of the house as she is scattered beneath a lilac bush she planted summers back, wearing cut offs and a bee sting on her shoulder, digging twice as wide as the root ball. Someone called it beautiful, a sort of coming full circle, to sow her with sweetness.

Cynthia Ventresca / Wilmington, Delaware

Pillars to Dream / Carella Keil



Digital Collage
Carella Keil / Toronto, Ontario, Canada

It Wasn't Like Us / Dannye Powell

to throw back our heads
and clap and keep on clapping,
but there we were
in the Luxembourg Gardens,
our eight-year-old granddaughter
racing in an old-fashioned pedal car
around and around the dirt track
with a dozen scrappy Parisian children.
She was in the lead, by golly,
and we leaned forward, shouting
her name, no longer the couple
back home counting out pills
into little plastic squares.
We watched the child's corduroy coat
soften to velvet, her hair a storm
of sparks as she pedaled faster
and faster, finishing first – *first!*
How we clapped as she stepped
out of the car, this girl
who would marry too soon,
whose heart would be crushed
time after time in the years to come –
this girl whose coat was askew,
curls loose, sunshine spilling all over her.

Dannye Powell / Charlotte, North Carolina

Stars in Her Eyes / Andrena Zawinski

My father smacked my mother in the chest with a softball he pitched, a curveball the batter missed in the Pressed Steel break yard where striking hell raisers once fought company goons. Nothing soft about that ball or their meeting as she let out a wail clutching her breast, tears coursing across her cheeks as she shrieked “I see stars!”

And as that story goes, it was love at first sight, or so they said. He lifted her up from the ground and off her feet while she winced from pain. It was if some meteor had flown off course to her heart to make a moment, once you’ve had it, forgivable and unforgettable. The rest of their lives would go that way beneath the constellations of lost jobs and hard luck—Orion tightening the belt at food lines for boxes of powdered milk and blocks of surplus cheese and those unannounced welfare checks on their two kids in a cold water flat.

There would be his drinking binges and her blackened eyes, his strap across the children’s thighs and his bouts begging forgiveness turning their pain into his, even a couple of commitments into the Veteran’s Hospital for electroshock, talk, and drug therapies. She was always there, even after dragging in after a night shift the kids could sleep through, always there waiting for him on the rolling green lawn outside his ward for his release to ride the streetcar home, holding hands and smiling, everything even if unforgettable ultimately forgivable.

Who knows why they stayed together. as he kept getting lost in gambling, boozing, and fighting—a roughneck waiting for luck to turn that never did. Maybe it was a meteor disguised as a baseball that brought them together in something bigger than the two of them could have ever conceived alone, but unlike Cepheus and Cassiopeia they would not live on together forever.

Decades after his young death clutching his own heart, she asked, her eyes brimming with tears, and as if I could know: “What did your father ever see in me?” And I answered, with all certainty as if I did know: “Stars in your eyes.”

Andrena Zawinski / Alameda, California

I Trade in My 23-Year-Old Car for Another 23-Year-Old Car / Lana Ayers

Today my right leg resists my intention to walk,
to bend at the knee, step up, set down, again

and again without sending a screaming pain
all the way from my shin to my neck

but I keep quiet and keep moving like
Frankenstein's monster made of too many

odd parts, though this is the original me,
not an upgrade, retool, or trade-in.

Akin to my beloved car who drank in the sea air
for too long, rusted from the engine out,

door frames atilt, back hatch refusing to latch,
and just plain seized up, refusing to move again.

Now, I live by the silent river missing
the steady whoosh of waves and salt spray.

Instead of down to the beach, I walk up
the hills into forest and down again,

traipsing the mossy slopes of being old.
My new old car works about as well

as you'd expect, engine grinding
as if gasping for breath even on flat ground.

I know how she feels and wouldn't
have it any other way.

Lana Ayers / Newport, Oregon

The Ferryman / Agnieszka Tworek

What does Charon do while waiting
for a new customer?
Does he skip stones on the River Styx
and scare sleeping frogs?
Is his boat his home,
or does he have a pied-à-terre?
Does he ever pet Cerberus's three heads?
Does he ever sneeze, whistle or sing?
Does he sip whiskey from a flask,
or is Stygian water enough to keep him going?
Does he ever get tendonitis in his wrists
from so many centuries of rowing?
Does his boat ever get waterlogged?
Does Charon ever get a day off?
Did he ever fall in love
with one of his clients
on the way to the underworld?
Does he ever dream of being a passenger?

Agnieszka Tworek / Staten Island, New York

A Cache of Antique Postcards / Leslie Schultz

What is clear—under fading,
blur-softened pencil
lines, postal
stamps affixed
askew forever—
is that what we build
dwarfs us,
outlives us, ultimately
mocks us in the present
as news from the past.

Leslie Schultz / Northfield, Minnesota

***Then Lakshmi* / Jean Biegun**

*Good-bye, Ruby Tuesday. Who could
hang a name on you?*

—Keith Richards, *The Rolling Stones*

I met a young woman back in the 80s
who renamed herself at every turn
her life took. Picked her own name

and when. First, last, maybe middle
if she fancied one at a new-horizon time.
She'd be in her 70s currently, and I wonder

what she goes by. How easy is it to change
from, say, a Jane into an Isis, from a Baxter
into a Harmony ... to know your ID

is a here-today-gone-tomorrow deal
like the Buddhists claim?
She was a pretty, White, free-spirit type

married to a liberal, bearded rabbi who
seemed to think she was cool. I could tell.
Lakshmi she became when they married.

I wonder who she is now, where, and how.
Does she ever miss Jane? I don't want to die
with my third last name. Nor the two priors.

I'd like to do what she did—shuck the past
like a too-tight snake skin, pluck from a juicy
mango tree, skip choking vines.

Jean Beigun / Davis, California

Space Dinosaur / Phillip Temples



Photograph
Phillip Temples / Watertown, Massachusetts

Immigrants / Richard Widerkehr

Near the Atlantic Ocean, in Coney Island
winter was the deal breaker. The east wind
on our threadbare stoop near Neptune Avenue,
the Mermaid Theater—you could see edges
of faux-marble steps worn thin by foot-soles.
Our dogged prayers not for joy
but respite from Aunt Helga's stories—
basement ceilings, sweatshop threads,
Larry selling apples on the street.
No one dreamed of cedar chests
or heard of Belgian lace. For luck
we learned to cast spilled salt
behind us like bread crumbs,
to look beyond the gray-white sky
which said, You can't leave. The cracks
in sidewalks did not have to tell us,
Don't lick chapped lips. We knew
our children would do better than us.
We should not have to tell you
it is no small thing to have worked
to prove an ocean wrong.

Richard Widerkehr / Bellingham, Washington

***The Greatest Catch by Willie Mays* / Matthew Johnson**

The day Willie Mays made his greatest catch was not filmed.
He has said in interviews it was not
The famous grab in the '54 World Series versus Cleveland,
Considered by many as the best defensive play
In the history of baseball, but just some play he made
During some random, dog-day of summer game in Pittsburgh.
There are no paintings or replays of Willie Mays
In some arbitrary inning at Forbes Field,
Where the maestro apparently pulled off his most extraordinary feat;
It'd be like Coltrane saying he never played better after belting his horn
In some tucked away dive in the middle of nowhere.
It's appropriate that the best player ever made his best play
To only a splattering of witnesses.
Moses was the only one who ever saw God's face,
Since it was too perfect for man to see, and I'd like to think
Willie May's catch in Pittsburgh was something like that too.

Matthew Johnson / Greensboro, North Carolina

***Sailing Past St. John* / David Milley**

(remembering my father)

Hands on cruise ship railing, you looked east,
past the islets rising from the sea. The sun rose,
and we stood together, without words.

We seldom used words. Words were a danger
to us both. You had no words to say, "I love you."
All my words could never earn your pride.

But sailing past St. John, only in that silent dawn,
not before that day or since, you tacked in from afar,
and looked at me, and smiled.

David Milley / West Berlin, New Jersey

Kudum! / Alexander Barr

Okay, their empire didn't suit everyone
especially near the end when it turned nasty
and their sultans often murdered their younger brothers
and I'm guilty of Orientalism, but
indulge me for a moment because
here in traffic-congested Istanbul
the music these men are making
in their long embroidered robes
is sizzling all my sinews.

I love the way the drummer looks up to the side
whenever he twirls his sticks
looking at what? Who knows? Doesn't miss a beat
and I'm touched by his palpable pride
but his youthful beard is nothing
to the thundering wide mustache of the older man beside him
(a scimitar in his belt) crashing cymbals.
Four others are crashing cymbals,
while the timekeeper thumps the paving with his staff.

But what's really killing me
is the sound of those long black pipes I think
are called kavals or zurnas.
Do I say their notes are throaty, mournful, harsh,
or simply give up describing them? Because
what matters is that they make me want to march
in a glittering pageant waving a long silk banner
blazoned with snake-like gold calligraphy
while I wear a long embroidered robe
and a tall crimson cylinder hat draped with fine white cotton
or maybe a giant onion of a turban
to the beat of that pair of drums they call Kudum.
Kudum! Kudum!

Alexander Barr / Fishguard, Wales

Your Place in This World / Jake La Botz

“Tommy, you got a Bardo?”

“Washington, Ramirez, Pucinski. Yep, we got him.”

A laugh from behind startles Steve. The joy in it reminds him of his Mom. He was only four when she died, but he remembers her voice — how playful and musical it was. “Pure country,” people used to say. Nothing like the hard Chicago talk — with rocks in the consonants and the threat of throwing them at you in the vowels — that came out of his father, Ernie, and everyone else in the neighborhood.

Steve turns and sees a man in tatters mumbling between giggles — searching the walls as if he’s lost something there.

“Hey you, warming center’s down the block. Get moving,” the desk sergeant orders.

The laughing man’s eyes land on Steve as he moves toward the door. The two rest their gaze on each other a moment before the man begins giggling again and walks out. Eager to hear more of the joyful laughter, Steve almost follows him.

“Bail is two bills. Got that on you?”

“Yeah,” Steve says, pulling a wad out of his pocket.

The desk sergeant accepts the rubber-banded roll and eyeballs the boy. “What’s your name, kid?”

“Steve Bardo.”

“Let’s see some I.D. Why aren’t you in school, anyways?”

There had been a birth certificate a long time ago. Steve saw it once when he was little. Baby Boy Bardo, it said on it. He thought it was a special document — one just for babies, to show what sex they were. He figured the real one would come when he was older. Truth was his parents never legally named him, though his Mom had started calling him Steve after seeing the Steve McQueen movie Bullit. Before that it was either “the kid” or Ernie’s favorite — an initialism from the birth certificate — “Triple B,” or just “TB.”

“I got a pass from the principal,” Steve says, handing the sergeant a note written by Ernie’s girlfriend, Loraine.

The sergeant reads the bogus letter, shakes his head, and asks, “Which school you go to?”

“Schneider,” Steve answers, hesitatingly.

“Who’s your homeroom teacher?”

“Mr. Napoli.”

Within his first month at Schneider it became clear to his teachers that Steve couldn’t keep up with classwork. As such he’d earned the label “learning disability” and was moved from Mr. Napoli’s room to a special class in the basement which didn’t have a regular homeroom teacher. Kids of different ages, from fifth to eighth grade, were in the basement class for special reasons too. Besides the learning disabilities there were “bilinguals,” who came from foreign countries and couldn’t speak much English, and “social adjustments,” who yelled a lot and sometimes threw chairs. Steve understood the bilinguals needed English, but it wasn’t clear to him what the rest of them were supposed to be learning.

“Pull the guy, Tommy,” the sergeant says resignedly, handing the roll of cash to a younger cop and returning to his desk.

“Your count is off by three bucks,” the young cop says.

Steve pretend searches his pants for the three dollars he’d hoped would go unnoticed. The young cop smiles at the would-be con.

“You gotta find your place in this world, kid. Otherwise the wrong kinda place’ll find you. Catch my drift?” The cop says.

Steve moves to the window and watches the heavy snowfall turn parked cars on Western Ave. into white lumps. The clang of a metal door a few minutes later lets him know his dad is on the way.

“If I see your kid here again I’m calling DCFS,” the young cop says to Ernie as he marches him into the lobby.

“I hear you, officer. I’m going back to A.A. anyways,” Ernie says, with a wink aimed at Steve.

Ernie had brought the kid along to his court-ordered A.A. meetings a year earlier. Steve thought the church basement groups were like social adjustments or learning disabilities for grownups.

Whatever it was they were supposed to be learning down there, Ernie wasn't getting it. But Steve had come to realize something important sitting in the bowels of God's house: there were different floors for different folks, and he and Ernie belonged on the bottom. They were basement people — not meant to be upstairs praying in the real church, studying in the real school, or working in the real office. Though he understood well enough which floor he belonged to, Steve still didn't know how to fit in down there. Ernie, on the other hand — whether he was in the hole at the state pen, living in a dingy cellar “between places,” or sitting in a church basement sipping coffee — was a bonafide basement dweller who knew how to engage in every aspect of lower level life.

“I knew you'd come through for the ol' man, Triple B,” Ernie says with a canned laugh, as he steers his son toward the door.

Over time, though, Steve came to believe that nobody truly fit in with anybody anywhere in this world. It didn't matter if they were basement people, upstairs people, or even penthouse people. What gave it away was the huge amount of effort they put into acting and sounding the same as the others. He'd seen it on the streets, at school, and A.A., with grownups and kids alike. The tight boundaries of a given group — its permissible and prohibited words and actions — always made Steve nervous. But the most painful thing, the one that clued him in every time, was the fake laughter.

“Got any cash left?” Ernie asks as they leave the precinct.

Steve shakes his head.

“Fuck. I'm dog sick. Loraine's ass better be out on the street.”

As they pass the warming center Steve runs to the door and looks inside.

“They got coffee and rolls,” he says.

“Grab 'em quick, TB. We gotta get moving.”

Jake La Botz / St. Paul, Minnesota

Stroke of Loneliness / Denny Marshall



Drawing
Denny Marshall / Lincoln, Nebraska

Quaff / Terry Blackhawk

Give me a name for this aroma, scent
of earth, leaves succumbing and suffusing,
essence seduced from foliage and stem
by sun's subsiding dance with lengthening
dark. Let the warmth of days linger. Give me
childhood's scuff and push into mulched layers,
or there where the pine's golden needles coat
my path—Oh carpet of honey and bees-
wax, tell me who I was when I first breathed
in your profusion as hickory nut shells
and acorn caps crunch beneath my feet.

Terry Blackhawk / Hamden, Connecticut

Jumping the Turnstile / Ryan Harper

As quick as usual as needed
he approaches, unspared of ticks,
like every rider normal in the transfer,
until the burst of tactic: gymnastic
but careless as a fare hike his hands plant—
silent planche and he is vaulting, low arch
and swinging mute, a long cartoonish stride,
head level with the swipers paying
no mind to the man suddenly walking on air.
Clearing the apparatus, he breaks no gait, proceeding
easy as a fare hike to his platform,
light as the hustle that gets him by.

Ryan Harper / New York, New York

We Should Be In Miami / Salvatore Difalco

My thumbnail, purpled by hammer,
is doomed this winter morning.
The sunshine deceives, the air
out here will seize-up your nose.

Sitting on chairs of snow, we know
we are far away from Miami,
its chameleons and monarchs,
burnt orange dusks and blow.

We sit nodding, snug as grubs,
on a Sunday in mid-January,
smoking the air, or slapping
our thermal mittens together.

Give thanks to life, for giving us
this moment, frozen in time
as it were, but we aren't talking.
We are thinking of Miami.

But aren't you glad we're alive?
It could be otherwise:
black-curtained windows,
a Clydesdale-drawn hearse.

My thumbnail aches
in its thumb-sleeve tomb.
Alas, I have never claimed
to be a fucking handyman.

We are sitting out here in ten
below zero centigrade, so
pissed off we can't express
our peeves, our deepest bones.

We should be in Miami
bronzing on the beach or
drinking Margaritas from a fish tank
and singing Jimmy Buffet tunes off-key.

Salvatore Difalco / Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Eyes to See / A. J. Saur

You can cross your “t”s
and dot your “i”s and miss

entire minutes, lost
in A Sunday Afternoon

on the Island of La Grande Jatte
at which point

Seurat has got you
where he wants you—parked

between the heady trees,
the parasols of shade

headed toward you
or away—the duration

of day no longer
discrete moments

of contrast
like Jesus strolling

the sea, the moon
a dark spot above.

But all is not
what it seems, both

waves and particles
are at play

like those buffeting the boat
or that small dog bounding

the shadowy grass
in the painting’s foreground—leaping

into a patch of sun
as if by faith.

A. J. Saur / Grand Rapids, Michigan

October in Adams County / Philip Lisi

We pick apples together as we have always done.
I watch you working the orchard rows,
balancing two in one hand, then another two,
so tender in your consideration of each variety.

Pink Lady, Pixie Crunch, Thornberry—
names that tingle in the back of the tongue.
Somewhere in the mix of Jupiter and Scarlet Crush
is Grimes Golden, sweet-tasting mother of Delicious.

When Eve suggested to Adam that he pick one to share,
it might have been a Stoke Red, Honeycrisp, or Virginia Beauty.
Then again it may have been too hot in the Eden sun
to be thinking about making love.

Maybe she would have waited for a chill in air,
for a Fireside or SnowSweet that ripens later in the season,
then watched for his first blush,
tantalizing in those days of innocence.

You unload the last of the harvest,
Frostbite and Prairie Spy,
your arms dropping the bins straight down,
no sign of the gentleness from the morning.

In the evening, we stand at the kitchen counter,
cutting up quarters for sauce,
and I remember how you used to dance,
a blossom floating in the autumn air.

Philip Lisi / Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Family Photo / Taya Kessler

The picture could be from anyone's family,
hues of sepia and faded, the old ones sit
on the old couch, my kid sister front and center
holding some sweet drink in a white styrofoam cup.

She's looking straight out into the eyes of whomever,
us all, the family. Daring us to challenge her
in what she knows, which, unfortunately, is everything.

The everything that's too much for a child to know.
Not this child, though, my sister with the old soul,
a steady gaze and calm.

It warns there is a storm coming,
and another, and another coming for us.
Many will leave. Some are lost. The family,
always changing terrifically, terribly.

But in the end, whenever that is,
after all that once was, and all the new and good
and angry and sad that we bring to it mellows
the sharp points of the familial landscape,

the blood that nourishes our features and holds us
to the distinctions we were born to, will flow down
to our children, our children's children, and theirs too
and we will still be family.

Taya Kessler / Bellingham, Washington

Estate Sale / David Chorlton

Broken clouds adrift
between the seasons, signals on the way
to brittlebush and mallow. Where have all the old
songs gone?

They're stacked
in a neighbor's garage
now she's balanced on her life's edge.

A breeze
blows yesterday's rain away. Could be hospital,
could be she's wandering again
house to house with a smile
breaking through the overcast days.

Maybe
she reached the island she once saw
on television, but the weather
forecast says she has a windswept mind.
Everything's cheap

at the estate sale:
games, ornaments, the garden's
bright embellishments and
a sky that doesn't know

whether to darken
or to shine. Three CDs for a dollar. Fifty cents
a saucepan. More rain due
next week. Wind calling home
through a disconnected phone.

David Chorlton / Phoenix, Arizona

Necessity / Sian Jones

The need to write
the poem will pass.
If I don't notice
while I'm doing laundry
how one shirt, laid out
to dry on the wire rack,
crinkles like mycelium
under a microscope.

As long as,
while I'm folding,
I don't focus
on the alternating
current of texture
in the clothes,
cotton rough
like topsail canvas
or soft like a childhood
hush.

Or don't think of raw cotton
clutched in its own brittle,
thorny fists, or remember
all the history in the plant,
all the crimes in its midst.

Avoid beauty and allusion.
Avoid reckonings slow and fast.
Avoid references to who you're missing.
The need to write the poem will pass.

Sian Jones / Salt Lake City, Utah

It's in here somewhere.

I roll the musty suitcases away from the wall, their shiny decals shouting at me: Aloha! Fly Better, Air Emirates. La Pura Vita! Remnants of a life lived well. A stack of U-Haul boxes, weakened by neglect, looms tall among dust clumps and clingy webs. Kitchen Utensils. Photo Albums. Office Supplies. Ski Clothes. A nearly empty carton of Milk Bone Dog Biscuits flattened. Things I never bothered to unpack. Things I no longer need.

When did the light stop working? The hanging rod at the back of the closet seems much too far away; the dense forest of storage bags stand side by side like a copse of pines. I retrieve a light bulb from the storage cubby affixed to the entry wall and climb the easy two steps upward. Success. New light settles and shines; I hesitate, adjusting to the wash of memories that glow in the light.

I start from the right. The garment bag is dull with age. I reach across to pull open the zipper and feel the motes of disuse offend my nostrils. It's my most recently bought black-tie dress. Dark silk blue, pleats across the bodice; the by-hand stitching suggests the entire dress is made of one sweeping bolt of illuminant fabric. I wore it to the Leukemia and Lymphoma fundraiser a few winters back. More likely, I realized, it was twelve years back, before I moved. I have lost track of time. I hold the hem in my hand searching for the stain. I'd spilled a drink, a Cosmopolitan. Splashes of pink pearls disappeared into the precious textile before I could grab a white linen napkin. The cleaner warned that the scattered blots would likely mar the silk permanently, but I saw no evidence of the accident. The dress was pristine. I nodded to the gorgeous bodice before zipping it inside its vinyl home.

The floral gown I wore to my twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, alive with color and whimsy, practically pops out from the still-opening zipper. Fitted, with yards of billowing leaves and vines clustered along the bottom, it carries the phantom salty smell of the ocean. I run my finger over the shoulder strap, apologizing in my heart.

I see a lipstick-red sheath encased entirely in sequins that turned me into a movie star for one brief evening's soiree. A summer sundress

from a Garden Gala at the National Museum of Art downtown where I volunteered a docent. I have the dress I wore to my childhood friend's wedding: a tuxedo-cut suit of burbling raw silk in forest green that makes me laugh gently as I stow it away. It was an Irish wedding complete with bagpipes and a hilarious appearance of the Knights of Columbus in their full-dress uniforms. There is a somber cement-gray pantsuit worn to honor Hillary Clinton at some women's event. Such fun. I'd had such a fun life.

Finally. There it is. Black as cold lava in perfect posture from the padded hanger, heavy as a drape.

"Don't wear black," my mother used to say. "Black is for mourning." I flounce the dress as if waking it up. It's in good shape. No hanger marks or discolorations. One of the buttons is slightly dull as if abraded, and the sleeve cuffs need a swipe from the iron but otherwise, it's fine.

The phone rings.

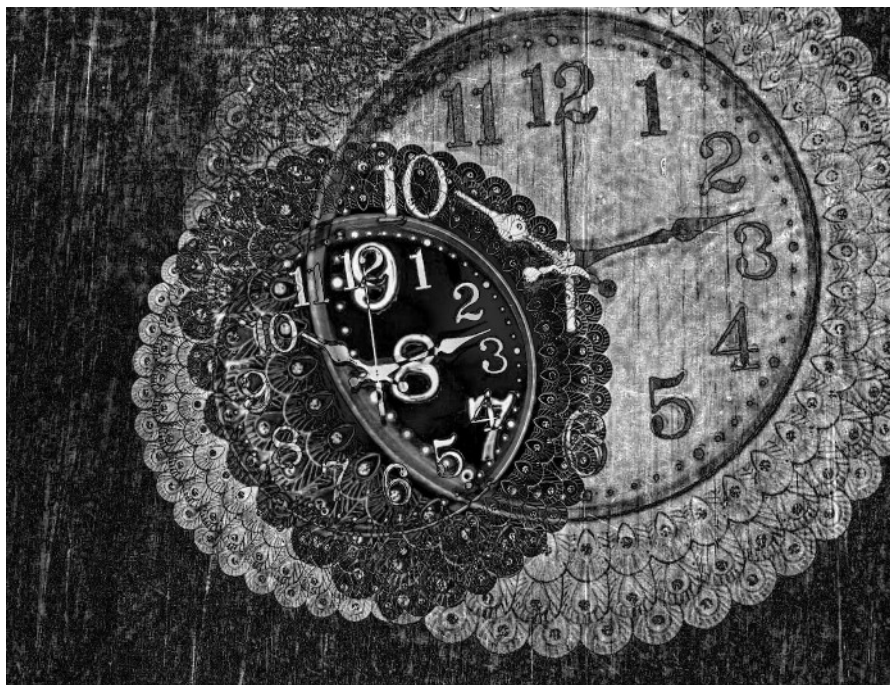
"What are you going to wear on your feet?" my sister wants to know. "The ceremony is going to be outside. You should wear your low black booties," she says. "That way your heels won't sink into the ground."

Sink into the ground. The words settle in my stomach like a fist of pebbles. I look to the window, at the skeleton trees, glowing, stalwart on the lawn. We had a big snow last night. The world outside glares white.

Her breath carries warmth; my body goes soft.

"Are you alright?" she asks. "Are you going to be alright?"

Lisa Friedman / Washington, D. C.



Digital Collage
Carella Keil / Toronto, Ontario, Canada

The DVD / Lawrence Bridges

I was distracted by a task
that should
have waited for the sun to rise.
A game
came to mind and I played two rounds
to see
if it favored the player or
the game.
The game gave equal weight to the
player,
with rules, if played fairly, that encouraged
the loudest re-shrieking and crying
from my
quiet heart, melting the guardrails
and fences
across prairie to mountain top.
Never
make a big decision until
you've played,
until heart-shaped footprints have led you
to your-
self or away with another,
the one
who asks you for the DVD
you've watched
a thousand times and memorized
and now send with love.

Lawrence Bridges / Pacific Palisades, California

Robot Apology with Dahlias, with Mums / Margie Duncan

after "Yellow Flowers" by the artist Carla Paton

You wanted to please me, to say sorry
for the many ways you can't read my thoughts
the moods that overtake me like mosquitoes
on a hike, the way you can't feel them bite, like words

that mean the opposite of what
you were taught,
and you're sorry for the noise
the rattle of every piece of you
when we're walking the clank of your corkscrew arms

your piston thighs so loud I can't hear the leaves snap
against my feet against your titanium boots the rasp
the screech of joints when you turn your head and point

to the squirrel in the tree and the inexpressive smile
the way you were taught to keep your mouth closed
because you have no teeth and so much of sex appeal lives

in the teeth and you have none
and damn I love you anyway
so I make it hard to say sorry and yet
you wanted to please me
so here you are with an autumn bouquet
you were taught
would make me say yes
everything's okay now

but you don't know enough to hold those flowers out to me
because that final gesture wasn't programmed
and neither of us was ever given the manual.

Margie Duncan / Kendall Park, New Jersey

Can You See the Moon? / Nan Jackson

Impossible to convey in a photo
the brilliant afterglow of the setting sun
lifting Lake Michigan through the clouds,
trailing wisps in colors of California poppies,
now orange, now red. Wave upon wave of light
changing water blues to deeper blue,
grays to iridescent, edges
flowing with molten silver.

I take the photo anyway, knowing it's enough
to carry my love. I text it to my husband
at home, two hundred miles downstate.
On top of Sleeping Bear Dunes, I write.

I imagine him relaxing on our screened-in porch
facing the leafy trees in the small back yard,
maybe dozing, with the cat curled up in its corner.

A moment later my phone buzzes in my pocket,
a message back from him, wide awake:
Great, can you see the moon? I'm looking at it now.

I take another impossible photo
and send him the moon from here,
my eyes filling, my heart full.

Nan Jackson / East Lansing, Michigan

Hammers come down all over
the neighborhood, just as the hail did
weeks before— precipitating the need
for men on rooftops.

Six scalp a bungalow across the street.
From my front porch, I watch them shimmy
shingle forks under the ridge cap, slide their long-
handled strippers, their curved roof rippers
beneath the asphalt tiles and sashay
in time—left arm, right arm, left arm, right—
with a rhythm not unlike their cocky walk,
their Spanish talk, to trigger an avalanche of debris—
strips of tar paper, bent nails, flecks of CertainTeed
Heather catching in the sun. See how they run
with wheelbarrows full, across the lip
to the shaded valley, where they tip them
into the receptacle below.

The humidity rises and beneath the glow
one slows, wipes his forehead with his forearm
before joining the others to lug pink bags
of new shingles to the peak. They lay down
the drip edge, tin snip the flashing, the felt,
pull galvanized fasteners from their tool belts,
while the hiss of the compressor and the kapow
of the nail gun clip the air like a metronome
keeping time over this technical tango.

I lift the hair off the back of my neck,
take a step closer to the edge, as they dress
the roof in Adobe Sunset, and that's when I see
they wear harnesses, but remain untied to anything—

except maybe to their own homes, where I imagine
their wives pray and their children wait. Their sons
so proud of their daddies— those big, brave men
on the roof.

Elisabeth Harrahy / Oconomowoc, Wisconsin

Tennis / V. P. Loggins

Without companion, competing with myself,
I smacked the tennis balls against the wall
alone in the park. This is how I spent
my summer days, riding my bike along
the sun-flashing street until I reached
the one sure place where shadows spread
from the darkening canopy of oak trees,
their branches sweeping sunlight away.
Tennis, from the Latin *tenēre*, to hold,
as fascination held me on the court,
my racket ready, a bag of tennis balls
set at my feet. I would aim my shots
just above the white line that streaked
across the bottle green board like the tail
of a comet, the height of an imaginary net.
Forehand first, then backhand, ranging
wider and wider as I sent each shot to force
my movements sideways, ever wider,
the shots returning to me like an echo,
as an echo needs only one person to play
the game, to sing the song, perform
duets, or as Narcissus discovered,
to be detained in a match of doubles,
until I or the ringing board had won.
Now setting competition aside, I find myself
still held on another kind of court
where the pop of tennis balls like words
are singing inside the hollows of my ears.

V. P. Loggins / Annapolis, Maryland

Ferns / David Southward

Each spring, their spiral heads
protrude from dampened soil
like shepherds' crooks. As leaf by leaf
their sprouting fronds uncoil,

young ferns take their destined shape.

Fringed feathers, brightly splayed
and sprinkled with the April dew,
fan open in the shade—

except for the very tips,
whose last leaves hold their curl
like little fists, as though refusing
ever to unfurl.

Then comes a sunny afternoon
when, starting to get warm
with hoarded dreams, the curled hands stretch
to offer up their form.

David Southward / Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Alive / Katherine Edgren

With no noisy motor, no
throttling back to avoid a wake,
we go in silence

with only a wing of sail,
a muscle of rudder, a line of rope,
and my own know-how.

Together we head up, jibe,
come about, heave to,
pinch, skim, glide, luff.

Downwind we're wing-on-wing.
Upwind, close-hauled.
On a beat, heeling brilliantly,

moving to wind and currents,
reflecting the sun,
waves lapping at her frame.

She slaps her hull on the water,
but never cracks. Her sleek heft,
her underwater shape keep us afloat.

She answers my touch the way a trumpeter
responds to the eyebrow of a conductor.
Our preferred tempo is vivace.

Her stays vibrate like strings on a cello.
The wind plays her like a flute.

I am remora to her shark.

Katherine Edgren / Dexter, Michigan



Photograph
Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky