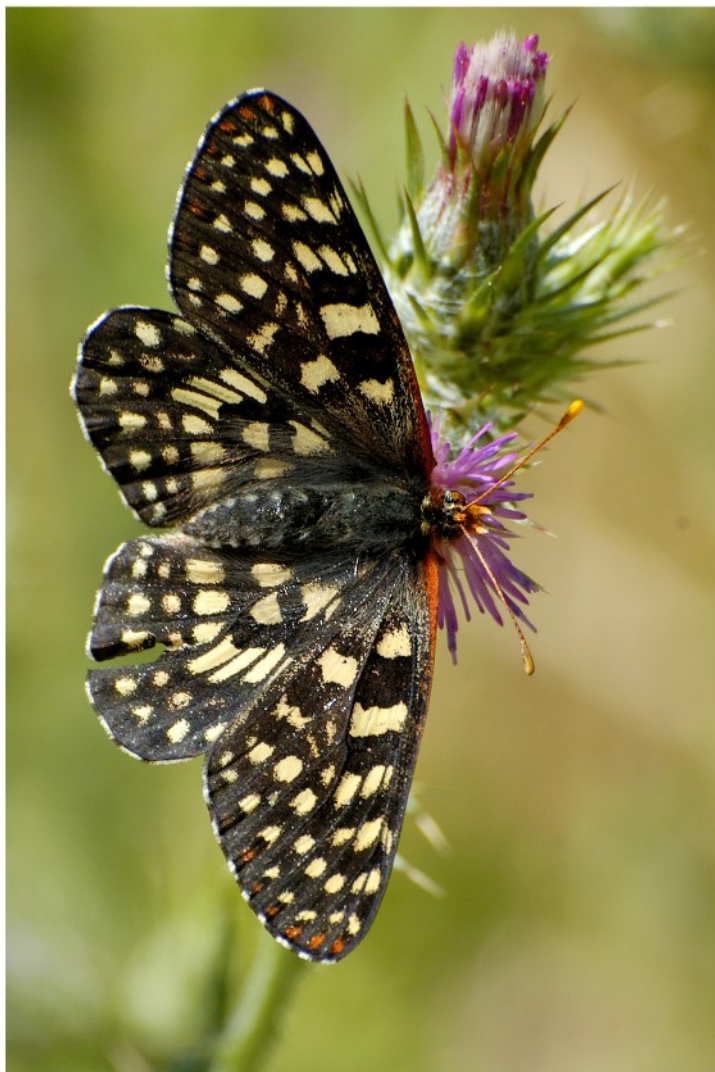


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Wednesday



Summer 2024

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

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## Editor's note for Summer 2024

Not much in this issue except for great poetry, short fiction and visual art by friends old and new, selected for you by our dedicated team of editors.

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Highlighting the contributions of our editorial staff, all volunteers, who keep this magazine running, I want to recognize and thank Marilyn L. Taylor, Associate Editor for Poetry

Marilyn, former Poet Laureate of the city of Milwaukee (2004 - 2005) and the state of Wisconsin (2009 – 2010), is the author of six poetry collections (or is it seven?) Her award-winning poems and essays have appeared in many anthologies and journals, including *Poetry*, *American Scholar*, *Able Muse*, and *Measure*. She also served for five years as a regular poetry columnist for *The Writer*. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin, where she continues to write and teach.

I can't adequately express the value of Marilyn's contribution to the poetry selection process at 3W. Her education, experience and dedication to the craft of poetry are priceless. The pithy notes she leaves me are concise, well-informed and she doesn't hold back.

---

For this issue we were also joined by guest poetry associate editor, Tom Brzezina. Tom is a poet, artist and musician. He lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I first met him at a poetry reading/workshop and was struck by his unique poetic voice. Thank you, Tom, for your contribution to this issue of 3W.

*Ivana's Bakery* / Claire Kenny

Underneath the ivory awning  
Was a cove full of bread:  
Fat squares of ciabatta  
Focaccia, soft as a duvet  
And coccoli as round as marbles.

A woman with curly platinum hair  
Sagging, wrinkled cheeks  
And pearls that yanked down her earlobes  
Peaked above the glass counter  
To ask who was next  
Of the humans packed in a long, snug  
Caterpillar out the door.

I marvelled at the bumpy focaccia  
Embedded with wisps of onion and  
Piled with wavy zucchini slices—  
Some trampling each other  
And others flopping off the side—  
And I longed to become  
As cozy as the pomodorini—  
Plump, red clown noses nestled warm  
In the cushion of the dough.

Claire Kenny / Haddonfield, New Jersey

## *Hold On to Poetry* / Claire Kenny

Note to self:

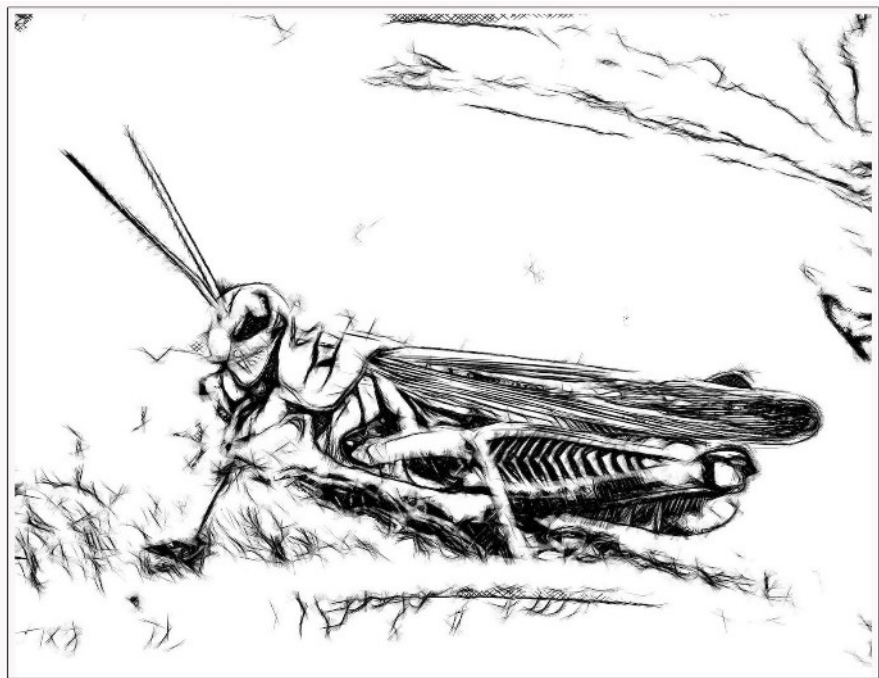
Sometimes the austere jaw of reality clamps shut  
And your lips feel chapped, blistered, dehydrated.  
You confuse letters with numbers, you try to  
Force your dreams into spreadsheets.  
Your hair clogs the shower drain and you think  
That cleverness only means stopping by the ATM and  
The grocery store in one trip.

For every penciled check mark, something erodes inside of you  
And you wonder what happened to when you thought  
The sun felt like an embrace  
And when you looked at hydrangeas and saw bundles  
Of fragrant nostalgia.

But stiff routine can soften into gelatin, and suddenly  
You realize that marigolds look like lollipops  
And you remember how the dove's coo  
Sounds dulcet and paints lavender in your mind.  
And something even more compelling now:  
You remember you can play with words.  
And, no matter how stupid you think you are for doing it,  
This is me wringing your neck—  
Someone enjoys your voice.

Claire Kenny / Haddonfield, New Jersey

*Grasshopper* / Rana Williams



Photograph  
Rana Williams / Hayesville, North Carolina



***Respect the Saw* / Robert Fillman**

my father says over the phone,  
urging me to return the thing

to Home Depot. Power tools need  
a steady eye he warns, extreme

focus, know-how. I won't tell you  
about my pap, a board slipping

in some small way, jamming against  
the blade and the saw kicking back

across his hand, his fingers torn  
apart. Respect the saw, he says

again, as my half-listening  
mind drifts this way and that, that phrase

skating past like a loose piece of  
wood about to catch and seize up—

***After Cooking Like My Grandfather* / Robert Fillman**

The Tabasco stings a cut  
on my finger, burning me  
to the bone as it stirs his  
memory from within, *sum*  
*bitch* spitting hot from my mouth,  
that red note clanking about  
the kitchen the way his old  
kerosene heater used to  
carry on, the stove he let  
me cut my teeth on, where Pap  
taught the language of cooking.

Robert Fillman / Macungie, Pennsylvania

## *Matryoshka* / Lisa Timpf

the stacking doll in my china cabinet  
displays, on her outer layer, a painted dress  
patterned intricately in red and gold  
while her face comes adorned with  
perfect circles of pink blush  
a pair of pencil-thin eyebrows arched like rainbows  
and bowed lips, their expression enigmatic  
as a cat's

inside the outer doll rests a smaller twin  
not so faded from the sun  
her cheeks bright and burning red

a third doll lies within the second,  
smaller and less detailed  
a carbon copy imperfectly pressed  
like Keaton's doppelgangers in Multiplicity

inside resides a fourth doll  
and finally, within that, a fifth  
the antithesis of St. Anselm's  
"being than which none greater can be thought"  
the one beyond which there is no opening,  
no revelation

Who are you, to look at me so?  
the smallest doll,  
with her up-arched brows,  
seems to ask, and perhaps she's right  
for we all have our onion layers,  
those things we choose to reveal  
or keep well hidden

Lisa Timpf / Simcoe, Ontario

*Santa Monica, 5 am, from a Bus Window* / Fredric Hildebrand

Warm winds buffet in from the coast,  
rocking the live oaks along the median.

A street sweeper rounds the corner,  
sprays and scrapes the gutter. Sirens

whine in the distance. On the sidewalk  
next to a 7-Eleven, layers of blankets

and clothing covering two bodies asleep  
or otherwise, bare feet barely visible.

From a dark alley, a tall, thin man  
high-steps into neon light with jerking

arms and legs, turns crisply up and down  
the sidewalk then marches back into

the darkness like a trombone player  
in a world somewhere else.

The airport shuttle carries me away.  
I am left with that moment, the gifts

I am given that I have no right to,  
and my many blessings.

Fredric Hildebrand / Park Falls, Wisconsin

*Cold Symptoms While Walking at Lunch* / Joseph Chelius

Feeling bad felt good in its way—  
first a cluster of chills  
as a gauge switches on  
in the mind's circuitry,  
the body emitting  
an almost pleasurable shudder;  
then an onset of aches  
through the sluggish joints  
that have me shift  
my stride to a stroll.

Such entitlement here.  
A time for troubleshooting—  
to grade each slope a hill,  
each small discomfort  
a stone in the tread.  
Thinking of the office  
with its bottle-necked jobs,  
each slip marked Rush!  
I putter along  
like a coddled engine  
with the pressure lifted—  
riding the brakes and hugging  
the shoulder, giving off  
an agreeable hum.

Joseph Chelius / Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania

*On the Other Side of the Door* / Robert Nordstrom

behind the knuckles rap  
the room sings, filling the hallway  
with Mario Lanza's tenorial boast--

Younger than springtime, am I,  
gayer than laughter, am I.  
I step inside.

Father takes a seat on the sofa  
next to his new friend, Eleanor,  
he introduces, but she does not look up.

Tears tickling a smile,  
she stares at the phonograph  
spinning joys and sorrows

like confetti in the wind.  
He covers her hand with his,  
the same gentle, yet insistent, touch

with which he cupped Mother's chin  
through all those nursing home years--  
Younger than springtime, are we,

he might have hummed as she curled  
into dementia's fetal fog.  
Eleanor, he calls again, wishing

to rouse what refuses  
to be recalled, while I,  
youthful intruder, listen intently,

remember well Father's kind touch,  
Lanza's mellifluous blessing,  
so distant so near.

Robert Nordstrom / Eugene, Oregon

## *An Elegy For Our Brothers* / Talia Cutler

You went missing when the street was still hot. You went missing when the days were getting longer and people had just begun to notice. The mailman drove with the door open. The cat sat in your spot on the couch. You never came home after dinner.

*What does it sound like?* It sounds like calling your name over and over.

Your car was found in a junkyard lot three towns over. The leather seats had recently been cleaned. The sun-bleached fuzzy dice hung from the rear-view window. The keys were in the ignition. You didn't plan on coming back. There is an ache that cannot be named. No one talks about it, but we can all feel it. There is a hole in the living room on your spot on the couch. We try to blame the cat, but we know who it's really shaped like. The neighbors put up signs with your face on them and a number to call. You look at me from everywhere on my walk to school. Your eyes bore holes into the back of my head, and I am always trying to catch you blinking.

*What does it sound like?* It sounds like car horns on the interstate.

There is a diner where you used to go to because the coffee tasted like licorice. The seats smell like grease, but I slide in and wait for you. I wait until the night shift tells me that despite their "OPEN 24 HOURS" sign, they would like to clean off the table. You should probably go home anyway, the busboy said, it's four in the morning. *Tal vez en otro momento*, he tells me, maybe another time.

I watch all the medical dramas that still run on cable. My favorite is General Hospital. You quickly learn to pick up on their jargon. Fluid in the lungs, superficial lacerations, benign tumors. It's all very corporeal. I think about your skin. I watch General Hospital until my eyes hurt. Each episode echoes an inside joke we once had but I can no longer remember. There is a rhythm on the screen, a beat, a color. *What does it sound like*, I think. *What does it sound like?*

It is your birthday and without thinking, I buy a cake at the grocery store. It is the generic kind, nothing special. The kind with white frosting and red balloons. My Aunt Carol would call it Processed

Crap. It sits in my fridge for three days before I eat it with a plastic fork. It tastes stale. I miss you. I will love you when I am old and dusty, I say. I hear no reply.

*What did you sound like?*

We disconnected the number on the signs right before Christmas. We did it quietly. No one ever called, anyway. I don't know who took down the signs, but one day they were all gone. You don't stare at me on my walk to school anymore.

There is more that cannot be spoken. The diner closed. They impounded your car. We got rid of the couch, then the cat. I have strange dreams with you in them that I can never remember in the morning. I wonder if you'll come into my room and tell me dreams don't actually mean anything. Just in case, I keep the windows unlocked and try to stay up until morning, but you never come. *Tal vez en otro momento*. Maybe another time.

Talia Cutler / Falls Creek, Virginia



## *Hicks Mountain* / Eva Parr

White iris and fields of lily  
on land I'll work and work  
and never own

I can't complain  
The sun shines, some days,  
and the pay is good.

The cattle are starting to recognize  
my face

When I lie in the grass on the ridge  
some days  
I feel the earth's  
indifference

Others, I feel it give  
and ever so slightly  
accept me  
Only in the spring,  
if I lie long enough in the soddenness of it all  
the soil simultaneously sinks in  
and pushes back against my skin  
and it feels  
almost like  
affection

Eva Parr / Point Reyes Station, California



*Petrogradskaya Embankment, St. Petersburg, Russia /*  
Diane Martin



Photograph  
Diane Martin / Bangor, Maine

## *As It Happens* / Karl Sherlock

As hay bends and divides beneath the blades,  
as the terrier, vigilant, courts the danger  
of the tractor tires, my uncle's harvester

grumbles to a standstill. He's hit a pheasant nest,  
unwittingly, in the tall palisades of yellow grasses,  
and dismounts. Somehow the hen still lives,  
however frenzied, and now at the field's far end  
she careers around the thick shoulders  
of lower branches, thrashing and tilling the air,  
but won't alight with those raw and glistening nubs  
where her legs once were. And here in this  
rousted place where she had once scratched  
aside the dirt and hatched out several chicks—  
the terrier gnashes the half-dead things, his teeth  
drawing in the flattened corpus of down and  
parody of stricken yellow claws, until we try  
to stay the horror: snatch the dead nestling  
from the obdurate jaw; flag my uncle's jacket after  
the skeet of stumbling feathers so that the hen  
wheezes forth a phrase, bewildered, and lurches  
into the hopeless shelter of other fields:  
there's an end to it.

And when the growing season has ebbed,  
we'll deny again what the terrier's teeth  
were meant for all along.

Somewhere,  
the viscous coil of the terrier's spoor  
sinks below the moss. Somewhere, the thorny  
bits of claws and bones hedge themselves  
in roots. Somewhere, the thresher  
has long since flocked the field  
with a pale distance of dirt, and a bird  
will never drop from the sky. Somehow,  
we were never there to see it happen.

Karl Sherlock / El Cajon, California

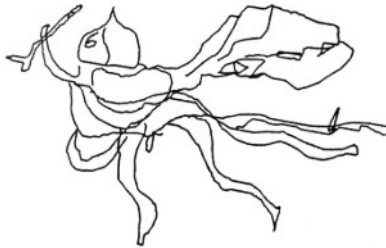
*If Only* / Jane Costain

the elephant in the room  
could become  
a unicorn in the garden

*Evenings* / Jane Costain

the cares of day slip  
to the bottom of a wine glass—  
only to resurface  
in morning's coffee mug

Jane Costain / Denver, Colorado



***Beth* / Vicki Wilson**

There is a stretch of road  
a mile from my childhood home  
where the girl  
in my third-grade class  
got hit by a car.  
She lingered for days  
in a hospital bed  
no one willing to give up  
on her brain.  
I had nightmares for weeks,  
her voice whispering in my bedroom  
even after I woke.  
This was before adults knew  
they should offer us counsel,  
and be honest and clear,  
say died and dead.  
So instead,  
at story time,  
our teacher told us the girl was gone  
and, as a mother herself,  
she tried not to cry.  
We were eight.  
We asked her to read *Cloudy*  
with a *Chance of Meatballs*,  
and, somehow, she did.

Vicki Wilson / Clinton, New York

## *Spoons* / David Miller

We have so very many spoons. Spoon-fashion,  
they nap in the silverware tray most of their day.  
Grabbed without warning, up-n-out from the drawer,  
one by one. Dizzy headfirst in coffee mugs,  
or prodded between teeth, across tongues. Tossed  
without thanks into the sink, given the hot-water  
plus soap-in-their-eyes treatment. Resettled  
spooning again.

I was saying, we have  
so many spoons, but their little odysseys  
threw me off track. What I meant to say was,  
some of these guys barely see daylight.  
They lie inert for years, wallflower spoons,  
while the popular kids get to see the world  
only because, for longer than anyone  
remembers, they landed on top,  
without any special merit, and stayed there.

David Miller / Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts

*A Connecticut Mill Town* / John Grey

From the shadow of the bridge  
I see the mills off in the distance:  
rotting benches, rusting machinery,  
cavernous rooms  
full of lazy light and sated spiders.

It's like a graveyard  
where the bodies are lowered  
into the ground  
but the great brick coffins  
remain behind.

The ones who would mourn  
are long gone.  
The ones who still  
earn a living there  
are pigeons cooing from the rooftops.

John Grey / Johnston, Rhode Island

## *Ants Are Fearless* / Karl Kliparchuk

They are born,  
they are in the army now  
but without training  
they move forward  
wearing their shiny black helmets,  
antennas to receive signals.

They know no fear  
moving forward  
over pavement crack trenches  
into the open battlefield  
searching for food  
to feed the colony.

They know no fear.  
An Adidas running shoe sole  
may be their last sight  
before the crunch and squish.  
They cannot report back  
to the others to avoid  
Adidas running shoes.

What a life to live  
without fear, knowing  
your purpose,  
to move forward  
in your military gear  
for the glory of the colony.

Karl Kliparchuk / Burnaby, British Columbia

*Umbrella Art Exhibit in Batesville, IN / Myrtle Thomas*



Photograph  
Myrtle Thomas / Metamora, Indiana



*In My Next Life I Want To Be An Elephant* / Vicki Mandell-King

Because they are  
the noblest of creatures,  
their leader a matriarch,  
who chooses her mate,

because their memories  
are long, recalling the locale  
of watering holes,

where they drink  
and spray and splash  
each other.

But memory can be  
a burden,  
the sight of their dead,  
ivory tusks hacked off.

Because they weep,  
covering the corpses  
with branches,

and because they hold grudges –  
charging into a village  
to find the culprits  
involved in culling.

Because they help one another  
in childbirth,  
females gently sitting on  
the mother's side

while the males form  
a perimeter for protection,  
facing outward  
with their tusked heads.

Because mothers carry  
newborns in their trunks  
and newborns suck on  
the ends for comfort.

I'll have to wait to be reincarnated,  
But, at least in this life, I can still  
travel to the sanctuary  
in Tennessee.

There, if I'm privileged enough,  
I might witness  
one of them bring

an old tire, a favorite toy,  
to lay upon  
an old friend's grave.

And because I am kind,  
and they sense such things,  
one might gently

blow and stroke my arm  
with the soft tip of her trunk.

Vicki Mandell-King / Erie, Colorado

*Sherman Did* / Rachel Rodman

He hated my car and he hated my youth and he hated the fact that I wasn't from here.

And hadn't I been speeding?

"Nobody goes that fast through Georgia," he said.

And while, beneath his big cowboy sheriff's hat, he examined my license, squinting first at it and then at me, I knew exactly how to counter this statement. And as it rose up in me: perfect fire, exquisite smoke, I experienced, just behind, a disquieting premonition of the hours nights weeks I would pass, in consequence, inside a Southern jail cell.

But I was already saying it.

Rachel Rodman / Eugene, Oregon

## **Waiting Room**

There weren't any windows, only doors, and those opened and closed infrequently. The door to the outside opened first thing in the morning to let them in; they were the luckiest or the most unfortunate of them, those with the least or the most practice at the waiting game. After a few weeks everyone learned that the best chance at getting to talk with anyone in the office was to be first in line. Being first also meant getting a seat with the best view of the door that led to the Commissioner's office; this door almost never opened. One could sit in the wood paneled waiting room, inhaling scents of nervous perspiration, perfume, and cigarette smoke indefinitely and never be called by anyone. Occasionally an office worker would open one of the ordinary doors that had glass in it and give some of those waiting more forms to fill out. A buzz of voices went around the waiting room then; the newer clients, who had not yet deciphered the basic English of those forms, asked the veterans or those with more privileged educations for help translating in both directions: their answers were always as simple as the English vocabulary of those present. Everyone eventually realized that being first in line made little difference.

In mid-September, the Commissioner's assistant knocked on the impenetrable door and went inside, did not shut it all the way; a murmur went around the benches filled with supplicants sweating in the Mediterranean heat. The Ambassador of their country was at the main entrance; soon he was among them, as was the Commissioner. They argued briefly. The Ambassador did not speak English well enough and refused to desist. They all clapped as the Commissioner grabbed the Ambassador's collar and ejected him with a kick. Later that week a white Mercedes with diplomatic plates drove slowly through the camp at the edge of the city and a hollow, distorted voice of a bullhorn told them to return to their country of origin. All transgression had been forgiven. Amnesty for everyone. That evening parents made their children come in with dusk.

## The Ward

The gate faced a quiet, tree-lined street. The light beyond it did not mark any difference across the wide lot surrounded by late nineteenth-century, brick buildings. Only one of these structures faced the gate and street. It was small and seemed a parlor or clubhouse. They went from the gate to its doors and chatted with a friendly keeper. She guided them across the park-like grounds and ushered them inside one of the taller structures. A uniformed man unlocked a heavy door to a once white, marble staircase. They could ascend comfortably in pairs, side by side, to a landing and another door. The expanse of the second-floor landing was divided by steel mesh wire and gates that closed each end off from the doors that remained visible. A small man with a jailhouse tattoo on his forearm cleaned the hall, it was said, for special privileges and cigarettes. He didn't speak their language, or English, but supposedly knew some German.

In the ashen light of the white painted windows, it was difficult to tell how many doors punctured the wall. A guard opened one of them with a key and motioned to the newcomers. They entered. It shut and locked after them.

The room was large, with high ceilings, windows that lent a view of trees and streets beyond a tall fence through the bars, and contained close to twenty beds, a small table at each end and a nightstand for each pair of sleepers to share. It may once have been a hospital. Now it housed refugees in quarantine.

Once dusk began to cover the windows with fog and streetlights fought golden, a guard came for them. The fresh occupants wondered what would come next. The veteran residents told them to gather soap and towels. Clean clothes were scarce. Most of them had not thought they would remain long. They filed out of the room, across the hall, past the cage doors and down the stairs, twisting a path to the showers. The procession looked much the same at meal times. It was repeated thrice daily until their status was decided. Sometimes they caught a glimpse of the small, muscular man on his knees with a steel bucket near and a large brush in his hands.

## Caravan

In the fall of Austrian hills, the gray coating that settles over Viennese streets in daytime seems nightmarish. Block after block after a river that bends there to confuse those already lost in constricted exile, all monotone, with rare flashes of color, inside the UNHCR van for a time, the others following obediently in their own cars, the ones of makes and with plates that identify them as having found the rip in the locked curtain. The lucky ones led onward, away from the ward to a place where they will wait out their application processes in greater comfort, among the locals, ensconced in a valley up some river, with a single road and boarding house, where they will all get their very own rooms, with doors that close and lock, and where nobody will attempt to break down the barriers that are useless against nightmares.

Torgeir Ehler / Denver, Colorado



## *Why the Dead Return* / Lew Forester

They must grow tired of eternity—  
the tedious rotation of galaxies,  
stars gone stale, planets  
spinning in languid ellipses.

Sometimes always is never enough—  
heaven begins to bore and the dead  
return for more of the temporal,  
ghosting the moments we miss.

They speak in the swoosh  
of an opening window,  
slip in and out between breaths  
between heartbeats.

Nothing is as far as the near  
so the dead go mostly unnoticed,  
though sometimes they appear  
in puff clouds lifting from dandelions,  
in the dizzy dance of starlings  
against a purpling sky.

The dead watch as our bodies flower,  
then quickly fade. More nimble  
for having shed their own,  
they turn corners just ahead of us  
in cities more vibrant than stars.

Lew Forester / Arvada, Colorado

*In Berlin* / Rinat Harel

I went to Berlin to meet Hitler.  
I went to Berlin—no, I lived in Berlin—for a whole  
year, wandered the streets, visited  
Platform 17.  
With a friend, not alone, you should never  
go meet Hitler  
all on your own—that's a bad idea, I'm telling you.

A whole year in Berlin and day by day the air thickened  
with ghosts. I even found evil  
in the faces of babies, in their eyes and in the corners  
of their little mouths. I might have lost  
my mind in Berlin, I'm telling you.

Fifty thousand of us were shipped off  
from Platform 17, the plaque said, and Hitler's laugh,  
terse and metallic, rang along the rusty tracks and vanished  
into the void that swallowed us. Forgiveness  
can only be given to people, my friend said, and I sat  
on the grass by the tracks and stared at the trees.  
Were they here then?

I'm pretty sure I lost my mind  
in Berlin. I'm telling you.

Rinat Harel / Greenfield, Massachusetts

*Latch* / Harold Ackerman



Photograph  
Harold Ackerman / Berwick, Pennsylvania



## *Street Cleaning* / Ed Walsh

When from their darkened rooms the people are rousing themselves for another day, I can be seen smoking a cigarette at the south end of Hauser Street. It is a long street and, pushing my dustcart, it usually takes two hours from the start to the finish— that is, three cigarettes. At the end, I sit under the big tree which I would guess from its girth is older than the street. And the street is not young; two of the stone lintels, adjacent to one another, are marked 1789. Why would stone lintels lie about their history?

Some of the workers - the cleaners and the mechanics, the civil servants and the pickpockets - when they emerge from their apartments and into the day, they look at me as if I am someone they might know from a time before I swept their street. Some of them seem pretty certain, the older ones at least. When I look up from my task and our eyes connect, I see some vague recognition scored into their wrinkled brows and uncertain smiles. I suspect that they would, under other circumstances, approach me to confirm their guesses. But they dare not. If I am being watched, they too may be watched. So, for them I do a favour and look from their gaze. For why in the name of God embarrass people without cause, or place them in unnecessary danger; I of all people should know that. So if they look, I pretend to watch a bird, adjust a glove, or examine my broom. The broom I suppose is not such a great pretence; the head comes away from the shank easily. The equipment they give us at the depot is not of the best quality. The gloves for instance are no protection against the winter. Those of us who can afford to do so buy our own. Because, either out of compassion or by oversight, they did not interfere with my small pension, I am in a position to buy my own.

If anyone were to be brave enough to approach me I would tell them - I was the Secretary for Culture. They have recognised me because I was for a long while seen on their televisions and heard on their radios. My face was in their newspapers. Now, after all that has happened, I clean their streets. Some, the more cynical of our citizens, would say that is no great fall; but my wife certainly thinks it is.

We sleep apart now. She says that it is because of my snoring, which she maintains has become worse since my defenestration. But I am not wholly convinced. I suspect that she is averse to the naked proximity of a manual worker. One might sympathise; the wedding certificate said Government Minister, not Street Sweeper. And my daughters are old enough to have witnessed my fall, and to have felt it keenly. Before it all changed they came to film premiers - sometimes with stars from America with whom they were photographed. It was a life of exhibitions and the opening nights of new plays. It was the use of hunting-lodges in the countryside. Now, it is none of those things and they no longer bring their friends to the apartment. They still have the photographs though, standing with the Hoffmans and the Voights and such people.

I drink less, now that it no longer comes freely to me. But at about three, after finishing in Roth Street, I stop for a beer or two before I take the tram home. I sit with friends, the few that I now have, one of whom was the Minister for Water. Also fallen, he now looks after the public toilets outside of the main library and he appears none the worse for it. It would be pointless to complain anyway. I have not asked him about his sleeping arrangements. It is not the kind of thing we talk about. We talk mainly of soccer and the books we have been able to get our hands on.

My wife, whose life gives every appearance of ruination, asks me every single day why I am not angry, and why I cannot rectify matters. Why can't I play the game as many of our old friends have done; friends who have said the right things to the right people, or have said nothing, who have acted in certain ways, and who remain in their posts and hold onto their privileges. She seems to believe that, with a whisper here and a letter there, I can retrieve our situation; that I can again summon the limousine and attend the palace. I tell her that it's not so easy, that once you have fallen, those who remain fear contamination. Even if it was that easy, I wouldn't do it. But I don't tell her that.

The fact is, I have settled into my circumstances and accepted them; aside from false accusations of snoring I have no resentments. I have become accustomed to the fresh air in the early morning, and to the people I meet, and to the sound of the broom doing its work. And what is so wrong about keeping the streets clean? Is it better to sit through one of Hruska's new plays than to rid the streets of their

fallen leaves and cigarette packets? To make the streets pleasant for the people to walk in? Have you sat through one of Hruska's plays? Have you had to meet the hero Hruska himself afterward, tell him how great his play was and hope that he didn't notice that you slept most of the way through it?

In the tram, I look out at the streets, for a while absent of litter and leaves, evidence that I have done some small good in the world.

We eat simply and go to our beds early.

Ed Walsh / Durham, United Kingdom



*What to Say When* / Gloria Heffernan

It's the unwanted skill  
we hone over time  
only after we have uttered  
the tone-deaf encouraging word  
that is somehow received graciously  
by the one who grieves  
like one more stone  
in a backpack full of rocks.

We lay down the burden  
of our helplessness as if it were a gift  
and expect it to be carried  
by the one we wish to comfort—  
well-intentioned words that bear the weight  
of our own impotence.

It is only after we have sat  
at the bedside of the dying,  
or stood at the front of the receiving line  
as mourners grasp for the right word,  
that we come to understand  
the blessing of silent presence.

We learn it from the friend  
who has the courage to say nothing,  
the grace to sit quietly and offer support  
like the steel beam that holds up  
some small portion of a crumbling bridge  
without ever saying a word.

Gloria Heffernan / Syracuse, New York

*Vigil* / Gloria Heffernan

I know how it feels  
to sit at the bedside  
in a hospice room,  
watching.

I know the smells  
that permeate the air  
surrounding a loved one  
whose time is running out--  
bleached sheets and a faint odor  
of unwashed hair.

I know the halting rise  
and fall of the chest,  
have listened to the labored breathing  
not knowing whether to pray  
for the next breath or the final one.

I know the precise yet tender gestures  
of caregivers doing what they can  
to keep the patient comfortable,  
without hope of healing,  
seeking only a peaceful transition.

Twenty years ago,  
it was my mother.  
Today it is my planet.

Gloria Heffernan / Syracuse, New York

## *Crowing* / Judy Cato

Staccato caws  
faint and faraway,  
answered by  
three palpable notes  
from a branch above my head,  
have me guessing about the world  
of crows

when a sudden halation of sound,  
like amplified drilling,  
stills  
all birdsongs.

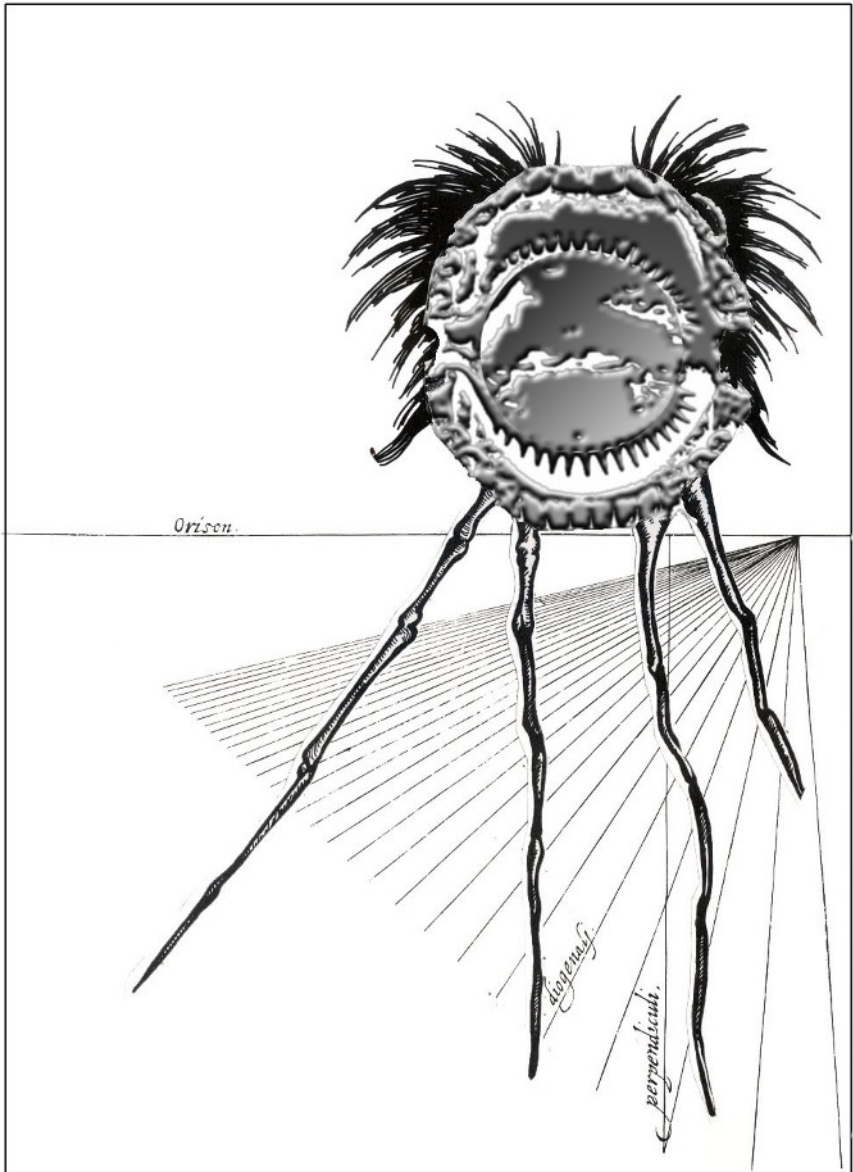
A teenage driver  
accelerates hard  
on this country road  
in a pickup  
rigged  
with an exhaust  
that explodes

into a grating sound  
that goes on and on  
and on.

I throw up my hands  
in disbelief  
to a neighbor  
who shouts to be heard,  
defending him:  
He's a boy; he's just crowing.

When staccato caws  
can be heard again –  
now erratic, loud, and distressed –  
their sounds express  
what I have no words for:  
a parting shot at my neighbor.

Judy Cato / Corydon, Indiana



Collage  
Ken Weichel / Benicia, California

Relief. That's all I feel. My duty discharged. My obligation fulfilled. What had to be done, has been done. The end.

---

I'm approaching the revolving doors when she steps in front of me. A nurse on Gordon's ward. Bright and smiling at the start of her shift.

"Good morning, Peter," she says. "How's Gordon today?"

"Oh, well. You know ..."

No need to say any more.

"I must tell you," she says, "we all think you're rather marvellous."

I look past her at the revolving doors.

"Visiting Gordon every day, the way you do. Come wind, come rain. Sitting with him for hours on end. I wouldn't have the patience myself."

"He has no one else," I say.

No, no one else.

---

I no longer walk round the park. There's no reason why I should. It did Gordon no good. Besides, walking round the park on one's own is a bleak business.

After Hazel's death, I found myself seeing Dr Woodward once or twice a month. Minor complaints mostly, but we both knew why I was there.

"I could prescribe something," he said, "but medicine's not an exact science. We try things. Sometimes they work; sometimes they don't. Taking a little exercise might be a good idea," he added, "although there's always a chance it might kill you. I'm so sorry. A tasteless joke. It's high time I retired."

Which he did. I half-hoped we might run into each other from time to time, but he and his wife moved to Cyprus, possibly to avoid his ex-patients.



Dr Woodward's successor is a brisk young woman with no time to waste. I sense it's best not to trouble her.

---

At the start, walking brought me some relief. Waking at six and reaching out for Hazel's hand. Then I'd remember.

Putting on stout shoes and my yellow waterproof, I'd climb the hill and walk my six circuits, clockwise, round the park. Then back to the house for tea, toast and Radio 4.

Walking in opposite directions — me clockwise, he anticlockwise — we'd pass each other twice each circuit. As we drew level, our eyes remained fixed on the path ahead. Later, we nodded. Later still, we exchanged good mornings.

Then, one day, he stopped in front of me.

"Walk with me," he said.

And I turned round and did.

"Gordon," he said.

"Peter."

And we continued walking anticlockwise.

---

Forging new friendships in your later years is difficult, particularly perhaps for men. How much of your past life do you need or wish to share? How much of it will interest anyone else?

A generalisation, of course, but it's not very far from the truth: women share feelings; men share facts.

"Anti-clockwise," Gordon tells me. "Widdershins. From the German 'widersinnig'. Taking a course that's opposite to the motion of the sun. In England it's considered unlucky to walk widdershins round a church but, in the Buddhist tradition, travelling clockwise benefits everyone, while travelling anticlockwise benefits the individual."

"I'm an atheist as it happens," he said.

I felt no need to share my own threadbare theology with Gordon. Hazel was a frequent churchgoer and that was enough for me.

If we'd talked more, I don't believe Gordon and I would have found we had much in common beyond the fact we both were widowers. Being walking companions was sufficient.

---

Hazel died peacefully at home, confident in her belief that she would be re-united with her much-loved parents and her younger sister.

Gordon never told me his wife's name. Perhaps her long months of suffering and despair drained away some part of her presence?

"A cliché, I know," he said, "but it was a blessed relief when she died."

We'd completed our six circuits when Gordon grips me by the forearm. "If something happens to me ... If ever you find me in a state like that ... Don't let me linger, Peter. Promise me that."

"But, Gordon ..." I said.

"Promise me solemnly, Peter. If you see me suffering, you must end it."

"End it?"

"Yes, end it. Give me your word."

I had no choice.

"Very well," I said.

And we walked on.

---

One morning walk missed. I thought nothing of it. A night away. A hangover. A head-cold. A second walk missed, a third, a fourth. Something must be wrong. I made enquiries and was told to call the hospital. Gordon had been admitted with a suspected stroke. I was free to visit him whenever I wished.

---

I sit with Gordon in a cheerless side ward. "We'll find him somewhere nicer when a bed becomes available," says a nurse. "For now, you should talk to him. He can probably hear you."

Silence. Not a sigh. Not a sound. Only his eyes saying over and over again: "Don't let me linger, Peter. Promise me that."

Days pass. Weeks. His eyes ever more accusing.

"Don't let me linger, Peter. Promise me that."

Sitting by his bedside, unable now to look at him. Silent and shamed. Weighed down with guilt and cowardice. Each of us as helpless as the other.

---

She's a new nurse on the ward.

"Don't worry, nurse," I say. "I can see you're busy. I know my way around."

Shapeless under the hospital duvet. I cannot bring myself to look at him, to meet his eyes. I take the pillow and hold it down. The instinct to cling onto life is much stronger than you'd think. It's all I can do to keep the pillow in place.

Afterwards, I sit on the bed to let my heartbeat settle. Then I leave the ward.

---

"Does Gordon like his new room?" she asks me.

His new room?

"It won't matter much to him, of course, but we thought you'd be more comfortable sitting somewhere a bit brighter."

I try to make sense of it. His new room? If not Gordon, then ...?

"See you tomorrow, Peter," she calls. "Take care."

I move rapidly towards the revolving doors.

Nicolas Ridley / Bath, United Kingdom



Collage  
Ken Weichel / Benicia, California

*Indian Pass Lagoon Beach, Apalachicola, Florida /*  
Stella Nesanovich

Summers, my mother, dad, and sisters  
gathered at Maggie's cottage,  
walked across grassed dunes  
to the beach, and crabbed with nets,  
filling tubs with our catch. Outside,  
after a dip in the Gulf, we showered  
under a windmill to wash the salt  
from our skin. I'd let my hair  
dry freely in the sea breeze.

I would love to return, slide again  
onto the cottage swing and listen  
to the roar of Gulf surf. Evenings,  
distant lights from shrimp boats  
mark the horizon while I'd sleep again  
folded in a large bed, windows open  
to the screened porch, to the sea  
glittering in the morning sun.

Stella Nesanovich / Lake Charles, Louisiana

## *Revelation* / Jeremiah Durick

Scripture me in here  
somewhere  
chapter and verse,  
a prophecy perhaps.  
Picture me  
on a mountain top  
holding forth, delivering  
admonishments aplenty.  
Picture me  
coming down from  
the mountain top  
getting lost in the woods  
lost in the words  
my own jeremiad  
chapter and verse.  
Scribble me in here  
somewhere.  
Hand me the script.  
I'm ready for scripture  
chapter and verse.  
Ready to do my bit  
before it's too late  
too late  
to get my say in  
somewhere.

Jeremiah Durick / South Burlington, Vermont

Finally, sweating and thirsty and urgently needing the bathroom after attending morning Mass, the mother stumbled into what she was sure was her backyard, but her children's sandbox and slide had vanished, and instead, in their place, flapped a huge bird.

Confused, she looked around the yard despite the urine trickling down her leg.

Where was her garden? Where was the clothesline drying her husband's huge white boxers?

"Your underwear's so big they could be tents for the homeless." How he'd laughed the first time she'd said that, a young bride in love with a big man. But wait. The mother frowned and stared at the big bird invading her empty backyard. Her husband had stopped being a big man. He was gone. Thin as a skeleton he'd become.

There was something wrong with the bird. It staggered in a circle through the grass. Its beak opened and closed. A shrill noise piped from its throat, like a child crying.

"Mahm!" the bird cried.

"Are you a swan?" she asked. She wasn't sure. It was hard to remember the names of things. There were so many things.

"Mahm!" the bird cried. Blood stained a wing and splashed the grass, blood drops winking like rubies in sunlight.

"Like rubies," the mother murmured. Goosebumps pricked her arms. Ruby was her middle name. Her birthstone.

Her own mama would have named the mother Ruby, but Ruby wasn't a saint's name. So Ruby became the middle name. Mama called her Ruby anyway, when she was rocking her to sleep or braiding her hair or rubbing her back. Mama had a long neck like the poor bird. And Mama had suffered like the poor bird, dying of women's troubles when the mother was only 7 years old. Mama's eyes had been open, but no longer bright, and how the mother cried when Pa pulled the lids down.

"She's cold!" the mother screamed, and she wouldn't stop screaming until Pa let her cover Mama with a blanket.

Even though Pa and her nine brothers were around, the mother always felt alone after Mama went to heaven. No one called her Ruby anymore. Pa drank, some brothers went to the war, and the rest worked their Minnesota farm, and eventually got married and went away. As did the mother, meeting a soldier at a bowling alley, impressed because he didn't drink and would pray the rosary with her, and so she married him.

They moved to his hometown, Chicago, into a brick raised ranch on a corner next to railroad tracks. The street became busier as the years went by, and the neighborhood kids meaner.

It was those kids, the mother thought, who had probably shot the bird with their arrows or bb guns or something, maybe the same kids who congregated on her garage driveway all night, and one time, when the mother was washing dishes, one of them stood in her gangway right below the kitchen window, looking up at her.

Heat steamed the mother's eyes. "Poor bird," she whispered. "I can't let you suffer like this."

She went into her house, down to the basement, to her husband's workbench, which her daughter and granddaughter hadn't yet disturbed. The mother searched among the tools, jars of nails, scraps of wood, and strips of metal, sneezing from the dust she stirred up. In a dented gray metal box, she found a hammer.

She returned to the yard. She knelt before the bird, now collapsed and trembling.



“Mahm!” cried the bird.

She raised the hammer. She swung it down.

It would not die. Harder and harder she swung the hammer. Red rubies sprayed, as did the bird’s cries, squeaky and shrill, until the hammer cracked through bone and brain, and the bird was at peace.

It was time to move, she decided, just like her daughter and granddaughter had been saying. But not into that little room they’d showed her, in the tall building whose windows faced a noisy highway. A farm would be nice, surrounded by intelligent cows, rustling corn, busy chickens. Far away from mean kids and noisy traffic and her daughter and granddaughter’s disturbing talk about memory care units.

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She hurries to the front of the house, stands on the lawn under her weeping willow tree, watching traffic, and when she sees a truck lumber over the railroad tracks, she waves.

The truck is big enough. Everything she needs will fit. The truck can take her to her farm.

She unpins the money she always keeps in her dress pocket and runs into the street, waving the money to show the truck driver she can pay.

A stranger’s face behind the truck’s steering wheel shivers into someone the mother knows, someone she hasn’t seen in a long time, the last person in the world she expected to show up to rescue her and take her back to the farm.

“Mama!” the mother cries.

The U-Haul slows.

A horn blasts. Brakes squeal. The mother soars.

The Cadillac that hit the mother stops, then speeds away.

The mother lays in the street, face up, eyes open, blinking.

For a moment, the mother sees faces looking down at her, hears voices calling for police and ambulances.

“Mama!” the mother gasps.

And there Mama is, smiling at the mother, rubbing her back, braiding her hair, cuddling the mother into her soft warm lap, whispering in the mother’s ear, “Ruby, my precious little Ruby. Come home with me.”

And the mother does.

Marie Anderson / Western Springs, Illinois

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### *Of An Age, At Golden Gate* / Michael Jones

Welcome, gray of hair,  
of fog, of sweater,  
of life-mate's eyes.  
Each day's rarity  
is clear now, each day  
open as a vowel, as air  
that plays the bridge's  
harp-like cables, here  
at this meeting  
of ocean and bay.

Michael Jones / Oakland, California

## *Madness, Madness, Madness* / Bethany Tap

on “Ophelia” by John Everett Millais

We’ve all read the play and seen the painting, the tragedy of a teary-eyed, snow-white maiden floating dead on a river, and thought how like a man to paint us with only sorrow’s strokes, a girl gone mad with grief as if there were only one way a girl could madden as if our rage were limited to blues and greens, river-deep, when we can run russet and amber red, soar mountain-high. Girl-child with the bird-voice and bird-appetite and fuzz growing along your arms: listen. Like Cerberus, we are three-headed, but you’ve forgotten how madness can rage and madness can frenzy. Gray Oizys has come to you and wrapped her damp arms around you, smelling of rot, dead fish, algae and sandy bottoms and you think that she is the inevitable way but here, drink this and revel in the bite on your tongue, the dizzying fevered joy: this, too, is madness, indigo stains on your lips and teeth, bleary-eyes, crazed smiles. Drink, girl-child, Semele says, for there are far better ways to madden than to die. Indeed, Lyssa cackles, bringing bloodied hands to face, leaving crimson war-paint streaks, she froths and foams and whispers revenge, revenge, revenge. Wear your rue with a difference, girl-child. Make it not only rabid-ragged, but ravenous, an unstoppable hunger like flames, burn it all, beautiful girl, don’t let them drown the rage for we only know what we are and not how glorious we may rise to be.

Bethany Tap / Grand Rapids, Michigan

## *Song* / Alfred Fournier

for Mom

You never got the full moon you wanted,  
the two-week tropical cruise—a friend told you  
the ocean there is a deeper blue.

Not that you complained, your hands in dishwater,  
gaze fixed out the window where a lone aspen  
made a song of the wind.

How gracefully you danced through each  
daily crisis. Knew the power of a hug.  
How to savor a peaceful moment.

Cup of tea on the porch beneath the stars,  
your man inside behind the paper, kids  
tucked in bed. This is what matters, you thought,

packing our lunches, sending us off each day  
with our limbs spread wide, listening  
for the song each of us made of the world.

Alfred Fournier / Phoenix, Arizona

## *Who's Allowed at Her Table* / Dorroh Jackson

Curvaceous redhead with a sideways grin and ineffable laugh.  
Tonight, her table is spread with roasted duck, cherry sauce,  
crostini bread, and pineapple upside down cake for dessert.

There's room at her table for the homeless man she took in  
after Katrina. His only mistake was to mainline her Godiva  
coffee liqueur when he thought she wasn't looking. For this  
trespass he gets only a raised eyebrow.

There's room at her table for the veteran who suffers  
from mental illness, the one that jilted her little sister.  
He gives seniors rides to the grocery store and to medical  
appointments.

There's room at her table for the formerly incarcerated guy  
named Michael who has ice blue eyes, who sleeps on her sofa  
and is always up at dawn pouring the first cup of coffee after  
the auto-brew sounds the alert.

There's room at her table for the old Italian lady pulling the  
oxygen tank with a pack of cigarettes hidden in her left pocket.  
A transplant from NYC, she complains about the quality  
of the shrimp scampi basilico at Salute's.

There's room at her table for the lady who constantly  
cries over the damage done to the oyster habitat by  
the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, who always stops her car  
to remove turtles from the road.

There's room at her table for the teen that approaches her  
outside the casino, explaining that the church can't help him,  
they're filled to capacity and the days are growing shorter  
and the nights colder.

And the old bearded man who grew up in Croatia, happy that  
the waiter keeps bringing hot bread and butter to the table.  
He sits alongside her, a glass of malbec in his hand,  
cherry sauce crusted in a corner of his mouth, laughing so hard

the crinkles around the outside of his eyes turn up toward heaven.  
He's in no hurry to get back to his lonely apartment, he loves  
to hear her tell her stories and the sound of her laughter.  
The chandelier lights above them spin and whirr, reflecting in the  
midnight blue sky ceiling like the swirling stars in Van Gogh's  
painting.

Dorroh Jackson / Caledonia, Mississippi

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### ***Kells, Scotland*** / Sharon Scholl

It seems easy to belong here  
where little that's visible changes  
between the generations.

These stones have been here  
since the Romans built their fort  
on that distant hill.

Grass has carpeted these meadows  
since antelope and bear trampled  
paths among the gorse.

The conveniences of modern life  
do not disturb what the ages left.  
There's still much that belongs here.

These walls retain the scents  
of many hundred years of cooking,  
and all the cooks have names.

Sharon Scholl / Atlantic Beach, Florida

## *Monopoly* / Allen Stein

Hotels on Boardwalk and Park Place, life  
as a one-percenter was the goal.  
And those poor souls around the corner,  
stuck on Baltic and Mediterranean,  
or a little farther down, doing hard time,  
lacking the Get Out of Jail Free card,  
well, that's just the way the dice rolled.

At twelve it was fun to play plutocrat,  
to feel kinship with the little cartoon guy  
in white whiskers, top hat, and morning coat,  
that victim of the vulgar depletion of the Crash,  
buffeted about now by the random turn of a card  
but ever-buoyant, ever-cheerful, irrevocably  
a member of the club, a credit to his class.

The interest in seeing small heaps of pastel cash  
grow inexorably, of keeping each hoarded pile neat,  
its edges and corners exact, was compounded  
by each sore loser's whines. I was speeding  
in a private car on the Pennsylvania Railroad,  
past the hobo jungles of those forced  
to trudge tarred roads on blistered feet.

Years later, in a peeling bungalow  
on some pallid Vermont or Oriental Avenue,  
I tally the bills from the electric company,  
the water works, the mortgage holder,  
and I know there are no dice, no cards,  
to get me past Go, that the big winners,  
feel no kinship to me and mine,  
and have never played the game at all,  
but merely owned it before I gazed at the board  
and dreamed of possibilities.

Allen Stein / Cary, North Carolina

## *The Field Beside* / Audrey Towns

was a dead-end that was anything but dead.  
It supplied all the necessities for childhood;  
grew long sylvan swords for afternoon fencing,  
where welts bubbled up as fast as a strike too hard  
from an older sibling, where we sought solace in  
the company of round red cows and told our troubles  
to grasshoppers cupped in small smooth palms.

On the hottest days sunflowers bloomed bigger  
than any sun we had seen, and each dark center opened  
up a new window to see what others existed inside.

In the evenings we drifted in dusk-bathed brush  
to make wishes on constellations we caught in glass jars,  
and when one boy challenged the neighbor to a bike race,  
it was only the long corn stalks at the end of the road that  
saved his life; no one bothered with helmets or brakes.  
And when we thought about the end of childhood, we threw  
rocks into the field's dingy pond to watch them slowly sink,  
even if we planned to fish them out again and take them home.

But when the fracking rigs finally appeared  
and the houses began to be built one upon the other,  
street stretching out into adulthood,  
no more room for the bright exclamation points  
of luciferin light punctuating the end of our days,  
we thought perhaps there would be  
other things that would sustain us,

because we had grown up in a place we thought  
proved completely that the end of anything  
was never really so.

Audrey Towns / Lakeside Texas



## *A poem About a Puzzle* / David Somerset

One across: "sensation"

The one feeling we don't have to analyze.

"Lie" Two across: One of the most popular ways  
of integrating self-interest and reality.

One down: "sin" going wrong on so many levels.

"Anonymous" five down: a method of reaping the reward  
without the penalty.

"Alas" Five across: a word to bridge the unfortunate event  
and it's following Doom.

"Used" seven across: a fine distinction between being manipulated  
and owned.

"Pal" six down: a friend who is not an enemy but unworthy  
of being completely spelled out.

"Extension" Four down: pushing your luck precariously  
on an already shaky premise.

"Blank" Three across: something you may draw but never see.

"Enable" Two down: To be responsible but not guilty.

Crossword Puzzle: A Poem hidden in a grid.

David Somerset / Salem, Massachusetts

## *Rain* / Beth Paulson

For Judith

Seems there's no end to these February rains.  
No sun, white skies like bed sheets. My friend is dying.

On sheets white as the sky my friend lies dying. No sun  
for days, just these steady rains filling the trees.

These steady rains have filled the trees for days  
as she drifts in and out of pain. Thin as leaves, her hands.

Hands thin as leaves, she drifts from us, from pain.  
I watch out her window as rain drops soft, then harder.

Hard to watch her end. Soft rain drops on the window.  
No joking now. She knows death's not a wit.

She's not joking now. Knows she can't outwit death.  
I breathe the rain-wet grass. Rain fills my hands.

Rain fills my waiting hands. I breathe wet grass.  
Eyes closed, she smiles. Perhaps she's dreaming of Paris.

Beth Paulson / Ouray, Colorado

## *Desert's Way* / David Chorlton

Cactus wren calling, thrasher in the thorns,  
sunlight parts  
to let the sparrows through.  
It's a slow path out of springtime  
where the fishhook cactus offers purple  
flowers and the earth  
inside the earth  
a patch of shade.

No language spoken here,  
just the crunch  
a footstep makes and the chorus  
of wingbeat and song from down among  
the mesquite tangles  
and stones

that fell from the stars.  
Every hummingbird glows  
with its own creation story. They have flown  
through rainbows to be here,  
broken out of the underworld  
and even in

their realm of flowers  
they live as fiercely as the warriors  
whose souls they once accompanied  
on their passage to the sun.

David Chorlton / Phoenix, Arizona

## *Need* / James Scruton

Back home from opposite ends of the country,  
my brother and I found two dark suits  
still hanging in a closet, both close enough  
a fit that all we needed to buy  
was shoes, the cheapest black pair each,  
hard and shiny as little caskets.

The salesman called them standard dress issue,  
asked with a grin if we'd enlisted  
together. I don't remember saying much,  
nothing about a funeral, I'm sure,  
no need to bring the guy down so early  
in the day, even the weakest humor  
all some might have to make it through,  
one foot in front of the other, bearing  
what they must before stepping away  
at last, the ground soft, the going slow.

James Scruton / McKenzie, Tennessee



*To One More Doomed Fruit Fly* / Robert Lowes

We both like bananas  
and a glass of red wine.

You walk on the wall.  
I'm stuck on the floor.

At times, we feel  
an urge to dodge.  
You have swift wings.  
I have attorneys.

We both have brains,  
but mine's so grand  
I can turn killing  
into a sport  
and keep score.

You can't talk,  
and beg for mercy.

I make speeches  
to justify my deeds.

There's no evidence  
your dot of a brain  
foresees death.

Death by flyswatter  
is not in my future.  
This much I know.

Robert Lowes / St. Louis, Missouri



Photograph  
Diane Martin / Bangor, Maine