

3rd Wednesday^k



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Spring 2025

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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 Spring 2025

The spring issue features the winning and honorable mention poems from 3rd Wednesdays annual poetry contest, judged this year by Marilyn L. Taylor.

This year's contest was judged by our own associate poetry editor, Marilyn L. Taylor. Marilyn earned an MA in linguistics and a PhD in creative writing from the University of Wisconsin. She has published eight collections of poetry, most recently *Step on a Crack* (2016) and *Going Wrong* (2009). The Wisconsin poet laureate from 2009 to 2010, she also served as the poet laureate of Milwaukee from 2004 to 2005.

After a long career teaching English for the Honors College at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Taylor retired to teach several poetry workshops under the auspices of Lawrence University, Western Colorado University, Poetry-by-the-Sea in Madison, Connecticut, West Chester University, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She is also a contributing editor for *Verse-Virtual* and *Third Wednesday* poetry journals.

Commentary on each of her selections follows, then the poems themselves, three winning poems, three honorable mentions and, finally, three additional poems of special merit.

3rd Wednesday Annual Poetry Contest

Commentary by contest judge, Marilyn L. Taylor

WINNING POEMS:

"Portrait Gallery: the Class of 2024"

Here the concept of human mortality is explored in vivid, human terms, using the poet's own recollections of friends, acquaintances, and miscellaneous others who may have pre-deceased him, but who somehow do not die. Against the background of his "private necropolis", the speaker comes to a breathtaking-- and genuinely disturbing-- conclusion. Extremely well conceived and well expressed.

"Circe at the Laundromat"

A memorable take on the goddess Circe, who has been brought back to life in the unlovely confines of the Pinch Penny Laundromat. In a single stanza, the poet/observer takes note of some strong similarities between herself and this mythological bringer of magic potions and heavenly bedding, along with the firm (if questionable) conviction that "men are pigs." Cleverly appropriated from the original legend, this poem is a delight.

"Landscape with Knife and Crows"

This very visual, beautifully written short poem could be read as a crash course in what scholars call "philosophical biology." Any attempt to paraphrase it would do it zero justice, but my takeaway is that the poem suggests-- (in only nine lines, crisscrossed with stark aviary imagery)-- the difficulty of existing simultaneously as an organism and a mathematical concept. I find it an exceedingly thought-provoking meditation on the nature of reality.

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

"Poseidon"

This heartfelt tribute to the poet's father is among the most moving love poems that I've come across in years. There is unbridled joy in the tone of the speaker as she joins her dad at the swimming pool's edge-- and pride in the knowledge that she is one of the two "bullets" who will break the water's temporary tranquility.

"In Wonder"

It's always a joy to confront a contemporary formal poem that actually follows the traditional rules of the road-- without lapsing, even once, into archaic diction and/or clumsy rhythms. "In Wonder" is a fluid and flawless villanelle that gracefully follows the time-tested formal guidelines, and avoids forcing the content into wacky syntactical convolutions that it never asked for.

POEMS OF SPECIAL MERIT

"Community Garden Newsletter"

Presented in the friendly style of a neighborhood bulletin, this fanciful prose-poem is irresistibly engaging, thanks to its friendly tone. It provides the reader with a charming chronicle of the garden in question, and several of its ornamental residents.

"Remember When You Could Fix Your Own Car?"

This speaker is absolutely for real, without a doubt. I'm convinced by her apparent devotion to all things automotive, and by the straightforward manner in which she expresses herself in Car-speak. I hereby hand her the literary equivalent of a "hoosie"!

"An Egg Almost Called Death"

This poem not only tells a riveting story, it also interweaves a touch of wit, and an ending that acknowledges, quite overtly, the serious implications of the narrative. Very effective!

Portrait Gallery: The Class of 2024 / Joel Savishinsky

Winning Poem

The year's end passes me on its way down the screen,
the newspaper's wave paying its ritual respects,
sucking me back in the undertow. These are the people
I don't know who I still seem to have known all my life.

Actors, writers, inventors of salvation, scientists of the soul,
craftspeople who carved a stubborn hope out of pure anger,
the politicians who sold it for a bargain, the businessmen
who had no business being in business. They will not
die as long as I can open a book, watch a movie, love a joke,
hold a grudge, regret the inadequacies of mere gratitude.

They are a gallery of my living dead,
my private necropolis. The faces
that don't need a name, the names that
now have a face, that finally let me see
what I've long known, but remind me
that seeing itself is neither homage or belief.

These black-and-white deaths leave me feeling
my life has been lost or left behind, that I owed
but did not own it, that these wraiths held a lien
on my dreams, and got a good price for my birthright.

I breathe deep and time slows down, but the pace
of loss quickens. Soon, they and I will be gone,
become – we hope – some other generation's
memento mori, its new version of history,
the star in the east, eight evening candles' miraculous light.

When the time comes – this decade or the next –
and the publicly mourned are among my own unknowns,
I will know my time has been fulfilled, attendance taken
for the last morning, and the class of my peers dismissed,
with the option to either go home for lunch
or play in the schoolyard till twilight.

Joel Savishinsky / Seattle, Washington

Circe at the Laundromat / Michelle Holland

Winning Poem

Before the cold months begin,
I bring the bulky comforters,
thick, warm bedding to the Pinch Penny,
hunker down with the fall issue of Tricycle,
pretend I am Buddhist in the midst

of machine noise, scrape of laundry cart wheels,
the rapid fire contrary gossip of two ancient
abuelas washing and folding Carhartt overalls,
flannel shirts, cotton boxers and so many towels.

What are you reading? Circe asks, easing into
the plastic waiting room chair beside me.
The seat must be cold on the backs
of her legs. Her dress a flowy, flowery thing,
looks like she's wearing her garden
in thin, dazzling silk. Fearless Zen, I respond.

We both sleep alone, keep a home going
for ourselves and our familiars, tending
kitchen gardens, gathering mint for tea,
sturdy greens for salads, and native plants
to conjure cures for lonely headaches.

She brings her bedding, too,
and I'm jealous as she whispers
her plans, knowing she will have
her way, magic and desire on her side,
a day for witches in the Pinch Penny.

I have forgotten men, though I still wear
my husband's boxers to bed in the summer,
share Circe's dreams of men pulling their
wandering ships onto the beaches of her island.

So vicarious, I'll listen to Circe's story,
hang on the dryer's heat as I'm folding
the blankets that will keep me warm,
watch her bring the corners together
of the immaculate white down-filled spreads,
and muse on the man she plans to keep
for awhile, make him forget his attachments,
his compass home. Yes, and laugh out loud,

as we honor our shared understanding
that most men are pigs. But...
oh, the ones who aren't, the ones
we can keep for awhile, work
our magic, outlast winter under the clean,
quilted fabric of our comforters.

Michelle Holland / Chimayo, New Mexico

Landscape with Knife and Crows / Ceridwen Hall

Winning Poem

The light's angled—and I'm autumn numb, watching
the hemlocks fall still, and calling my own crows
home. Everything lands, in this time of weather,

only to scatter again: a final golden flourish, a first
woodpecker's knock. Migration plays linear games
in the mind; memories rise like causes. Crows gather

and echo one another. I quarter an apple—who taught you
this small, useful violence?—then make eighths.
Beyond the window they draw lines across the sky.

Ceridwen Hall / Cincinnati, Ohio

On the hottest July days,
my father would wake me early.
Let's go,
he whispered to me
and the sunrise.

We were always the first ones
at the neighborhood pool,
first to greet the water,
impossibly still
under the weight of our reflections.
More rink than river.

I never entered from the stairs,
never splashed water on my legs.
I channeled none of my mother's
flick, glisten, shine.

I had no use for the ladder,
never imagining that my body could
unstitch a seam in the water
and slip in,
a knife finding its sheath.
I never cupped tiny hands to form
glittering chalices,
never lovingly dressed my skin
in silvery water sleeves.

Even when I saw other girls kneeling –
genuflecting saints
offering weightless wafer frames
in chlorinated communion,
the pool their altar –
even then, I knew:
my body was
no sacrifice.

Instead,
holding hands with my father,
we ran.
Two bullets shot from an otherworldly chamber,
our bodies burst
through the water's threshold,
as we parted the seas
and claimed the terrain as our own.

Jennifer Sapir / Merrick, New York

Because the world has given me this day—
a red-rubbed crown of light, a spray of snow—
I stand in awe. I push away the gray

and praise the earth. My old workshirt is frayed,
the cuffs are torn, my knuckles thick with dough
and age. The world has given me this day

and I will clutch it in my fist. The bay
awash with slick-backed waves, a rough edged glow—
I stand in awe. I push away the gray

despair that's held so tight to my airway
I couldn't breathe. Outside, mouse tracks in snow.
I know the world has given me this day

to celebrate, to craft my art, to lay
a string of beauty in my wake and so
I stand in awe and push away the gray.

Sometimes I'm mute since all I have to say
won't fit inside a poem. I'm old and know
I'll die, and yet the world gave me this day—
I stand in awe and praise it in my way.

Judy Kaber / Belfast Maine

Remember When You Could Fix Your Own Car? /
Michelle Holland

Special Merit

I never knew all the words under the hood,
but I could change my oil,
sparkplugs, even work on the timing,
knew how to replace fluids,
oil what needed to be oiled
on my first car, a rambling 1967
Chevy Impala, rusted out along
the bottom of the chassis
from so many winter seasons
and salted roads. Later I married
a man with a Chevy C-10 ½ ton,
who knew how an engine worked.

When we bought our first brand new car,
I noticed a funny noise, tried to explain.
We opened the hood, and couldn't find anything
that looked familiar. Where were
the sparkplugs? My husband couldn't
reach the oil pan, the whole engine
impenetrable. The days of knowing
what the thingy was, or where the whatchamacallit
connected to that springy metal gadget
were over. Conversations leaning over
the car radiator replaced by computer
systems and God knows why the check
engine light is on. There's a "right-to-repair"
movement, but not in our state.

I remember when he said, "hand me that hoosie,"
and I did, with the precision of a surgeon's
assistant, and we got things humming
in no time. Now, the only option when
the car won't start, and jumper cables
aren't the answer, is to haul the car
to a garage that doesn't even smell like oil,
the mechanics replaced by technicians.

Michelle Holland / Chimayo, New Mexico

There are the grasshoppers, brazen bellies up to the mums, downing their orange and burgundy blossoms as if they are the regulars at McSorley's, singing "Everyman's Prayer," then sleeping it off in the alleys between the sage and daylilies.

They are mini-aegirs, and there would be more, I know, if not for the scrounging Western tanagers and the woodpeckers, the valkyries that I've seen diving into the alleys, and skimming the tops of the Maximillian Sunflowers for a meaty snack.

No aphids though, I can thank the lady bugs, who showed up in coffee klatches and book clubs in the spring. They trade in garden gossip, and know for certain what happened to the katydids. They think the grasshoppers drink too much, or they are just rude.

Walking sticks would rather have the stalks to themselves, find the color that suits them, and be left alone to stretch out their fragile legs, throw out their yoga mat, and maintain tree pose for a while. They meditate, take on the air of stillness, refuse to be anyone's chorus or laughing stock.

Oh, and the echinacea just wasn't posh enough this year for those katydids. They are always dressed as debutantes, having practiced the allemande as if they arrived from the halls of where the Baroque instrumental suite is played. A little high and mighty, just ask the lady bugs.

But, it was the fated wedding last week of the praying mantis, the couple who hung out in the roses, behind the second blooming, that made the papers. The last anyone saw of them was at the reception, where they danced the tango in the late afternoon just before the clouds roiled into a welcome late summer rain.

Notes:

- Aegir – Nordic god of parties.
- Inspired by a great fine art picture book that I bought recently: *There Will Be Nonsense*, Leah Ode Kiser, and the page with the wedding picture of the praying mantis couple.

Michelle Holland / Chimayo, New Mexico

Who would have thought that it started with an egg but really it doesn't does it? It started with mumps and the husband taking to his bed because he was certain that he would become sterile catching it. So, she nursed him back to health and tada. Pregnant.

But no, the doctor was sure she was not. Eventually, blood started flowing, and flowing so, no. Not pregnancy despite an uncomfortable pain in her left groin. Then another doctor refusing to believe her age, her marriage, refused to examine her, test her, told her happiness is a death sentence. Well, no, not his exact words because he thought her twelve, not twenty-two.

Then the trip home, and visiting with a sister and brother, and almost the prediction that not all eggs are viable, lodging themselves in canals that are only to relay the happy product, but now, definitely is a death sentence, a primary vein eaten away by an embryo that could not live, an egg turned into cells which will never cry or laugh.

Of course, this story ends "Happily ever after" or at least happy that the hero and heroine lived, had other children, wished she did not have to have the abortion the church called the surgery to save her life, but grateful that the moon comes up another evening, and the evening grosbeak walks resolutely along the backyard edge of grass under the maple tree, looking for seeds, or insects to take back to her hatched eggs, now beautiful fluffy chicks waiting to learn to fly, waiting to leave the nest and move on as strong, fertile birds.

Cynthia Pratt / Lacey, Washington



Photograph
Gloria Keeley / San Francisco, California

Going Through Their Things / Ron Koertge

Shoes that will never see another ballroom.
Dresses somehow even beyond vintage.

Then I find a shoebox of photographs:
people I don't remember with names longer
and more difficult than mine.

Except for one snapshot: my parents
standing beside a black-and-white cow
with an enormous udder.

On the back in my mother's handwriting:
Me, my new husband and Cha-cha.

Here's what I want to know, Mom. Who named
that cow after a dance none of you could do?

Ron Koertge / South Pasadena, California

Metropolis with Flames / Joan Bauer

Spared the smoke & hellscape
I pour over maps—

which friends have been stricken
what vaunted landmarks lost.

Years ago, my home leveled by fire.
Shock & heartache. But that's not losing
sixty square miles of streets & community
to smoldering ruins.

As flames pillage the Palisades, Altadena,
Pasadena, Malibu

as flames menace Mt. Wilson, Getty Villa,
even the Hollywood Bowl, I brood

over the Santa Anas & the tiny embers
that could ignite—who knows—

Since I was a kid, this was my city.

Sunshine & bungalows, palm trees & beaches.
The sprawling history of farming & oil,

aircraft, movies & art. All the contradictions.
Greed & charity. Glitz & heart.

For the pioneers, scoundrels & visionaries
who built the City of Angels—

For the fire crews & prisoners who risked
everything to quell the flames—

For the old timers, dreamers & immigrants
who scrape & struggle to survive—

Since I was a kid, this was my city.

Joan Bauer / Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Found / Donald Wheelock

The gifts you find are best.
Of those, the ones you keep
have made it past your test

of time: the stone you found,
polished by the brook
for countless seasons, ground

smooth on all its edges,
to nestle in your palm,
your memento of the ages.

It mingles with your change,
or with the dust of time
among forgotten, strange

collections of the things
you could not throw away:
the foreign coins, the rings.

That one near-perfect stone
that chose you as the one
while walking there alone.

Donald Wheelock / South Deerfield, Massachusetts

Across the Room / Claire Scott

There she is
across the room
looking pale and thin
in baggy sweats
dusky circles under her eyes
missing eyebrows
a pre-tied paisley scarf
wrapped around her head
she wants me to embrace her
welcome her into my world
I want to travel to Morocco
ride a camel, wander the streets
of Marrakech
I want to hike in the redwoods
eat seared scallops with sparkling wine
I don't recognize this woman
who looks so frail
so lost, so needy
but there she is
my future
I hold out my hand

Claire Scott / Oakland, California

Aubade as Sestina / Lisa Charnock

How to repair this exquisite old quilt—
sunflower blocks, pulled from the cedar chest—
my ambition too big, again.
And how I miss you—it's all a tangle.
Watching the black edge of the storm
I feel like that: sunlight fading, lost hope.

It's like a cat, it prowls, that hope
of a life with you. I turn away, back to the quilt
hear wind chimes dance for the oncoming storm.
The animal curls into the scraps in my sewing chest
kneads the fabric, pulls the thread, rests in the tangle.
I can't help myself—I stroke it again and again.

I bought a soft yellow calico—return to cutting patches again,
re-making the big tattered blocks, save the one I hope
to save, centered in a new constellation. I tangle
with the seams—such precision—do I have the skill for this quilt?
Stopping, laying down, giving up, cat on my chest
I see the first flakes—sun swallowed by the storm.

No good—no rest—it's inside, too, a storm
of wanting: and I'm a mess again.
If I could pound my fists on your chest
cry, plead, lay out a plan—but I know there's no hope
just like for this monster of a quilt
that hulks on my sewing table, a wadded tangle.

The snow keeps falling, calming. I want to untangle
desire from fact, feel in my heart the cold truth of the storm.
I imagine sewing feathers into this quilt
to fly—not to come to you again
but to be released, stop grappling with hope
feel wings beat, new muscles in my back and chest

but last night I dreamed—my body felt the peace—of lying on your chest.
Maybe that's why today I can't let go, can't untangle
you from me, me from the fingers of hope.
The snowfall has slowed, a blanket laid by the storm,
and my hands reach for a block. I rip out stitches again
to rebuild the sunflower, do it right, pour everything into this quilt.

Tonight, hope will have its way, burrowing me into your chest
as I sleep alone under another old quilt, my hair in a tangle—
the storm spent—minding a little less how you have left, again.

Lisa Charnock / Anacortes, Washington

The Silence from Beirut, 1976 / Patricia Hale

The Lebanese guy
with soft brown eyes

doesn't know if
his family is still alive.

He gives me a shirt
that no longer fits him

but refuses
to tell me his name.

What for? he says.
Why should you know?

Patricia Hale / West Hartford, Connecticut

The Reading Railroad / Lisa Yount



Digital Collage
Lisa Yount / El Cerrito, California

My Favorite Mug / Franziska Roesner

After my first daughter was born
I thought it was the lack of
caffeine, the cooling paper cups
of hospital coffee I kept
leaving around everywhere.
Instead it was my own self leaking out
through a man-made hole,
my spinal fluid tugging, pulling,
gravity dragging down my brain
every time I dared stand up.

The fix for a spinal headache
is to draw out your own blood
and re-inject it, like birds might use
their own feathers for a nest,
like a baby (made of you) might nurse
from your breast.

After I brought her home,
I was surprised by
my cats' faces, which looked
suddenly animal.
Three months in, when
one of them lay, corpse-like
in the corner behind the baby glider
refusing to eat, burning pancreas
I wondered if there was a balance
someone was trying to keep.

After my second daughter was born
I started drinking my coffee
out of a silver thermos mug,
shaped like a stemless wine glass
curved and cool against my palms.
The point was to protect the baby
from spills, but it became
a solace in my sleep-deprived state,
soft brown liquid, still hot,
even relentless hours later.

When she was a few months
old, screaming in the car seat,
the mug I had forgotten
on the roof of the car
tumbled down with surprise at a stoplight —
soft brown liquid, still hot,
streaking my windshield like
muddy rain, like a film across the eye
before blinking.

I watched as my mug
ran the red, escaped
head over heels down the hill
lid-less, kid-less
emptied of its contents,
laughing hysterically.

Franziska Roesner / Seattle, Washington

Chilled Spirits / Christel Maass

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

A crow glides overhead
and calls out a name
as I walk along Lake Superior's
Graveyard Coast
where skeletons of ships
rest
on red sandstone
under the breakers.

I arrive wind battered
at the tired lighthouse
filled with ghosts.

Christel Maass / Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Durance / Annie Stenzel

When I left off with my last lover, I did not think
I was slamming the door forever on physical
expressions of affection. If I thought about it at all,
I might have used the word hiatus.

And then, nobody came next. There was a slow
healing from what had ended badly—that long pain
like a snail-track on a moving sidewalk. But bruised,
my feelings balked at the prospect of anyone new.

Let's say years passed, and now more
than a decade has vanished behind me.
At some point in the span of time, my friends wondered,
anyone new on the horizon? And then they stopped asking.

I was staring at my face the other day
for some sensible reason, and my mouth caught my attention.
No one but the mirror witnessed a single finger
trying to remind my lips what touch felt like.

Annie Stenzel / Point Richmond, California

A Little Escapade / Michelle Li

for Helen—thank you for reading my writing,
and happy seventeenth birthday

Let us suppose we walked into a winter with no exit signs, the
lawns flammable behind us. We'll vanish softly, like clean

snow underneath a warm afternoon, the bird song in the trees
the sharpest thing in miles. Forgive me—I am cold throughout

the end of a year closing itself, and cannot help dreaming at night
to keep myself happy. At breakfast, my mother asks what time I went to

sleep/what I want to do with my life/what it means to be a daughter with
no origins. Forgive me, I tell her, I spent my time thinking about my future

without contrition, with slurred abandon on each new skyline I walked
beneath, shoe soles grating an uneven horizon. Let me leave a sob

story without intention, but by carelessness, by accident, by dreams; the birds
silhouetted by a swollen moon. Have I told you how much I love standing in the

rain? Fistfuls of water, and here is the river of my palm and the way it holds
nothing*. Here is my lifeline and the way it shivers in December,

where I stand drenched under each new rainfall. Here is the room with
all of my remembered moments. Helen, somewhere in the world,

I am thinking of you, and you are laughing in the rain. Helen,
come spring and everything will be green—growing out of forgotten love
songs,

out of steeled earth, green whittling the countryside into landscape, the fault
lines in my mother's voice. Helen, remember the time I cried and cried in the car

after basketball tryouts, the bruises on our knees bright. Helen, this is where
the camera pins us down, and we are young with high pigtails, singing.

Helen, I don't have enough tragedy to be sad anymore but just enough
for a love poem. Helen, I don't know if I believe in God, but I believe you

are beautiful. Helen, we'll go away, sing a love song in the rain, dry our bodies
by silver moonlight. Helen, the birds outside are calling us—

-

My mother asks, gods where is my reckless, reckless daughter.
Helen, in the mornings, you are the kindest thing for miles.

Michelle Li / Austin, Texas

*From Ayanna Uppal's "Moon-Side-Up"

Greg asks if I ever played after doing lines of speed. He looks at me, presses an index finger to his nostril, snorts loudly - just to emphasize the point. I tell him I haven't, that I'm good with caffeine, know a dealer that sorts me out. His ears prick up at "dealer."

"Barista," I clarify.

He says I'm missing out; tells me I'd go to the next level if I did some with him.

"Come on, man," he says. "You'd be quicker than Travis!"

"Fuck off," I laugh, pressing my cigarette into the brick wall. "I'll see you in there."

The place is dimly lit. It's for the best. It would be confronting to see the scars, lack of teeth; the way people look at you. Posters line the walls, many fading, scratched to death; all relics of the past, flashbacks to hangovers.

"You're on at 9," says the burly man standing in the doorway, arms folded. I nod, look at his tear-drop tattoos, wonder what poor bastard he killed; if they attended the shows littering the walls.

Green room smells like stale cigarettes, cheap perfume and sweat - scents which infiltrate the foundations and linger forever. I throw my Styrofoam cup in the nearest bin, don't dare to see what else lurks in there.

Guitarist drops gear at my feet, opens a case, looks at me with concern. "You alright, mate?" he asks.

"Never better," I smile, nervously swinging on a chair.

My fingers jostle coins in my pocket, PA vibrates through walls, crates of beer land on benches.

“Good to see you again, man,” says a dread-locked guy whose name I can’t recall. “Has been a while!”

He passes a bottle of vodka around; goes through the hands of bandmates and others, skips me. They are friends, comrades in arms, and at the same time, strangers.

“Might grab some air,” I say, slapping the guitarist on the shoulder.

Eyes swarm me like a gang of angry wasps. Neon exit sign is the insect repellent I need. Cold air hits my face; pull jacket up, wander into the night. People laugh under heat lamps, shovel food into mouths, hail cabs, walk arm-in-arm to new destinations. Bars and restaurants cast a warm glow over busy streets; music dancing from each.

I’ll think about this walk for years; how I could have kept going, not turned around, never known the path I found. I’ll remember how her smile wrapped around me, through frosted windows across the street; how it was a life raft in hostile waters.

“You’ve got this, mate,” the guitarist says, moments before we take the stage. “At least you’ll remember it now.”

Heart races, fingers twirl, fog lingers. Jeans and shirt cling to body, yet I stand naked before them; nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. Applause builds, waves break over stage. Sink or swim. Black silhouettes surge forward, animals sensing blood.

I grip sticks, hope to survive, and then I see it: that smile. Front row, centre left. Everything will be okay.

“1-2-3-4!”

Rowan MacDonald / Kingston, Tasmania



Drawing
Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky

Masonry / Edward Lees

The photograph shows jowled men
side-by-side in uniforms, carrying truncheons.
Some mouth cigars and one
calmly looks at us
with the poise of belonging,
of owning.
His confidence could refute a dream.
But the marchers did get to Montgomery
and the Voter's Rights Act did pass.
Half a century after the photo was taken,
I see angry rain drive rough city streams
and wonder how they arise -
these occasional visibilities.
Perhaps it is how a broken wave speaks
of the sand-bar beneath.
I think that this surge had been openly predicted
for all to see:
written there in the pavement,
written in stone.

Edward Lees / London, United Kingdom

Crew teams, a singlet or so, turn
the water's weight, river sparking
silver shards, as if to coxswains'
drumbeat. We're walking, stopping

to rest Dawn's new back, now housing
hardware: six screws, two rods held
in place by bone harvested from
her hip. Arriving in Philadelphia

in 1892 from a village in Russia,
Simon Klein opened the grocery store
where this October afternoon in 2024
we purchase root vegetables pulled

from Jersey soil for tonight's soup.
The day's all rhythm, all back and
forth, the river turning, our walking,
our minds dipping through centuries

like oars pushing and pulling.
At the next resting spot, cradling
a few pounds of parsnips swaddled
in brown paper, I start to sway,

begin, without intent, a mother's
rock I've witnessed women perform
around babies' cries for closeness,
milk. Dawn stands to go on as I

go on rocking the parsnips
like a nanny, curious, suddenly,
as to why this indoor/outdoor
bar's named Bishop's Collar,

know that I can rock the parsnips
with one arm, Google with another
to learn that this term refers to
the head on a Guinness, white foam

atop dark ale like the circling
white band above Catholic
bishops' black frocks, like a
river's froth, all of me wanting

all of it together, synchronized
rowing, Klein's supermarket,
babies held, fed, full, harvests
of enough, flesh fixed with

bionics, death, of course, death,
bishops blessing whomever
we love to go on and on, cradling
earth, seas, endlessly rocking.

Virginia Smith / Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Mindfulness / Raymond Byrnes

I close my eyes, inhale to a slow count of four
hold for seven; leak out all breath and thought
for eight; inhale, relax. I picture a solitary daffodil
bright yellow on velvet green. Daffodil, daffodil...

fry bluegills in bacon grease; shower tomorrow;
get two-stroke engine oil; call Ben and Beth;
asphalt's going to steam after this rain; I could
really use some pancakes; all toddlers can dance;
I will help my little buddy cut out more coupons;
seal the grout; get fermented dills; take more CDs
to Goodwill; shoot a garden video for Uncle John

Inhale. Daffodil, daffodil...

Raymond Byrnes / Leesburg, Virginia

While touring the natural history museum, my grandma Rita, who's still here but nearly gone (down to ninety-seven pounds with her scarf on), says to hell with a burial, insists the sea cucumber in the museum's doing death the right way—stuffed in a jar of alcohol to preserve its looks. Grandma Rita takes a shot of whiskey every night at seven o'clock. And she sips one now, when the guide's not looking, from a tiny brown bottle stored in her snakeskin purse. She says it keeps her young—loosens her joints and makes her nostalgic—when the whiskey's warm enough.

Maybe that's why the sea cucumber's chosen a jar of alcohol, boozing to feel nostalgic for the days when it floated freely across the Pacific—no museum, no glass, just the sparkle of sun, the taste of salt, a blue rippled view of the entire world. I lean closer to the cucumber, notice its body's blanketed with pimply white sprouts, like the potatoes Grandma Rita finds in the back of cabinet, dusts off, and calls “ripe and ready.” But then I see other spots too, bright yellow ones that glow in the fluorescent light like they're worth something.

Grandma Rita's pretty in old pictures—pimple-free, clear skin, clear eyes. She didn't drink back then, only danced, back in her happy school days. When she lived in the tiny black and white house in Minnesota she insists was really the color of fire. When she twirled her sister around in the kitchen to radio tunes and whirled across auditorium stages in polka dot dresses and wasted winter mornings carving her swing partner's name with a stick in the snow. Maybe those are the memories that defrost in the whiskey warmth. Or maybe it's the ones about Grandpa Chuck—an all-state sprinter whose heart beat too fast for his veins, and whose feet, Grandma Rita complained, were always too quick when he waltzed. She doesn't want to be buried beside Chuck (says he kicked in his dreams), but she still visits him every week, just to tell him she sleeps better now.

I watch Grandma Rita lean against a wall of piranha pictures, her skinny elbow resting between sharp toothed jaws as she takes another swig and smiles for a moment with her eyes closed. I'm only ten, but I wonder what would happen if I had a couple drops, if hazy images of my mother would sharpen, if I'd feel the way I did in kindergarten, when I named backyard bugs and jumped barefoot into puddles and never knew the time. If my memories would look like movie flashbacks—all golden, gleaming, and perfect.

The guide's already moved on to the anglerfish in the next display, to describing how it lures its prey to death with light, when Grandma Rita points her cane at the cucumber and says, loud enough for everyone to hear, "So how do these pickles get it on?" The guide smiles and claims sea cucumbers display no signs of intimacy. And though it's slight, I swear I catch Grandma Rita shaking her head sadly at this notion for just a moment before reaching back into her purse.

I take a last look at the jar before we head to the jellyfish exhibit. No signs of intimacy, huh? Well sure, I think to myself as I follow the group out of the room, maybe not when we're watching. Maybe not when scientists or tourists or silly museum-plaque-writers are sitting underwater on sea grass beds taking notes. But later, when the prodding divers with their cameras and tubes float away, when the sun sets and the water chills and the cucumbers slip under their sandy sheets, who's to say they don't cozy up and whisper that they're in love?

Seth Gleckman / Sebastopol, California



Digital Collage
Lisa Yount / El Cerrito, California

Every Warm Thing / Karen Craigo

The possums on the deck
seem more like ours
than the two cats
we adopted who hide
in the basement rafters.
We have no say
in who takes us up
on the bits of charity
we space out in a line
to end with a morsel
in the palm. Maybe
nothing will come —
not the cats who hiss
and run, nor the wild ones
who snuffle forth
wedges of nose
to sniff out the worth
of our leavings.
There we sit, still
in the dark, milk
arrayed in saucers.
Every warm thing
seems to inch our way,
and then spies us
and leaps and runs.
We have little say
in who ends up
loving us, despite
the care by which
we offer our scraps
or that voice, high
and keening, to show
we mean no harm.

Karen Graigo / Springfield, Missouri

Grief Birds / Karen Craigo

Don't worry—I still move
through the world. At first
I doubted I could stir
or raise myself up
on an elbow to sip
a bit of broth.
But I'm fine. I go
to the store, read the back
of the cereal box, notice
each time the furnace kicks on.
What I mean is
I take things in. Just today
I saw where some species of bat
hibernate through the cold,
but others migrate. That's right.
You figure you're looking
at birds in flight,
but they're so much darker,
so much more upside-down.

Karen Craigo / Springfield, Missouri

A Camera for Sale / Jonathan Chibuike Ukah

I have put up my video camera for sale
and if you're interested, you can buy it.
Its lens is the size of the sky,
its focus is the sea, and its size is the earth.
My grandfather bought it for me
when the soldiers came to attack us.
It has videos of my family weeping
after pleading with the soldiers to leave us alone,
to leave my grandfather, not to force him
because he was too old to go to war.
You will see the day my mother
hit a soldier with her balled fist
and his colleagues spent the afternoon
searching for the healing cassava leaves.
We have no ice to place on our wounds,
but here in this camera is our wound
oozing blood, water and freshness.

See pictures of the kwashiorkor children,
naked ribs, bony ankles, skinny bodies,
eyes popping out of hollow sockets,
as they lined up at the refugee camp
where the Red Cross shared cornmeal and rice,
bread, baked beans, bones of goat,
wheat, oats and assorted canned beans.
It's the history of a destroyed people,
ready to give up the ghost in the afternoon,
arrayed in pictures and films, in memories uncut.
How can we forget so soon the wounds
which our carelessness inflicted upon our children?
Buy this camera and embalm these memories.
Do not forget the ancient landmarks;
observe how our bodies are in ruins
having wasted our time building piles of paper.

Now that the war is over,
and there is no victor, no vanquished,
now that the children did not die in their days
before waking up to this dawn smiling at them,
a world fermented with their photos
announcing their fame, their courage,
how they confronted the dragon on empty stomachs
and slaughtered it before dawn broke up the night
and the first morning dew sneaked out,
now is the time to celebrate their eternity.
There's no need to fall into despair now
because these pictures tell a story
of how to win a war without shooting a gun,
swim the Atlantic Ocean with no skill,
of how a shark can somersault inside a sea
that no mortal pen or arrow or gun can kill
or obliterate from the pages of history books.

Jonathan Chibuike Ukah / London, United Kingdom

Mountain Torrent With Stars / Judy Kaber

after *Dark Night in the Pyrénées Mountains*
by Jean-Francois Graffand

Here the stream becomes the gift of light	fog from stars
heart dark blue skin of sky lucent and full	in the shade of oak and pine pricked of longing
some stars may last against this	forever darkness
rollicking in sound fluvial murmurs, chords	small crevices notes choruses
constant drummings ripple through the human beast that struggles calamitous, cacophonous	soothe this imperfect soul unseen beneath
the churning of	stars

Judy Kaber / Belfast, Maine

I remembered it was close to the university, walking distance, after the traffic circle. Every morning that summer I would stride to class and marvel that my teacher could speak English, Italian, German, French to all the students assembled for three weeks.

Studying abroad was my friend Joan's idea, staying in a traditional pension, full meals, each of us with a room in the attic, its layout like Vincent van Gogh's. A simple single bed on the right, light streaming through one window every afternoon. After class I'd sit at my ink-stained oak desk and try to figure out what to write.

Outside everything was green, the wide expanse of yard, front and back, where we took our meals family style. We peeled our lunchtime bananas with knife and fork. There was the rotund man we all called Papa, although I never knew whether he had any children. And a young woman who corrected my French, exasperated that someone could make so many basic mistakes. *Vous dites, vous dites!*

Papa once took us out for Turkish coffee, showed us how strong and sweet it was, how you could stick your spoon in the dregs, and it would hold.

That summer I learned the word *désaxer*, unhinged – the young woman used it to describe a character in a Bardot film, which explained everything – loneliness and loss and fear of going crazy over a term paper about the United Nations Charter.

That time I went back to Geneva, I told my driver to keep going around and around, insisting the place must be there, except the pension had been torn down to make way for a medical complex and high rises, and Joan, back home had jumped out of a window, ending it.

Ronnie Hess / Madison, Wisconsin



Photograph
Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky

The Ghosts in My House / William Derge

The ghosts in my house
are too clever by half.
They choose windy days
to occupy the rocking chair
on the patio,
and power outs that
flicker and kill the light
to come on board.
They wait for the cats
to dent and warm the pillows
before they lay their heads.
It's all a clever ruse.
They don't really care
about making their presence
known. They have
no messages to send.
They are content
to let us live in comfort
without a scare.

But I'm not buying it.
I tell them the awful news
of what's happening today
and that I'm scared.
And I say that it's all their fault.
Of course they don't answer.
Maybe they've taken offense,
or maybe they're ashamed.
It really makes no sense for them
to defend themselves,
being powerless to change the past.

But I think their silence is
just another one of their tricks
to let appearances hide the truth.
On this side of the veil,
I'm just another crazy coot talking
to a pillow, to a chair,
to the dark.

Columbine / William Derge

Columbine. A generation
will know of it for only one thing.
Will they ever bother to
look up its meaning or origin?

Two years ago, we planted
a handful of seeds to fill
an empty spot in a flower bed.
We hadn't done our homework,
or we would have learned
that, unchecked, Columbine multiplies
as unashamedly as dandelions.

Now, we look about
for any spot where it hasn't
taken hold.
We've made
our bed a common lot,
and now we have to lie in it,
like lotus eaters without
the motivation
when we awaken,
to wash the sheets
we've made an
awful mess of.

William Derge / Frederick, Maryland

Director's Cut / Craig Dobson

The camera's pause on him –
three drinks in, jacket creased –
is drawn to a feminine bud
of shadow in the corner,
unfolding among the song
that she's just put on: one
that has you three bars in,
and tags this whole scenario.
Its teasing chords compete
with the pool game's ratchet
and the bar staff's banter,
allowing the set's synaesthetic
subliminals to flow from shot
to sense, and so define
the film's unravelling intent...

... or tiring hold: this song's
dismal chorus drizzling on,
these background figures'
distracting blur, even the girl's
tawdry florescence absorbed
by something more compelling
than our hero's leaden stroll
across the floor to score
the lens's ironic show with nothing
so original as a simple Hello.

Craig Dobson / Sussex, United Kingdom

My Second (and Last) Day on the Farm / Bradley Samore

We each lift one green bean
seedling at a time, poke a hole
in the soil with a finger,
place the roots in, then finger-rake
soil to surround the stem.
Stand up. Shuffle. Crouch. Repeat.
I ask Francisco why
he's not wearing gloves, and he says
Con los guantes puestos, no puedo ser
tan preciso. Daño las raíces.
I fumble a few more seedlings,
accidentally snap a stem, yank
off my gloves. I rotate which finger
I poke with till all my nail beds brim
with dirt and pain. I never knew dirt
could hurt so much.

5 hours in,
knees trembling, I refuse to admit
to Francisco that I can't keep up
with a potbellied 50-year-old man.
Just as I'm about to say I need to sit,
he says we're all breaking
for lunch. The other men join us,
taking turns pumping water from the
hand-washing station, splashing
our faces. One man calls out
the gringo elephant at the table:
¿Pero por qué estás aquí
en vez de estudiar para ser
abogado o médico?
I say Quiero conocer la tierra
con mis manos, but he just looks at me.
Feeling his stare, the pain under
my fingernails gripping my sandwich,
I'm not sure I know anymore.

Bradley Samore / Plano, Texas

Rear View / David Chorlton

Here's a handful of sunset to savor,
a taste of last light
that will last until dawn,
a few inches of lightning
and a rain scented leaf for a keepsake.
Here's a minute preserved
from the past,
a raindrop that fell
in the last summer storm, and a glass
full of fog from midwinter. Here's a bone
washed clean of moonlight
and repeating all night a few bars
from a mockingbird's song.
There's space enough
between what's true
and false for a comet
or a dream to pass, wind running behind,
its cheeks puffed full with stars.

David Chorlton / Phoenix, Arizona

My Dead Dog Comes to Me in Dreams / Nicelle Davis

Myths about dogs say they could have been human but refused to give up their impulsive tendencies. I should have opted to be a dog. I have thoughts of digging up the body to see how it's coming along—to understand firsthand how the planet manages to contain multitudes and not split open. Did you know it can take up to 18 years for a dog to decompose? The internet knows. There are videos made just for people like me to watch how the smile never goes away—flesh tatters like a flag in the wind. My therapist tells me not to get another dog, not until I learn how to love the dogs that are living with me, and do not require anything other than me. I've cried the weight of my dead dog in tears. My therapist warns, people often cry more for pets than family, because we have no rules when it comes to mourning animals.

Nicelle Davis / Quartz Hill, California

Love in the Empty Spaces / Nicelle Davis

My friend, the psychic, arrives unannounced
at my door with the ugliest flowers she could find—
an off sort of purple that could be taken for the color *dead*.

She knows, without being told, that my dog has died,
and offers a joyless bouquet for the freshly dug grave
in the backyard. She is magic and most magic lives in

the cracks of things. Things have changed since her heart
was stitched back together—more blood, more vigor, but
energy can be tricky when it comes at midlife—she might

burst at any moment. She says, *You've always had a gift
for communing with the dead*. I tell her, I feel as though
I could follow them right across thresholds—go and come back.

And you could. But you shouldn't, she warns me. I've lost five
friends this summer to psych-breaks. Six if I include my father.
On my ride home from work today I screamed into the open

road my dead dog's name until I lost my voice. He didn't come
when I called him. He never did.
They never do.

Nicelle Davis / Quartz Hill, California

I Untangle the Chimes / Raya Yarbrough

When there is nothing I can do about the world,
I untangle the chimes.

They complicate themselves
in the wind.

When I hear
the silver ting of syllables,
the spell exchanged
between hollow metal reeds,

I know that I will soon be useful.

I know the abrupt chorus
in the emergency of a squirrel's foot.
And the shatter song
from the children's chaos.

I listen for days
until the flutter rings are gone.

Then I walk out into the garden.
Past the broadcast news of the ashes of my hometown.
Past the pixelated faces of children limp,
and wrapped in white, in the holy land.
Past the smug of oligarchs, claiming Jesus like a brand name.
Past my profile in the mirror, growing gaunt and gray of these things.

I sit down at the bough of the tree
at the mess of jingle and string.

Reed by reed,
I unweave, and unweave.

And reed by hollow reed,
they begin again
to sing.

Raya Yarbrough / Culver City, California

Thanking the Barista / Colleen Alles

At 6:36 a.m.,
a barista with hair

the color of an azalea
hands me a white cup

filled with black coffee
without knowing my father

three hundred miles away
is in a paper towel

gown of powder
blue—embellished

maybe with navy clusters
of clovers, possibly some

scattered fleur-de-lis. I am only
guessing at the gown

because all my mother said
just now was,

They're ready to take him.
I don't know how fragile

all this is because I'm not
there, I'm here—thanking

the barista, wrapping my hands
around the double-walled

cup whose flimsy insulation
can't contain

scalding heat. I'm picturing
hands belonging to doctors,

surgeons—the way they'll touch
his skin as he sleeps

and when the barista
smiles again, tells me

be so careful with that,
dear,

I nod, close my eyes
briefly, then make from this

moment some kind
of prayer.

Morning After the Election / Colleen Alles

This year, let's give
our gratitude
to the wide-winged
hawk atop the utility pole

taking the long view,
I like to think

open-eyed, undeterred—
aware,
as we are,
he was promised

a tree.

Colleen Alles / East Grand Rapids, Michigan

Ripe Now / Nancy Noelke

My word for the year is savor—
as in this ripe Anjou pear,
its soft red skin
opening sweet gritty rivers
in my mouth.

I do not know when I will die.
It is none of my business.

So now, bring me figs and prosciutto,
almonds and honey, paired with Pinot.
Take my hand
beside a luminous stream
next to the bur oak,
its branches like our own—
wide-reaching into full fall sun.

The world is always ending, isn't it?
Maybe we are meant for now.

Taking our seat
on this warm patch of earth
as tangerine sun caps
over the western sky
and you offering me
sweet dusk in a cup.

Nancy Noelke / La Crosse, Wisconsin

Seriously / James Lilliefors

To love this way is to visit the ruins
of the house where life began,
where inspiration once flowed
through thousands of secret rivers;
where sins hung in shady solitude
like ripe fruit in the front yard,
and great burnished stones baked
out back in the drought
of a secret yearning.

To love this way is to excavate
the blue that was buried in the Earth
beneath that house long ago, making time
to re-dress the still-healing wounds
that gave life its meaning, waiting
for night to come and quench the wants,
warmed by sacred stones,
by steadfast starlight.

To love this way is to pray
for the mortal streams to twine
with the divine, to roll back
through the rooms of childhood
where good souls in greenhouses grew.
To see your morning-blue windows
again, and hear your Earth-toned voice,
surprised to find: this is not a serious place
anymore, not a serious country;
but then to occupy it anyway,
seriously this time, not as before,
in love with what is missing –
and in so doing, to love it more.

James Lilliefors / Naples, Florida

The End of an Era / Christy Hartman

A bonito flake dances on my forefinger while you break up with me.
I blow the papery fish flake onto my tuna tataki; it balances on a
piece of pickled ginger.

Apparently, you were humiliated by my vintage Chanel dress. I'd
missed the memo that your company Christmas party dress code was
uninspired fast-fashion bodycon minis and two-thousand-dollar hair
extensions.

Small talk with those sequined dresses and plumped up lips had
turned into a perky firing squad.

Up-cycled sculptures? That's—interesting.

But what's your real job?

Hobbies are important, especially once you and Josh have kids.

I did water colours in high school. Even won a contest once.

That dress is so—unique. I could never pull off something like that.

In college, you called my style bewitching. You'd tag along on my
thrift store circuit, a golden retriever boyfriend holding up corduroy
pants and fringed jackets for approval. I'd toss you vintage tees and
Levi's to wear to the revival theatre or free Thursday at the museum.

Today you're convinced my fraying hem cost you a promotion. A
piece of sushi rice clings to your stiff upper lip.

My mind flies over the floating sushi boats and soars through the
restaurant window. Complaints about my lack of motivation,
foresight, and support fade as I spread my arms, spinning down
Main Street, away from your insecurities and judgements to the
ocean. My patchwork skirt billows in saltwater as I watch my future
roll by in cotton-ball clouds: a little studio surrounded by
wildflowers, steaming pot pies in English pubs, a partner who won't
decide I'm not enough.

Your silence signals my turn to talk. I spew enough ingenuous
platitudes about growth and change to satisfy your sensitive ego,
then float from the restaurant, light as a bonito flake.

Christy Hartman / Comox, British Columbia