

# 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday



Summer 2026

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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 2026*

There is a particular kind of optimism that arrives in a submission confirmation email. The poet has revised their poems, triple-checked the guidelines, and sent their work out into the small, faithful world of the literary journal. Now they'll wait several months (not 3rd Wednesday) for a likely rejection. Then, with something that looks like hope, they'll do it again.

This is the merry-go-round of contemporary poetry's grassroots ecosystem: write, submit, wait, receive rejection, revise, resubmit. For the many thousands of poets who will never appear in *Poetry* or *The New Yorker*, the regional quarterly, the university-affiliated magazine with two hundred readers, the online zine run by two graduate students — any of which serve as both arena and reward.

What drives the carousel? Publication in even a small journal confers legitimacy. It tells the poet that someone read their work and chose it over someone else's. That small confirmation matters enormously because acceptance is proof of existence.

The machinery of submission performs a useful cultural function. Lesser-known journals are the research-and-development wing of the art form. They absorb enormous quantities of imperfect work and occasionally surface something startling. The minor journal is where the major poet is sometimes made—gradually, through iteration and rejection and the occasional yes that encourages them do it again.

Then there is the question of readership. Most journals are read almost exclusively by other submitting poets. Poetry ends up speaking mostly to itself, and yet the merry-go-round keeps turning. Poetry requires community, community requires exchange, and exchange requires venue. The lesser-known journal, underfunded, overstretched, but edited with genuine love, provides all three. It tells poets that their obsession is shared, their labor is witnessed, and their art form is not, quite yet, alone in the world.

It may not sound like much, but for the poet waiting on a reply, it's almost everything. Round and round we go.

David Jibson, Editor

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*Notes from a Teacher's Meeting in Winter* / Blake Kilgore

Just when I caught a small patch of brown grass  
hungering up to the sun, tomorrow's forecast calls  
for more dreary gloom—ice and snow, freezing gale. I'm weary  
of the shovel, long nights, the lingering pain in my spine.

Yesterday, eighteen years ago, my father died on a table  
in a sterile chamber, surrounded by none of his kin. I was  
five hundred and thirty-one miles south, gazing down  
into shallow green waters from an arched stone bridge

traversed by sightseers shuffling their way to remember  
the Alamo, where Travis, Bowie and Davy Crockett all died.  
I was taught to blame Santa Ana. He was ruthless, true, but sometimes  
heroes dig their own graves. This morning I'm learning to smooth the path,

to offer a smile, to welcome the multi-language learner. One  
of my colleagues just leaned over, whispered a sad tale—his toddler  
son participated in ICE raid drills at his preschool yesterday morn.  
My buddy's son is brown; his winter has only begun.

Blake Kilgore / Burlington, New Jersey



Photograph  
Michael C. Roberts / Anthem, Arizona

*The Dream and the Long Journey* / Brian Kates

I am sitting on a chair in my study late at night,  
feet propped up on my desk, a book of poems open  
on my lap and in my hand a half-empty glass of bourbon.

My eyes are closed and I see myself, small and solitary,  
sitting under an ancient elm in the middle of a meadow,  
dusk edging daylight into darkness.

Behind me is the rambling brick farmhouse where  
my classmate lives with her mom and dad,  
on a small farm, struggling to make ends meet.

I am eleven years old and deep in the oblivion  
of a daydream. She, I'm sure, was the subject  
of my dream. But what I remember, can never forget,

is the scent of clover and alfalfa, the pink and purple  
of the pre-dark summer evening and the feeling  
that I am at the start of a long and mystical journey.

Brian Kates / Pomona, New York

*Cicada Song* / Brian Kates

Like the joyous racket of water  
racing over rocks,  
wind chimes caught  
in a summer breeze,  
the incessant om mani padme hum  
of a whirling prayer wheel,  
the relentless rhythm of  
the earth creaking on its axis.  
And yes, my love,  
the rock-n-roll of our bedsprings  
on this sweaty August night.

Brian Kates / Pomona, New York

*Schoolyard* / J. R. Solonche

I drove by the elementary school this afternoon. It was recess. All the kids were in the schoolyard working hard at playing. There were about a hundred, so one of them is bound to be a poet someday. It will be the one you least expect. It will be the one not working hard. The tall, skinny boy with glasses, shooting hoops alone.

J. R. Solonche / Blooming Grove, New York

*Happy Hour* / J. R. Solonche

The clock strikes a bargain  
with the light, shaves a sliver  
off the afternoon to pay for  
a glass of something amber.  
Now is the hour of the great  
softening when the sharp edges  
of the workday begin to blur.  
The room is a choir of low  
voices, a steady hum of small  
confessions rising above  
the clink of the ice. There's  
a temporary grace in the salt,  
in the way the lime sits on  
the rim, a small, green moon.  
We're all investors in this brief  
market who trade deadlines  
for a sixty-minute truce. By  
the time the sun touches  
the glass, the heavy lifting  
of being ourselves has been  
set down on the floor, and  
for a moment, the tab is  
settled, the shadows are long  
and kind, and the next hour  
is someone else's problem.

J. R. Solonche / Blooming Grove, New York

*Corvids* / Audrey Hackett

Three crows come  
not so much  
to eat the seeds as  
strut awhile and talk.  
Their patent leather  
feathers shine in  
such a way that I  
wonder if they look  
in each other's mirrors—  
remembering  
the ghost of my face  
bending to each shoe.  
Behind them a pall  
of fog and ice  
wraps hills and trees  
in the white air.  
I do not know why  
they affect me this way—  
only to say that  
they're theatrical  
and beautiful  
and sad.

Audrey Hackett / Sandisfield, Massachusetts



Photograph  
Kathleen Gunton / Orange, California

*My Ex-lover Said Blues Was His Favorite Genre* / Obiageli  
Iloakasia

& heartbreak songs soothed his spirit  
like the buzz of cicadas at sunset.

One night, he cupped a cicada in his right  
palm & labeled it *the best jazz artist*

*of the twenty-first century*. I believed him.  
That same night, news from Nigeria reported

that unidentified armed herders massacred  
about a hundred villagers in Benue. I doubted

the news. What we choose to believe becomes  
the truth. I slept that night, hoping my disbelief

would falsify the news from home. Cleaving  
to succor, I laid on his chest & listened

to our heartbeats colliding, as though we were  
twelve or thirteen, in love for the first time.

Obiageli Iloakasia / Memphis, Tennessee

**29-B Adler Place / David Colodney**

Don't ask me why I remember this address: brownstone townhome,  
as hard as brick & the mortals living their diaspora of moments inside.  
We don't stay here long, but I can't stop thinking of this place & I can't stop  
thinking of it as home.

My Google Earth search from thousands of miles & several decades away  
leads to a street view photo of a screened gazebo, pink & white flowers  
in steady rows, attempting to cheer up that still sepia façade.  
I see it, but none of this appears in the tenancy of my memory.

What it reveals is this:  
Me on a Saturday morning running down the stairs, flinging  
the storm door open, only to be blinded by the sting of the sun  
cascading across a sheet of snow.

Me at six or seven, my mother & father vibrant,  
my sister not yet a box on a high shelf, too far to reach.  
On a black and white Zenith TV, I watch Brian's Song & cry  
at a sports movie for the first time but not the last.

That Internet image stares back at me like a lecture.  
Sidewalk cracks seam through the concrete like the train track veins  
running through my body. I hope the crevices splinter & leave  
room for a trauma of dandelions.

David Colodney / Boynton Beach, Florida

*Mockingbird* / David Chorlton

The silver-throated bird  
who cannot sleep imitates the sound

dreams make when they float  
on darkness. It passes down the street

where windows are left open  
for the season's scents to drift

inside. One tune becomes  
another while the midnight presses roll

with next day's headlines.  
Questions daylight cannot answer

roost in trees, convenience store cold  
cases hum to themselves and

driver-less cars go wandering with no  
destination. Bright moon, insomnia,

a radio playing another country's  
music and an intravenous drip of starlight

sky to Earth sustaining  
the vital signs of mystery.

David Chorlton / Phoenix, Arizona

*Under My Umbrella* / Richard Holdsworth

At the city crossing  
sirens rose and fell  
traffic rushed and braked  
as tires swished through rain  
Walkers hurried by,  
heads bent,  
keeping pace  
But under my umbrella  
the steady drum of rain  
above my head  
gathered me  
and quieted the rush.

Richard Holdsworth / Wilmington, Delaware

*Where Fall Leaves* / Kathleen Gunton



Photograph  
Kathleen Gunton / Orange, California

*What We Don't Know* / Paul Miller

We cannot love what we don't know.  
But that doesn't stop us.  
Opening ourselves to someone,  
we flood a field with moonlight.  
We've not been to that moon,  
and its light is only a reflection.  
Still, we feel a welling up,  
urge words to describe it,  
then lay down to welcome the dew  
that accompanies us into morning.

Paul Miller / Bloomington, Minnesota

*Wherefore Winter?* / John Muro

There's little else to slow my steps  
besides the soft diffusion of light  
and a maundering wind in search  
of some fallen leaf to lift or place  
to pause as it makes passage through  
the fissured wood before suddenly  
erasing itself and leaving behind  
a silence that seems well-suited to  
a world dipped in paraffin with its  
lacquered trees and frosted fields  
and where snow-dusted hills extend  
like a string of pearls beneath a sky  
fashioned from clouds of graphite  
gray blotting out an aging sun  
in such a way that even this early  
hour appears perched upon the cusp  
of dusk and eventually, with no  
distractions or outward signs of life,  
the fatigued eye can't help but to turn  
inwards in a slow drift towards  
an even deeper stillness seeking to set  
aside memories of those who only-  
just endured this life and still haunt  
the tormented heart without so much  
as a breeze to lift or resettle them.

John Muro / Glastonbury, Connecticut



Photograph  
Ann Kazak / Havertown, Pennsylvania

*Smile* / Mark Williams

—with thanks to Charlie Chaplin

I'm working on a short story. If you read it,  
you'll find slang words for someone's death  
on page 7, words I had trouble coming up with,  
since the character who speaks them, Ryan,  
a Gen Z sod farmer about to dig up  
a distant relative's gold-filled grave,  
is a half-century younger than me. Who knows  
how he'd describe death. So,

when I'm walking out of Barnes & Noble  
and see two young men about to get in a blue Jeep,  
I walk up to them and say, "Excuse me,  
I'm writing a story. One of the characters  
is about your age. What slang words  
do you guys use to say someone has died?  
Kicked the bucket? Bought the farm?  
We used to say someone croaked."

Much as darkness increases  
a minute or two each day in fall,  
my thoughts of death grow more frequent.  
The bucket's within a leg-length. It's as if  
I live near a frog-filled pond.  
"If any of you cry at my funeral,  
I'll never speak to you again,"  
Stan Laurel said to his nurse.

"This wallpaper and I are fighting  
a duel to the death," said Oscar Wilde  
on his deathbed in Paris. Thank you,  
Stan Laurel. Thank you, Oscar, for seeing  
how you closed the deal on your farms; and  
thank you, young man for adding light to my day.  
"I just say, they died," he said,  
before he slammed his blue door shut.

Mark Williams / Evansville, Indiana



Digital Drawing  
Tony Brinkley / Bangor, Maine

*A Faster Brain* / Lew Forester

If only the brain sped up as we aged  
instead of slowing down—  
we'd catch sly digs and instantly

produce a clever retort, see each sleight  
of hand and not be swindled.  
How great to deduce the outcomes

of words before blurting them out,  
know which to send forth like blessings  
and which to let rot on the tongue.

But I'm thinking of a brain fast enough  
to stop motion, still life, count feathers  
on a hummingbird wing mid-hover—

so fast that with one eye on the road,  
the other eye could read headstones  
while the cemetery flies by

at seventy miles per hour. We'd see  
that the hours are glass, even as we tally  
the grains of sand pouring through them.

Lew Forester / Arvada, Colorado

When Elvis's death was announced  
on AM radio, the air waves crackling  
    like limbs, I was sitting in the crotch  
    of the apple tree that never produced  
edible fruit, lacking the dogmatic  
alchemy of sun and water and bee  
    and soil that's necessary for it

to unkink into blossom. He'd had  
a heart attack while on the toilet.  
    At the time I thought nothing could be  
    more embarrassing than being  
caught dead with your pants  
down. Now I know that the indignity  
    is death itself, that no matter how

it arrives you won't survive  
what it does to your body in its final  
    moments, forcing out fluids  
    and a terrific amount of perfumes  
to climb into the nostrils of the person  
who finds you, who probably won't be  
    who you want it to be.

Jen Karetnick / El Portal, Florida

*Record Distance* / Aldis Petriceks

You wanted to feel something.  
I've wanted that, too.

I know the sound fear makes, a promise  
in the making like arrival of light  
from a dying star, feeling larger than life  
and then it's gone.

There's nothing smaller than a star without light.

*Farm Study in Northern China* / Aldis Petriceks

Where has love gotten us? All winter  
on the road and not any closer  
to the farm, and already the snowmelt.

Some things get farther away  
the more you think about them,  
unpainted parts of life taking shape,  
details formed in dim light  
tumbling toward an unknown harbor.

And as the day goes on  
they stay hanging, happening  
no matter how much we subtract  
the ink from silk, moon from tall grass,  
forgotten things that blossom at night.

Aldis Petriceks / Boston, Massachusetts

*A Slender Bookmark* / Juan Mobili

I believe you noticed  
that I paid close attention  
  
to your fingers when  
you pulled the silver wrapper  
  
off an empty pack  
of cigarettes, and folded it  
  
over and over  
into a slender bookmark  
  
to select a poem  
you loved and revisited  
  
time after time  
while you lit your last cigarette.

Juan Mobili / Valley Cottage, New York



Digital Drawing  
Tony Brinkley / Bangor, Maine

*Shell Beach* / Bob Meszaros

High on the moraine trail, between  
Long Island Sound and tidal salt marsh,  
on this Sunday afternoon in my eighty-second year,  
I stop to listen to the songbirds, to the sea surf  
beating boulders into silt, to the bark and wail  
of Harbor Seals sunning on the rocks.

And for a moment, I would be a child  
again, light-footed, eager, flushing sparrows  
from the trail-side marsh grass, driving Harbor Seals  
back into the Sound, diving into sea surf, my arms  
and legs spread welcome wide.

But, now, my steps are soundless, small  
and too precise. And like this windswept trail  
before me that dips and bends down to a hundred yards  
of empty shells, my body's old and beaten flat.

It is on Shell Beach that I smile.  
There, at trail's end, with each small step  
beneath my feet still I make the sea shells  
sing—my part in the music, now.

Bob Meszaros / Hamden, Connecticut

Here is a fact: humans share about 50% of their genes with potatoes, so part of me is a yellow-brown lump in my grandma's garden. I'm not sure how I feel about this. I'm not sure how my students would feel if I told them there was a potato inside them. They clutch notebooks to their chests & click their pens as we stroll through hallways of bones, bones, bones. I tell them to write what they see—carbon, life, death, lovers. I think about how I am a house of bone & fat & muscle. Blood trickles through my hallways. One day, I will be chunks of calcium scattered in dirt, and archeologists will uncover me with a shovel, prop up my femur in a glass case. They will say: *In this girl was a potato, and in a potato was this girl, and in us is a potato and this girl. Always and forevermore shall be.*

Evangeline Sanders / Columbia, South Carolina

*Paper Doll* / Katharine Gregg

The man—no special man—has tied  
the girl to a wall.

He's preparing his act.

Where did he find her?  
She's not even pretty--a bush  
of hair, maybe bad skin.

He bows to us, then stands back . . .

Delicately picks up each knife by the tip,  
flicks back his wrist

and throws.

The crowd holds its breath.

So do I.

Each blade whispers to the body.  
This happens twelve times.

He unties her.

She stands a moment without  
looking at us. I want her

to look at me but she just  
walks off stage.

Her outline remains  
empty space on a wall.

Katharine Gregg / Amherst, Massachusetts

*The Female Condition* / Manoela Torres

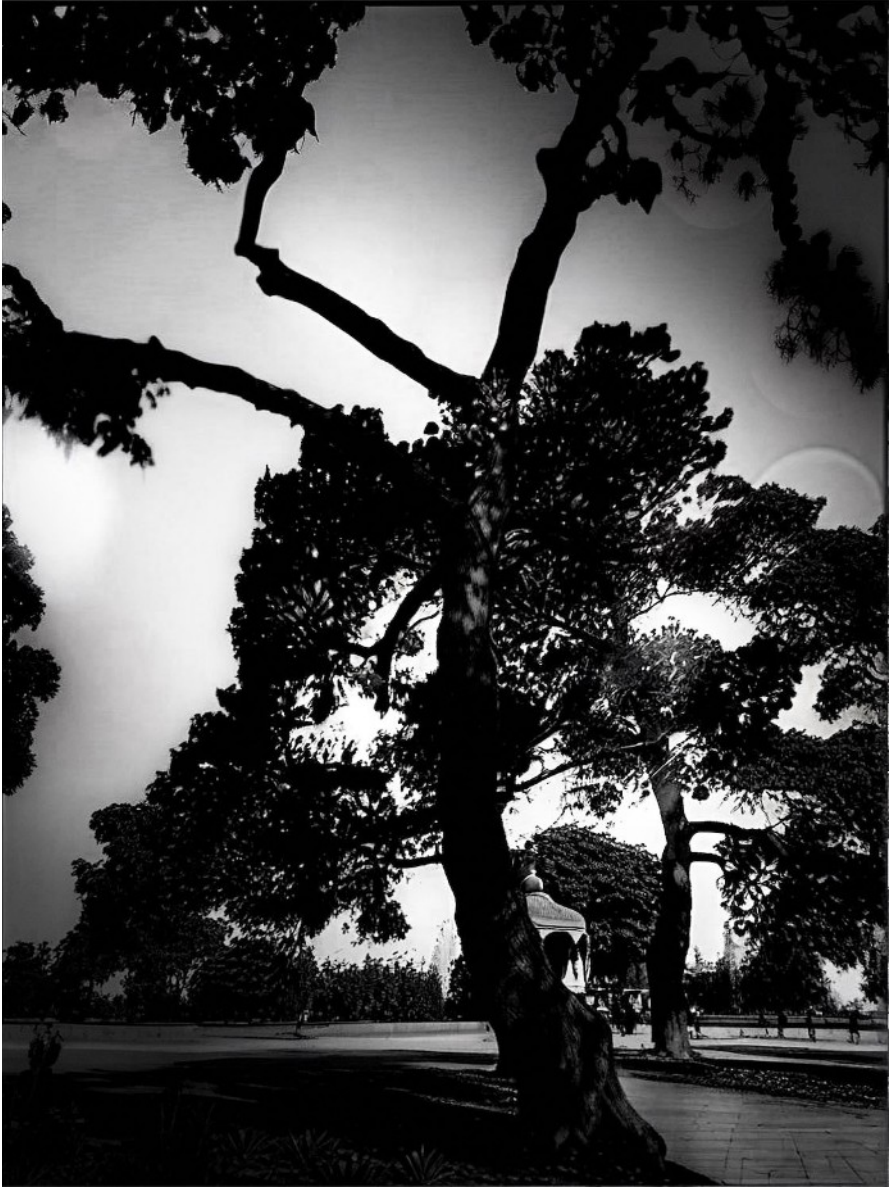
The first time a man looked at me I was fifteen.  
wearing a dress that belonged to somebody else.  
I remember the dress more than I remember his face—  
the way it sat on me,  
the way I had not yet grown into it  
or had already grown past the kind of body it was never meant for?

The man looked and I felt myself become still  
in a way I had not chosen.  
Then I saw the carcass of my girlhood—  
the body I had always regarded as mine  
was fruit ripening for someone else's looking.

Womanhood arrives the way heat arrives in a room with no windows—  
you don't notice it until you are already inside it,  
until it is already the condition of everything.

Manoela Torres / New York City, New York

*Moonlit Night* / Gloria Keely



Photograph  
Gloria Keely / San Francisco, California

While shopping for eggs  
I opened a carton,  
wiggled each, and one stuck:  
A secret crack I couldn't see.  
I put them back and chose another.

It's a habit I've had  
since the day, as a student,  
forty years  
and three thousand miles ago,  
when I put a dozen in my basket  
and an elderly lady approached  
with this tip:  
Move every egg to make sure none are broken.

Our lives still brush  
together in the dairy section.  
It pleases her  
each time  
my fingers gently glide  
over sandpaper shells.

Brian Gotta / San Diego, California

*'Not all pull is personal.'*

You learn to apologize before the water reaches the steps.

It's a small skill at first: a tightening in the chest when someone else's voice sharpens, a preemptive softness in your tone. You say I'm sorry the way other people check the weather—automatic, preventative. You watch for changes in barometric pressure inside the house. You can feel it in the hinge of a door, in the way a cabinet closes too hard, in the pause before someone exhales.

You become fluent in tide tables no one admits exist.

When the mood changes, you change with it. You lower your shoulders. You make yourself smaller at the edges. You smooth out what you can reach. You learn to speak as if your words might steady the surface.

You apologize for timing. For being hungry when someone else is tired. For needing quiet when someone else needs noise. For asking a question at the wrong moment. You apologize for the rain that interrupts plans you didn't make. For grief that arrives unexpectedly.

You apologize for silence that lengthens beyond comfort.

You apologize for the tide as if you created the moon.

As if your gravity were the cause of the pull. As if the water rose due to your carelessness with your mass.

No one tells you to do this. That would be too easy. Instead, you learn through pattern recognition. Raised voices come before slammed doors. Withdrawal follows disagreement. Love diminishes when the air becomes tense. You learn the sequence. You assume causality. The equation settles: disturbance plus you equals flood.

It feels safer that way.

If the tide is your fault, then you can fix it. You can anchor the furniture. You can close the windows before the storm arrives. You

monitor yourself for excess weight, excess wanting, excess sound.  
You can discipline your orbit.

You begin to believe that your presence bends the room.

There are nights when you lie awake and gauge the distance between your breathing and someone else's. If they turn away, you note it. If they sigh, you file it under evidence. You replay the day, looking for missteps. Too much laughter. Not enough enthusiasm. A hesitation that might have come across as disapproval.

You study yourself the way astronomers study gravitational pull.  
You look for proof that your mass distorts the field.

Outside, the ocean continues its indifferent mathematics.

The moon does not wake with regret. It does not look for damage on the horizon. It exerts force simply because it exists. The Earth keeps spinning. Water responds accordingly. The cycle continues whether or not there's an apology.

Then one evening, the air shifts once more. A familiar metallic taste forms at the back of your throat. The floor feels unsteady. You brace for the climb.

You start to say it—I'm sorry—before you know what you're apologizing for.

The words stall.

Nothing you've done in the past hour explains the pressure building in the room. No mistake. No careless comment. No shift in tone. The pattern doesn't hold.

The tide comes anyway.

It lifts the air. It drags at the edges of the furniture. It crests in someone else's voice. You stand there, unmoored from the equation.

Later, you step outside.

The yard is dark, and the grass feels cool under your feet. The sky is stripped of cloud cover. You look up not for comfort but for confirmation.

There it is.

A pale body hangs at a distance that makes your chest ache. It does not look back. It does not track your breathing. It does not notice your restraint. It pulls at entire oceans without knowing your name.

You stand under it long enough to feel scale return to you.

Your body is not tidal machinery. Your presence is not a celestial event. Rooms have their own weather. Systems predate you.

The water will rise whether you apologize or not.

You inhale.

For once, you do not interfere.

Lauren Kelley / Aitkin, Minnesota



Photograph  
Gloria Keely / San Francisco, California

*I Lost You in Clotheslines* / Carly Osborne

and ivy-eaten tires, the collapsed  
willow trees that flanked your parents' street.

Lost you in the overgrowth beside the railroad,  
where your mother cut wildflowers for birthdays  
and you waited

for a train to take you away. With aching slowness  
the days peaked like baby teeth.

I lost you, then, to poems on napkins, the clink of change  
on coffeehouse counters,

pianos that yearned for the lithe hands of a tuner  
but only got played

again and again, losing you to untrue love,  
rust-ruined trucks, the chainsaw buzz

of cicadas. Found you, years too late, on a bus  
that rushed past

wild vines climbing fast food signs beside  
the highway. Pretty pastures and boxcars dripping  
with spray paint.

You were rain-ragged, suitcase between your legs.  
Lids closed, lips parted,

torrential youth pouring out  
of your mouth.

Carly Osborne / Milwaukie, Oregon

*Laundromat, Sunday* / Eric Goldfarb

The sheet keeps losing its corners. You hold  
one end against your chest. I take up mine  
and meet you somewhere near the middle, wrong,  
a third fold where there should be only two.  
We start again. The washers stop and breathe.  
You lift your edge, still patient, like a door.  
I walk my corners in to meet your corners.  
The middle buckles. Still. You say, that crease  
is yours, and mean the valley near the center  
where one of us slept badly or too well.  
We laugh, then fold it wrong one final time,  
agree to call the shape a rectangle,  
and drop it in the bag. The dryer ticks  
down to zero. Outside, a man walks  
a slow dog.

Eric Goldfarb / Sandy Springs, Georgia

*The Museum of Lost Weather* / Khayelihle Benghu

The rain from 1987 hangs in a glass case.  
Visitors press their faces close to the droplets,  
trying to remember who they were beneath that storm.  
A guide in a blue coat explains  
that all vanished weather eventually arrives here:  
the snow that startled Johannesburg,  
the fog that swallowed a lighthouse,  
the thunderstorm that interrupted a wedding vow  
halfway through forever.  
In another room,  
summer afternoons spin slowly inside crystal spheres.  
Children place headphones over their ears  
to hear forgotten winds moving  
through trees that no longer exist.  
At closing time,  
an elderly woman sits before the exhibit marked,  
Last rain before the drought  
She watches it fall again and again  
without touching the ground.

Khayelihle Benghu / Johannesburg, South Africa

*The Librarian of Forgotten Dreams* / Khayelihle Benghu

Every morning she sorts returned dreams.  
Flying dreams go on the top shelf.  
The dreams involving oceans are stored separately;  
they tend to leak.  
Nightmares require gloves.  
Some arrive damaged  
missing faces, missing endings,  
missing entire years.  
One afternoon,  
she discovers a dream without an owner.  
Inside, a child walks through a city made entirely of birdsong.  
The streets hum. The buildings sing.  
The sky opens like a bright blue book.  
She places the dream in Lost Property and waits.  
No one ever claims it.

Khayelihle Benghu / Johannesburg, South Africa

It had never been the shiny one, the one you would choose for its glitter and glitz. Maybe because the silver had been artificially aged when it was made in the 1950's, or maybe because it had been worn for long, working hours, over the years. It was square, quite thin, a very fine and elegant piece of jewelry, of modest appearance and ascendancy. There was definitely nothing fancy about it, but it had a purpose, and it was intent. On the square, a black Cross of Lorraine had been engraved, probably with the help of an American *Dremel Moto-Tool*. The double-crossed Christian symbol of the French Resistance, in its Gaulliste aspect, must have made it a popular artifact in those days. A suitable and affordable gift for a communion or a confirmation, from a godmother to her god-daughter, to be handed down one day, from a mother to a daughter. A signet-ring. A statement. A testament. It was waiting in its familiar case open on the dressing table, as if it knew today was the day it would change partners.

“Sit down with me for a minute, will you?”

Bella left her copy of *Foundation* fall open on her knees. She hadn't heard the door. She was checking fast. Room cleaned. Homework done. Hair combed. She started panicking. What was going on? Her mother was sitting on the edge of the bed, her legs crossed in the half-reserved and half-nonchalant way that made men turn their gaze. Through the half-closed shutters, the midday summer sun was carving out shades of light on her bare thighs. Bella was on the alert, a boxer waiting for the next blow. She avoided her mother's eyes and her mother's legs, but kept a wary attention on her mother's hands. The right hand opened. Bella felt a chill run through her body and braced herself. She must have forgotten something and, in an effort to remember, blinked, then gave up. She would get it, whatever.

“Bella, look! This is for you. It was given to me by my godmother on my confirmation. It's precious to me. And though you won't have a communion or a confirmation, you're no longer a child”—Bella blushed—“so I want you to have it, and take care of it. Come on, try it on!”

Bella slid on her knees to get closer, knocking the book down and losing her page. She tried to remember –fifty-one or sixty-one?– and stayed immobile while her mother was placing the ring on her right finger.

“See, it’s exactly your size, as it was mine. You recognize the sign?”

Bella was looking at the ring back in her mother’s palm. Mixed feelings of relief and shame were running through her thoughts. Maybe her mother was not a monster. Not always. Maybe she didn’t mean it when she called her daughter a burden and an embarrassment. Maybe.

“It’s the Lorraine cross,” she answered. She remembered seeing the cross on TV when the old general passed away a few years ago. “Yes, and it meant a lot to my godmother’s generation, and to mine as well. It was a means for her to encourage me to value our traditions, but also to honor the courage of those who fought for our freedom against oppression. It is a very powerful symbol, Bella. The symbol of success in adversity, of never surrendering, of fighting for what you believe is right. Always. Yes, I can only hope that it will mean a lot to you, too.” Her mother stood up and left the ring on the bed.

Bella looked up, not sure what to say nor what to do. “Yes, of course, Mother. Thank you.” The simpler, the safer, she had learned.

“Ah, and you will have to Hoover again in the living-room, we’re having guests tonight,” her mother said before leaving, closing the door in her usual, soft way.

Bella took the signet-ring and placed it on her finger. She lifted her hand, watching the slanting golden rays of the sun shine through. She was afraid, and excited, and curious! Too many emotions to be safe. It was never a good idea to let yourself get carried away, and to be off guard. She would think about it later, within the shelter of her sheets and blankets, when the adults would be on the other side of the house. For now, she had work to do and for a change was grateful for the chore that would occupy her mind and her body. Should she wear the ring while accomplishing petty tasks? She decided not to, and displayed the silver trinket next to the treasures already residing on her bedside table. She pressed her forefinger on

the ring to feel the engraving. It was hard. She imagined that it would leave its mark on the tip of her finger if she pressed long enough. For once, she couldn't wait for night to come. She decided she was brave, brave enough to find the courage to surrender to the goodness of the summer day. She left her bedroom, humming to herself, "Mama loves me! Mama loves me! Mama loves me!"

Isabelle Audiger / Les Sables d'Olonne, France

*Shower* / Carole Greenfield

When I am sick, the only thing that works is steam.  
Long, hot showers, something I don't usually indulge in,  
having grown up in a country where the hot water ran out  
after five minutes; if I used it up, my family would rage.  
It's where I do my best thinking, you told me.  
It's where I let myself dream, you said.

Last week when I could barely breathe, I remembered  
how we stood together in a shower that first time  
and I said 'Show me how you do it. Show me what you like.'  
I turn the tap to highest heat, stand beneath the stream,  
the steam wafting round my head, take a breath.  
And then another. The miracle of it, breathing.  
Grace slipping down in ordinary places.

Carole Greenfield / Norwood, Massachusetts

*The Little Mysteries* / Richard Krohn

Wiffle Ball buried in a basement box,  
its curved surface scuffed half a century past

on Lou's backyard patch of driveway,  
his mystery pitch, secret grip on oval holes,

white plastic ghosting against a backdrop  
of drying sheets, how it menaced my head

until, like his drunk Uncle Enzo careening  
to a couch, it lurched low and away

through my broomstick swing, striking  
the bathmat draped over chain-link fence.

At times I'd foul one off the Inselbrick back  
of his house or into his dad's workshirts

baking under the sun like blue-clad fielders,  
sleeves clothes-pinned wide to shag flies,

but I never really figured it out,  
and Lou is blind now, as much a mystery

to his doctors as our lives became to us,  
so I don't know how he threw it,

his kidding that he'd strike me out again  
if someone faced him toward home.

Richard Krohn / Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Mercury in retrograde? On the dashboard  
a yellow triangle with embedded exclamation mark—  
engine coolant low. Shopping for a solution,  
I scan the racks, but cannot find the brand I need  
for when I boil over. Mercury not to blame,  
nor for the rise in temperature  
in too many others these days, a new norm,  
as for instance, my driving away from the post office,  
giving a little toot at a vehicle backing out  
but not seeing me, that driver then honking me  
all the way home, thankfully not firing the gun  
likely hidden in his glove compartment.

Jim Tilley / Bedford Corners, New York

*August* / Terri Yannetti

The moon looks rusty  
and overheated, like  
an engine on its last  
legs. I half-expect to  
hear it sputter and rasp  
watching it through  
the blades of a battered  
window fan, which  
erratically grinds and  
ticks, threatening  
to short out before  
summer ends.

Terri Yannetti / Milford Connecticut



Drawing  
Gary Wadley / Louisville, Kentucky