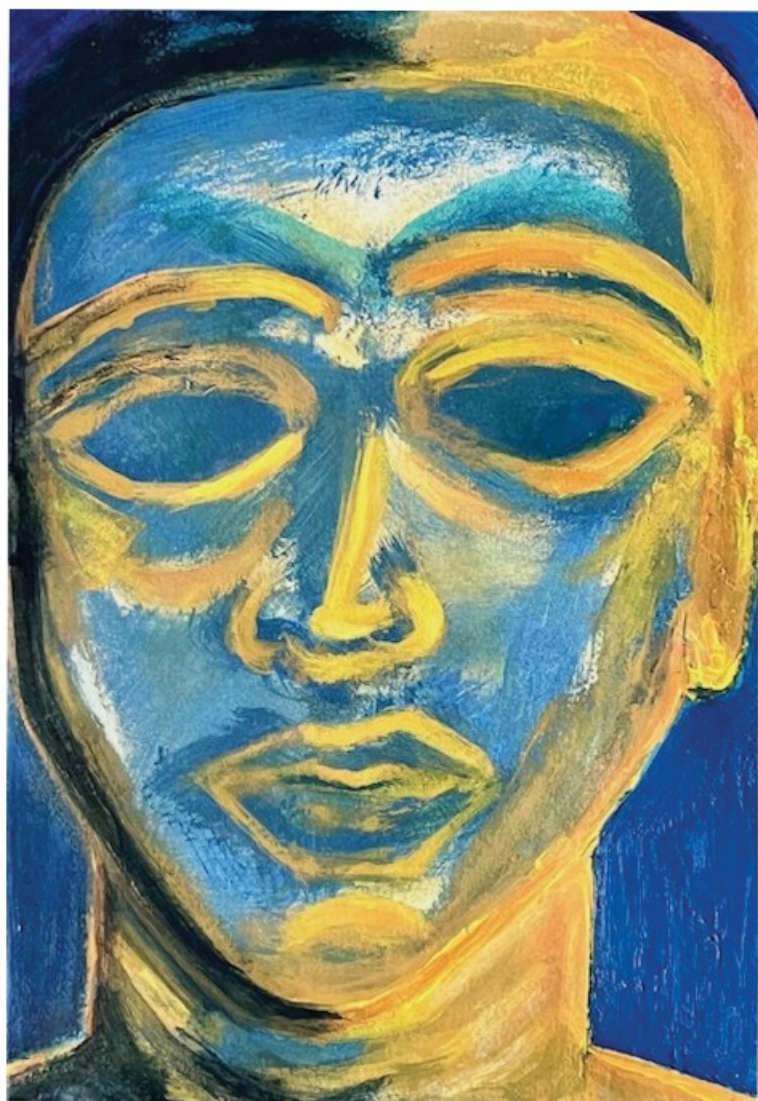


3<sup>rd</sup>  
Wednesday



Autumn 2026

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# **Third Wednesday Magazine**

**Volume XIX, Number 4**

**Fall, 2026**

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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## **Cover Art:**

*I Can See You*

Painting

Ernest Langston / Seattle, Washington



## *Editor's Note of Fall 2026*

Most journals, including *3rd Wednesday*, state in their submission guidelines that they will not accept AI-generated or AI-assisted poetry or fiction. But in truth, how would we know? That's an honest question, and it's one many editors aren't addressing out loud.

We can catch the obvious cases — the pieces that read like prompt responses, full of abstract nouns stacked into a kind of fake profundity, the turns that are really just pivots, the endings that resolve everything a human poem would leave open. An editor develops an eye for that. But a skilled poet using AI as one tool among many at the generative stage, then revising hard into their own voice? That's much harder to detect. And if the resulting poem is genuinely good, the question becomes philosophically uncomfortable.

Detection tools don't help much. They produce false positives on spare, plain-spoken work and miss well-polished AI output. Any editor claiming they're running submissions through a detector and catching cheaters is probably fooling themselves. Most of these tools were built for academic prose, not creative work.

The policy is easy. The enforcement is essentially faith-based. In a community of poets and writers, we have to trust that the creative process itself is more motivating than building a résumé of publications.

For the growing number of writers who use AI to critique or brainstorm before sending work into the world, what does "AI-assisted" even mean, and where is the line that shouldn't be crossed? That's not a question editors can answer, but if you didn't write the words on the page, we don't want you to send them to us. Answers will have to come from the poets themselves — from their own sense of integrity, not from any rule *3rd Wednesday* can enforce.

— David Jibson

## Table of Contents

|                                                                         |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <i>After I'm Gone</i> / Moudi Sbeity.....                               | 7  |
| <i>Picking Cherries in West Seattle</i> / Moudi Sbeity.....             | 8  |
| <i>Porch View in My July</i> / Via Fitzgerald.....                      | 9  |
| <i>Everyday</i> / Benjamin Green.....                                   | 10 |
| <i>The Musical Chatter of Light</i> / Douglas Cole.....                 | 11 |
| <i>Einstein Lights a Cigarette</i> / Douglas Cole.....                  | 11 |
| <i>An Aster Means Patience in the Language of Flowers</i> / Merie Kirby | 12 |
| <i>Bird Woman 2</i> / Ken Weichel.....                                  | 13 |
| <i>Ambition</i> / Michael Goldman.....                                  | 14 |
| <i>Hilltop Cabin</i> / V. E. Taylor.....                                | 15 |
| <i>When the Hollow Wakes</i> / V. E. Taylor.....                        | 16 |
| <i>Bird Woman 1</i> / Ken Weichel.....                                  | 17 |
| <i>Daughter – French Teacher and Chicken Farmer</i> / Judith Hoyer...   | 18 |
| <i>Getting What We Came For</i> / Jon Ballard.....                      | 19 |
| <i>Buffalo</i> / Martin O'Connor.....                                   | 20 |
| <i>Her Second Grief</i> / Marguerite Doyle.....                         | 21 |
| <i>The White Cat</i> / Marguerite Doyle.....                            | 22 |
| <i>When Asked: What Is Your First Memory?</i> / Andrea Potos.....       | 23 |
| <i>Come Back</i> / Lisa Yount.....                                      | 23 |
| <i>A Silence of Sirens</i> / Ruth Holzer.....                           | 24 |
| <i>Velvet Elvis</i> / Mark Jackley.....                                 | 25 |
| <i>Exodus</i> / Richard Jones.....                                      | 26 |
| <i>Birds</i> / Gloria Parker.....                                       | 27 |
| <i>Two Dysfunctional Families</i> / Mark LaMonda.....                   | 28 |
| <i>Morning Light</i> / Anne Kazak.....                                  | 29 |
| <i>The River Speaks in Currents Only Fish Can Hear</i> / Lana Ayers...  | 30 |
| <i>Eye of the Beholder</i> / Lana Ayers.....                            | 31 |
| <i>UFO</i> / Gloria Keeley.....                                         | 32 |
| <i>Best Friend</i> / Josh Ellenbogen.....                               | 33 |
| <i>It</i> / Jane Blanchard.....                                         | 34 |
| <i>Dusty Blue Door</i> / Scott Waters.....                              | 35 |
| <i>Lake Merritt Blues</i> / Scott Waters.....                           | 36 |
| <i>Might As Well</i> / Melanie McCabe.....                              | 37 |
| <i>Love, and its immediate consequences</i> / Logan Lee.....            | 38 |
| <i>Medieval Pelican Tatoo</i> / Vic Cavalli.....                        | 39 |
| <i>[sympathy flowers dry on the windowsill]</i> / Logan Lee.....        | 40 |
| <i>Forty-Three Labels</i> / Ashley Mangtani.....                        | 41 |
| <i>Noon Whistle</i> / James Scruton.....                                | 45 |
| <i>Somebody's Blues</i> / James Scruton.....                            | 45 |
| <i>A Tragedy in Five Acts</i> / Daniel Barlekamp.....                   | 46 |

*Barrow Town* / Paula Appling.....47

*Tea Kettle Blues* / J. R. Solonche.....48

*Metro Escalator* / Anne Kazak.....49

*Sakebi* / Kelly Murashige.....50

*Fugitive Mind* / Yvonne Morris.....53

*Ramadan, 2012: Erbil International Airport* / Todd Epp.....54

*Icons of War* / Tony Brinkley.....55

*After I'm Gone* / Moudi Sbeity

I will miss the stutter of the creek,  
the seen and unseen mouths that kissed it.  
I will miss the contentment of the slow  
and hoofed, which never belonged to me;  
not the slow, not the hoof, certainly not  
the contentment. The scripture of clouds,  
the poetry of soil. Trees in their  
constellations, their many shades of hope,  
and so the many shades of star light.  
Not to mention the orchestra of birds,  
their determined song.

With what generosity did you dream this  
up, beloved?

I can make amends, so long as I am still here.  
I can ask for forgiveness, so long as I am still  
alive. I can still be taken into the arms of awe.  
I'll miss the mystery, the proof of body and  
Earth. I'll wish to have loved it more;  
the body, the Earth, certainly the mystery.

Start today, said the mountain, who heard my  
thin sorrow. Trust me, I have seen the erosion  
of joy. Kneel your desire to the ground while  
you still can.

Moudi Sbeity / Boulder, Colorado

The tree by her house before the divorce  
is still there, drooping and heavy and bearing  
little red bells. She insisted that we harvest,  
parked the car, lunged her limbs up the trunk.

I saw us as children in the village again,  
cousins climbing the peach tree, apricot  
tree, gathering lemons, stuffing our  
mouths with figs.

Here she dropped handfuls of cherries from  
the canopy, pressed her foot into a branch,  
sinking bunches into our open palms, pockets  
filled with the double digit pounds of them.

How is it that we are not living in such  
daily abundance? How did we ever get robbed  
of this birthright pleasure to fruit trees and the  
sweet dirt of the Earth?

I miss the village, the feasts. I miss the  
luxury of sorting seeds. I miss home  
before my parent's divorce, life before  
the useless wars.

Who has time for bombs? Who wakes  
full of vigor for fighting? The trees are plenty  
and fertile. They stand lonely in their armfuls.  
They are wet with desperation.

They are hungry for our fill.

Moudi Sbeity / Boulder, Colorado

*Porch View in My July* / Via Fitzgerald

The summer dance was slowly turning  
around the crowns of drooping pines,  
and the night was never black but  
navy, with fewer stars than cities  
burning. In a sense our fate was  
stolen— of course, we tasted ignorance  
then. Like frozen syrup, or broken glass.

Never black, but navy. A blue you  
could sail your dreams on. A blue  
so boundless, so flooded, so aloof.

Via Fitzgerald / Austin, Texas

*Everyday* / Benjamin Green

The stars of night  
are not for long—  
sunrise, followed by sun  
in the canyon  
brings wind to  
the cottonwoods,  
ends the quiet  
with songs of birds,  
hum of insects,  
bark and mew  
of wild critters;

the old man  
walks--  
looks and sees,  
hears,  
sensible and sensitive,  
touched and being touched—  
and casts  
his shadow  
on the creek.

Benjamin Green / Jemez Springs,

*The Musical Chatter of Light* / Douglas Cole

I forgot you're dying with all the talk  
of dog training and Lake Crescent  
with its cachet of cars gone off the cliff  
and bone fingers tapping  
the temple of your windshield,  
voice asking for license and registration,  
this blue more blue than sky or water,  
a pure blue that seems to be in everything,  
even you reaching down to lift that cyclist  
out of the rip rap marching over Hurricane Ridge,  
and here where that blue is most intense  
and we see all those vehicles we left behind  
like remnants of a great machine blown apart  
by time and immaculately preserved by cold—  
here, we recall all the rest like a soft dream  
exposed in hard daylight with that knowing—  
oh, yes, that—before we move on.

*Einstein Lights a Cigarette* / Douglas Cole

The moon sweeps night back into its basement.  
All these boxes, the childhood toys, things  
that had plastic totemic charge now wear  
the dull patina of the past. The evening, long,  
but not long enough to ride back into that glow,  
a flower-headed new creature absorbing everything,  
gliding the green spring with hint cloud flashes  
of a land before this fast dream of melting clocks  
and last ones on earth, light-drenched at dusk,  
the long shadow reaching across the field,  
and the stranger walking out of the sun.

Douglas Cole / Seattle, Washington

It might take a million years,  
gas and dust gathering, coalescing  
into nurseries, collapsing  
under their own weight, heat  
and pressure building until –

a lilac star. Or a Greek goddess  
might weep stardust tears  
seeing desolation after flood.  
Where her tears splash earth, flowers:  
heliotrope petals, starburst centers.

A common flower. Host to butterfly  
larvae waiting out transformation,  
feeding a steady hunger. Spring  
comes and goes, other flowers,  
eager bloomers in the cutting garden  
push to be first to offer their pink,  
yellow, and orange faces to the sun.

At last, late summer rolls in  
on a chariot of humidity, pulled by  
crickets and ice cream trucks.  
September on the horizon, notebooks  
in stores, swimsuits sun-bleached  
to pastels, the aster, the frost flower,  
finally opens its violet rays.

Merie Kirby / Grand Forks, North Dakota



Collage  
Ken Weichel / Benicia, California

Thankfully the ocean covers  
most of the Earth, and is largely  
unmoved by our ambitions.

The ocean has its own gentle  
and tempestuous rhythms,  
while we measure and think,

plow through our afternoons.  
The soft creatures and the toothed  
avengers glide around unconcerned

about time and expenses.  
We go and look at the ocean.  
Sometimes dip in a toe.

Michael Goldman / Florence, Massachusetts

She keeps the curtains half-open  
so the moon can mind her business.  
Light spills across the hardwood  
and finds her first—  
bare feet planted on cool floorboards,  
shirt hanging off one shoulder  
like it's tired of pretending  
it doesn't want to fall.  
There's sage in the ashtray,  
a chipped mug on the windowsill,  
and the softest hum of night things  
pressing in against the glass.  
She doesn't look at me at first,  
just tips her head toward the quilt  
spread wide like an invitation  
I'm not required to accept.  
"Close the door if you're staying,"  
she says, not unkind,  
already climbing back onto the bed  
like this cabin was always meant  
to witness this exact moment.  
I do what I'm told—  
palms grazing rough wood,  
heart catching on the click of the latch.  
When I turn, she's on her side,  
hair silvered and wild against my pillow,  
eyes catching every flicker of candlelight.  
She pats the space between us once,  
then lets her hand fall away,  
as if to prove she'll never pull.  
Some spells don't need words,  
or even touch—  
just a woman in a hilltop cabin,  
sheet tucked to her waist,  
watching me decide my own pace  
like it's the holiest thing she's ever seen.

V. E. Taylor / Somerset, New Jersey

*When the Hollow Wakes* / V. E. Taylor

In the first light,  
the old brown chair feels different,  
wood holding the chill of whatever  
I couldn't name in the night.  
From here, I've got a front row seat  
to the world deciding to wake up again—  
tree line clearing his throat,  
creek rubbing the sleep from her eyes,  
birds stitching sound through the treetops  
until the whole hollow finds its rhythm.  
Deer step careful through what's left of the dark,  
noses testing the air between his shadow and her song.  
Squirrels argue over breakfast in the oak by the bend,  
tail flicks keeping time with her small collisions on the rocks,  
while a rabbit freezes in the tall grass,  
waiting to see if this morning will call her by name.  
Behind me, the cabin holds its breath—  
coffee cooling on the rail,  
screen door leaning half-shut like it's listening too.  
The old brown chair settles under my weight,  
wood and bone agreeing to stay a little longer  
while he finds his rhythm in the treetops  
and she braids her bright cold song around my ankles,  
reminding me I live here too.

V. E. Taylor / Somerset, New Jersey



Collage  
Ken Weichel / Benicia, California

She is more fun  
than 15 chickens with fluffy derrières  
who flaunt Hermès silk around their necks.  
One is Lilianne, another Laetitia,  
another Marianne, names of her amis français.  
My love for her sings behind  
the wheel of the Camry  
as she hurtles over two bridges,  
swallows a boat yard,  
skirts the hem of the library,  
me in the passenger seat  
gripping the grocery list.  
I didn't know I would fall so hard  
for her gift of inky Paris tea  
steeped in currant, caramel and citrus.  
My love for her is as obvious  
as Block Island when fog decides  
to lift its drowsy head.  
I follow her to the carousel, the caldera,  
the cabana, the cliff walk.  
I follow her to the end of the world,  
to Finistère, the Breton coastline.  
She takes me where I never thought I'd go.

Judith Hoyer / Wayland, Massachusetts

On the last day of the estate sale  
we decide to walk through  
the dead neighbor's house, having,  
like the cagiest of crows, put off  
for long enough our native itch  
to pick over its splayed remains.  
But you bid caution at the threshold:  
we don't need anything—not one  
more dog-eared thriller, chipped  
Fiesta ware coffee mug, or middling  
watercolor—and so I understand  
the task this time around is less  
mindless accumulation than brazen  
nosiness. Inside, we make a beeline  
to the den where the awful thing  
is rumored to have happened,  
a random calamity involving  
a stationary bike, a clumsy dismount,  
and a table's blunt edge. What we  
find there instead is an almost  
empty room, the furniture already  
sold off or discarded. Only a marked-  
down Tree of Life suncatcher  
remains in one of the windows,  
symbol (among a hundred other  
things) of immortality. Our moment  
of silence grants there is really  
nothing worse than ironic death.  
One more person trying to stave off  
decline, all the while fate chalking  
its invisible outline on the den  
floor, waiting years for it to be  
filled in, as always getting the details  
exactly right: legs akimbo, arms  
spread, the neck cocked at an odd  
angle, like a grim dancer mid-vogue.

On our way home a glint of light  
flares off the green-gold leaves  
of the suncatcher in your hand,  
that bargain-priced relic we agreed  
we didn't need but had to have.

Jon Ballard / Farmington Hills, Michigan

*Buffalo* / Martin O'Connor

A solitary Metro rumbles  
through sad-trumpet light.  
Balding brick-and-stone bachelors  
tuck in shirts, high-rise nurses  
stand watch on the graveyard shift.  
A warehouse hand falls into  
grease-stained and arc-burnt arms  
at Gene McCarthy's, then turns  
his key in the Old First Ward  
as early risers murmur and clink  
their way through Sunday morning  
short stacks. Behind it all,  
Lake Erie sleeps—  
thirty-five fathoms  
of moonless sky.

Martin O'Connor / Wyalusing, Pennsylvania

*Her Second Grief* / Marguerite Doyle

She sits in the kitchen, bathed in the red glow  
of the stove, watching as trains rumble past  
throwing slats of light on the wall.

In other years she'd glimpse the house  
from the train, her father's face  
at the window, then meet him rushing  
up the village to take her home.

The embers in the stove sigh and fall.  
She opens it, adds a log cut  
from his last winter, then with a blaze

of flame across her face and black dress,  
returns to where the kitchen table  
is piled with packages and coffee cups.

Items are sifted, she thinks of her brothers  
and aunts, ties string on parcels,  
fixes labels on boxes and envelopes.

She takes time over his jottings and diaries,  
the pages and notebooks filled  
with his neat handwriting,  
the fragments and drafts of poems.

For a moment she holds them to herself,  
closes her eyes against their final  
journey to lie buried in basements and lofts.

She turns away to look out the window,  
her face a pale halo in the darkness.  
A train passes, breathes fire, rattles the stove.

Marguerite Doyle / Dublin, Ireland

*The White Cat* / Marguerite Doyle

It emerged, white against the rocks  
of the ragged shore at Loughshinny,  
then stopped and stood watching us.  
Blue-eyed, its tracks newly printed  
in the washed sand, it held our gaze  
unafraid, standing still on the beach  
unmoved by the wind and the waves.  
I remembered again, when I'd seen  
it first time, that day of her funeral  
and since, now and then a white cat  
like the bright cast of a spirit moon  
in November. We followed its path  
so near All Souls, a bolt of white fur—  
and eyes as blue as the sea, like hers.

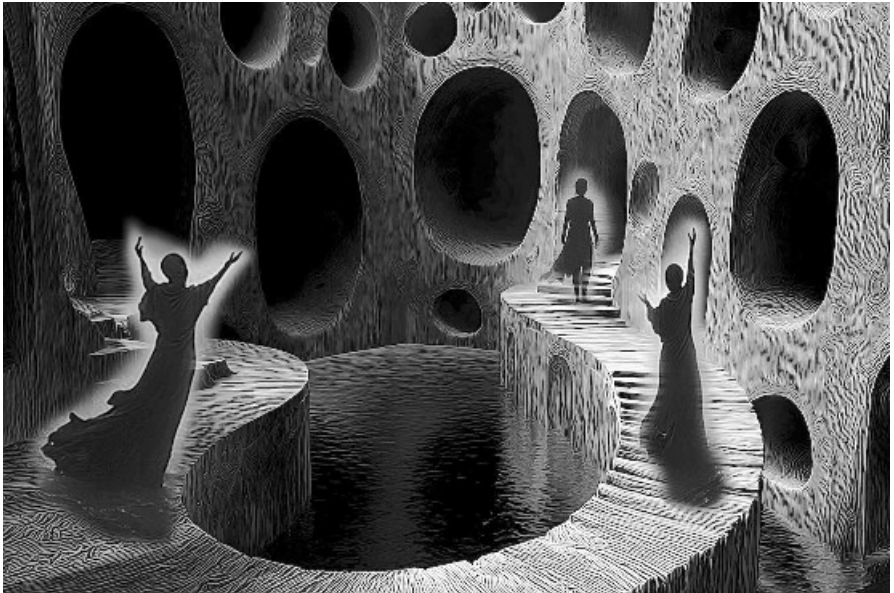
Marguerite Doyle / Dublin, Ireland

***When Asked: What Is Your First Memory?* / Andrea Potos**

I couldn't say really, it might be buried  
like some time capsule  
in my grandmother's backyard, near  
the flagstone path leading to the grape trellis  
where clusters of dusky purple grapes grew,  
under the swing my grandfather hung there so  
I might fly near to the sky, or maybe  
it's inside the hostas whose bloated blossoms  
I would pop flat with my toddler hands.

Andrea Potos / Madison, Wisconsin

***Come Back* / Lisa Yount**



Digital Collage  
Lisa Yount / El Cerrito, California

*A Silence of Sirens* / Ruth Holzer

After meditation and herbal tea,  
deep breathing and progressive relaxation,  
it's 4:30 and I still can't sleep.  
Peering through the blinds, I see  
red lights flashing across the street:  
two fire engines, two ambulances  
and the sheriff. Out comes my neighbor  
who looked just fine yesterday.  
Now she's strapped to a stretcher,  
tightly wrapped in a yellow tarp  
and I know she's gone  
because they've covered her face  
and they slide her in feet first, not like  
somebody they're going to work on.  
They're not rushing off to the hospital,  
either, but mill around, chatting  
and packing up their equipment.  
One by one the vehicles slip away.  
An old man in blue pajamas  
stands in the driveway for a while,  
shivers, and goes back inside.

Ruth Holzer / Potomac Falls, Virginia

*Velvet Elvis* / Mark Jackley

Bursting from the blackness,  
the universe writ small  
in shimmering polyester,  
swollen as a god,  
he dances on the table  
of a yard sale, deathless,  
more than gently used  
but always priced to sell.

Mark Jackley / Richmond, Virginia

When everyone else was hungry and grumbling  
to go back to captivity in Egypt, the slave master  
and his whip, a diet of cucumbers and onions,

I'd like to think I'd have followed Moses, who  
trusted God would provide quail and manna  
and sweet water gushing forth fresh from a rock—

not that I necessarily would have believed Moses  
and the promise of sweet bread falling from the sky,  
but because I've always wanted to live as a nomad,

pitching a tent of black goat hair in the desert,  
happy to wander forty years in a barren wasteland,  
a cloud of protection at noon, a pillar of fire by night,

my eyes fixed on Moses' staff held high leading us  
through the Wilderness of Sin to who knows where.

Richard Jones / Glenview, Illinois

Truth is, if it isn't blue with a crested head...  
bright red or red-breasted, I couldn't tell  
you its name...

not that I don't appreciate those little dun  
fellows that come to the feeder...I admire  
their routine...

the way a sentinel stands guard at the top  
and awaits his turn while the others peck  
at the seeds.

Early this morning, on my way to the store,  
a different type of bird, a long-necked one,  
rose up right in front of my windshield.

If I lived closer to water, I might think it was  
an egret or a heron, but what would either  
be doing on this landlocked suburban road?

It soared up until it looked like the check mark  
version you'd see in a kid's drawing. I don't  
need to know its name...the moment was enough.

Gloria Parker / Wayne, Pennsylvania

*Two Dysfunctional Families* /Mark LaMonda

You can drive a bus  
between bodies  
when her family deigns to hug.

But they make decent conversation,  
keep a clean house,  
ask all the right questions

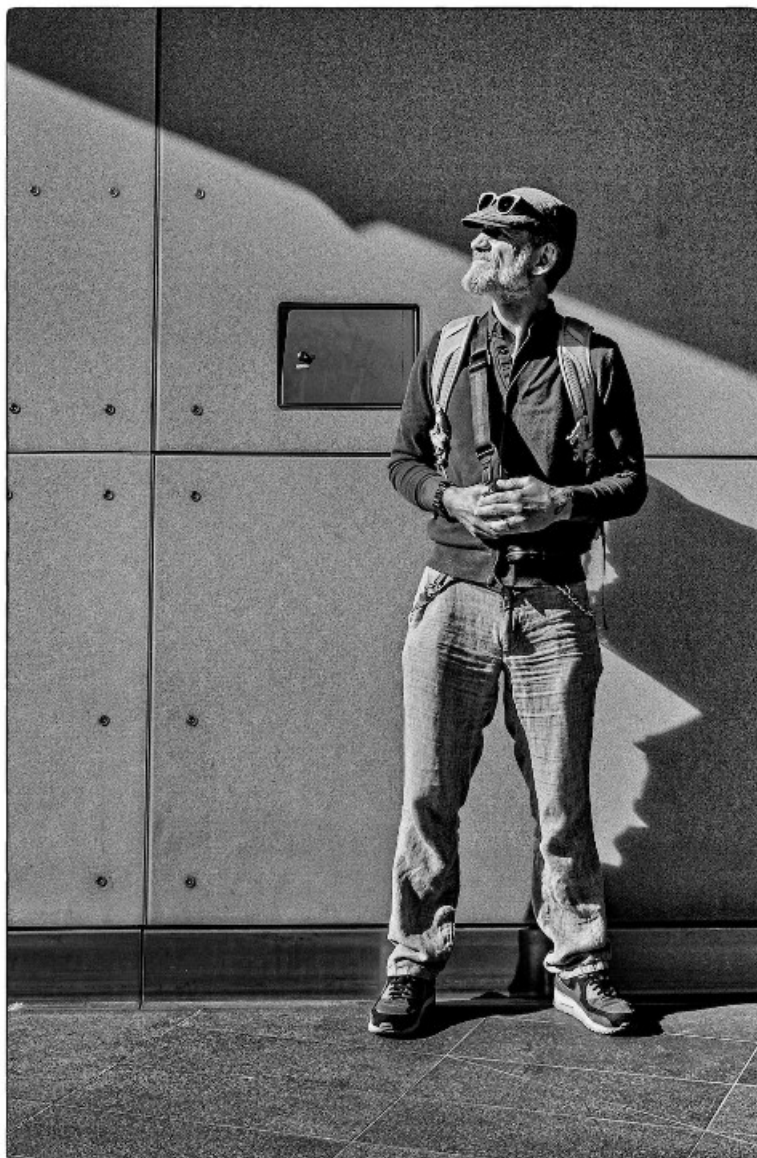
and feed you well.

His family kisses  
on the lips,

but would be the first  
to turn to cannibalism  
if it were dinner time

and you were looking a wee bit peaked.

Mark LaMonda / Valencia, California



Photograph  
Ann Kazak / Havertown, Pennsylvania

My dreams are full of noise—  
ticking clocks, slamming doors,  
overheard intense arguments.

I've never been gifted church  
bells in my sleep, or chanting  
monks, or music of any kind.

Sometimes my panicked heart, louder  
than a metronome rouses me.  
Sometimes a cough, my own.

Water dripping, the screech  
of 747s from JFK airport a lifetime,  
a childhood away.

Where is the opera of the gods?  
Where is the chorus of angels?  
Or a beloved saying anything kind?

Sometimes I wake with a headache.  
I may be going deaf in one ear.  
Will my sleep be quieter then?

I dream my mother's piercing "You imbecile!"  
but never my father's dulcet "Moon River"  
Never my dog's soft woof, woof, woof.

Lana Ayers / Newport, Oregon

Bobby with his racing-striped bright bird's-egg blue Mustang was the only cool friend my teenaged geeky, science fiction loving, comic book collector, ham radio operating brother had in junior high and high school and it never made sense to me except, Bobby was kind of shy, hardly ever spoke first, didn't look you in the eyes the rare times he spoke at all. Bobby with his dirty blond hair, six feet tall, broad shouldered, looked like he'd stepped off the cover of Tiger Beat magazine, a cuter version of David Cassidy but without the singing voice or hippy family bus.

Why was he friends with that band of weirdos, my brother and gangly Vincent of the ever strawberry-acned face, and scrawny Einstein Richard who was like a walking, talking encyclopedia, and freckle-faced, red-haired Joel who told knock-knock jokes with wah-wah worthy puns? Bobby could have run with a pack of popular boys, could have tried out for football, dated anyone, but all he wanted to do was hide out in our swampy basement to read Mad Magazines and listen to The Beatles and putz around with his oddball crew.

He struck me as the most hurt puppy of them all. And it wasn't until he showed up one day with with the skin under his left eye a kaleidoscope of purples, blues, and fuchsias, the white of the eyeball streaked red as a bloody sunny side up egg, pointed at his face and said, "My old man's at it again," I truly knew he bore he more bruises invisibly. I drew a picture for him of his fancy loud-muffled car that blasted music at decibels higher than firetrucks, and colored it in with the crayon labeled Cerulean.

Black wavy lines shot out dual silver exhaust pipes. The Mustang in my drawing was more a wonky box with squashed-donut-shaped wheels than the badass chick magnet the car should have been. Bobby, looking me in the eyes, smiling wide, proclaimed my art a masterpiece and made me sign my name to it

with the Carnation Pink Crayola, swearing hand on heart,  
“I’ll keep this beauty on my bedroom wall forever.”  
I wonder how my drawing’s held up these last fifty  
years and whether Bobby is still kind of shy and sweet.

Lana Ayers / Newport, Oregon

***UFO*** / Gloria Keeley



Photograph  
Gloria Keeley / San Francisco, California

When I first met you, it was like a churchman encountering monkey genitalia, glimpsed through the bars of a cage at the zoo. There was an embarrassed recognition of kinship, an uncomfortable acknowledgment of commonality, something I could not deny, but would have preferred not having had to accept. And like the churchman, I puzzled long nights over the meaning of the fearful riddle, and suffered my own crisis of faith.

When I became friends with you anyway, it was like a Red Army commissar in war, making a concession to some human frailty in his men—their longing for their hometowns, or their need for sex, or their love of their families. I may even have fancied myself both generous and shrewd for indulging it: “You can’t fight for the revolution twenty-four hours a day,” I said to myself, removed my belt and pistol, and sat down by the warmth of the fire.

When I saw you get sick, and sicker still, it was like a peasant woman living under a pestilence, seeking protection in folk superstition. I knew our shared susceptibilities and debilities, our conjoint matter, even the strange graces uniting us, so you became a terrible augur. “Lest I end like that.” So I looked at you and muttered an oath my mother taught me when I was a girl, burned the card of a saint when a cock crowed at dawn, never let my shadow fall on a barndoor after noon, wore a poultice of magic herbs... Or perhaps I just secretly crossed my fingers under a table in a coffee-shop, and one time held my breath while you told me of your afflictions.

When you die, a churchman, a Soviet commissar, and a peasant woman will come to your grave. They’ll be too ashamed to make eye contact with anyone else, but maybe they’ll furtively acknowledge each other during the service, go off afterwards and make an unlikely trio, known around town for their conviviality and kindness, their gaiety and their wisdom. Quite unlike us.

Josh Ellenbogen / Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

You learn to live without it, don't you know,  
The it you thought you'd never live without.  
Your life has given it the big heave-ho.

Whatever it once was, it had to go.  
It is no longer something you can tout.  
You learn to live without it, don't you know?

The loss of it seems like a heavy blow  
Because you used to count on it for clout.  
Your life has given it the big heave-ho.

You miss it. Even mourn it. Want it so.  
But it will not be back, you have no doubt.  
You learn to live without it. Don't you? No.

Too often you took it for granted, though.  
Now it is what you'd like to care about,  
Your life has given it the big heave-ho.

Since you no longer have it, you feel low.  
What should you do? Perpetuate a pout?  
You learn to live without it. Don't you know  
Your life has given it the big heave-ho?

Jane Blanchard / Augusta, Georgia

*Dusty Blue Door* / Scott Waters

You have trouble sleeping at night.  
The street whispers  
like a hooker in an alley,  
showing a little leg.  
Houses are old men hunched  
in black coats, smoke curling  
from chimney mouths.  
You're out here, puffing  
your cancer stick as you walk,  
the pre-dawn chill  
reaching a bony hand  
up the back of your sweatshirt.  
The stars? They're dead moths,  
and the crescent moon's  
a rusty hook for your sorrow.  
A black cat just ran across  
the sidewalk into the bushes.  
As if your luck wasn't bad enough.  
Turning the corner,  
the house with the dusty blue door.  
Somebody left the light on.

Scott Waters / Oakland, California

*Lake Merritt Blues* / Scott Waters

65 storm drains carry the noxious drivel  
of civilized Oakland into this glittering jewel of a lake —

which, in spite of bowling balls, condoms, gasoline, feces, fast food  
wrappers, yo-yos, skateboard wheels, Drano, motor oil, a probation  
anklet, bottle rockets, soda cans, beer bottle shards, a gerbil in a tiny  
casket, buttons, bracelets, wedding rings, dear departed goldfish,  
dental floss, a human finger, tennis balls, dog toys, and a marble  
made of actual marble —

hurls its aching blues  
at the disbelieving sky.

Scott Waters / Oakland, California

I might as well write a love poem

to the broken shard of green bottle glass that gleams  
in the brown creek's ration of sunlight

or to the scent of wild honeysuckle that teases  
cruelly at a billowing window screen

as write a love poem to you.

I could string together some pretty words

for the lattice of spider hopes spun across  
my doorway in the darkest hours of August

or the breeze that turns the lime and yellow  
leaves just enough to spangle the tree with sky.

I might as well write a love poem

to a garden snail or to a slick stone disappearing  
in a rising tide of lichen and moss

as waste my words on you

who loves me precisely as much  
as bottle glass, web or rock,

whose heart is as heavy with memories of me  
as that fragile shell tracking silver through the vines.

Melanie McCabe / Falls Church, Virginia

There are squalls brewing overhead. Feel them blister and boil. Ghosts in the margins. Gaps between memories opening just wide enough for grief to slip through. Yesterday's sunset was a violent affair, all sharp chartreuse and burnt sienna. The western zephyr carried you home, a broken echo without geometry. We called every doctor, but you were already gone. Or at least no longer here. The pallor of your skin weathered and jaundiced, rupturing beneath my touch. Later, I tongued the slither of your name between each slit of my teeth, swallowed the syllables whole. Numbered the digits of your fingers as they bruised anoxic blue. There are the infinite hours of the after, and the finite of the before. Feel history waver, swivel, multiply, pitch forth. All of the stories where nothing matters and I still find you at the end.

Logan Lee / New Haven, Connecticut



Drawing  
Vic Cavalli / Mission, BC, Canada

& the dishwasher trembled all through  
the night, her jaws frothing ravenously,  
begging, hollowly. My grief sharpens, dulls,  
smolders from ash to flame. Even the horizon  
is so intolerably blue—some mottled wind  
bruising into a blizzard. But there is such  
simple joy in the today. Church bells slough  
through the heavy air, faithful and true  
even in the worst of times. The sunset steps  
into the same saffron hues, day after day.  
Is it wrong to admit that I once feared such  
mundanity? Laughter splashing, like sunlight,  
onto exposed tile. I was young and wanted  
even what I already had. But tomorrow, after  
the storm has retreated upstate, you will awake  
to a graveyard of rime in the garden outside.  
I will ask you back inside, music spilling through  
the door thrown ajar in haste. The extravagance  
of it all: continents shifting, countries splitting  
open at the seams. Just come back home.  
There is tea on the stove and enough daylight  
for both of us.

Logan Lee / New Haven, Connecticut

The coordinator asked for his name.

"Raymond," Dad said.

Which were right.

Then he told her he'd been a carpenter all his life.

Which weren't.

He were a postman for thirty-two year. He knew every street in Oldham by name. They gave him a plaque when he retired.

We put it in the loft when we moved him.

There were nowhere to hang it here.

She wrote down carpenter. I let her.

\*\*\*

Eli pressed his face to the window. Out in the garden, three residents sat in plastic chairs. None of them moving much.

"There's a cat," he said.

There weren't.

I did the labels the night before. Masking tape and permanent marker. Raymond Holt pressed into every shirt collar.

Every pair of trousers.

The comb he'd kept since before I were born.

My mam used to say he'd take that comb to his grave.

I wrote his name on the plastic. The first one smeared, so I wrote it again.

Forty-three labels.

\*\*\*

The coordinator took us to the room. Dad sat on the bed.

He pressed both palms into the mattress—that same flat-palmed bounce from the Sunday furniture sales, his face set like he were gathering evidence.

That were still him.

Right there.

He looked up at the coordinator. "Have you met our lass?" he said. "She comes Thursdays."

I were three feet away.

Eli turned from the glass. "That's me mam," he said.

Dad looked at me.

His mouth opened, then closed again. "Diane. I know it's you, ya daft 'apeth."

He said my name. The one he'd chosen. He said it with the stress on the wrong syllable, sounding like a question he already knew the answer to.

Then he turned back to the coordinator. "Good lass, our Diane," he said. "She comes Thursdays, don't you, pet?"

I locked my knees to keep from swaying.

\*\*\*

We walked him to the dining room. He sat across from a stranger and told him he'd been a carpenter for forty year. Built some solid stuff. The man said that was something.

Dad picked up his fork. He wrapped his thick fingers around the handle and started to eat, looking like he'd sat at this table every day of his life.

In the car park, our breath came out white. "Does Grandad know where he is?" Eli asked.

I unlocked the car doors. "He's settling in."

"He didn't know you, though," he said.

"He did. Just for a minute."

Eli went quiet. He were six. A minute still counted at six.

\*\*\*

At the junction, I kept my foot on the brake.

In the rearview, Eli stared back at the building. Waiting the way he did when a film finished, expecting something more to happen. On the back seat were two shirts with no labels. I'd run out of tape.

Dad's own father were a carpenter.

Died donkeys ago.

There were no photographs of him in our house. No old chisels in the shed. Just a name that dropped out of the air the day they buried him.

Dad had spent thirty-two year wearing the map of Oldham into the soles of his boots.

He came home smelling of damp wool and exhaust fumes, his right shoulder permanently dropped from the canvas strap.

Not a speck of sawdust on him.

And now here he was, building himself from whatever parts remained.

Carpenter.

Father of three.

Raymond. Which were still true.

I hadn't put my name anywhere he could find me.

Not on a label, not on anything.

The light went green.

I just watched it.

Ashley Mangtani / London, United Kingdom

*Noon Whistle* / James Scruton

Pitched high over town,  
it divides each weekday  
as if there were still  
some factory here, some plant  
or mill with shifts  
coming off, coming on,  
a shrill two minutes  
above and beyond our work  
by now, one long tuneless note  
of hail and farewell  
to another morning.

*Somebody's Blues* / James Scruton

For some, these songs remind us,  
the only luck is bad, all love but sorrow.  
The brighter the morning  
the darker the tune, a cigarette  
and an empty glass at dawn.  
*Got no money and my baby's gone.*

It helps, hearing woes like Job's  
in a minor key. Every chord  
sounds out some loss,  
each note a familiar pain,  
this deep dive into so much blue  
the only way out of it, the one way through.

James Scruton / Brookville, Ohio

*A Tragedy in Five Acts* / Daniel Barlekamp

For L.

I.

Harbor lights.  
A salt spray becomes a gale.  
The cruelty  
of rocks.

II.

Midnight call.  
Am I speaking with the parent of \_\_\_\_\_?  
A beat.

III.

Beeping monitors.  
White coat.  
*You'll be okay, but your friend...*

IV.

House across the street.  
Blue paint, brown leaves.  
Black suits  
on Saturday.

V.

Midnight call.  
Straight to voicemail.  
Seagulls cry.

Daniel Barlekamp / Melrose, Massachusetts

***Barrow Town*** / Paula Appling  
pop. 1

A windmill sits still,  
useless on this stifling day.  
NOAA forecast: another hot, humid, stagnant Sunday.  
Silo, nearby, topped with weathervane,  
holds grain for plastic cows and horses.  
A brightly colored Ferris wheel  
languishes in the heat –  
no water flows in the stream beneath.  
Pretend crops grow willy-nilly,  
along with one towering red canna lily.  
Livestock, oblivious, crush  
pipe-cleaner corn and Indian paintbrush.  
Where is the farmer?  
Maybe in the barn,  
its door open, where a carved  
wooden dog sits, a muddy mouse in his mouth.  
The nearby farmhouse, a tidy little thing, shows  
Granny in mourning clothes,  
knitting, tiny teacup at her side.  
Grandpa, a skeleton with a folded-paper hat  
and a tattered newspaper in his lap,  
rocks, if the wind blows.

It sits on the back burner,  
holding its cold water like  
a secret it's tired of keeping.  
The blue flame rises,  
a sudden circle of teeth.  
The metal does not flinch.  
It has learned the patience of things  
that must always be hurt to be useful.  
Inside, the dark work begins.  
The water grows restless,  
shifting, then rising on tiny bubbles  
like a crowd looking for the exit.  
Then, the high, thin note.  
The sharp cry of a small throat  
pressed too hard by the steam.  
It sings because it is empty.  
It sings because it is full.  
It sings because there is nothing else  
to do with the heat.

J. R. Solonche / Blooming Grove, New York

*Metro Escalator* / Anne Kazak



Photograph  
Anne Kazak / Havertown, Pennsylvania

To him the birds were chirping.

To her, they were screaming at the top of their lungs.

He was used to the sound, having lived in the same apartment since their senior year of college. While not quite a trust-fund baby, he was much better off than the majority of their classmates—including her.

He had offered to let her live in the apartment with him. She had turned him down, not because she didn't want to feel indebted to him, as their friends and her ex-therapist theorized, but because she needed there to be some degree of separation between them. If she moved in with him, if she went home to him every day, or else waited for him to return from his steady, if boring, job at his father's company, she would either resent him or fall desperately in love with him, and she would have rather died than do either one.

“What do you think they're saying?” he asked her, his arms crossed over his chest. Unlike everyone else in their friend group, he had never struggled to strike a balance between personal fitness and a burgeoning professional life. He had always known he would end up working for his father and took out any bitterness he might have felt about this at the gym near his apartment.

Keeping her mouth as still as possible, as if donning yet another Korean face mask gifted to her by her mother, she said, “I have no idea what you're talking about.”

“The birds,” he said.

Her eyes snapped to him, then back to the far wall. She hadn't realized he noticed the birds anymore. She would have thought he had begun tuning them out.

Then again, she had never learned to do that with him, despite all the time they had spent together since meeting in their freshman year.

“Those noises must mean something,” he said. “If we could translate them into English, what would they be saying, you think?”

He had posed this question before. Not to her. To the strangers he had taken back to his place after a night at the bar. Most simply shrugged or frowned, as if they had never been asked a pointless question before.

Perhaps they hadn't. Perhaps no one asked questions purely out of curiosity. Perhaps he was the strange one for trying to make conversation.

She, on the other hand, neither shrugged nor gave him one of her belittling looks. He imagined she was thinking it over.

In truth, her mind was snagged on the word translate.

Her family had met him only a handful of times, and while they liked that he was close to his family, and that he was rich, they made it clear that she was not to date him.

He would never understand, her mother had told her, slipping back into Japanese while he stood off to the side, doing a poor job of disguising his curiosity. She could practically hear him asking, What were they saying? What did they think? Did they call me pasty, the way I said they would?

"Maybe," she said slowly, "they're screaming for help."

Inadvertently imitating those he had invited back to his apartment once, then never again, he drew his brows together. "What? That?"

He pointed to the window. One of them. Two of the walls held tall windows, and though the curtains were drawn then, light still filtered in.

"You think that is screaming?"

It was then her time to allow the ghosts of his guests to momentarily possess her, her shoulders hopping in a casual shrug. "They're songs to us, but to them, who knows? Who's to say it isn't screaming?"

He opened his mouth. Closed it. Wondered how it was possible to love someone without truly understanding her.

He felt the distance then; she was always acutely aware of it. It was like a rip in her clothes, air whispering against her bare skin.

There were times when she thought about telling him. When she imagined walking him through her entire childhood, explaining why she was the way she was. Why she was so different with him, and from him, and why she could be cold, even when everything in her was burning up with the need to be near him.

She wanted to scream. Had wanted to scream for so long. She had been forced into playing the piano as a girl, like every other Asian child at her school, but secretly, she had always longed to sing. To make noise with her own mouth. To let everything out in an outpouring of sound, unfiltered by the curl of her fingers.

“They’re screaming,” she told him. “That’s what I think.”

He studied her for a minute, as if she was something precious. Something unknowable. Something precious because she was unknowable.

“Okay,” he said. “You’re right.”

“Of course I am.”

Her legs were shaking. Badly. Instead of placing a hand on her knee, as he wished he could, he pretended not to notice.

Outside, the birds’ noises danced through the trees, their voices rising and falling, then slowly fading into nothing, a distant memory even as their song went on and on.

Kelly Murashige / Honolulu, Hawaii

I remember the windmill, the fields, three horses.  
The college girls who boarded them on our ten acres.  
Mom feeding the barn cats in our kitchen. I was four,  
captivated by their fresh stealth. And I recall my mother's  
story about chasing an errant pig down the road away  
from that house. Where was it going? And why did we  
leave home as well? Rooms we moved into squeezed  
too tight. Neighborhoods grew brassier yet bluer. I try  
to understand now what happened then, but my memory  
behaves like a fugitive who, sensing trouble, slips away.

Yvonne Morris / Elizabethtown, Kentucky

*Ramadan, 2012: Erbil International Airport* / Todd Epp

The thermometer bumps 115 degrees.  
The sun bears down on the Kurdish desert.  
The airport worker  
stands in a puddle  
    firing an electric power washer.  
He hasn't eaten since the night before.  
He hasn't drunk water since the night before.  
He wears no boots  
    only sandals  
    no socks.  
He wears no goggles.  
    Sand and water spray over him.  
He wears no safety vest.  
In honor of Ramadan  
he wears a blue blazer.

Todd Epp / Harrisburg, South Dakota



Digital Drawing  
Tony Brinkley / Bangor, Maine