

FutureCycle Poetry

poems for the ages



ANNUAL ANTHOLOGY • 2009

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Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome; however, we now accept online electronic submissions only *via our online submission form*. To avoid unnecessary delays or unread returns, please read the complete submission guidelines on our website before sending your work.

Robert S. King, Editor-in-Chief

FutureCycle Poetry

Cave Spring, GA, U.S.A.

Please refer to the last page of this issue for information about our annual poetry book prize competition.

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Debrenee Adkisson

Center of the Storm

The floor came up too quickly, mess
Of sweet salmon pink and cold grey stone,
Polished and enticing as the poisoned apple
Must have been when bitten, savoured,
Swallowed without guilt, without
A second thought for daughters
Who might later, in their same pain
Fall as the first, tripping over lies.
She cried out, sharp notes hit, and
Suddenly, her hair spanned tiles,
Skull sunk slowly in a sea of
Night spread out, fanning. She
Did not try to break the final fall,
Cushion it with padded palm,
Land on lower arm or cheekbone.
It was done before it started, black
Hole rising, killing stars, exploding
Tiny points of light behind her eyes.
They would remark on bones,
On the grip and clutch of fingers
Wound tightly round the wooden handle,
Even as she floated off away somewhere,
Far from thoughts of fury cured by pain.
And you, her keeper for the moment,
Fickly loved and left—her sole revenge—
Will dream it when your own eyes close:
Crimson ribbons curling over fists,
Ornate gifts as yet untouched, undone.

Rane Arroyo

In My Mind

No one taught me that kitsch
has something real in its center,
something that's not always sweet.

For example: James Taylor sang:
In my mind I'm going to Carolina.
Guy sang this to me on his futon

and now he's gone but the song
remains. Now, I need to know
which Carolina—north or south?

Is there another one in the Void?
Amigos take me to a karaoke bar
and a punker in chains and charm

sings of his Carolina and I'm crying
because it's so kitsch, a healing
far from my bed of invisible nails.

Keith Badowski

Pursuit of the Sweet Spot

I want all the hidden sweetness even if I have to bite down and risk a chipped tooth, a gouged inner cheek, a cranium skewered with harpoon pain. God created me with this hunger for nougat and I will work all the aspects of my jaw and teeth and tongue to reach that small bead of paradise. The animals tutor me; oh, the lessons of the ravenous Saarloos Wolf Hound so doggedly focused on extracting the treat wedged like marrow inside a hollow bone that his ears deafen to all stimuli. The best enticements ignored: a Frisbee toss, a car-ride, a run in the park, even a sled pull in the Iditarod. You've got to want that special morsel, not just with hope but with fangs! Fangs scrape against bone, clamp down on bone, crack and chip bone to get down inside. Nothing of true worth is gained by maintaining disciplined dental hygiene. In time gums loosen, roots perish, and enamel wears away. Might as well crunch the hard candy and skip brushing when it stalls the quest. The lunatic beavers' gnaw into trees only suggests the delve required. Don't feed your tankful of Pot Bellied Mollies. Then thirteen days later shower them with flakes and watch how fast they suck those red, brown and orange crackers to quell the vampires inside their scales. Watch Technicolor snow swoosh into their mouths and sputter back out, their shrunken stomachs too weak to keep it down. Yet they dart and slurp in a frenzy. This cruel experiment offers the barest inkling of the howling vacuum endlessly seeking to extract nougat, caramel, that elusive toffee, that burst of sweetness, the essential core hidden amid the Alaskan forest—inside the hull of a frigid cabin—against the log walls of the blackest corner—under the shroud of an army surplus blanket—embedded deep within a metaphysical, bear-proof barrel—stowed for emergencies and stocked for relief.

Marcia Black

scoliosis 1995

bandaged by light i sleep
bandaged by light i fall into darkness
under the blue sky my name is broken
the shy cathedral of my ribs undone

this bandage a skin i can't shed
the sky no longer trustworthy
the blue no longer brave
syllables garble and slice open
the bones of my name shatter
against the dome of sky and now
no bones no cathedral no God

i know others can be touched without bursting into flame
i know others don't hear touch as a molten hammer
striking notes so deep no world can contain the melody
i know i once was fluent in the alphabet of my ecstasy

now, bandaged, i trace the braille of my desire
from vagina to heart to vertebrae to clavicle
to mind's cathedral to wing to star to soul

Marcia Black

worth counting on

had i known you were coming
i wouldn't have drunk the dark thunder that rolled down the sky
i wouldn't have closed my eyes and found a liquid haze just above my eyes
where i could float into the garden of not

i wouldn't have sipped my measure of tears from each of the salty seas
the full moon wouldn't have spoken to me in quite
the same tone the same grimace the same demand the same
when all is said and done forgiving sigh

i wouldn't have heard the way the trees sigh at night after
we have climbed the stairs to bed
only they can see we are falling upside down into the stars
our roots in heaven in jeopardy
don't we know that erosion of the topsoil of human decency
leads to the dislocation of God's ground
and the tree's sighs pour out into an ever-emptying sky

had i known you were coming
i would never have ridden the dark horse of night into the caves
where the full catalogue of skeletons still rings with amber light
and raw promises burn down into molten medicine
but the gallop of time is a thunder of remorse here
so i learned to bow down to kiss the ankles of love

now that you have come we listen to the most quiet of languages
you show me the wing's broad expanse from cartilage to tip
along with the daily absolution from my daughters' kisses
is worth counting on and meeting your gaze
heaven's tree takes root in deeper soil

(to marc)

Jennifer Campbell

Eat with your mouth full

The fibrous center of one kiwi slice
is easily pierced by a thumbnail,
gritty black beads forming a sunburst pattern
around the shallows of grass-green flesh.
You should allow for an occasionally
stringy separation, hear your teeth sink
without guilt or even expectation. Each bite
reveals multifold textures, each seed
gives birth to the whole fruit: newborn fuzz
over russet skin, forbidding brown shell
hardy enough to endure hot summer sun,
a fast-growing vine eager to yield its edible berry.
That's why French women aren't fat,
he insisted. They savor food, sensually caress
their subject. Observing the sentient swell of yeast,
they celebrate the soft crust's gentle tear,
notice the humidity of the warm white sponge,
how bread dissolves sweetly on the buttered tongue.

Susana H. Case

Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death

Insomnia again—no escape. A late night flick
about chicks like me

with doctorates, slaying males dead as rail spikes
in the jungle

of southern California academia. Piranha women
on a horror rampage.

The location looks like the outskirts of Montecito,
a fancy neighborhood

I visited for a conference just last spring. They eat
marinated male jerky

with wit and guacamole. The future of feminism,
a Conradian stew

of androgyny and poststructuralist anthropology
—TV

on a tubular one-night stand. In this movie's thicket,
no one ever returns

from a synecdochic life like mine to a homecoming
queen's prosaic sunlight.

Kathleen Dale

Ghost

On the far side of the theater in the round
surrounded by summer oaks, cicadas, whippoorwills,
warm breeze drowsy, billowing the cloth of the set,
she sits alone in the first row, shoes off,
loafing and enjoying herself, laughing at
the fool's jokes though the play is a tragedy,
slim, slouching in the comfortable heat then leaning
forward, rapt, chin in hands, elbows on knees
spread wide across the sleeveless light-blue dress
and my throat tightens, knowing it isn't you,
can't possibly be you, but,
not able to make out her features, how
like you used to be she is, and,
abruptly conjured from the trap door of my heart,
from underneath the worn edge of my outrage
at your self-murder twelve years gone,
without warning rises the sharpness of how much,
how much I miss your outrageous laugh,
our youth, the lanky ease of your fierce company.

Kathleen Dale

Sit. Stay.

In yoga, holding Virasana, thighs trembling,
I think of how my pup learned to “stay”
during his second Doggie Manners class.

He wanted so badly *not* to “stay,” wanted to
bound up and explore the butt of the aspirant
panting placidly on the next mat.

The only way he *could* “stay” was by looking
up at the ceiling. He still trembled, but for a
moment I felt the room fade, with its twelve dogs

and their disciples, as his practice elevated
us both before he glanced down, broke form.
Learning how to live in the world without

a leash might some day save his life.
Today as I lean back into Ustrasana,
a strap binds my ankles, but some day I may be

able to let it fall. Some day
I may even untether my breath from thought,
leaving me space to curb pain and fear.

But now,
gripping the ceiling with my eyes, I think:
*This is basic. This is crucial. This is
the hardest thing I have ever done.*

Kathleen Dale

The Final Thing

At seventy, the final thing she wanted
to learn was to dive:

to tuck her chin to her chest, between
her outstretched arms and to fall

headfirst toward the bottom she had both
feared and yearned for since she had

first seen water—the still pool
untouched, unrippled, heavy with meaning

and promise: to feel its cool caress, hear
the bubbles of breath leave her body, see

the illusion of being enclosed utterly by blue;
to know that she could aim her body down,

then up, and it would joyously comply,
her remaining breath buoying her up, up,

up to break the surface of the old familiar
world as if rising from sleep; it was something

like flying, she thought, something like
taking off from one medium and trying on

another, shedding one set of rules for a second:
one which both frightened and enthralled,

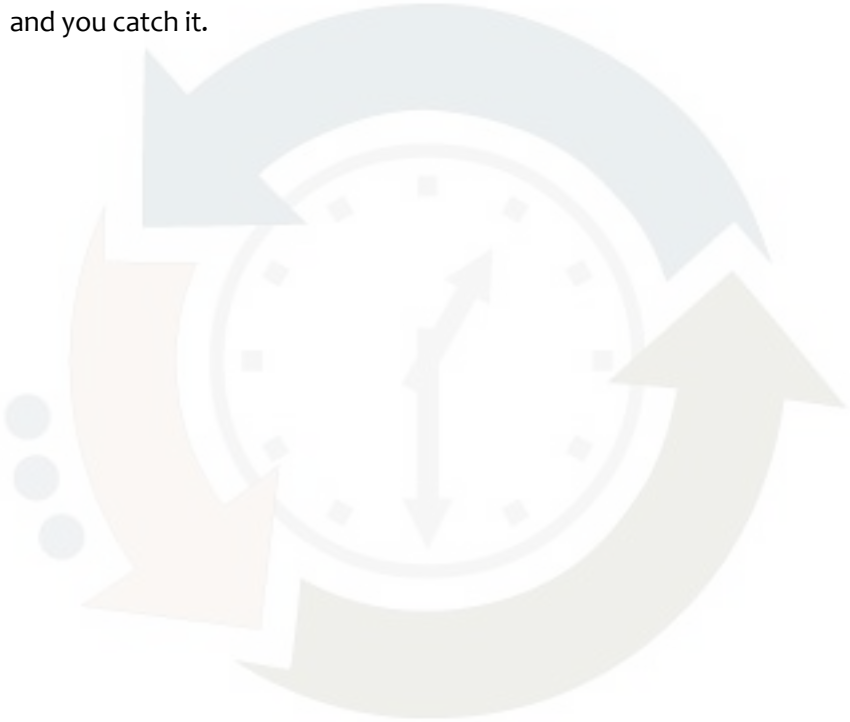
a kind of life to which we are not naturally born,
but on the edge of which we are forever poised.

Janann Dawkins

Balance

There near the shelf is where you'll lose it,
arms wheeling, mouth wide
as you fall toward the lake.

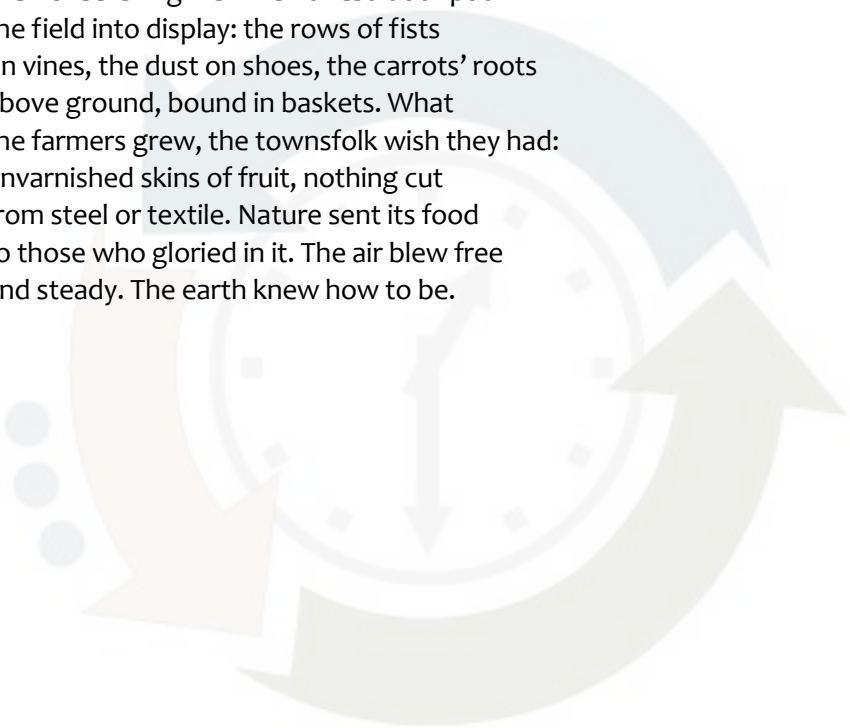
Five seconds from now is the large dark stone,
ominous as a shark. The water rushes to you
like waves of geese, full of rolling liquid feathers,
and you catch it.



Janann Dawkins

Utopia

The peas to pick were their own. The land had burnished a plentiful harvest, a feast for hands. The soil underfoot seemed sand in blue-hot days. The grapes in back released the gatherers' imaginations, creased their cheeks in grins. The honest labor put the field into display: the rows of fists on vines, the dust on shoes, the carrots' roots above ground, bound in baskets. What the farmers grew, the townsfolk wish they had: unvarnished skins of fruit, nothing cut from steel or textile. Nature sent its food to those who gloried in it. The air blew free and steady. The earth knew how to be.



Alan Elyshevitz

Hurricane

*A wind of such violence
Will tolerate no bystanding: I must shriek
—Sylvia Plath*

Here comes the storm of the century again,
more profound this time than a dewdrop

It is our affliction of the moment,
a bad headline for anxious eyes

A wrecked ambulance appears radiant
and lurid bedecked in toppled phone lines

The car horns, the embarrassed medical
team, the fluids bursting from every sewer

In public shelters the dispossessed cough
into their hands like guttering candles

How they yield to the deepening blackout,
jostle, compete, exchange ingratitude

There is no refastening dislodged pride
nor the limbs of any man or tree

A swath of humiliated poplars extends
all the way to the high countryside

Vegetables rest in their easy valor,
their noses deep in fragrant mud

To be a squat dense thing—resilient,
wrapped in leaves, optimistic, home

Rupert Fike

You Probably Had to be There

—after Kinnell’s “The Apple Tree”

My Cambridge walking-tour stories fall flat
because I lack our guide’s posh accent,
her vowels so trilling, so rounded
you wanted to have upper-class sex with them,
enunciation as a force of persuasion . . .
especially for hopeless Americans
whose push-pull with the koan of nobility
mirrors the plight of UFO nerds at night—
they yearn for the ship yet fear the probe.

It’s the Newton legend that really flops,
how the gnarled apple tree by the old gate
descends directly, seed-to-tree-to-seed-to-tree
from the one that . . . well, you know . . .
For friends to accept this from my flat voice
would be to deny what must be treasured—
skepticism, the only thing holding us back
each time a Carnie yells, “Step right up!”

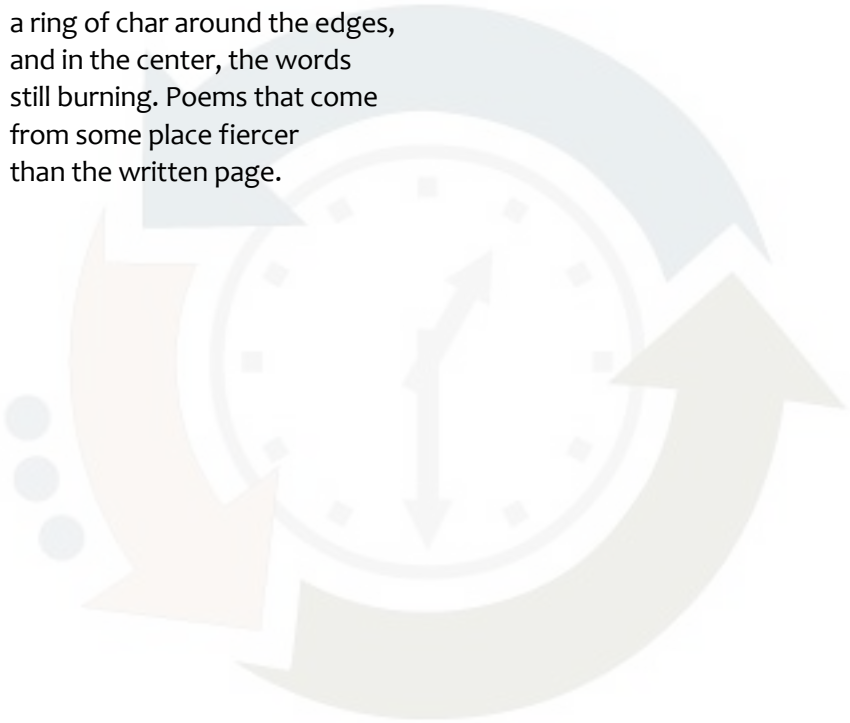
So no sale on the tree even though its apples
have obeyed a now-out-of-fashion law
(okay, light bends, but things still fall!).
They lie bruised, rotting, on their way to wine,
feeding Kinnell’s worms who emerge and behold:
creation unopposed,
the world made entirely of lovers . . .
now there’s a target audience for yarns—
the smitten who stroll, bike, punt on the Cam.
Even when fed stretchers, obvious whoppers,
lovers must be about their Lord’s work.
They nod, they question not. So much is true.

Taylor Graham

An Old House

The panes of the solarium are clouded,
there's dry-rot in the floor. Too many
utensils in the kitchen. You've given up
on fixing things. Sometimes you wish
fire would take everything but the poetry—

a ring of char around the edges,
and in the center, the words
still burning. Poems that come
from some place fiercer
than the written page.



Taylor Graham

A Blacksmith Gets Through Security

remembering his hammer, which grounds him at cruising altitude, 31,000 feet above farmland. From his window seat he admires cultivated fields in neat-stitched rows. Tractors. Who needs a ploughshare anymore? Still,

he knows his metal, believes a man in flight would rather be connected to his shadow; hand to haft and foot to furrow, listening for lark song; brain engaged with body—not like that lady in the aisle seat, nervous for her cell-phone.

Her connections must be moving at the speed of worry, around a globe too vast, spinning faster into space. So much latitude for fear-and terror-mongering. He looks out at endless sky, and weighs the hammer of his mind.

John Grey

Stairwell

Elevator hasn't worked in years
but now you find yourself walking
whereas once you ran
down those concrete stairs.
And the graffiti is unfamiliar,
anonymous tags,
a much more belligerent spray paint.
You no longer take the bus downtown,
stare up at the fancy apartments that line the park.
You're content to stroll the wreckage of your neighborhood,
crumbling brownstones, abandoned tenements,
empty lots where shards of broken glass
glint their low-rent sunshine
through weeds and concrete.
Once you stood inside the great upside sound canyon
of the mightiest cathedral
and, as the choir sang,
God broke out on all sides of you.
Now, a storefront church must do,
some wooden chairs, a makeshift altar,
a pastor who's a plumber
when he's not quoting scripture.
Too many blocks to the river,
just enough to the grocery store,
the walk-in clinic, the bar . . .
your world's become this other stairwell,
dark, compressed, in its outlook,
ever narrower in its steps.

Peggy Heinrich

His Little Jig

And didn't we move from place to place
in our rickety caravan. We'd stop to sell
a pot or pan that Da would hammer from the tin.
And didn't he turn his taste for drink into a virtue,
bragging that it kept him from Ma's nipple
and the milk meant for the recent babe.

Ma saved each piece of string,
each scrap of cloth or paper, wrappers
greasy from a meal of fish and chips.
She'd stuff them in a niche behind a shelf.
Da said she'd make the wee ones sick
with all her dirty hoardings. *And isn't it herself,*
he'd say, *pushes me away, claiming she could*
catch a virus each time I try to kiss her?

And why not, was Ma's retort, *unacquainted*
as his lordship is with soap and water.
Da laughed and danced his little jig,
more like a shuffle. God knows
he did look foolish, his face so red and bloated.
Ah, those luscious lips of hers. Who could resist?
'Twas inevitable she'd marry me. I was a handsome lad.

Then Ma would go all quiet as she stared along the path
the moonlight sliced across the ragged moor.

Dianna Henning

Climber

It isn't until your husband hikes the roof to batten down the TV antenna that you realize he could fall, especially since he shoulders a step-ladder and ascends higher on the roof's ridge, hanging onto the antenna, the tenuous broadcasting loud and clear, its twang and wobble affronting you, especially when near the ladder's top he wiggles one foot over, straddles the backside, snarky winds teething on guy-wires, and you whisper, *Please don't fall*, pictures of Humpty Dumpty's "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again," rising, although you take issue with horses puzzling anyone back together, the absurdity in a child's rhyme, how you can hold an image and get fooled, which brings you to *Through the Looking-Glass* when Alice prompts Mr. Dumpty's response: "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean," and you think of your words before your husband scaled the ladder, *Please be careful*, and see how words could slip-slide into care-fall, fallen care, and you wish for a different caution because to speak holds power, leaves too might plummet from their sketchy coat-hangers—and you, standing there, looking where he's at, hoping he doesn't tumble while another scenario arises, *Call 911, Cover him so he doesn't go into shock*, so when he eventually descends he won't know how many lives you've put him through, and you totter on one foot, as though repositioning yourself provides equilibrium for him up there on the roof.

Michael Henson

Loneliness in New York City

The woman at the news stand takes my money.
She does not look at me.
She looks at the newspaper in my hand
and she looks at the three coins I give her.
Crowds of people stride past
in November coats and jackets.
The river wind chutes down the avenues.
The harbor wind sweeps the streets
and I know
the woman in the stand is probably cold.
But it seems she is contented
and it seems she has a friend
for she looks to the left and she is talking
and she only glances at the paper I hold up
—just to check—
and at the coins
—three quarters—
that I drop into her palm.
She does not break stride in her conversation with her hidden friend.
She is framed
like a woman in a Renaissance painting
by tabloid newspapers and fashion magazines.
So perhaps it is fashion
that she speaks of with her friend.
Or perhaps the recent election.
How can I know?
She speaks in a language that is not mine
and it all happens very quickly.
But I know she will not say, tonight,
there was a man of such a height
with his ears tinged red from the cold
and he wore a beaten hat
and his collar turned up.
For how could she remember?

She barely even sees me,
just my paper,
and the three coins that drop into her palm.
And that is how it is in the city.
Buyers and sellers
crossers and dodgers
drivers and messengers
a boy all in gold
and men all in black
a naked man in a cowboy hat
angels of the alleys
ghosts of the squeegee men
a line of angry gridlocked cabbies
Amazing! Amazing!
So many people press from so many sides,
so much dance of one past another
and we have only so much of soul
to absorb it all.
The world is wide.
Our arms are small.
So we bend home to the small warm place;
we shift our eyes from the blazing street.
We turn to the hidden friend
as I turn, now, in this poem of broken wings, to you.

Paul Hostovsky

Kissing the Cat

In the catalog of my addictions
which is in the order I acquired them,
the mouth of my cat Pinky
is preceded only by my thumb—

His mouth was the only mouth
that didn't speak the language
of our house and television,
so I knew he'd never tell

as one by one my self-propelled
fish-mouth kisses found his mouth
and exploded, and his eyes
dilated like the binocular view from space

of a world going up in smoke,
and his ears changed shape like a hat
changing heads on his head—
Still as a water jug, he sat

enduring as I sipped his spout
on the lime couch
in front of our television, which
in the catalog of my addictions

would be the third entry.
According to my sponsor Phil,
either we give them up in the order
they're killing us—which is often the reverse

order of their acquisition—or else
we simply exchange them one for another
and they kill us cumulatively.
Pinky died when I was off at college

learning to shotgun beers and roll a joint
while steering a car with only one knee.
I never graduated. But I did finally get sober.
And when I finally got sober, I got a kitten—

He tottered around my apartment, tentative
and awkward as my new sobriety.
So I named him Thumbs. And now we're two
old toms living together, complacent

and fixed. We've given up everything
including sex. He mostly likes to sit
on the kitchen table, next to my cup and my plate,
while I'm eating. And mostly I just like
to let him.



Paul Hostovsky

The Weeping

For a long time it was just a trickle,
and it came the way people come trickling in
who are late to a great gathering
of people, silently,
self-consciously,
holding the door, holding
the breath, letting it
close softly behind before the next
jagged inhalation opened it
again. And again. Then it grew
louder, like a great gathering of people
churning and swelling and overflowing
the small enclosed spaces chosen especially
to contain it: the car, an empty
stopped elevator, a bathroom with
the door locked, the door
of the throat opening, the great
sobs forcing it open now like a
birth, like an actual person being born into a world
full of people, in a very small room
with only one person.

Joseph Hutchison

The Things That Carried Them

Mother.

Cradle. Bassinette. Crib.

Shoulders. Snugli. Stroller. Car seat.

Pull sled. Saucer. Double-bladed ice skates.

Tricycle. Pedal car. Roller skates. Scooter.

Training-wheel bicycle. Skateboard. Ten speed.

Monkey bars. Merry-go-round. Swing set. Slide.

Cottonwood treehouse. Willow-branch swing.

Bumper car. Paddle boat. Ferris wheel. Flying Eagle.

Carousel. Roller coaster. Tilt-a-Whirl. Scrambler.

Rubber raft. Rowboat. Aluminum canoe.

Skateboard. Ten speed. Snowboard. Skis.

Mini bike. City bus. Daddy's car. Beater car.

Chevrolet. Volkswagen. Datsun. Subaru.

SUV. ATV. Crotch Rocket. Chopper.

Sailboat. Bass boat. Bowrider. Jet Ski.

Parasail. Parachute. Hot air balloon.

Helicopter. Gulfstream. Seven-forty-seven.

Booster rocket. Space Shuttle. SpaceShipOne.

U2. F-15. B-1B. C-130.

Stretcher. Gurney. Wheelchair. Crutches.

Stretcher. Gurney. Body bag. Coffin.

Coffin. Coffin. Coffin.

Earth.

Joseph Hutchison

Yoga

for Melody

The teacher guides their breath
into a depth his doesn't like
at first. He lets her make
his lungs plump up, then

lead his body into Downward
Facing Dog. The class has seen
what her body does; but his—his
just isn't made the same. Her glance

argues, *All you lack is discipline.*
Why? Those years in school,
outwitting bullies, making grades,
escaping into books—didn't his body

bear him like a mule on its back?
Suddenly, tremors invade his arms—
but the teacher's fierce. "Hold it. Hold it."
He breathes into his shaky limbs

because she says he can . . . breathes
(it hits him) because she breathes
so beautifully. It must be her
he wants to breathe in! "Good,"

she announces. "Child's Pose."
He collapses with the rest, folded
around his secret. Or do the others
sense how intently he listens

as her naked feet brush the bare wood floor? Now she halts, inches from his tucked head. “Just relax,” she says. And he tries. He tries!

“And don’t forget to breathe.”



Michael Lee Johnson

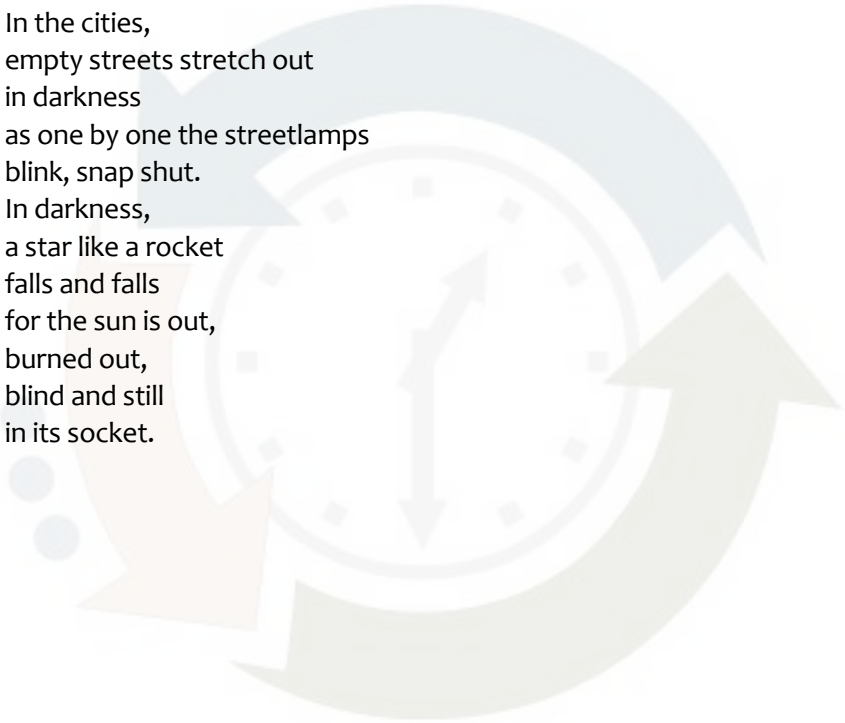
I Am Old Frustrated Thought

I am old frustrated thought
I look into my once eagle eyes
and find them dim before my dead mother,
I see through clouded egg whites with days
passing by like fog feathers.
I trip over old experiences and expressions,
try hard to suppress them or revisit them;
I'm a fool in my damn recollections,
not knowing what to keep and what to toss out—
but the dreams flow like white flour and deceive
me till they capture the nightmare of the past images
in a black blanket wrapped up
and wake me before my psychiatrist.
I only see this nut once every three months.
It is at times like these I know not where I walk
or venture. I trip over my piety and spill my coffee cup.
I seek sanctuary in the common place of my nowhere life.
Solid footing is a struggle in the socks of depression,
it is here the days pass and the years slip like ice cubes.

Diane Kistner

Childhood's End

Bulb by bulb, the lights
burn out
in the fields.
Filaments wither;
the flowers wilt
on their stems.
In the cities,
empty streets stretch out
in darkness
as one by one the streetlamps
blink, snap shut.
In darkness,
a star like a rocket
falls and falls
for the sun is out,
burned out,
blind and still
in its socket.



Diane Kistner

Oneself

A mirror is one side of the box One lives in.
The box is made of windows made of mirrors.
One's face, pressed up against the glass,
as flat as a mirror is flat,
does not see houses, willow trees,
ducks on the far windowed lake.
One does not see the random cars
passing by One's house,
does not see his own children
baking in the sun.

Beyond, beyond, the faceless ducks
dive through the mirror of the lake,
breaking down its opacity,
splashing water into the sky like rain.

Sky is another side of One's box,
as flat, as opaque as a mirror is opaque.
One watches television, talks at his wife.
One cannot see through the sky.

Diane Kistner

Karen

There are horses on Karen's walls.
There are dolls in the closet
staring their dreams out like dogs
in the dark of an alley.

Karen's boots stiffen in a corner.
Blue ribbons over the mirror fade.
A desk calendar remembers her birthday
the third year in a row.

If a hand would come down,
would trace the room's dust edges,
it might find a porcelain rider
on a horse with broken legs.

But no one comes here anymore,
not since they locked the door.
There are horses on Karen's walls,
horses she thought raced on wings.

Diane Kistner

The Walls

Four years old
with colored crayons,
you have discovered the walls.
Not old enough yet to know better,
you have covered the white expanse
of your boundaries
with castles and kings and queens
from your Mother Goose book.
You have walked
in your own enchanted forest.
You have flown bright flags
against a sky of dreams.
You have skipped down to a sea
of fishes, walked upon the beach,
built castles of sand
and danced
and laughed
when the waves
washed your castles away.
Crayon in hand
and queen of your land,
you believe
you can always make more.

When I spank you,
you cry you hate me
and stare with those dark yet
not yet extinguished eyes.
I wash and wash at your pictures
with soap and rags, trying
to make the walls dull
and white again.
How long will it be
before you stop fighting me,

I who am grown up
and see all colors at once,
undone, whirled into oneness?
How long will it be
before you accept the walls?



Diane Kistner

The Lamps of Night

Child, the lamps of night
burn brightly, softly
as you sleep,
though you in your bed
of feathers
may not see them.

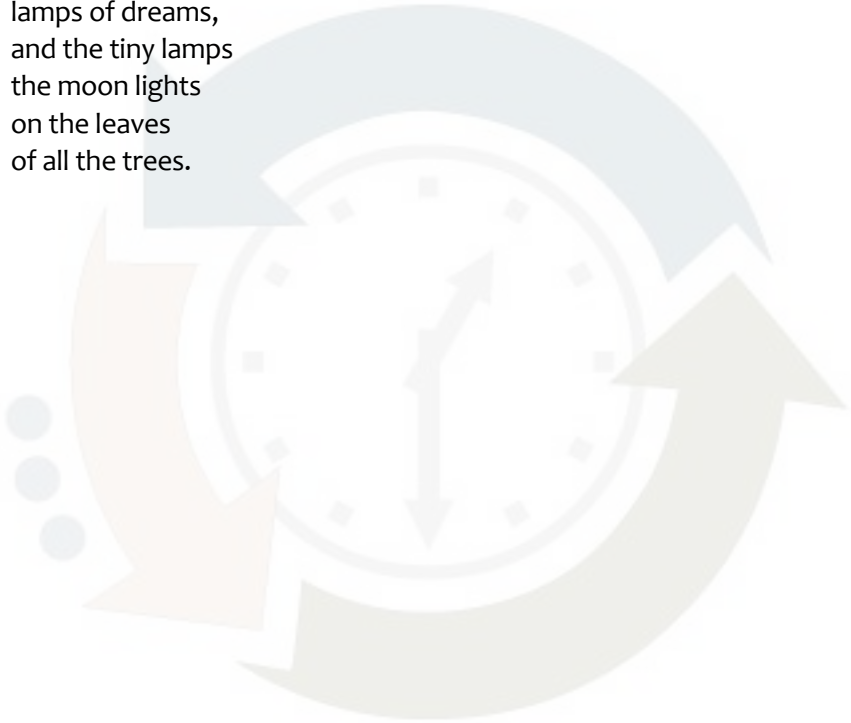
The night birds and the bats,
the soft grey feathered moths,
are diving
through the streetlamps
as you sleep.

The stars are out now,
flying in circles,
and so are the fireflies,
flying in circles
of circles.

Glow worms lie
radiant under straw,
little curled fingers
of light,
curled as the moon,
ringed in jewels,
secure in their beds
of straw
and leaves
and feathers.

Out in the wood,
near a darkened pool,
stones that no one sees
are glowing,
golden.

There are others too,
enduring and subtle:
lamps of magic,
elves' lamps,
lamps of dreams,
and the tiny lamps
the moon lights
on the leaves
of all the trees.



Joy Ladin

The Siren in the Mirror

You feel for the siren
Among the muscles
Of your throat. You try to feel,

To feel a sound moving
Out of the mirror
Into your throat,

To feel like a siren
Who knows how to move,
To sound, to feel. Naturally,

You look in the mirror.
You watch your throat tighten up.
If you were to make a sound,

It would be atonal, like a siren.
The muscles in your throat
Squeeze a sound like a siren

Progressively upward
Out of the mirror
Into a feeling

You already know.
Look in the mirror.
Something in your throat

Yawns to its fullest position,
Swallowing the siren
Trying to move; to sound; to feel.

Grab your glass of water. A sound yawns
Like the siren
You already mirror,

A moving sound, open and feeling,
Squeezing something
In and out of your throat.



Sean Lause

The visitor

The cicada dies and remains
clutched to my upstairs screen window,
punctuating thought.

At dawn it glows gold,
a hyacinth
lit from within
by emptiness,
wings shedding needles of light
to thread the windy leaves.

At noon it burns blue,
folding the sky in its wings.
Living locusts
trill for its return,
but it remains
loyal to its death.

At night it is a black heart
feigning invisibility,
patient,
no longer fearing the cat.

In Summer it remembers
the last cry of its wings.
The storm comes, quickening the shadows,
tormenting the screen,
but still it clutches,
whirling with the earth.

In Winter, winds
turn trees to claws,
but still it clings, waiting,
molding itself
into a diamond of ice.

In Spring it is gone.
Finally, I can leave this house
to find
on my grandmother's tombstone
a cicada shell broken and free.



Jack Lindeman

Advice

Awaiting the glowworm
as if it were a speck of enlightenment
or a speech by a bank president,
I'm watching
as if someone were walking
through a dream of stained glass
without counting his scratches.
Though the abrasions are small
the experience is inexhaustible.
What did you expect
with your highbrow anticipations,
an arboretum with uncles
wearing the glass eyes of hardship
while sustaining the burdens
of heavy buildings
like caryatids?
Would you prefer a broken gate
that has bartered its hinges
to honor a mortgage?
Let the cicadas roar like lions
and everyone come running
to enhance his piety.
If you are looking for consequences,
think swiftly in some native language
without purchasing a ticket,
for people are hammering
on the floor above me
as if God Himself
had consented to their renovations.

Joanne Lowery

Death masquerades as a riverboat gambler

even though luck is seldom involved
in the thrown dice's cross-eyed sprawl

with his blackjack cloak bulging
and a poker-faced skull's stare

when he saunters on the deck of a casino
retrofitted from a paddlewheel

on a Mississippi green as May
and rising: the roulette spins

like a solar system, the dealer shuffles
elusive aces in the smoky air

and you can read on players' lips
the desperation of strategy and prayer:

he's upped the ante tonight, taking chances
as the paddle creaks, the moon swells

and his scythe reaches to rake in
plastic chips and life's losers.

Iain McDonald

Thrift Store

I approve in principle, of course
(reduce, reuse, recycle)
and the money raised
all benefits some good cause
(hospice, kids, stray dogs)
but I'm no sooner inside
than I start to feel
that skin-creep of discomfort.

I scan the books for sale
and there are bargains to be found,
but still I can't ignore
the insidious taint of poverty
from the racks of clothing
never quite in style,
the stack of videos
no one wants to view,
the mismatched furniture,
some of it in decent shape
save for the hairline crack
across a surface
where someone fell one night
for reasons now unknown.

The well-meaning volunteer
(elderly, female)
smiles at me
from behind the counter,
and I force my own smile
in reply,

but there is something here
of sad, disordered lives
that's much too close
to what has been escaped.

I turn, head for the door
holding my breath
until I reach
the cold, clean air outside.



Timothy Martin

Exchange

The ones that were lowered into salt mines
by ingenious device of winch, sling, and rope . . .
the horses and burros who'd stood unluckily in
nearby farms . . . never again touched surface,
begetting foal and hinny that never, ever
touched surface, pulling by gaslight down there
the wagons and tumbrels that must have been
writ large in dreams. Scratching their backs
on jagged mineral columns (plentiful, ubiquitous),
and eating what could be readily mashed, which
is to say what could be coaxed from provisions
that were threaded down the shaft after them.
While a cruel lot, not an insufferable one
(the salinized air held by some to be fortified,
therapeutic). Until they expired
in the most inapt of settings,
surrounded by a thousand kilotons of cool preservative.

To the childlike, the disingenuous, the mercenary,
it must have seemed a miracle: dispatch
the whinnying, braying form below, and
you pull back an armful of prize. Suitable
for improving tastes, preserving fish, gaining footing,
for double-penalizing your enemy's wounds.

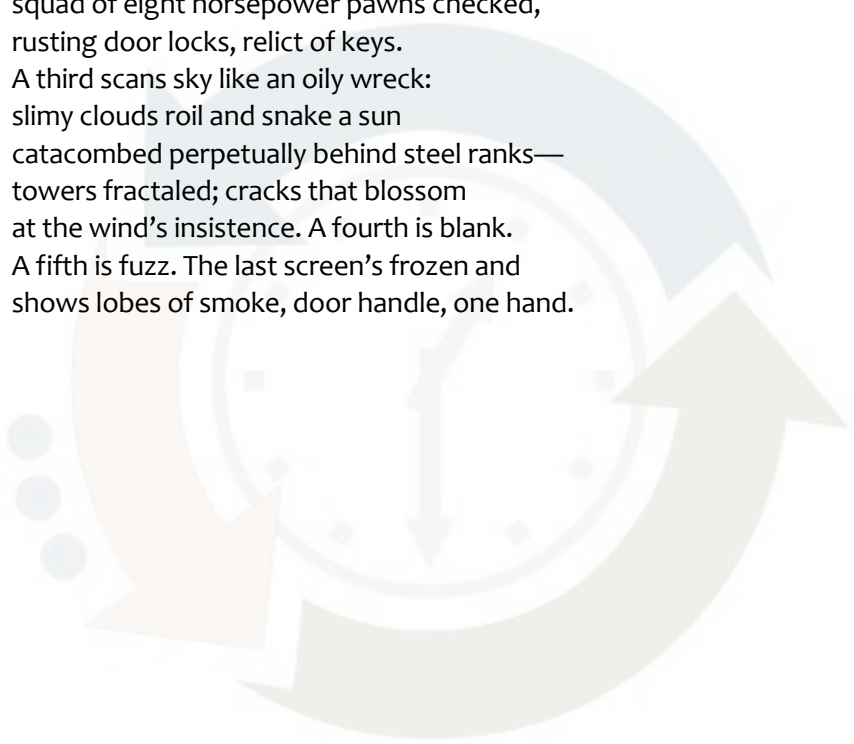
Catherine McGuire

For the 21st Century: Elegy on Six Monitors

Grainy pixels coalesce and flow.

En-framed: ten feet of hall, immortalized
in Dada brilliance, endless, empty, now
saved to disk. Another screen espies
grayscale daisies, chessboard of weeds;
squad of eight horsepower pawns checked,
rusting door locks, relict of keys.

A third scans sky like an oily wreck:
slimy clouds roil and snake a sun
catacombed perpetually behind steel ranks—
towers fractaled; cracks that blossom
at the wind's insistence. A fourth is blank.
A fifth is fuzz. The last screen's frozen and
shows lobes of smoke, door handle, one hand.



Catherine McGuire

Fear of Losing My Soul

It's not a sudden strike,
a single-pointed spear,
more like vines overgrown
whose roots strangle the soil,
whose tendrils ease themselves
into a labyrinth of greed.

By the time a sense of danger stirs,
the path is nearly lost—a thicket
of doubt where no slanting light
gives direction or hope.

Heroic efforts only shred the mass
into smaller pieces, each
with its own weedy strength.
What is needed is quiet care,
to slip from the tangle and leave
the vine to embrace itself.

Brad Rose

Leaving Camarillo State Hospital

Despite the beige meals
and the weeks of furious sleep,
nothing moves in.

You can't stop it
from climbing into you, like fire ants.

On good days, you carry on,
a clinical gypsy, singing to yourself,
as you wander through this replica
of something nearly alive.

The medications crawl through you, velvet caterpillars, molting.

The other days, assassins shovel skulls and wait
for little bolts to open a big front door
through you toward terrible miracles.

Today, however, you have decided
to stick to the real objects: a comb, the bed, the sky.

These can guide you.

The whispers are, after all, only ghosts.

Your clothes may be asleep or ablaze—
that short white shirt, in particular,
half-latched, like a broken medicine cabinet—
but it doesn't matter

because in the distance, you hear
an ambulance's Dopplered wail
recede behind the walls' grey paint.

You carefully memorize its scream of hope
and resolve to ignore the spate of snakes.

Nothing will keep you here.

You'd gladly answer that ringing phone,
if only there were one.

Jim Scutti

Wood Stork

Always hungry, hunting in shallows,
lakes, even stagnant canals by highways,
a big white guy with strokes of black
beneath his wings, a gnarled iron wedge
for a head, his beak a foot-long poniard,
ideal to snatch and swallow in a flash,
his specialty. He can multi-task,
spraying waste while scratching his beak,
all on one leg. That thing must be itchy.
They say he's loyal to his mate
and helps in the nest, sitting on the eggs.
Sometimes I see them hunting together.
When I approach, she flies away.
He waits until I come within ten feet,
then chicken lopes a safe distance—
Groucho striding across a stage,
a long Havana dangling from his lips.

George Seli

Periscoping in Midtown

Reflections of prewar buildings
quiver in my coffee.
People in gray slacks, straight as shears,
advance at a quick clip.
Weeds disappear from memorials,
for even death gets old.
Bushes take whimsical shapes
in the park where tourists eat crepes.

A girl strolls by with
a holiday-red bag. Gusts
ruffle its cold multitude
of sequins like feathers.

It carries little more
than mixed tapes and combs.
New songs and hairstyles,
bold as squawks.
The way it is slung matches
the slant of the rain
across an office tower's
mirror-grid.

Those who understand
fashion and weather are
everywhere, everywhere
everywhere above us,
reclined behind windows.

Those who wonder sprout
unnoticed toward the sun,
their taut faces
squinting at everything.

I sit and sip quietly, varied perspectives
cast upon me. I feel them no more
than points and edges
of angular shadows.

Who knows? Maybe the next gust
will extend my red scarf over me
like an acute accent indicating
I am to be stressed.



Noel Smith

Ways of Knowing

Tommy brings a turnip
from his garden, slices
the blindsided halves
into translucent wafers,
touches one raw to her lip.

This is how
She can taste Tommy,
his tilled earth, his house,
his heart wild-card sweet
with a sting built in.



Amanda Strand

As If They Were Going to the Museum

He was determined that he would go first
when he inched up toward sixty.
He would say things like
“After I’m gone . . .” and give away old family heirlooms
if you weren’t careful and admired something.
He still squired his second wife,
opening the car door for her;
she’d wait, seemingly absorbed in the latch of her pocketbook
each time he’d come around,
a rehearsed surprise, “Oh thank you, Honey.”
He’d meet her every Friday for lunch in town
at the end of her shift at the hospital gift shop.
When he’d finally gone she told me
she’d heard him come in as usual a few Fridays,
looked up,
and then remembered.
It was a lot snowier than he’d expected out there.
The Gravely could only take it just so far,
but when the snow reached the wheel wells of the pick-up
a neighbor had to come to plow them out.
But the pond and slope of the hillside were free entertainment
like the symphonies he’d heard in his head
ever since the second heart surgery.
“Nine hours under anesthesia, what can you expect?”
“Cough! They kept telling me. Cough!
But I couldn’t do any better.”
She’d sat by the bedside regular hours
with her knitting,
going back to the hotel at 5 o’clock.
Putting her hearing on the bedside table
next to her Mary Chestnut

and the pinochle for when he'd be feeling up to it.
They just padded through the emergencies
in their comfortable shoes,
sandwiches wrapped in wax paper,
sweaters just in case,
as if they were going to the museum.



Wally Swist

Double Rainbow

Walking the meadow track after
a day of rain, beside the dripping
trailside of autumn maples and oaks,

we enter into the mist descending
and a shower of tamarack needles
that turns golden in the twilight.

Only our angels know why we stop
to look behind us into the sky
to see the spread of the initial

prism arc broadening its hues:
each band distinguished in concentric
patterns, when a second spectrum

appears curving above it—
one reflecting the other
across the horizon like flame.

We stand beneath it to watch
the colors blaze, making me aware that
we are reawakened by the wealth

of the continuum, that what we are now
is what we always have been, that
we were not meant to be too happy,

but we have grown into one another,
walking as far as the hip deep swale,
almost hovering there a moment.

Gina M. Tabasso

Roundup

This is the roundup she knows—
cowboys' thighs tensed for the ride,
spurs jangling, stirrups loose,
whiskey flowing, bed roll ready,
stubbled chins and lopsided grins
from cheeks full of chew, hats askew.

They are the gods of these hills
who can whistle blades of grass,
make coffee and little else,
open tins of stew, play guitar,
build fires, woo.

They ride, drive, castrate, sell;
sleep sitting up; pay no mind
to the mingled smell
of unwashed bodies, cattle, geldings.

Muscl'd but essentially weak,
they are the ones to fret
like a dog over a bone
about the women in town
and the woman left at home.

When they see her strong, long,
deep bust she feels their stares
right there; feels how they want
to ranch her delta dust,
her corrals full of horses.

Rhian Waller

morgengeist

Streets shine
like chocolate wrapped
in tinfoil and she
walks in the rain,
refracted six ways.

She passes the place
where the masses
gathered to tear the
idol down and
raise the

cross. The
blunt bread and sour
wine still sit on her
tongue, ten years gone.
There, in the wall, are

charred scars left by a
gumbo of fire
and fertiliser,
half-hidden by
ivy.

On the
railings of a
balcony, towels
flap, swelling with
the heavy water.

Opposite, shutters
stick closed. She knows
the story of the
man who once lived
inside,

detained,
charged and sentenced.
His crime: attempted
suicide. They
gave him to the boys

with guns. On the news
(Execution!)
his final words were
censored by high
choir song.

She, with
grocery bags
banging plastic at
her knees as she
searches for her keys,

wonders: did he cry:
I take it back!
I don't want to die!
or whisper his
Thank You

to the
blessed bullets?

Kathleen Worrell

Lapse In Time

In reviewing last week, I find another Tuesday has fallen off my March of Dimes calendar into one of Einstein's bottomless black holes, or perhaps its subscription has been cancelled.

Today the mailman brings the ubiquitous white envelope with an oval window through which my name and address peep like two children lost at the mall, relieved they have found their mother.

Dear Madam, Tuesday was repossessed due to insufficient payment. Don't miss a single exciting moment of your life. Pay this bill in full and your 24 hours will be reinstated. P.S. A \$10 late fee has been assessed.

The cosmic accountant, who once presented King Khufu with the estimated cost for his Great Pyramid at Giza down to the final limestone block and expendable workman,

now sends out monthly warnings from a gray brick box in Nowhere, Ohio: *Your next payment is due on March 1. Failure to comply will result in cancellation of service.*

After rising to the fourth floor on an endless stream of Begin the Beguine, a bored blonde from a Raymond Chandler novel, cracking gum while painting her nails and filling out forms, says, *Whadda ya want?*

I want, young woman, to file a complaint. The early days came in large, extra large, even double X. Minutes moved so slowly you could walk by their side. Time stretched like Dali's watches.

Then they were laps at Indy 500, a 6 Flags roller coaster, rock-a-bye baby, sighs in a Yellow Submarine. But now days resemble the lonely stripe on a minimalist painting, single-ply, gray on gray, and there seem to be less of them. *Well, honey, sighs the blonde, waving her nails in arabesques. That's life. Days drop like flies and you only get so many. When the bill costs more than what's left, that's all she wrote. You get your final notice.*

Charles Wyatt

Bomullock

This is the bird which has no song,
which gapes and all the dark about you
falls in, falls in—

This is the face that has no eyes,
behind you now, and when you turn, behind
the paper on the wall—

This is the cry that stops your heart, knotted
and sudden, this, twisted brow where
no eye is watching—

mullach, mullach, the grisly ghost, yodeling
like a drafting line of geese, a goblin's
crooked eyebrow—

spectre of dark behind the falling snow
where the lost bird huddles and grass bones
melt through.

Cami Zinzi

Ars Poetica

*poems like gunslingers
ask me
what the hell my game is
—Charles Bukowski*

I found a poem in my underwear drawer
wedged between a Wonder Bra
and a pair of red lace panties that
wore its tag like a chastity belt.
I asked it what it was doing there.
Why not find your way to the thong I took
to Mexico? Surely there are some
good lines hiding out there.
But it just stared at me dumbly.
There's got to be a better poem than this around.

Then I found a poem in the teary droplets
sliding down my shower door.
But, it was too cliché and self-absorbed, so I killed it with
one wave of my palm.
There's no way I'd write that poem.

I even found some horny little poems
itching for a jail break in the expired box
of condoms in my nightstand.
Fuck them. Why should I write them?

And then I found even more poems molding
on the two month old whole wheat bread
in my fridge.
But, I'm not looking for a crusty, smelly poem.
Some were drunk in the wine-ringed, lip stained
glasses in my sink.
But, I think they need to sober up before I can write them.

More were hiding out between the papers I
didn't grade, the gym bag I didn't pack, the vegetables
I forgot to eat, under my couch where I
didn't vacuum.
But, I'm not going to write any of those wicked,
nagging poems.

I know I must have left some poems at my
ex-boyfriend's house, inside his pockets, his
bed, between his thighs.
But, I'm too proud to go searching there.

I found more primping themselves
in my make-up case,
coily batting their eyelashes
amidst \$20 eye shadows,
blowing kisses from \$30 tubes
of lip gloss.
But I think I've had enough of vain poems
for now.

this poem
was the one
that handed me my car keys,
demanded I take it for a ride,
open up
the convertible,
let it drive.
I say, sure, what the hell.

I suppose that when
I return,
all these other greedy bastards
will start asking me
for favors too.



Featured Poets

Debrenee Adkisson

Rane Arroyo

Keith Badowski

Marcia Black

Jennifer Campbell

Susana H. Case

Kathleen Dale

Janann Dawkins

Alan Elyshevitz

Rupert Fike

Taylor Graham

John Grey

Peggy Heinrich

Dianna Henning

Michael Henson

Paul Hostovsky

Joseph Hutchison

Michael Lee Johnson

Diane Kistner

Joy Ladin

Sean Lause

Jack Lindeman

Joanne Lowery

Iain McDonald

Timothy Martin

Catherine McGuire

Brad Rose

Jim Scutti

George Seli

Noel Smith

Amanda Strand

Wally Swist

Gina M. Tabasso

Rhian Waller

Kathleen Worrell

Charles Wyatt

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