

# Third Wednesday

Vol. X, No. 2





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Submit via email to: [submissions@thirdwednesday.org](mailto:submissions@thirdwednesday.org)

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## EDITORS' COMMENTS

The past few months have seen a lot of change for our little magazine. The biggest change is in going from email submissions to using "Submittable" as our exclusive platform for handling submissions for poetry and fiction. This has streamlined the process of putting the magazine together and has made it possible for us to greatly improve our response time to contributing poets and writers.

If you've looked us up online recently, you will have noticed that we have completely redesigned our website. Our old site was static. It rarely changed from month to month. Now we do regular updates that include announcements about new issue releases, samples of artwork and sample poems from issues of *Third Wednesday* that anyone can read for FREE. It's another way of exposing the world to some of the great work that gets published in TW.

Augmenting our web presence is a new Facebook page that puts those announcements and many of those free samples in your Facebook news feed. We hope everyone who reads or contributes to *Third Wednesday* will include us in their cyber-life by clicking the "Like" button on our new Facebook page. In conjunction with our new Facebook page, we maintain a micro-blog at Tumblr where we archive those free samples of writing and art. You'll find all of our locations in cyberspace when you type *Third Wednesday* into any search engine.

The main reason for doing all this is to bring our magazine into the 21st century and provide more for the people who already love and support us, to build a *Third Wednesday* community.

*Third Wednesday* began as a print magazine and we are dedicated to keeping it a print magazine. We love holding it, reading it, listening to the turning of the pages. We love the space it takes up on our bookshelves and we especially love that our contributing writers and artists can see their names in actual print, whether it's for the umpteenth time or for the very first.

As for the new emphasis on our web presence, isn't it great that we live in the future?

- David Jibson, Co-editor



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## After School

Walking home  
from the busstop

dark arriving.  
Worn green sock

bunched under the heel.  
Wind whips at my face

creeps under my sleeve.  
Count the steps. Roll

the piece of lint  
in the hole of my pocket.

Do not step, step  
on the crack.

Open the door.  
Go in. The house is dim

water is boiling.  
Onions fry in oil.

I slip off my coat  
find my room

click the door.  
Sit on the bed.

Cold lingers  
at the window's edge

hides under the shade.  
I listen:



for the tremor  
in the wall

storm building  
at the corner of her mouth

in her footstep

Laura Guli  
Austin, Texas

### **Corvette**

It was the first American sports car, lacking everything later generations demanded: power, speed, manual shift. It was tooled from borrowed parts, cheaply fiberglass, and critics gave it short shrift. You, however, drooled. Lackluster? Not to you. Powerglide transmission? Who cared? Inline six? So what? It was a sleek seed of what was coming: class, dash, imaginative flare, a mako-shark world view for men become boys again.

It was a first. It was automotive puberty, beautifully awkward, darling with gawky promise, adolescent dare, dangerous for a boy who'd been bored and waiting. It was your youth unlimited in oh-so-innocent 1953. It was the time in your life when you were truly free. It was being a teen in a hand-built, American machine.

Rob Jacques  
Bainbridge Island, Washington



## Underwear and the After-Life

You said that you believed the After-Life  
existed, at least, in what people said  
of you, or thought, or felt, even the least  
bit, when you were gone. I did not think Love,  
that day, but Memories.

Years later, when  
I was away at college, laundry days  
came only once a month, because

*At college,  
you'll be too busy to do laundry more  
often than that.*

I went away, then, with  
a four-week supply of underwear, more  
or less, and spoke about you, laundry days,  
to friends whose moms had sent them off with less.  
And you were with me at least once a month.

Today was laundry day. There were two pair  
too holey to keep.

So today I picked  
out, from the back of the drawer where I keep  
the unopened pairs, another from your  
last Christmas gift to me, more pairs than I  
can use,

as was your wont from first to last,  
that now,

Long After,  
you're with me once more.

James Nicola  
New York, New York



## Hopscotch

The boy with the eye patch  
jumps on the hopscotch board  
alone. His parents watch closely.  
Hands on hips, measuring him against  
other children – “normal” children –  
who jump higher, are more agile,  
don’t miss entire squares,  
as he does, or step on lines  
that in a real game would force him back  
to the back of the line. Be known as “Loser.”  
When the boy plants his sparkly sneaker  
outside the box, the broad shouldered  
dad says, *Oops*. When he falls,  
Dad scoops him up.  
But mom can’t control herself,  
wincing, twisting away  
as the boy trips both feet  
into one square. She covers her face  
when he does that mechanical neck craning  
movement so that his good eye  
can locate the target.  
She gasps as he takes off, and groans  
as he touches down on the chalk line  
again—cringing like she’s in the stadium,  
loving that boy so much, cheering him  
to be the football star  
a pretty girl falls hard for, marries,  
has perfect children with.

Michael Mark  
San Diego, California



## Drug House

Across the street, three angry women band together and frown at the Drug House. While they all claim to have the same gripe with the neighborhood, truth is, they don't. Woman number one wants everything on our street to be neat, clean, and perfect. Houses should be vinyl sided in muted tones and everyone will wash their driveway daily. What comes out of her mouth, though, is a different story. She's outraged by the Drug House and everything it causes. Why, did you know that the crossing guard sells middle school kids drugs that she gets from the Drug House? Woman number three told her all about it. That Drug House! Why, it's just AWFUL! Woman number two is a tiny dynamo of confused energy. She walks her dogs three times a day and spends a lot of time orbiting woman number one. They are next door neighbors with matching lean New England faces that speak of unfulfilled hungers. Maybe not enough food, not enough love, sex, or feelings that they belong. She takes up woman number one's rallying cry about the horrible Drug House and its inhabitants. The nerve! To do business like that right in front of God and everybody! The Drug House! The Drug House! Woman number three is the true beneficiary of the Drug House. Instead of being scrawny like her neighbors, woman number three is huge from feeding on their energy and all the good things the Drug House brings her way. Like a giant spider, she draws whoever she can into her sticky web of lies and uses them for all they're worth. She is a master of two faced deception. Her crocodile tears and saccharine smile snag the minds of the two women who so desperately want to feel important. They want some justice? Well then here's a cause! Every day she spins a shocking new tale about the evil Drug House and fills the two women with it. Like paperboys shouting out headlines, woman number one and two canvas the neighborhood in righteous frenzy.

"The Drug House woman is a prostitute! The Drug House! The Drug House!"

"The men of the Drug House are raising killer pit bulls! The Drug House!"

"They're using four year old kids to deliver heroin! The Drug House!"

"Those creeps from the Drug House destroyed my son's car! Now the insurance company will have to give him a new one!"

No matter how ridiculous or suspect the stories are, they never fail to put woman number one and number two into a righteous frenzy. Until all they can see is the Drug House. All they can hear is the Drug House. Their lives run on Drug House time. They won't rest until they get justice for woman number three. Why, she's just trying to live a nice quiet life. But she can't because of the Drug



House! If it wasn't for THEM, this would be a real nice neighborhood! Woman number three wrings her hands as she tells her carefully rehearsed stories with her sad, sad face. "It just ain't right!" She weeps as she goes back into her home. Once inside, her flabby face breaks into a grin because she's got them right where she wants them. The Drug House smokescreen hides her sins. It was her son and his buddy who wrecked the car. They slashed the tires and hit the vehicle with sledgehammers right in her driveway. Woman number three entertains multiple boyfriends late at night and makes her money from fraudulent insurance claims. The Drug House! The loud Drug House music covers up the sounds of her other son beating his wife and hitting his kids. While all three women frown and glare at it, the truth is that they'd be lost without the Drug House. Woman number one wouldn't have a target for her speeches about how things ought to be in our crumbling neighborhood. Nor would she have the important feeling she gets from calling the police multiple times a day. Woman number two wouldn't be able to support woman number one by making even more calls to the police station and glaring fiercely at the drug house when she passes by it with her dogs. "Hmmmph! We'll show THEM what's right!" But woman number three... Woman number three has definitely won her showcase in the game show of life. Hooray for the Drug house! Jump it up and down for the Drug House! But she's got to be cool and keep that bad face on. Three angry women band together and frown at the Drug House, foolishly thinking that they have the same goals.

Brian James Lewis  
Endicott, New York

### **Morel Hunting**

It's your wrinkled countenance I seek  
There, beneath the duff, unassuming  
Quiet secrets the mark of your being  
Aspens, their young around you  
Bowing in reverence. I have sought this  
In others easier to discover, and louder  
Voices calling out from the woods.



There are fireflies along the coast  
Calling mariners home, confident  
In their place, nothing hidden, nothing.  
My boots scuff the ground, moving  
Last year's leaves, like ideas, aside.  
All things lying in my way, hiding  
Your delicacy, your mysterious choices  
Like schools of fish, divert my advance.

In them, seeing myself, covering  
The lens of the light until it sneaks  
Into itself, erupting like a horn  
From the animal beneath the earth  
I will find the way to gather you.

Brad G. Garber  
Lake Oswego, Oregon

### **The Last Prayer**

Who will tell her story,  
Who will paint the pictures she splashed  
on the canvas of my mind. Who will  
remember the mountain lion that was her pet  
or the aborigine who bit the hearts out of  
chickens and rattle snakes for pay.  
And how craftily her father chewed and  
swallowed razor blades and glass before  
a stunned audience. Who will believe  
they were church going people, not those  
low life carnies.  
Who will save her memories like colored  
glass beads, her happy to be living smile.



Who will be the one to close her eyelids  
when she dies and apply the benediction  
oil to her still forehead as they say  
the last prayer.

Jean Varda  
Grass Valley, California

### **Elegy after Hearing Brahms' Fourth at Symphony Hall**

It's one of those nights when the on-ramp is a herd of lurching cars.  
Brakes and motors swamp the sounds of winds and strings and brass  
that try to linger in our ears, and headlights burn away the afterimages

of women dressed in black, and men in formal coats, each playing just one part,  
one set of notes on one real, tangible, old instrument—one violin or horn  
or drum or flute, merging into others in the dark.

The maestro's waving hands brought back the music of nineteenth century,  
alive again and filling up the air just as it did so long ago  
when time was elegant and decorous,

before the trenches ate the boys,  
before the falling fires burned the past away.



But then the lights came on, and time receded into time, and we rushed out, still hearing scraps of cadences that didn't want to die. We left the underground garage and drove away, escaping hordes of sparkly, half-dressed children pouring from the Civic Auditorium, giddy from a night of Britney Spears.

The last vibration of a flute holds on to life a little while,  
until an angry car horn honks, and it is gone.

Joyce Schmid  
Palo Alto, California

### **The Land Reverts**

We watch Bill steer the big John Deere  
in its long arc, drop the 12-row  
planter arms, and ease his way up  
the rise over where the house

used to be. Mothers fed families here,  
kids sailed stick boats in the creek,  
slept soundly in the house. People  
died and were born in this place.

We could not rent this house,  
eight miles from town and down  
a drive from the main road so muddy  
you had to walk in when it rained.

Raccoons took the house, ripped out  
walls, made holes in the roof. Water  
leaked in, wood rotted. No one cared  
for its history or wanted to live here.

We bulldozed the house, gave the barn  
to a man who wanted its wood.  
Now the tractor moves unhindered  
over a new acre, furrows trailing



behind it like strings played out  
in the dust, while wild turkeys  
flutter through the fencerow and  
a blue heron flies down the creek bed.

George Stevenson  
Evanston, Illinois

### **Senbazuru**

Her patient hands  
are folding happiness for me,  
teasing out a set of wings  
to fly to paradise,  
and just in time

to bring longevity.  
Fly to me, crane.  
I'm over here,  
out on the front lines,  
no one to fight,

no enemy but time.  
Nine hundred ninety-nine  
more cranes and you  
could grant the wish  
that I wish every night,



pressed tight  
against his breathing back,  
my arm across his chest.  
The paper folds. The paper folds.  
He rests.

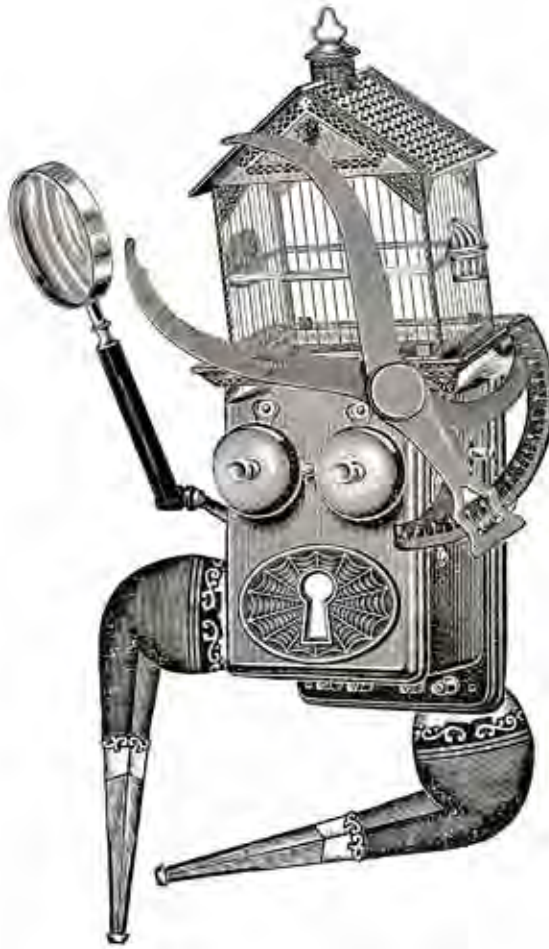
Joyce Schmid  
Palo Alto, California

### **In Timing**

I wedged my fingers into the slats  
of the blinds and widened some light in  
  
just as the first blasts of train horn  
hit town, timing things as if the dying  
  
wild grape vines in the tree line,  
made just real in that sudden vision,  
  
were singing a single preferred note  
in the morning's rain storm. We live  
  
just close enough to the train line  
for them to haunt in on our routine,  
  
just like this, paralleling our moves  
by surprise, a spare voice at home,  
  
even if we're not, watching over things,  
probably singing along with the radio  
  
or television, as attuned to the songs  
as any twice-correct dead watch  
  
might hope for in a good day's work.

Larry Thacker  
Johnson City, Tennessee





**The Trance of a Beauty Mark**

Bill Wolak

*Collage*



## Knife Incident

I spent Christmas last year pleasantly with part of my family in North Augusta, South Carolina. I drove there with my sister to spend time with her kids. She planned to stay on awhile; I had to fly back to Michigan where I had obligations. When I made reservations, I found I had to change planes at Charlotte, North Carolina. They told me it would be tight with only about twenty minutes to get from gate C to gate A. How long could it take to walk between three gates? As I checked in at Augusta, Georgia's airport, I emptied my pockets to pass through customs to discover that tiny, less than 2" long, knives were considered dangerous weapons capable of being used to take stewardesses hostage while hijacking airplanes. Such had hardly been in my sister's thought when she gave me that knife; it never occurred to either of us that such might be possible when I put it routinely in my pocket instead of in my toilet kit.

It occurred to me later that before surrendering my treasure I should have broken off those tiny scissors, bent some blades, so that some airport lackey would not be able to give my personal property to his undeserving kid. Had I known I was wielding such threatening weaponry, I might have planned my own attack to set society as we know it back ten years. Should, would, could; all I was worried about then was getting to Douglas International Airport in Charlotte early enough to catch my connecting flight to Detroit.

I discovered that to get from gate C to gate A in twenty minutes would require more speed than I could muster in my waning years. Luckily, my flight arrived early, giving me time to run what seemed like two miles. Using one of those 'motorized monstrous wheelchair things' in this holiday crowd would have been disastrous. I ran, full-out, breathless, when disaster struck. We had been warned, of course, for weeks about holiday crowds being targeted by ISIS terrorists. "See something suspicious, report it," TV announcers had droned into our unconsciousness. In my haste, it never occurred to me that what appeared to be one of those carriers marked 'kitty taxi' which I had used so frequently might be out of place sitting alone amidst busy scrambling crowds. When I regained consciousness, aware that I had been knocked off my feet, I discovered that some wire encased in plaster had become embedded in my leg. It was throbbing painfully. Medical help had arrived, young, confident, well in command.

"I need to remove this metal strip from your knee. It's attached to the wall material that has wrapped itself around your leg. I need something small to get in there to wrench it loose. You don't happen to have one of those miniature Swiss army knives with you? You know, pocket sized, with various sized blades."

Laurence W. Thomas  
Ypsilanti, Michigan



## Delicacy

Lunchtime has ended at the middle school  
and Doreen, who works security there, her hair  
pulled back combat-ready like the girls she  
dealt with an hour ago, her two-hundred-fifty pounds  
settled now on a bench, is on break and in a  
delicate phone conversation, lowering  
the voice she usually keeps on sandblast mode,  
saying *oh, check me out tonight? I don't know –*  
*this might be more woman than you can handle.*

Michael Jones  
Oakland, California

## Aubade

*'Tis true, 'tis day, what though it be?*  
-John Donne

From the watched darkness,  
under-lit rose-yellow clouds bleaching to white.

A meadow seems the fluid world  
of Monet's gardens--Queen Anne's lace

for his water lilies, dewy grasses, the water. Fog,  
like his evanescent mist, levitates in a single swath.

Nearer our clapboard farmhouse,  
thickets of honeysuckle and mock orange.

Already, stuttering rhythms of bees abridge  
at the hive to slow, day-work adagios.



Wild blackberries hold down sections  
of rusted barbed wire along the gravel road.

Then, that same rusted red pickup  
clatters past and rouses the neighbor's hounds.

I turn from the window to the four-poster.  
She smiles, extends her arm. *Morning, love.*

Michael Cole  
Vermillion, Ohio

### **The Red Cadillac**

Every time I see a red Cadillac,  
I think of him, the car matching  
every stop sign and traffic light.

A magical, metallic red, a candy  
apple color with a summer-heat  
shimmer like quartz. I am the co-pilot

belted beside him as the car consumes  
the striped asphalt passing beneath us.  
The red Cadillac idles at the red light.

My eye is drawn to the tinted window,  
waiting for him to lean out and wave.  
It will not be him in the driver's seat.

He no longer plays fighter pilot at the  
steering wheel, wearing his leather  
aviator jacket, his pale eyes shielded



from the glare. The music changes with  
every passing year; I grow taller, leaving  
a higher imprint in the headrest, a ghost

of a bygone childhood. The car no longer  
shines with enthusiasm at our imagined  
adventures of fighter jets and car chases.

It has been driven away, sold or scrapped.  
Someone else sits in it now, watching the  
rain beading the windshield and arguing

in the backseat. The scent and sounds  
of our weekend excursions, our secret  
missions, have evaporated, replaced by

pine-forest air fresheners and bleached  
upholstery. No longer are we two spies  
tailing double agents in the sedan ahead.

The taillights flash red in the darkness  
like curious nocturnal eyes, a distance  
measured in memories instead of miles.

Jessica Goody  
Bluffton, South Carolina

## **Staple**

A metal splinter marries two pieces  
of paper by piercing holes through them

The sheets cannot come apart  
without tearing a part of themselves

Liz Ebenhoh  
Toledo, Ohio



## **These People You See on the Beach**

Their towels are spread out on the sand.  
Their heads sink into cushions.  
Every radio is tuned to lite rock.  
Torsos, shoulders, faces, glisten with oil.  
Dark glasses remove the eyes  
from the scenario.  
No more than three pages  
of a book are read.  
No water bottle is less  
than half drunk.  
They turn slowly  
like bodies on spits,  
so ultra-violet rays  
don't miss a thing.  
Agreed, they don't sound so exciting  
when described like this.  
But, keep in mind,  
it's my friends and I  
I'm talking about.

John Grey  
Johnston, Rhode Island

## **Resurrections**

Spring can never come  
too soon:  
grass already fat  
and flush with the first crop  
of dandelions,  
columbines spiking flowers



above a float of green,  
peonies unfurling  
red feathers  
punched up  
through last year's  
dry remainders,  
iris raising fans  
to promise blues  
rich as the sky  
behind a lattice  
of still bare trees,  
skirted with brush  
in bright leaf.

The air has lost its edge,  
touching the world soft  
as a hand brushing  
the hair back  
from a child's forehead.  
I watch a hawk rise  
and glide  
as the sun on my back  
warms and releases me  
from the last of winter's  
brittle ice

Mary McCarthy  
Gibsonia, Pennsylvania

## **Heart of Glass**

A glassy orange fragment has become  
embedded in the corner of my eye.  
I ask the doctor what it will take to  
get it out. Two thousand dollars, he tells  
me. It's too deep for easy extraction. The  
skin has grown back over the wound.



What will happen if I leave it be, I  
wonder. The news is not good. It will  
sink deeper, eventually cutting into  
my brain. It would probably lead to lost  
memories. I wonder if I would even care —  
do you miss what you can't remember?

Afterwards, it will likely continue  
downwards, through my bloodstream.  
This could be good luck, it will dredge  
out some of the gunk in my arteries. At  
least, if it doesn't cause a stroke before  
that ever happens. It's Russian Roulette.

Eventually, it will reach my heart. At that  
point, says my doctor, it's a lot more serious.  
How serious, I ask? At least ten grand.  
That's a lot of money. And really, with  
a shard of broken glass embedded in my  
heart, I may finally feel at home in this world.

Paul Ilechko  
Lambertville, New Jersey

### **The Wayfarers**

the end-start of dawning  
blue barely lines the horizon

golden sun nips  
the tips of craggy mountain peaks

five old growth firs  
four wayfarers stand on a beach

last stand of trees  
spines and trunks silhouette black

Lynn Geri  
Bellingham, Washington



## **Prinsengracht 267\***

How long it takes to know you're born a Jew!  
I read about this annex growing up  
And also felt what no one knew I knew.  
To squeeze inside her bedroom! Showing up  
In guilty lines of packed invaders, spooked  
By these dark, empty rooms where Anne first kissed  
Peter; where she first realized her book  
Would be what's left if she were gassed.  
What's left are words her father never read  
(Though she entrusted him with them each night!)  
Until the end when all of them were dead  
But him. For weeks it sat unread. The sight  
Of it. His daughter's inner life. Her womb  
That gave us birth who walk inside this tomb.

\*Address of the Anne Frank House and Museum in Amsterdam

Richard Solomon  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

## **Enbridge Line Five**

What happens when all the light  
spills from the full moon  
onto the lake, a slick of silver

spreading to the edges of darkness?  
I wade out into the night  
with cords and pink balloons

to rope it in before moonlight  
drifts all the way through the Straits,  
chokes Mackinac and Bois Blanc



oozes south through Lake Huron  
to St. Clair, and down the sunset coast  
toward Gary, the clanging sailboats

and mumbling cruisers strangled with it  
the beach sand drifted with its snow,  
the old folks telling their grandchildren

it was once as blue as the sky  
and people took off their clothes  
and dove right into it.

Robert Haight  
Marcellus, Michigan

## **Double Down**

A humped-necked  
buzzard gives thanks

over a hindquarter  
teeming with flies

I lower my head  
& take the air's hand

almost say amen  
as he accepts

this lot of bones  
three days old

my mind's a landfill  
spilling over the fence



too many scraps  
that won't settle & rot

I pick through them again  
as the bird unfurls

towards the poker chip moon

Robert Kendrick  
Clemson, South Carolina

### Journalist

*"There is measure in the darkening."*

--Mario Chard

Then came the moment that the rushing  
through his mind of words and politics  
and needs swirled away and left him peering  
through a darkened window watching  
breeze-swayed bougainvillea  
shadow dance across a chipped stone wall.

Each night just after dusk he stopped  
and listened as twittering gave way  
to something breathing deeply.  
And breathing with it he would sense  
returning somewhere he had been  
with people he had loved and feel a rising  
towards something distant, glimmering, good.

And for a moment he would lose attachment  
to the many things his fingers could accomplish,  
find a sort of balance between clocks  
and clock-less distance, sound and rising silence,  
a space where nothing mattered,  
where existence absorbed everything he'd been.



And he would float, suspended, for that moment  
then drift self-ward, window intervening  
between where he was and where he'd been  
and he would feel the thoughts returning,  
cares and worries, hurts and dangers,  
re-assume in nighttime all that day had been.

Robert Stout  
Oaxaca, Mexico

### **The Ambassadors**

They have pushed the old  
Model T Speedster  
he drove in parades  
under the canopy  
over the entrance  
to the funeral home.

Inside, people  
we have never seen before  
mill around, talking  
to one another.

We catch no one  
looking at us.

Once again  
we are the people  
from out of town  
no one knows, wearing clothes  
that are slightly  
out of place, and something  
about us is not quite right.



Our skin  
is identical  
to their skin  
but not quite

our accent not quite  
their accent.

When we lean over and talk  
with his one love  
in her wheelchair  
no one can hear what we say  
and no one comes near us.

They all know something  
is not quite right, not quite  
what they expected.

We leave right away.

No one says good-bye  
and we say nothing

and after we are gone  
they won't even bother  
to ask each other who  
those people were  
from out of town

and if there were those  
who did know  
they will keep saying nothing.

Robert Tremmel  
Ankeny, Iowa



## Nos Da

(from a story sequence titled *The Moving of the Water*, set in the mid-1960s in  
an upstate New York Welsh-American community)

Why couldn't he name it? Something green. Unfamiliar. A good smell. Something green and ... and something. He could smell another thing too, a bad smell without a name, damp and dark and close.

Lying on his back, he was staring at a sky bluer than any blue he could remember. Bluer than his father's eyes. Where are the clouds?

"Rich!" someone said, urgently, close to his ear. "It's me. It's Denny. Stay with me, buddy. You've got to stay with me. Tell me something. Your name. Start with that. Say your name."

Rich didn't say his name or look at Denny, squatting by his head. He heard a flutter in the distance, a bird's heartbeat. Can you hear a bird's heartbeat? The flutter didn't have a smell, not yet. It wasn't good, it wasn't bad. Like a basketball dribbled on a court in a gym far away. Somewhere to his right, men were shouting, "Keep alert! Keep focused!" He didn't want to hear their voices. He wanted to hear the bird or the far away basketball.

Someone closer shouted, "Bowen! Private Bowen!"

Rich glanced at a big man kneeling by his legs. "State your name and rank!" the man shouted.

Rich had seen him before. Lambert. The medic. Sergeant Lambert. Rich shifted his gaze to the sky. He couldn't think of a reason to state his name and rank. "What's ... that smell?" he asked Denny, croaking out the words.

"He's talking, Sarge," Denny shouted. "He's saying something."

Denny leaned close to Rich's ear. "Smell? I don't know. Don't everything smell like garbage in a garbage pit? But you're talking. It's great you can talk. Because as long as you're saying words, you're not, you know, not saying them."

"Like a thing you'd eat," Rich said. "But you wouldn't."

"Yeah, maybe," Denny said. "It's different here for sure. There's every stink you can imagine and plenty you can't. In a strawberry field you smell strawberries. In a garbage dump you smell garbage, and if it's not garbage, it will be." He sounded tired. "Anything I smell here, I wouldn't want to eat. Where the hell's that medevac, Sarge?"



“On its way.”

“It needs to be here.”

“I know,” Lambert said. “I know. OK, got the tourniquets on.”

“Can he feel anything?” Denny asked.

“Nah. Shock. And he’s pumped with morphine.”

The blue sky narrowed and darkened, though Rich didn’t see clouds moving in. Strange to be here, he thought, and not somewhere else. Strange to be on my back, staring at an empty blue sky, like staring at a ceiling while you’re having your bath.

“When it’s dark,” Rich said to his father, sitting on the edge of his bed, “where does the sun go?” He was under the bed covers, feeling warm, though his hair was damp from his bath. His bedside light illuminated his father’s brown hair and white shirt, but the rest of the room was dark. He didn’t want his father to leave – that’s why he asked about the sun. If his father answered, Rich would answer his answer, and they’d be together longer. They would talk about where the sun goes. Megan was already sleeping. Their mother was putting away the dinner dishes.

“It goes below,” his father said. “No, sorry, it doesn’t go anywhere. We just can’t see it. We turn away from it.”

“Must be around three o’clock by now,” Denny said. “They came out of nowhere, like shadows from under rocks. If shadows carried AK-47s. But now they’re gone. The sun’s out, the perimeter’s secure, so they crawled under those god-damn rocks again with the snakes and spiders. Always coming and fucking going and fucking coming again.”

“Where does the sun go?” Rich said.

“Jesus,” Denny said. “What is it now? The sun? I have no idea. I flunked astronomy, the most gut course you could take. That’s why I’m here, I’m a flunky. The sun’s far the fuck away is my guess. Other side of the earth. Like the dark side of the moon, you know?”

“A good smell,” Rich said, “and a bad smell. That’s what I don’t get.”

“What the hell’s he talking about?” Denny asked Lambert, now working on Rich’s left arm.

“No idea, but keep him talking. If he’s talking, he’s breathing. And if he’s breathing, maybe he wants to do it some more. There, got the arm done. The medevac should get here any minute. Keep him talking, that’s your job. I need to move on.”

“OK, Rich, you know who I am, right?” Denny said, squeezing Rich’s shoulder gently. “It’s your buddy. Denny. Denny from Brooklyn with the six brothers and two sisters. Irish guy, remember? Good-looking – that’s



what Mom tells me. You stepped on a mine. I saw your foot go down and the earth go up. Then the gooks started firing, so it took a while to reach you. But Lambert, he's fast – you know, with what he does. And you ... you'll be OK, I promise. You bought yourself a ticket home. No more freaking rice paddies. No holes in the ground to crawl into. No shadows in the daylight. Nothing more for you buddy. You're all done. How you feeling?"

"Cold," Rich said. "The water gets cold."

"Yeah, it gets cold. It won't be long, I promise."

"Dad was the one."

"For what?"

"For me. Friday nights."

"What? What was Friday night?"

"Bath."

"You liked that? God I hated bath night. Ed Sullivan and then a bath. But you couldn't enjoy the show, knowing what was coming next. The scrubbing, the stinging eyes. And if you're number seven in line, no hot water."

"Warm then cold. Then warm." Rich looked up at Denny. "Where's the towel?"

"Got no towel," Denny said. "I got nothing. I'm empty. Hey, I've got water." He lifted up his canteen. "You need water?"

"Cold."

"Yeah," Denny said. "You lost ... you know, some blood. They've got blankets in the medevac. And coffee. It's a thousand degrees here, but I'd die for hot coffee. From Dominick's, Second Avenue. I'd actually die for that."

"She cried all night," Rich said. "And wouldn't get out of bed that morning."

"Who? Your girlfriend? I thought you didn't have a girlfriend. Hard to keep up with you buddy. No moss under your feet. Don't matter what the girl wants. No one wants you to go. And you, especially. No one except your crazy Uncle Frank because he got sent to Korea and now thinks everyone should get an arm blown off like him. But here the fuck you are anyways. Talking, right? At least you're talking and that's the main thing. Though I gotta be honest, I can't wait for the chance to shut up."

"Cars," Rich said.

"Now we're talking cars? Not many here. Unless you go to Saigon. What sort of wheels did you drive, anyway?"



“*Nos da*,” Rich said.

“What?”

“*Nos da*,” Rich was smiling.

“Are you talking Russian or something?”

“*Nos da*.”

“That’s not a car. What the fuck does it mean?”

“*Nos da*. Where does the sun go?”

“Fuck man, talk sense. I got no time for bullshit.”

Rich again stared up at the blue sky, which widened and brightened. He lifted his head to see himself. His legs were missing, but he could wiggle his toes. Just like in the bath, he could lift his feet and wiggle his toes. Lambert had cinched straps around his thighs. His fatigues were soaked dark red, but everything else was green: grass, leaves, trees, bushes – the hills were rolling, endlessly unfolding shades of green. Then the sky narrowed, leaving a pinprick of light. Rich wasn’t sure if his eyes were closed or open or both or neither.

“Red,” he said softly, “that’s the bad smell. Green, that’s the good smell.”

Denny couldn’t think of anything to say.

Now in complete darkness, Rich had a moment of certainty. He knew he was about to die.

“Chopper’s here!” Denny shouted, standing and waving at the descending medevac churning up debris. The pilot, wearing a massive helmet, gave a thumbs-up.

“God-damn here at last! No more talking crazy bullshit. You are going home, Richie boy. Back to your cars and your fucking mother and father and girlfriend you maybe have and those baths you love and the sun on the dark side of the moon. Back to the towel. Nose-fucking-da, you crazy fuck. You’re going home.”

Note: *Nos da*: means “good night” in Welsh.

David Lloyd  
Manlius, New York





**Pride**  
Nicole Gordon  
*Drawing*



## THIRD WEDNESDAY ANNUAL POETRY CONTEST

The results of the *Third Wednesday* annual poetry contest. There were more entries than ever this year, making judge Larry Levy's decisions all the more difficult. His general observation is: "This is the third or fourth year in which I've been privileged to serve as the judge of *Third Wednesday's* poetry contest, and once again I find myself learning from the entries what I enjoy most and seek in poetry; namely, writing, as Robert Frost wrote, *that begins in delight and ends in wisdom*, that does not waste words or explain but provides telling details and reveals truths.

### Seeking Center

My piano teacher looked Russian.  
White wisps feathered his temples,  
veins blue as rivers on a relief map.  
Bony fingers gestured for me to sit  
down on the mahogany bench  
in a dark side room of Monroe's  
First Congregational Church.

*Close your eyes* he said, and when  
I did, he struck a single note.  
*See if you can find that note,*  
and of course I failed at that, only  
the latest on a long keyboard  
of student disappointments.  
Later, I learned that was Middle C.

They say being a middle child  
is difficult. I grew up quiet, shy,  
sidelined by two older brothers  
and the attention lavished on the baby,  
fourth and last child, a sister. Gangly  
limbs and Coke-bottle glasses  
barred my entry to the school elite.

In river guide school, they taught us  
to seek the center of a rapid's vee,  
that glassy tongue where the current  
pours its energy, for smooth passage.



At Drunkard's Drop on the Wenatchee,  
I missed the vee and ejected a paddler  
head first into the swirling froth.

A fractured first marriage,  
an ill-timed career, and ten years  
of wandering, a sense-sucking gypsy  
dancing across sheer-walled crevasses  
to feed the next flaming appetite.  
So my life has gone, veering right  
then left, too high or low, always

missing the mark hit by sensible people.  
An unexpected rescuer, poetry runs  
my linguistic rapids, images channeled  
between imagination and desire.

Cheryl Clough  
Clinton, Washington

Judge Larry Levy commented: *Seeking Center* seems to me one of the most deserving winners in this year's entries. It demonstrates a strong command of language, economy of expression, and sense of direction. It begins well, builds with an interesting theme in mind, and develops and sustains that theme in surprising and arresting ways.

### **There's Something About Scandinavia**

*Dedicated to Henning Mankell, 1948-2015*

Dear Kurt Wallendar:

I know you are a figment of Henning Mankell's imagination,  
a fictional character whose murder cases have been explored in  
books and onscreen, a man whose daily life includes  
windy days, rain, fields, trains, seagulls, land that  
grows crops and folds, gradually, into a greenish,  
brackish sea of confusion and gloom.



I have fallen a bit in love with you, Kurt:  
your flaws, your angst, the pauses in your speech,  
the way you take hold of each case as though  
grabbing it in your teeth, clenching, growling  
like a dog who will not release what it must have.  
I love your depression, though I want to shake you,  
for not everything bad that happens is your fault.  
I want you to eat, pay your bills, shave, smile  
once in a while, tell your father off, then hug him close.  
I want you to take care of your health, go home  
instead of sleeping at your desk, be less awkward  
with the grown daughter you so love, the daughter  
who tests you, who aches for from her father.

Your diabetes, emotional break-down, heart attack —  
all very real, all symbolic of society's ailments.  
And speaking of symbols, what about your father's  
same-same-same paintings of trees and grouses,  
your phone, keys, the gun you never have when you need it,  
the pills you swallow dry, birds; the grim landscape?  
You are a poet, saint, sinner, obsessive-compulsive, inarticulate  
Man, a Man of Honor, a Man of Moods, a Man Who Doesn't  
Know what drives him except that he is tired of  
the evils he sees and needs to make something right.  
I am one of your groupies, Kurt, someone who thinks  
she knows you but doesn't, someone who would like  
to provide comfort as daughter, friend, colleague.  
I ache for you and understand, in my way,  
your disillusionment, fatigue, melancholy.  
All I have to offer is my wish that you have  
a good night's sleep and a tomorrow of sunshine.

Sincerely yours,  
A Faithful Reader and Fellow Traveler

Louise Kantro  
Modesto, California

The judge's comment: *There's Something About Scandinavia*, has an interesting letter format, unaffected language and tone, ambitious development of a fascinating theme, and understated humor.



## Fifteen

The age he was  
when our grandmother found us naked  
and beat me in that narrow bed  
while he stood silent with his penis shrinking  
and that frozen look in his eyes.

The year it's been  
since he killed himself at 55  
gassing the air in a taped-up car  
after a letter lamenting to me  
all his cold decades of lies.

These startling minutes  
it's taken me to write this poem  
in one short draft like a sudden breath  
before my fingers stop themselves,  
before my courage dies.

Katharyn Howd Machan  
Ithaca, New York

*Third Wednesday* judge Larry Levy found that *Fifteen* is a punch-in-the-gut, very tight, nothing wasted, with strong connections between its three brief stanzas. It makes the kind of leap poetry must make — from a person's personal wounds to a statement of universal truth, pain and insight.



Larry Levy chose two poems as Honorable Mentions

### **The Assimilation of A Little Colored Boy**

Under the summer sun of long ago, when we were colored,  
Yellow Hammer cut my hair in a kitchen chair under a shady tree.

Conversations of colored men permeated the air,  
baptizing me in thoughts of crackers, the war, and negroes.

I watched colored women whispering liaisons in the ears of old men, who all wore hats.  
Little colored girls in pigtails jumped on bloodstained sidewalks.

While the brother in the doo-rag, wearing a shark skin suit,  
pimp the welfare mother out of her state check with silver words,  
Colored music played on a radio with a wired hanger, Motown never sounded better.

My uncle Edmond danced with a bottle of black label in one hand while looking for a skirt.  
Aunt Mamie stayed home intoxicated, waiting for his return.

It all ended when the yellow constellations went behind the clouds,  
the little colored girls went home when the street light came on,

the doo-rag pimp went to spend his money on a fix,  
and the colored women went to play love with the old men in hats.

I remembered this when Yellow Hammer cut my hair when I was a little colored boy.

Tyrone Harper  
Dearborn Heights, Michigan



## Man Shoots Self Behind Dairy Queen

*"There are not enough seats in the  
steel lifeboat for everybody."*

— U. S. Steel Executive

Before the layoffs, we children watched men  
of our neighborhood trekking walkways, hefting  
coal. Some huddled at the shore, lunch boxes

flashing with flicks from an oiled sun  
and their thermoses in hands like rescue flares.  
Facing the Works, we ate pizza and dust,

vines of crown vetch all around — one spill of red  
blossom in our gray landscape. The smell  
of sulfur still moves me. A blast

I never saw, colorless in the air, but I knew  
something was lost, like benzene or fleeting  
particulates: the train pushing Route 1 on the bank;

a barge steaming the Monongahela River;  
the oak disappearing in the waters.  
And Mr. Antonelli's funeral procession,

remembering how he mowed his lawn,  
nodding as we walked past. The odor  
of my town was sour dough, stale egg and fresh grass.

I couldn't wait to get out.  
I can never get it back.

Janine L. Certo  
East Lansing, Michigan





**House in Mason, MI**

K. Carlton Johnson

*Photograph*



## Screenplay

The white sheet hangs from the clothesline,  
a bright rectangle blocking a small world.  
Two carpenter bees engage in a dogfight,  
spiraling back and forth before the sheet,  
each fuzzy buzzy engine humming,  
the eventual victor uncertain after  
incidental music, faintly following  
the aerial action, plays from a radio.  
Someone runs by, casting a shadow  
noir and large from the sun's spotlight.  
Air kisses and whispered wind  
dry the worn sheet. We undrape it,  
our folding failing, so instead: into  
the plastic laundry basket it goes,  
a small cloud contained and crumpled.  
Not knowing a spider waits in silence  
like a subtle plot twist in the creases.

Ronnie Sirmans  
Lawrenceville, Georgia

## Trains by Slough

have not slowed down, exactly.  
Precisely, we are moving  
faster. Eventually. And once  
we arrive we will wish for our trains again. In  
both past and present tense.

So is the cycle of humanity, glistening  
where the rules of grammar end.

Sabina Paneva  
Amherst, Massachusetts



## Walking the Path, Listening to Charles Wright

The olives silver, then not silver.  
The wind in them, then not.  
Only the wind matters,  
only the wind as it moves through  
the tin shine of the leaves.

-Charles Wright, 1981

Two fawns and a doe startled  
as I walked up the path,  
your deep voice  
spoke from my cassette player:  
the olives silver, then not silver

Swish of white fluff and spotted flesh  
across the path then frozen stares  
as if lulled by the rhythmic poetry,  
the wind in them, then not

or uncertain  
whether to watch carefully or to flee;  
perhaps brains were muddled....  
only the wind matters

I turned off the sound and inched closer.  
Finally they moved  
aside to let me  
pass

only the wind as it moves through  
the tin shine of the  
leaves.

Sara Epstein  
Winchester, Massachusetts



## One Day

One day, when my blood dissolves  
into the Indian Ocean  
and your dreams fall away into the past  
like the sun's shimmer on waves

we will think of each other  
we will read each other's faces onto  
the cryptic pages of daily life.

Human meaning is so much illusion. Your absence  
haunting me like the tree's shadows rocking  
across the cabin roof beams one August afternoon.

Sarah Ruth Jacobs  
Ridgewood, New York

## Yoga Class: Raisin Meditation

Look at the raisin.  
Smell the raisin.  
Squeeze and feel the texture of the raisin.  
Listen to the sound of the raisin being squeezed.

Sounds like the squeaking of the water and wax in your ear after swimming.  
Taste the raisin,  
Chewing slowly,  
Juices activated,

Impulse to swallow strong.  
The smell of the raisin reminds me of poking chubby fingers into my small box of raisins,  
Reaching in around one last raisin ,  
And raising it against the side of the box.



The empty box became my trumpet,  
The sticky taste still clinging to my mouth,  
Mixing now with the taste and smell of waxy cardboard.

I could fit the open box in my mouth  
And blow air through it,  
Stick my tongue down into the box  
Occasionally for an exploratory lick,

Then pull it back,  
Blowing till a high tooting sound  
Prevailed.

Sara Epstein  
Winchester, Massachusetts

### **The English Teacher**

Today we'll read a poem by Robert Frost.  
The speaker talks about a yellow wood  
in which he came across two paths; how could  
he choose the better one? Perhaps he tossed  
a coin. In any case, I also crossed  
a fork like this when years ago I stood  
before a choice. There was a man. A good,  
courageous man. He is the path I lost.

Two roads. I took the asphalt one that led  
me far away from him, I feared disgrace  
and shame. Yet even now I can't erase  
my memories of forest trails, the bed  
we shared one night, his kisses and embrace,  
his eager hands, his body and his face.

Yakov Azriel  
Efrat, Israel



## Calling Long Distance

My whole head  
is shot through with your voice  
pouring from a vague  
dimension that contains,  
defines you.  
Your speech sounds  
weary, having leapt  
great mountains  
and squeezed into the shape  
of your projected  
presence. You are  
stuck at a place  
between thought  
and fact, so diaphanous  
I cannot think its name.  
Our laughter dances  
on that ledge of possibility.  
In the after-silence  
I hear this indefinable  
swallow you like arctic  
darkness and bear  
you off to mystery.

Sharon Scholl  
Atlantic Beach, Florida

## Wisdom

pieces of tooth scattered  
about the dentist's chair  
swept up after each brawl  
at the neighborhood bars

Robert Beveridge  
Strongsville, Ohio



## **Parked Roadside**

*If the dream is a translation of waking life,  
waking life's also a translation of the dream.*—Renee Magritte.

Magritte's cirrus, cumulus like loosed batten  
innocent as sheets on a clothesline.

Lost in life's details, I look for scenes that fade  
from memory, like that movie about bridges

covered the way affairs are. Streep goes back to  
ironing, folding clothes, housekeeping

after that week-end, bath-tubbed with a lover,  
covered in suds, slapping her thighs

like a man. Laughing over a beer, I guess she  
never wanted anything more

than the secret between them, kept it hidden  
like her black scarf, satin-trimmed,

highboy's top drawer, loved it too much to wear.  
Clouds changing in seconds,

the drift and pull rearranging, my eyes like Magritte's  
erasing, covering what you don't see.

You, the viewer, never know what's on my mind—  
neither pipe nor hat. In my hands,

like the hands of Magritte, things appear or disappear.  
Writing like a charlatan, painting

over canvasses, I cover the real scene underneath.  
In my Bowler hat, back turned

toward you the viewer, I gesture for emphasis,  
and wave good-bye like this.

Madelyn Camrud  
Grand Forks, North Dakota



## The Poem in the Middle of the Dream

It's always about landfall these days.  
Ararat. What's saved in the middle of what is lost.  
pushing on when hope is lost as if there is something else  
To hold onto. Life times. Life lines. Whatever works.  
Whatever comes to mind in time. And I know  
We are all in this together. We imagine and dream.  
Start over. The black birds and the wrens, my small dog  
in the light barking in the wind, how it is eased, where it is  
Safe. Near the six foot sunflowers and the night roses.  
The petals may as well be the same as wings or sails are,  
so many means through which to see each other again,  
here where we're traveling light, making tea.  
Wishing each other well.

Charlene Langfur  
Palm Desert, California

## Cocktail Hour

The Venetian blind is throwing itself at the window  
Open on this windy night.  
I am waiting for it to be dinner.  
Everyone is waiting in their room for my father to come home.  
It is winter.  
Outside my room, I have been watching two gray squirrels  
In a nut race.  
The bigger of the two wins.  
I hear the front door close.  
My mother calls out  
*Your father's home.*  
We open our doors  
To go downstairs.



Maybe nothing is going to happen tonight.

The music goes on and it is Rachmaninoff's "Concerto Number 4."

I am number four.

Upstairs in the hall there is a map of the world  
In bas-relief.  
I always run my fingers over it, imagining I am blind.  
Russia isn't as flat as one might think.  
China seems to go on forever.  
I wonder if all the people in China are lost all the time  
And if they eat off plates.  
I would like to live in China.

Lucinda Watson  
Sausalito, California

### **Parable**

For the majority of his life N. had a sore need of money, but possessed little and suffered the usual pains attendant on this lack. When, by some divine miscommunication, he came suddenly into great, very great wealth, he lamented: "How the gods must laugh at me. When I was young, restless to sample the world, they saw fit to starve me. Now that I, pauper though I am, have tasted my fill of things and am too old to learn the life of a wealthy man—only now do they decide to glut my dead desire. O how the gods do laugh!" This laughter was, incidentally, a sound wholly unknown to him, and later commentators have long suspected that therein lay the gods' true gift.

Aaron Novick  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



## When the Moose Come to Town

In February when snow on the Teton slopes gets deep  
and hard and the moose break through  
uncomfortably and food sources are scarce  
and hidden, they come down to Wilson.  
Or maybe it's just a vacation.  
We sense their presence and keep the dogs inside.

In the square mile-size town,  
we probably have a dozen moose  
emerging all at once, silent phantoms.  
They could stay in the lonely areas  
up Fish Creek or over at Trail Creek Ranch  
but they seem to like it downtown.  
Maybe it's the Christmas lights  
that everyone leaves up until spring.

Moose prints and moose scat dapple  
the wooden boardwalk from Owen Bircher Park  
to Hungry Jack's General Store. One sleeps  
under the spruce outside my bedroom window  
and disappears by morning. I see its messy bed.  
Sometimes a dark back shows above the snowbank  
and saunters down the street. Three brown, bony  
heads are suddenly visible in a patch of willows,  
a huge face at the window, a bull moose  
at the door, a cow rests among cottonwoods  
at sunset, air below zero, mountains pink  
in alpen glow, her eyes in amber.

Each year a few moose are killed by cars  
and a few dogs are kicked by moose but mostly,  
until March, moose and humans both  
gangle absurdly down the same icy streets  
in our separate, parallel universes.

Betsy Bernfeld  
Wilson, Wyoming



## Block Island, 1962

We danced  
in raw spring air  
by the sea, naked  
except for strings of feathers  
we'd tied round our waists  
I and Lesley  
“part Navajos”  
blessed the rough  
tumbling wind  
thwacking our hair    magic  
spirits  
flew about us  
in tidal air    rolling  
back against our wet flanks  
shivering  
were our limbs with pure

delight to be out  
in fog  
descending  
on us  
like a threaded blanket.  
O blessed were we green  
in earth's arms,  
hurling prayers at waves  
as if our voices would break  
bloom  
into a rush of star flake.

We spun with feathers trailing,  
bumping butts    giggling  
slamming into  
one another,    bouncing back,  
guffawing, pausing  
to play a clapping game,  
“Miss Mary Mack Mack Mack  
All dressed in black black black...”  
We ran over dune grasses,  
“swooned” on the sand



jumped up again,  
flailing our hair wildly  
like horse tails,  
our bodies wet,  
our feathers glistening.  
Lesley strode away  
returned, wiping her pouch  
with grass stalks.

My joy this sister,  
whom cancer took,  
unlinked our arms,  
Lesley and I, our  
whirling around,  
around untamed  
with gulls screaming,  
we whooped we hollered  
we did a rain dance drops fell  
on our faces  
but it was only the splash  
of surf still  
we raced tumbled,  
the new air whipping our cheeks  
our bodies crisscrossed with strips of rose.

Alison Carb Sussman  
New York, New York

### Upon Hearing of a Former Student's Divorce

I remember you  
showing me his photo  
on your phone,  
and thinking: *no*  
*neck, dead eyes*  
*bad teeth*, though he'd



already moved in  
and you were  
beaming, so I smiled  
and said the one  
or two things  
people say in those  
moments before  
you twirled off  
to your next  
class in G-block,  
and I stepped past  
the library into a cold  
and dazzling light.

Jared Harel  
Rego Park, New York

### **Vetting Migrants for Asylum**

*I lift my lamp beside the golden door.*

-- Emma Lazarus

Are you like us? We like our own kind. Do you  
fear what we fear, believe what we believe, or  
do you see the world with an alien state of mind?  
We receive your bodies (which surely look like ours)  
but not your native dress, not your customs, nor  
your god or gods that anger ours. We expect you  
to assimilate our culture, our faith and think it odd  
if you don't love what we love, hate what we hate.

The small altar in a corner of a room to some god  
is permissible if not overdone, your belief possible  
in our religious land if it doesn't rival or intrude.  
We expect your son or daughter to Americanize,  
to adopt our ways, eat our food, sing our songs,  
become openly patriotic, someone who belongs.



Do you speak English? You won't be understood if you don't. You'll be avoided, thought strange, won't fit in any neighborhood until you realize your responsibility to change from what you are to what we are. Be wise if you want to be on a par with us. Lose your foreign tongue, now good only for your heartaches, no surprise. Blend, if we're people you choose to be numbered among.

Will you fight, kill, die for us? Is an attack here an attack on soil you consider home? Learn your old country is a place to which you can't go back without having to explain, for once we grant you asylum, you are obligated to remain bound to us and forget who you might have been.

Last question: Do you make love? And when is the last time you began by taking, taking, and ended by giving yourself, hawk becoming dove? Have you experienced poverty being overcome by a touch? By the rubbing of a thigh, his, hers, or your own? Are your troubles such that they disappear temporarily in a shared sigh or moan? Do you know how to seek love, once shown?

We who are afraid of you would respond better if your eyes softened at the sight of us in our worry, if your fingers entwined with ours as more than a coping strategy, proffered moistened lips to kiss, loosened your culture for easy removal, offered bliss without hoping for recompense or approval.

Rob Jacques  
Bainbridge Island, Washington



**2:06 a.m.**

...you know you shouldn't be here sneaking down between the heartbeats of the night, it is absolutely unnecessary and altogether wrong, wrong! standing at the fridge in mismatched socks as you gnaw the last bit of meat off the bone, scrape the savory sauce from the jar, tell yourself this is just what you need, that inner wisdom leads you to this very kitchen tile, your ever-wise body knowing that it needs this boost of protein and rich globule of omega 6 to slay the stray pathogen, oh yes, your brilliant body has healed itself countless times, invaders and mutations quietly righted, smoothed like fresh ironed sheets, fighting battles while you fret about the weather, the workload, this clever craving that woke you is in fact simply the trumpet calling for reinforcements at the darkest hour, while you sleepy, sated (and stained) will stumble back to bed, sleep away the storm within, dream the cloudy dreams of the blissful unaware, like all civilians who never know the wars won on their behalf...

Laura Guli  
Austin, Texas

### **Sea Change**

The sea throws up ugly things;  
Rotting mussels, crabs long dead,  
Rubbery kelp in twisted threads.  
These are the lovely gifts he brings.

Then laps a magically pulsing tune,  
Innocent as a baby's belch.  
What else can we do but forgive the stench,  
And gladly breathe his salt perfume?

The sea makes claim on the surface, too.  
He rips a toll from those who share  
The pure delight of ocean air,  
Then throws back change when he has what's due.



That's why I sit and watch the sea  
While children splash and hunt for shells  
And brazenly tease the grasping swells.  
I will not pay another fee.

Tovah Yavin  
Columbia, Maryland

### **I am old. What are you?**

Now when the mechanic asks if I want the oil  
that lasts for 3000 miles or the 7000 mile one  
for an extra \$19, I calculate how many more miles  
I'll likely live.

If you think I'm asking for your pity you're not old.

I believe eating day-old bread is morally correct.  
You don't have to laugh at my bonus joke: "I do it  
to make the bread feel useful."

If you do laugh you are either old, lonely  
or appreciate the miracle powers of a toaster.

When I wait until Tuesday for my favorite soup  
at the diner I can get the senior deal—a bowl  
for the price of a cup. The question is if I die  
on Monday was it worth it?

If you answer that with anything but a shrug you  
must think you're God or my accountant.



At the corner I have to watch the red-man-stopping go  
from green-man-walking to red-man-stopping to green-  
man-walking to red-man-stopping to green-man-walking  
before I can get the proper timing to walk across before  
the second row of cars go past me. The first cars can  
see me and steer around - the ones behind are the threat.

If you don't see how much goes into crossing the street  
I have no use for you. My parting advice: look both ways.

Michael Mark  
San Diego, California

### **Leaving Monterey and Carmel** *to Maureen*

That morning, on a Pacific Grove's spruce,  
we saw legions of Monarchs,  
each one trembling, warming-off dew from its wings.  
*They're like small orange and black explosions.*  
*The whole tree's on fire.*

Forty years later, we sit in our snowbound house  
watching wind from Canada toy with  
hemlocks, maples, and thick-skinned oaks--  
the white of a full-blown blizzard  
from this side of an iced window.

*California Dreamin'* you call it.  
September sun, a drive down the coast--  
*Everything was distance and color*, a vanished day  
like a small bird, about the size of a man's heart,  
that flutters in through another window.

Michael Cole  
Vermillion, Ohio





**This Fragile Husk**

Jude Dippold

*Photograph*



### THIRD WEDNESDAY FEATURED POET: JOY GAINES-FRIEDLER

In Plato's *Allegory of The Cave* – Socrates suggests that the shadows on the wall, the reflection of objects from unacknowledged, unseen sources, are in fact reality for those imprisoned inside. The shadow of a horse is a horse for they have only the one perspective; reason and discovery don't exist.

Suppose one is dragged from the cave. Again, Socrates suggests that the prisoner would, at first, be blinded by the intensity of this new world. Frightened even. But, eventually he (or she) would see the world beyond his previous experience.

Among other things, Plato, I suppose, points to the notion that we are blinded, fooled by the whole idea of reality, for each “source” comes from our own perceptions, experiences, and points of view. The allegory shows us that without reflective understanding, by choosing perhaps to see only one perspective, we are left captives of that point of view. Perhaps one of the jobs of the poet, of the artist, is to unchain the prisoner, to throw him or her from the cave and let her wander; let her wonder in multiple directions. A poem is the plank one stumbles down between the interior and exterior world allowing us to contend with the meaning of “the shadows on the wall” and to reason over their sources.

I'm not interested in creating new realities but rather, seeking, finding my personal source of light, and how and what it reflects. There is beauty in both the branch of the tree and the shadow of it; in the aliveness of the outside world and the mystery of the interior one. In this way poetry becomes a way into the mystical. I write in order to discover and give embodiment to this mystery. I know this much about myself: I am a see-er and I walk into walls. I love as easily as I despair. Art, I believe, allows us to navigate that twilight. Rod Serling calls it the region that sits on the boundary between light and shadow –Yeats asks, is it the dancer or the dance?

The poems here are from a manuscript called *Capture Theory*, which is a political term for the way in which regulatory agencies have been captured by the very businesses they were designed to regulate. So too, it is a scientific term – a debunked theory of how the moon was captured in earth's gravitational pull. I am, of course, using the term figuratively, grappling with the question of how we become who we are. What captures us without our knowing? The poem “Teaching Young Adults at Risk” speaks to this. What do we capture, what perspective, in order to cope, reason, contemplate? The poems “Friday,” “Saturday,” and “Sunday” address these questions as the speaker, in wonderment through her dying mother's journey.



*Joy Gaines-Friedler is a Pushcart nominee and award winning poet. Joy is the author of three books of poetry and teaches creative writing at schools and for non-profits in the Detroit area, including Springfed Arts and the Prison Creative Arts Project (University of Michigan). Her work is nationally recognized in over 50 anthologies including The Bloomsbury Anthology of Contemporary Jewish Poets, RATTLE, The Patterson Literary Review and Poetry East.*

## **Refusing to Ride The Creator**

My cousin wears a red bandanna, green tank top,  
can't wait for the line to wing its way  
to the metal pew she'll climb into  
with faith. I refuse

to trust a track tended by a tattered man  
who may be drunk.

I watch her ride her little kayak into the sky —  
imagine the view from up there & fear  
the fall.

I'm not brave. Not about this.

I've hitch-hiked through canyons  
gone off in cars mildly rippling with danger  
— been thrown around

by love, and its absence. The view  
from the river is just fine.

There is rocking, there is screaming, metal,  
wheels, track, wind

bruises.

Look how convinced she is  
that no matter how jostled

there is cotton candy in the end.



## **Come Over, Bring Keats**

*He who saddens/ At the thought of idleness cannot be idle* —Keats

Bring your booster rockets,  
burn through what's left of this catastrophe,  
leave your dusty boots by the bed - plant a flag on "us."

There was still time then.

Years later you will say  
"I know now what you wanted."

*Yourself—your soul—in pity give me all...*

There will be no comfort  
in that. Only my own reflection  
in glass gazing at iridescent glazes  
of museum pottery. Artifacts  
whose histories cling

the way I opened  
a small container the other day,  
found a tiny tintype of you,

your face trapped in shadow.  
A small hole in the metal – makes it a charm.

Flat & smooth against my fingers, I held it.  
A kind of radiant heat still burning.

## **I'm No Yearling**

In the open field the body finds a way to breathe. In the garden,  
unnatural selection –  
carpet weed pulled - violets kept.



In the camera, the eye is a luck-filled capture. In the television a study on escape. In the fingers – consequences:

Press the plastic keychain pig  
get a funny squeal, alight of crazy eyes. Do it over  
& over again. Why not?

In the evening more food than I need. Pork.  
In the book, cast a suspicious light on Atticus now, on everything  
but the finches.

In the store, a Congress of sex-craved shoes. In the sky, pools of captured water  
merge into images that can be named—  
elephant, rabbit, the face of my father...

In the turpentine basement my grandfather  
diluted in his paintings, eyes  
of deer. In the darkened hallway  
an obstacle course of metal trucks, baseballs, empty boxes, barriers  
constructed by brutal brother hands.  
Nothing to cushion the fall. In the attic,  
mice (of course).

In the tongue speaking Hebrew, the words water & sky  
are the same. *Mayim*: water here. *Shamayim*: water there.  
one character changes the eye's direction,  
changes the gaze.

In the computer lit & unlit fields, which become traps.  
In the backyard singing insect tongues.  
In the breath an appetite for puns *pudding* my best friend to shame.  
In the being-late a refusal to enter, pricked by shame.

In the lately *I've been bringing with me everyone I've known* –  
assigning old to new – assuming then assuming (the best & worst)

the proof is in the pudding of course.

In the phone – texting *called hospice today*.



## Friday

Black capped terns track ahead of me. Morning.  
Beach. Deserted. I walk where waves break  
then spill their energy.

Sand solid like skin. I sink slightly, still held safe.

Hospice nurses from Miami start *Critical Care*.  
Later, I hear it called *Comfort Care*. They can

read the phases of her breathing, the pallor of skin.  
Still in her wheelchair a shot of morphine  
*helps her breathe*. They take her to her room.

I follow like a noun: Daughter.  
Seven states away my mother's life mooned into loss:

First keys, then walking, then, as though the new moon  
hidden in the shadow of the sun, speech.

All my life she perched on a broken branch.

Settled in her dream state,  
I take my rented car, bring back tacos  
for the nurses who talk about lunch.



## Saturday

The sea surprisingly warm,  
the sky a blue room I wait in. Fearless  
pelicans plunge headlong into waves.

I walk the imagery of my mother's life.  
There are no birds in these images,  
I have never seen her dip her toe into the tide

never seen her startled by stars, no wonderment  
at the way water ripples or forms clouds.

She is never looking up.

Here in the space between waves  
where a kind of sanctity floats  
I praise what I can:

A porcelain blue saucer,  
the smell of Aqua Net & acetate  
nails polished Frank Sinatra smooth,

the Formica table worn pale from hours of Solitaire,  
cravings to leave – hers  
as much as mine.

I return to her room – keep shut the blinds,  
the way she always liked them.

The day clings to the edge.

Outside a cloud of a thousand starlings  
move in unison, left then right – then left.  
They land. Settled-in for the night.



## Vigilance Notes – Sunday

*The greatest insights happen to us in moments of awe.*

—Abraham Heschel

*Write:*

Small white flowers bloom  
along the edge of the pond.  
A heron toe-pointes into the water.

*Write:*

I have made an appointment with the lawyer,  
thanked the angel caregivers, faxed  
the funeral home. The air is a damp ribbon.  
I have eaten little.

In the distance intercostal bridges are timed  
to open in perfect succession.

Plato says *the soul*  
*is imprisoned in the body.* I remember this  
as I watch a pair of smooth-stoned birds,  
mourning doves – build a nest  
beside a blue wall, their shadows  
so much larger than their bodies.

*Write:*

What primal desire does it take to build a nest?

She never learned to drive.  
Her Hyperloop, her helix... my father,  
took her to the beauty shop,  
to the grocery store, he'd wait for her,  
in wait rooms, her kite builder, her skate rink.

As she slips further—

*Write:*

I whispered in her ear: *Bravo* —  
*Such obstinate courage to hold out.*

*Write:*

The sun will rise tomorrow,  
on the anniversary of my father's death,  
& again those drawbridges will open.



## Drum Therapy Workshop

I have not gathered these logs  
nor sawed, nor planed them smooth.

I was simply handed this small circular frame.

I am stretching moist rawhide,  
flattening it firm, lacing it  
against the soft wood.

The spine of the animal  
embedded in the skin.

At night it pops & pings, sings  
me awake with its voice as it cures.

In the morning cross-legged, I sit newly  
made tabla in front of me. Handed paints...

*Make it yours.*

I'm afraid to ruin its beauty.

Along the outer edge, I dip a brush in black,  
draw a triangle, hollow, then another,  
until a circumference of stable  
but empty steeples – a geometric

ring of unfinished but steady structures  
becomes a platter of houses without chimneys.

A little grieving knocks on each door.

But the wind cannot enter.

Each, I fill with gold.



## Teaching Young Adults “At Risk”

From my back row desk  
I witnessed a teacher bully a girl:  
“Who is buried in Grant’s tomb?”  
Whatever word she stumbled on, the asking  
morphed her into silence, darkened the room.

We still don’t know where the moon came from  
or exactly how deep its craters. *Impact*  
*Theory* claims an off-center collision; moon  
formed from debris.

When have you known the sweetness  
of tapped maple or looked in the silent river,  
saw what’s hidden in the current?  
When has sorrow clung hard knuckled, open handed –  
taloned. When has your throat been a planet?

I once slept alone on a beach in Florida, all night  
sea-anxious, sand-cold, my roommate high  
on psilocybin, Jethro Tull flute-blown from the windows  
of cars – we hitchhiked. I fled my mother’s china cups.  
Morning arrived with sea offerings.

*Fission Theory* says the moon was once part of us.

When have you surprised yourself  
by your own success? The way a discovered word  
becomes a bird in your hand.  
If a rock could speak what would it say?

Let’s throw china cups from the 3rd floor  
watch their shards skate across the parking lot,  
hear the surprise quiet of that.

Write down three things you saw today...

Three blood-red plums in a brown bowl.  
A small crack in a Wedgewood-blue wall.  
A squirrel that survived crossing the road.

*Capture Theory* claims  
the moon formed elsewhere.



## **Snow Day**

Let me enjoy the snow that calms the lawn  
across the street. Let it lay its buckets of weight  
around the bird feeders, full, then empty  
in one day.

This morning's mail an announcement  
of your new business, a picture of you,  
your new wife, your newly inherited dog.

The day's become a shroud around an old photo  
I keep hidden in my desk: Our fingers  
intertwined, you carry me, a feather  
of weight on your shoulders.

On the news women in Haiti dwell  
under blanket tarps, clutch babies,  
croon in Creole, broom the broken  
dust into a still trembling sky.

Let me return to the feeder. Refill it.  
Watch a cardinal brave its way  
tree to tree – come down out of the pine  
to the sliver of what I can offer  
in the carved out hollow.

Joy Gaines-Friedler  
Farmington Hills, Michigan





**From a Sketchbook 1**  
John Loree  
*Drawing*



## Stuck Inside

No point trying to get out for my bones won't let me.  
Nor will my flesh despite all those inviting pores.  
Can't force my way. Can't think my way.  
Even the process of opening my mouth

merely locks me in that much more securely.  
And you - you're one more jailer.  
You love me, which pretty much  
seals me inside what I come with.

Yes. that daily recognition is the real killer.  
Not just you. Even strangers.  
A nod in my direction is one more bolt being slid.  
I'm stuck inside my body, my name, my situation.

It's a bizarre and intractable business.  
All I know is that I'd better like it here.

John Grey  
Johnston, Rhode Island

## Grief

She doesn't cry at funerals anymore,  
as frequency has a way of making death  
seem like yesterday's weather forecast.

In the past, when events were unbearable,  
she turned grief into movement by crying.

Now, at eighty, when the sun dips  
behind a dark horizon, she slips away  
to watch a drop glisten on a white lily,



a diamond of radiant purity,  
love that's not felt by the body.  
Here the poverty of tears has currency.

Lynn Geri  
Bellingham, Washington

**Listening to John Coltrane's "Crescent"  
While Looking Out at Frozen Lake Michigan**

Recorded live in Tokyo  
almost fifty years ago  
but through the mystery of radio waves

I am listening to it now,  
Coltrane long dead and disappeared,  
his band disbanded and off to the rest

of the music of their lives.  
His wife Alice plays piano. Pharoah Sanders  
sounds the low foghorn of bass clarinet

and Jimmy Garrison plucks the standup bass.  
Someone whistles from the crowd during a pause  
in the solo, the moment captured as if all

those years since, the graying hair, the losses  
and the joys, were just daydreams  
to be reborn in the darkness

of five o'clock a.m. filling the kitchen here  
thanks to the reach of public radio  
that has arched across the Straits



into the pines and cedars, snow covered now,  
the lake nothing more than white desolation,  
the crowds of last summer gone

of next summer not yet born  
and Coltrane's saxophone fluttering  
like a gull on the beach

that instead of leaving  
when the season changed  
decided to stay through it all.

Robert Haight  
Marcellus, Michigan

### **Goat vs. Spider**

Goat of cloven hoof cleaves from  
the pack and stands, goat-like,  
aloft. Stands, goat-like, alone. Goat-  
horned and proud, stinking of goat  
musk. There between the spider-  
webbed bushes, there in the white  
frozen fields of winter, spider-watched,  
the goat achieves tranquility.

Goat tracks show with cloven-footed  
exactitude where goat has been.  
Between the alabaster, snow-thickened  
trails of spider lines, the cloven prints  
recede into an icy, weary hinterland  
of absent goat, lost goat; with just the  
merest memory, tendrils on the wind,  
of the faint approximation of goat stink.

Paul Ilchko  
Lambertville, New Jersey



## Sunrise Overtime

Morning, a ball worn soft,  
second sun arced into blue  
before coming back to concrete,  
each dribble a fingertip  
kiss from smooth rubber.  
Two hundred jumpers  
before eight hours dunking  
deep fryer baskets at Pete's.  
Sprint. Rebound. Flip.  
Turn. Catch. Release.

Eight weeks of overtime,  
ten thousand rotations of seams  
against shifting breeze,  
no way to predict how each change  
could alter the best practiced stroke.

No future in it. I'd been cut,  
I'd be cut, I'd turn my best  
drop step on a hand truck  
two years later at Beer Nuts.  
No matter. Dawn stroked  
the backboards, and chain nets  
chimed muted notes. Each drained  
bucket drew applause from the leaves.

Robert Kendrick  
Clemson, South Carolina

## Best Man's Pocket Knife

Last week I found the pocket knife  
your father and I gave you the day we got married.  
It was in the bottom drawer of the white bureau  
that used to be in the guest room.



I always imagined you  
slipping it into your pocket every morning,  
carrying it into the world like a secret.  
But here I am,  
running my finger across the still-sharp blade,  
spilling it into an old cup  
with spare change from the day.

Rebecca King  
Lillington, North Carolina

### **Last Look**

If this were my last autumn,  
when told to go home  
and put my affairs in order,  
I'd look first

beyond the file cabinet  
full of medical bills  
to watch the twiggy arrogance  
of berried crab-apple trees,  
a pair of them intertwined  
like the hands of old lovers.

Or the maple above them,  
still green, saving its red-gold  
riches for a last elegy, or

the black spider weaving her  
ubiquitous web on the sill,  
which I'd hosed off only  
yesterday. She's back,  
netting my window in silk.



But I need to sort out  
the house, the banking,  
the savings for which  
others will extend their  
hands. And I,

needing less and less  
except for medicines,  
scant nourishment,  
and a bed to lie in,  
will focus my eyes  
on the bit of gray lace  
that is still the sky.

Donna Pucciani  
Wheaton, Illinois

### **Things Get Lost**

Things get lost: gloves. A sock. A fork. A spoon.  
Receipts you need. A bill you have to pay.  
Your birth certificate. The month of May.  
A language you once spoke. The month of June.  
A certain man you loved; the afternoon  
you met him and the night he walked away.  
His name. His voice. The prayers you used to pray.  
High tides that flow according to the moon.

Things get lost: jungles. Seas. The planet Mars.  
Photos of your kids. Birthday cards your wife  
had given you and which you used to give  
your wife as well. Your wedding ring. Thick bars  
on prison windows. Closet doors. The life  
you could have lived. The truth. The life you live.

Yakov Azriel  
Efrat, Israel



## **Towards Taoism**

To/To  
Seek/Balance  
Yang/Yin  
From/With  
Yin/Yang  
Is/Isn't  
The same/The same  
As/As  
To/To  
Seek/Balance  
Yin/Yang  
From/With  
Yang/Yin  
Before/Unless  
We/You  
Zigzag/Zagzig  
Our Path/Your Way  
With/Without  
A thought/Any feeling  
About/Towards  
Nature/God

Yuan Changming  
Vancouver, British Columbia

## **The Mother of Magritte**

Sometimes there is darkness, even  
in the darkness, a velvet cloak that opens

to another velvet cloak. I close my eyes  
to find it, let it take me

though the walls of my house. Doors  
that kept my insistence to die



locked, at last opened, I drown in the river,  
wash downstream in secret.

My son, fourteen, sees rescuers pull me  
from the water, my body

like a fish, nightgown washed over my face.  
Later, he paints me, a fish

by halves: scales, fins; head or body like a pike.  
Sometimes I'm a mermaid,

the river I drown in, an ocean. Waves  
in his eyes take me farther

into water, alabaster. The man in the bowler hat  
refuses to look at the camera,

turns his back on the viewer, paints clouds  
in windows, windows in windows—

paints what he chooses, wraps lover's heads  
like the mummy I was

when they found me, gown I slept in washed  
over my face. Paints me

in clouds, finds me in the river, velvet  
running over my breast,

nightclothes coming clean in current, ceaseless.

Madelyn Camrud  
Grand Forks, North Dakota



## **In Your Absence**

In Your Absence the yard-cat, Flower, has started sleeping on top of the fridge and I've reverted to practices that bring the same joy as reading Nancy Drews on my cot at Camp Ann Bailey, rain drumming on the roof, when I was ten. I instant-videoed two full seasons of HBO's Six Feet Under, which adds up to attending 24 funerals in 12 days. My sloth runneth over. On the following issues Flower and I are in complete accord: the lack of import of Michelle Obama's senior Princeton thesis; that sugar, not the loss of societal shame, is the reason so many people are fat; plus a whole range of other untold topics. One thing I'm especially proud of: When you return in fifteen days, I will be able to face you with this declaration—though sorely tempted, I stuck to our resolution that we were giving up Dark Chocolate Nuggets. And if you broke down and had a Hershey Bar or three or four, I'm not going to lord it over you.

Ginnah Howard  
Oneonta, New York

## **Fibromyalgia**

One-quarter turn to the right. Twenty-one  
gun salute echoes in knees and hips.  
Creak of distended soliloquy and the sharp  
scent of useless medication. Pain is its own  
reward but unhappiness just sits there, takes up  
the whole couch, eats your snacks,  
watches soap operas

Robert Beveridge  
Strongsville, Ohio



## Murmuration

“A rare gathering of starlings that looks like dancing clouds”  
passed over my head this morning like a shiver in a graveyard.

### *Murmuration*

The sky darkened, my dogs slowed their pace, and I still

struggled to hold up the dike against the flood of winter.  
My mind pushed back the chill of late fall, back

against the solitude coming, the harsh quiet of the snow.  
As long as I'm moving, I can't remember you

but in winter the mind releases its starlings  
and there you are, suddenly, in all your glossy magnificence,

and here am I, alone.

Lucinda Watson  
Sausalito, California

## The Temperature of Trees

*I will take the sun in my mouth and leap into the ripe air—E.E. Cummings*

Birds whisper overhead, their wings drip oil  
below a woman with strong legs and weak eyes  
walks across the mole-ravaged lawn

approaches a mound of rotting logs  
filled in with brushwood and debris  
from last year's harvest, buried  
in compost we've been turning  
since our children were born



she kneels before her new garden  
sorts the lilacs, mums, and irises  
she will plant there, sighs happily  
swats a mosquito from her nose

two sandhill cranes land in our grassy goo  
a wetland thick with dead ash and elm  
fallen in anguished angles of repose

I worry about what cannot be known  
the temperature of trees, the moment  
one begins to die, the storm  
that will take it down and leave to rot

I love the feel of my wife's hands  
after a day digging in the garden, the smell  
of young flowers on her clothes,  
strands of bird's nest falling from her hair,  
arms tan as a potato just pulled from the dirt  
and her back red like boiled beets

trying to push through the last poems of EE  
I slip into a shallow sleep unaware  
until I hear her humming below my window  
just before dusk, the screen door slams shut  
the kettle whistles, she calls out, asks  
would I like a cup of tea

I pull on a shirt, roll off the bed, do yoga  
to coax the pain from my back, eager to slurp  
down a steaming mug of lemon ginger, grateful  
to have cheated death this long and ache  
to tell her about my enormous narrow dream

Douglas Smith  
Chelsea, Michigan



**Road Up Road Down**  
*for Sun Weining*

Road up road down  
still the same road  
but this road down  
comes not back up:

flux is arrowed, unturned  
by Time, implacable, rolling  
from general to particular,  
*rolling its flood forever.*

except the mind motors  
in reverse, a meager  
turning daily further feebled,  
axon by axon stripped:

except this backward rolling,  
definition stripping back, as  
the myriad flower furls  
itself back into seed:

except the limbs, the  
lungs, revert to fields,  
to fateful imbalance, like  
a face half-collapsed:

the seed rolls down,  
unbecoming, to egg not  
egg, impotent potency, to  
a vacancy wholly partitioned:

as your words roll  
in to his ear  
you will see his  
head is so small

Aaron Novick  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



## All Things Beautiful

I was fresh out of high school and had no plans for college. Every night at dinner, my father would say, "When I was your age, Brian, I had two jobs." Mom would nod her head in agreement.

My hoped for writing career wasn't taking off as I had planned, so I took the first job offer I got, which was with a home care provider. The company assigned me to work for a man named Sergey Kovac, who was paralyzed from the neck down. Right away I noticed that every question I asked him about himself went unanswered.

"Look, son," Kovac said to me one day. "I'm not your friend." Even with his voice deeply dipped in accent, I could sense his irritation.

"I just thought you might want someone to talk to."

"You get paid to clean my house and wash my ass. Do what you're here to do."

I didn't take his rebuke personally. He was a man who could do little for himself. I had no idea what had left him the way he was, but I was sure that in his circumstances, I'd be bitter too.

"Would you like some music?" I asked one day.

"I want to hear something with violins." I found the music he wanted. I found it heavy and dark, but he told me to let it play. The lines that creased his face became less noticeable as he relaxed.

"Is this music popular in your home country?" I asked. There was no reply. He simply chewed his lip.

Three months after I started working for him, I was cleaning Mr. Kovac's attic when I came across a manila envelope labeled "All Things Beautiful." Inside it was an unfinished manuscript by Mr. Kovac. I sat on a dusty crate and began reading.

When I heard Kovac scream my name, I realized that I had been in the attic for nearly an hour. I reorganized the manuscript and put it back where I had found it.

"What were you doing up there?" He asked. "Dusting doesn't take an hour."

"I lost track of time."

He scowled. "Well, don't. I'm ready for my bath."

I sweated while washing Kovac's heavy frame. There were dark surgical scars near the nape of his neck. "Don't," he said through



gritted teeth when the towel grazed the black ring he wore.

When I got home that night, I thought about the manuscript I had read. It was a brilliant story and was beautifully written. I craved to know more about the characters and how the story would end.

"You used to be a writer?" I asked Mr. Kovac nearly two months after reading his unfinished manuscript.

There was a long silence. I made a show of cleaning to give him time to respond.

"You were snooping through my stuff in the attic," he said, biting into his lip.

"I saw your manuscript by accident while I was cleaning."

"And you read it?"

"Yeah. I think you should finish it."

"Even if I wanted to finish it, I have no way to do it." His lip quivered and he looked away.

The next day, I came to work with my laptop. I pulled a chair into Kovac's bedroom.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked.

"You're going to tell me your story while I transcribe it."

Until now, Kovac had never smiled in my presence. Now there was a hint of something at the corner of his mouth.

Kovac spoke for hours while I typed as fast as I could. I stopped only to give him water, even ignoring my own need to use the bathroom. The story he told was beyond beautiful. He finally smiled when I showed him the finished manuscript.

"Mr. Kovac, what inspires you to write like that?"

"Pen, paper and an unhealthy obsession with coffee." He smirked.

"You know, the way you write, you could sell millions of books."

The smirk was gone as quickly as it had come. His eyes glistened. I opened my mouth to say more, but he interrupted.

"You can go now," he said dismissively, avoiding my eyes.

During the next four months, Kovac allowed me to read other shorter pieces he had written. All of the stories were resilient, often with dark overtones but not depressing, drenched in a sobering reality.

"I used to want to be a writer, too," I said to Kovac one night.

"Used to?" He laughed, causing me to tremble. "What does that mean?"



"It's not for me. I can't tell a good story."

"Have you ever had a bad experience?" He lifted an eyebrow.

"Yes."

"Then you must have a story to tell." I felt reassured by his wink.

Mr. Kovac became my writing mentor, and reading his voice helped me begin to look for my own. I asked him about his stories and what influenced them, if he wrote as a hobby or something else. "Every line must have a purpose," he would say.

One day I asked him about his ring.

"It's onyx."

"Does it mean something special?" I asked, while I wiped his bed railing.

He started to say something but changed his mind, pursed his lips in thought and after a moment said, "It doesn't matter."

"Why not?"

"Some things are bigger than us." A single tear rolled down his face when he squeezed his eyes shut.

After that conversation, there were days when Mr. Kovac would be so quiet that I thought something must be wrong. On those days, he chewed his lip and stared at the plain white walls as if he were in a trance.

"Hey, are you OK?" I would ask, as his breathing grew rapid and loud. "Mr. Kovac?"

"I'm fine." He would say calmly, as if nothing had happened.

I worked for him another five months before a blood clot caused Mr. Kovac's lungs to fail. Two weeks after he passed, Mariana, his nighttime caretaker, showed up at my home.

"Mr. Kovac told me to give this to you if anything ever happened to him. He said you would know what to do with it."

She handed me an envelope labeled "All Things Beautiful". I thanked her and closed the door.

Jermaine Reed  
Chicago, Illinois





**Abandoned Ship**  
Jennifer Lothrigel  
*Photograph*



## More

There is something about classical music  
that bothers me  
and is why I hardly listen to it,  
something about a man's work  
being finished  
that startles me, makes me cringe.  
I don't want to know  
about the end of things. I want  
to feel as though there's more to come,  
just around the next emotion,  
that there's still something that needs  
to be done before I die.

Terry Persun  
Port Townsend, Washington

## Cold Oven

tires on gravel  
the couple drives away  
embarking on their travels

hiding behind a rose bush  
I leave a rose at their door

I take over their house  
I sleep in their bed  
I cook on their stove  
I wash my clothes in  
their machine  
cold sheets blow on the line



friends receive my new  
phone number  
my driver's license has a new  
address  
mail arrives daily

I walk the invisible dog  
to the beach every day  
shorebirds search the shore  
I give them sand dollars  
to purchase the moon  
squid prefer clean water  
their ink writes chanties  
on the ocean floor  
terns turn in  
five directions  
sewing up the points of stars

back home I turn on the oven  
the potatoes burn  
like hot horses  
after a rough night ride  
I eat juicy tomatoes  
picked from the field  
row upon row of  
red sea shell souls

the radio news is on  
there's a wind over Kansas  
rain makes progress  
on the roof  
the shutters shuffle noisily

I enjoy the evening  
beauty salon magazines  
on the coffee table  
the Braille of piano rolls  
etch audio notations

a photo album contains  
one baby picture  
beautiful rosy cheeks  
and dress to match



before bed I go outside  
to view the stars and moon  
over the house  
with my face skyward I  
name each constellation

at peace I start back  
toward the door  
I spot a cross  
out farther in the yard  
the oven turned off and cold

Here Lies Tiny Alice  
her rose dress  
emptying in the ground

Gloria Keeley  
San Francisco, California

### **American Bedouin**

*for colleen*

nomads  
    our oasis   a place  
                called rest stop   well-lit at night

clean rest rooms  
                with sinks for small baths  
                                our tent the bowl of sky  
        we have no dreams  
                        only the cold stars  
    we'll move on when they tell us  
                a caravan  
                        disappearing down the road  
                                in our desert of nameless

Lou Ella Hickman  
Corpus Christi, Texas



## No Need to Wonder

Unexpected sweep of warm air pushes across our frozen fields.  
It's nearly Spring, and Canada geese arrive in multitudes, forging  
rows of soggy corn stubble for kernels misspent months ago.

Heads down, their gleaning seems measured against mud's cold.  
They hardly raise their heads, but when they do, we see the way  
they gaze beyond this field's ruin to the dream of winter wheat

now greening in the distance. And so, our lives become like  
theirs—waiting patiently for longer days & intense sun, and  
shimmer of peepers willing us— *alive, alive, alive*.

M. J. Iuppa  
Hamlin, New York

## Punishment: Letter from God

I am, how you say, crying the river  
right now. I am feeling the blue.  
Are you happy down there  
with your life coach, with your  
pants for yoga, with your waxing  
of the hair to make it remove?  
I am literally not happy as the clam  
is happy. Or the camper  
who is, how you say, ecstatic  
when camping. You won't talk  
to me. You kill me. You kill everything  
you love. No, wait.  
I kill everything you love.  
But that is my job, my Job.  
Oh, I am cracking myself up.



But I digress. Forgive me.  
I get that way where I am forgetting.  
But you, you should not forget.  
Where is my card from Hallmark?  
Where is my fruit bouquet and balloons?  
Clearly you have the fish to fry  
that is bigger, eh? That okay.  
Go ahead, pay attention not to me.  
Why don't you call me anymore?

Kevin Griffith  
Columbus, Ohio

## **Maddy**

One day Maddy said I walked like a duck.  
I looked down at my feet.  
“You do walk strangely,” mother said.  
“Perhaps you need special shoes.”  
Next day I went to school in black corrective shoes.  
Maddy pointed, laughed. “What next, a brace?”  
My shoulder blades sank under the weight  
of the chain link fence in the playground.  
Maddy stomped my newly straightened feet.  
I tore her hair.  
“Maddy is an actress Off Broadway,” mother said.  
I folded my arms.  
During the class play, Maddy tripped me. I felt the scrape  
of her boot buckle across my leg.  
I told mother. She said, “Maybe you're imagining things.  
You might be jealous of her.” She took a sip of whiskey.  
I slammed into my room.  
I drew a pastel picture of me  
with shiny high heels, and one of mother



with nose glasses and a whiskey bottle,  
and the door ajar  
because Maddy had just left laughing and yelling,  
reeling like a drunk monkey with all mother's jewels  
swinging from her neck.

Alison Carb Sussman  
New York, New York

### **My Oarsman**

Would you have it back—  
the old races on the Charles, the pain?  
the toiling backwards, blindly,  
wondering what god blasts your boat forward?

The Charles' murky streak awaits your cut with knife-keen oars  
that braid the air, ream the river's stall. The shot forward.  
Your rammed knees bend up like a fetus.

Lunging at the coxswain's scream, *Gimme Ten Big Ones*,  
you'd pull monster strokes, thirty-eight lashing the water,  
the ecstatic getting ahead--then back, return to the slick  
corrective --as if gain were without end.

It was rough, my oarsman, my husband of ages, admits.  
He's outraced one cancer, another lurks.  
No time outs. In rowing no stops for water or gulps of air,  
always the gasp for more air. Always pain.

Needles of it drive into thigh muscles, forearms seem to split.  
Repeatedly and without respite,  
quadriceps, triceps, biceps, deltoids, latissimus dorsi,  
abdominals, hamstrings, and glutes grunt.

Small muscles hold an exquisite equipoise, a balance  
that keeps the fragile shell on an even keel.  
No question, hurt hammers on. When pain hits,  
what does one do and how well to do it?



Grueling, this anniversary, our 50th, much  
of its hours spent with doctors.  
I take my oarsman's hand, still steady  
with the control and patience of a Zen monk.

Alone in the waiting room. More than the icicles  
on his hands and the lack of oxygen, my oarsman  
remembers The Swing. That synchronous motion,  
a harmonic flexing of shell and muscle, when

the boat and rowers pull unchecked, graceful,  
fluid as one. He sees again a moonless evening  
finishing practice, their boat gliding back to the shell house  
through quiet and darkness. A "zip" and that's all;

the oarlocks never rattled at release. Eight taut bodies  
rocked back and forth like pendulums. Each subtle turning  
of wrists was mirrored exactly by each oarsman from one  
end of the boat to the other.

White blades flashed like wings of seabirds in formation.  
So beautiful. It cuts through my sheath of sorrow.

Geri Radacsi  
Farmington, Connecticut

### **Archeologist Examines Warrior's Skull**

She cradles it, precious porcelain bowl,  
fractured hatchling shell -- runs her  
finger over the spreading cracks  
as a fervent prayer, conjures  
spells and resurrection  
unaware that her breath  
is the first of a woman to touch him  
since his wife pressed against his warmth



smoothed his hair, damp  
from battle-fevered dreams.  
He left her with five babies to feed  
and a field with no one to plant.  
He never let her see what was inside,  
let her caress him. She couldn't imagine  
the fractured, mad experiment of time  
would grant another holy access—  
that he would have no choice  
but to surrender, shieldless,  
to this most intimate moment  
watch her piece together  
sliver by sliver, splinter, shards  
of what became of life  
held together with pins and prayers  
learn how one piece finds another  
hours measured in ash  
settling in the deepest corners  
between the thin temple bones  
in the quiet space  
just behind where his eyes would have been.

Laura Guli  
Austin, Texas

### **Blue Room**

When...*you get that mood indigo*,  
when you slide down the rain-soaked  
slope of regret or sorrow...

In the widening circle of music  
there are no angles or corners,  
no vases or lamps to knock over,



not even a tiny light to guide you,  
or a bed to tumble into, or a dream  
to get you out of this one...

Listen to a sax's jazzy moan--  
Coltrane, Rollins, Desmond--  
the smooth glide around a blue room.

Michael Cole  
Vermillion, Ohio

### **Ancestral Research**

Get out of your city. Take a main thoroughfare  
through downtown, the urban express outward  
to an interstate heading away across the burbs  
until you're in what you euphemistically call  
countryside, although it isn't countryside yet  
until you exit onto a state route that becomes  
a county road that becomes a rural pathway  
and then a dirt road banked by shrubby trees.

Switch to four-wheel drive and continue on  
over rocks and washouts, across dry creeks  
and by cellars where pioneers once pioneered.  
Old folks buried hereabouts in fields like these  
were your ancestors, and you should pause,  
get out of the car. Get down on your knees.

Grovel in ditches amid goldenrod, chicory,  
bedizened fireweed, purple-crowned thistles,  
your fingers in powdery dust awaiting rain,  
you, hands and knees at last amid what's left –  
you, the last of what once might've been wild  
but which in the scheme of things became tame,  
but which in the order of things became mild,  
confusing history with fact, sin with shame.



What would they say, all those gone before,  
seeing cultured you on all fours among weeds  
scruffling today in dirt of Earth's genealogies,  
dun libraries where lie living's eventual sum,  
in pages defying reading, in detritus of ages?  
Would it have been better had you not come?

Rob Jacques  
Bainbridge Island, Washington

### Dirge

Grandma loved the Versailles elegance  
of coffins displayed in draped parlors.  
She craved the Byzantine formality  
of receiving lines, the burnished  
elegance of gilt-edged prayer books.  
Grandma learned funereal whispers, tones  
tremulous at phrase ends,  
the precise pressure of clasped  
hands dispensing sympathy.  
She longed to be wept out to courtly  
gestures of lace handkerchiefs  
and revived with reception edibles.  
Grandma was a priestess in grief's liturgy,  
practiced in the intricacies  
of its cantilena. She died with Bible  
and long gloves, reading the obituaries.

Sharon Scholl  
Atlantic Beach, Florida



## **The Former King of Covington**

The bottom of the eighth  
And I'm down by a touchdown,  
The last one standing in the outfield.  
Everyone looks at me and nods in silence,  
They know that it's gone on too long.  
It's either the end of an era  
Or a period of time.  
Plenty of rivers have been crossed already  
And she wasn't on the other side of any of them.  
I'm looking forward to new beginnings  
Like a daytime doubleheader  
After a twelve inning affair.  
I'll eat my eggs in privacy now,  
You can go lay them all over town.

Robert Bartusch  
Newport, Kentucky

## **August Fishing**

Late summer  
gets shaggy  
with wildflowers

trout idle in the shade  
and remember evenings  
of mayflies

until a grasshopper  
blown into the river  
by a sudden gust



thrashes its legs  
and needs to be saved  
from drowning

by the brown trout  
who picks up  
the grasshopper

in its mouth  
and spits it out  
on the mossy top

of a fallen log  
and just that fast  
is gone.

Robert Haight  
Marcellus, Michigan

### **Blue Ridge Descent**

No one on the gorge trail this morning. Light  
sleet and rain. Winter takes its last shot at March.

I've come to sit on the rocks where Doug and I  
talked of young men's trouble, listened to the creek's

rippled riddles. Today, a technician five states away  
exchanges Doug's water and blood for formaldehyde,

sculpts a new head and neck to replace what Doug blew  
apart with his own .38, a new face I can't be there to see.

This ridge still holds scars from blasting the road.  
Two crows bow to their absolutes: torn flesh, sudden flight.

Robert Kendrick  
Clemson, South Carolina



## Jesus on Woodward Ave

i.

As my mother's ashes make their way to Mystic in the cargo hold of a Boeing 737, in a small corrugated cardboard box labeled "human remains," I am trying, but failing, to pump gas at a BP station on Woodward Avenue in Detroit, and Jesus is there.

He looks just like the pictures from my catechism books, with his disturbingly overgrown beard and hair. Only this man I see here is holding no laughing children on his lap while he tells them stories from a Bible that hasn't been written yet. This Jesus is leaning on one of the pillars between the two gas pumps, and his body straddles a bicycle. He looks so weak that his body might fall over if his bike and the pillar weren't there.

He's carrying a bag full of bags, for carrying the empty bottles and cans he's hoping to find in the trash. I tense up, knowing he's going to ask me for money, because right now I look like the type of person who's got some. I'm dressed in my job interview costume and I just blew another job interview downtown. I've been out of a job for two years. My feet are aching and I just want to get home to my safe college town where everyone sits in safe cafes and drinks lattes. I don't want to spend another moment here, in this wilderness on the outskirts of the city, where the plastic bags and newspapers are free to roam the streets and empty lots where houses once stood. The windchill is five degrees above zero.

*Whoever got the idea that hell is hot? I wonder. It's so obvious hell is cold.*

I close my long black wool coat tightly around my body and wish I didn't notice that the man is not wearing gloves, and his hands are purple.

*Probably he would attack me just to get my gloves.*

I have heard they prey on the weak, so I try to look strong, but I can't even get the gas pump to work.

"It wants your zip code," the man tells me, and I know enough not to meet his gaze. That's how they make prey out of you.



“Why should a gas station need my zip code?” I ask, punching the buttons on the front and trying to get the pump to notice I’m there.

“They are collecting information on us everywhere we go,” he says sullenly.

That is such a paranoid notion that I don’t even respond. I keep punching the front buttons, until finally he comes around to the side. I feel my body stiffen, but I know that’s how they decide who to prey on, so I try to look relaxed.

He shows me the numerical keyboard on the side, where I never would have found it.

“Thank you,” I say, somehow afraid I shouldn’t let even Jesus know my zip code, and he can feel my suspicion, so he goes back to leaning on the pillar.

He looks tired.

Then suddenly I feel how tired I am, too. I wish I could lean against the car, but I have my goddamn \$200 all-wool job interview long black coat on. So I just try to focus on the sound of the gas flowing in, and soon, it becomes a fast-moving clear mountain stream that I am remembering from long ago in Shenandoah National Park when we went there.

I haven’t slept much since my mother died just 10 days ago, and I am always thinking of her. Sometimes I see her, like now, I find some strange resemblance between her and this man leaning against the pillar. Though she never had such ratty hair and such a bushy, bushy beard. In what way do they look alike, I wonder? No doubt, the lack of sleep is causing such strange thoughts. When I do sleep, I dream that she is traveling. A Buddhist friend of mine told me to pray for her now because souls have to roam for a while before they can find their way home.

And every night I dream I am roaming, alone, with a tent, and staying in state campgrounds that smell like other people’s urine. In the dreams, I don’t know who I am, or where I’m going, but I know I’m supposed to be going somewhere. And I’m sure that the dreams must be about my mother—that I am my mother in the dreams, and she is me, trying to find my way in the world now without her.



ii.

I am falling into a reverie as I hear the swish of gas through the metal nozzle. It becomes a fast-running stream again. My mother is trying to sweep the campsite clean even though it is made of dirt. Whenever we went on “vacation,” she never left camp. There was always too much to do.

All my mom wanted was for the world to be clean, so it was always torture for her when my dad took us camping on vacation. And I think he knew. He knew, the son of a bitch. Maybe for him it was vacation, but for her, she had to work even harder than she did back at home. While we all went hiking, she stayed back to tend to our campsite, collecting water from the pump and carrying it in buckets to the picnic table. Finding wood and starting the fire to boil the water to wash the dishes, sweeping the dirt and sand out of the tent, boiling more water to wash our clothes, and then starting all over, cooking dinner on the wood fire. She always told him that if she was going to have to clean and cook for seven people over a fire, she’d rather stay home. “Now that would be a *real* vacation,” she said. “If you all cleared out of here, and I could just stay home. I could eat eggs and bacon for every meal, with tomatoes, and drink red wine, and eat chocolate ice cream for desert. I might even read a book.”

No, I never once saw my mother reading a book. There was just too much to do.

There was one time we went camping and she did finally ask us all to help. But my brother didn’t boil the dish water long enough, and we all got the shits. So she went back to doing everything herself.

Dad always spent weeks planning out our itinerary. He was a captain in the Navy, and studied at the Academy. He always took us to Civil War battlefields, and he taught us the calculus of the dead. We saw the Arlington National Cemetery, all those rows and rows of white crosses, adding up, after hundreds of years, to nothing.

I remember the worst fight they ever had (that I know of). My mom just wanted to spend one night in a motel on the way home to Connecticut. “All I want is a good shower,” she said after five days sleeping on a dirt floor.

But my father said it cost too much money.



iii.

The pump clicks off the flow of gas abruptly and I jump. I look over at Jesus to see if he's been watching me. He says: "Lady, do you know where I can get a shower? I haven't had a shower in days, and I really need one."

*How can this man be talking in my mother's voice?* I wonder.

"I just need a haircut, and I want to shave off this beard."

I thought of my mother, how she would want to clean him up good. "How much do you need?" I ask, starting to dig in my purse for my wallet.

"How much do you have?"

"I can't solve all your problems, you know," I said, trying to decide between giving him a ten dollar bill or a fifty.

"Lady!" he yells with his hands over his ears. "I'm fifty years old. You don't know how long I've been doing this. I lost my job two years ago. They gave me two apartments that didn't work. The sewer system didn't work. The showers didn't work. The whole system in Detroit doesn't work. Look here. All I want is- *just-one-shower*. You've got to believe me!"

There was no doubt about it then. I gave him sixty dollars.

He studied the fifty dollar bill, then narrowed his eyes. "Is this real?" he asked.

"As real as you or me," I said.

Now that I could look into his eyes, I saw that they were green, like my mother's. He said his name was Michael, and he would pray for me the rest of my life. And I asked him to pray for my mother.

Then he whooped and started off on his bike towards a Motel Six. I don't know if they let him in.

I didn't dream about my mother anymore after that.

I figure that means she finally made it home.

Madeline Diehl  
Ann Arbor, Michigan





**Manhattan Bridge Tower Closeup**

John McCluskey

*Photograph*



## **Delivering Mulch, Friday, July 19, 1996**

Sailing out with ten yards of pine bark mulch,  
I dangle an arm out to sidetrack that made-up wind,  
left on Beacon, right on Ash, then I'm at an oversized house  
standing next to a bird bath's two stone owls before I climb  
back in and find the dirt road that leads me to a small field.

I won't break my short walk until I get the dusty light all  
over me and reach the tall sycamore's chipped white meal,  
the white-throated sparrow high above scribbling  
those thin notes on the air. On this clear, cool morning,  
I sit on top of a pile of rocks for a good long while.

It's an old story playing out in the dirt, the long overdue  
and scattered dirt, what's past dead and running loose.  
What's wrong with you? No one ever says that. Mister boss,  
I want to say, I'm out here dusted free of the clouds.

Billy Reynolds  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

## **Small Things Matter to Ordinary People**

They come like dreams in which all the troubles  
have already passed through them. They are  
tempered. Miracles of the mind at rest,  
ideas that take to us when we're least aware.  
Planting the garden in the spring. The idea of it  
without the actual planting of it starts, seeds in rows  
and squares, then hauling rocks for the borders.  
Soon sunflowers are grown giant and cosmos growing  
light as air itself, delicate enough for any of us to imitate.  
How easy to sketch them in the living room chair  
at night, draw how they grow from the memory of them.  
The willowy and the green. The sycamore trees



in the backyard protecting the house from heat  
and everything else. Things that save our passions  
from falling away. What comes to belong here with us.  
What we sit with and see up close. Wrens outside the window  
so small they are almost not there at all,  
hummingbirds moving constantly and then gone.  
Afterwards some brown rice and black beans, steamed  
greens, green tea. What stays us. What moves us.  
The colorful and the light. What makes things right.

Charlene Langfur  
Palm Desert, California

### **Purple, Prickly**

The purple pricklypear cactus  
more purple than ever this year  
due to drought and cold  
beautifies the canyon walls  
on the steep trail to Elephant Head  
the mountain I have loved  
all my life still there  
my life in prickly  
segments now purpling  
childhood home demolished  
elementary school flattened  
junior high slated for takedown  
pink church going Father gone  
my bloom yellow with red center  
opening in the morning  
closing in the evening  
just once forever.

Betsy Bernfeld  
Wilson, Wyoming



## **A Morning Wedding**

What strikes me first  
is the drying-out drunks  
leering like clowns in a sacristy  
as Amy and I stumble past their cells  
down the hall to the judge's chambers.

They smirk as if we are a dirty joke.

Next comes the moment  
my soon-to-be mother-in-law  
sweeps her sleeve across her eyes.  
Perhaps she has noticed Amy's pallor  
as I slip the ring on her finger,

Amy is twenty-one. She is my student.

Later, Amy and I pick at eggs Benedict  
and feed each other crumbs of white cake  
during the smallest wedding reception  
ever. Amy sips champagne, reverts to  
ginger ale. A fly circles. The lilacs wilt.

Last I heard, Amy stables horses near Butte.

Richard Merelman  
Madison, Wisconsin

## **Love in the Time of the Choleric**

Today is a day filled with hidden  
stressors. Some of them squat in the laundry.

Others dangle from the bird feeder  
or loosen my spark plugs. One

is a renegade gnat assassin. All of them  
are attending the game against Michigan State



after they finish their chores. It's unclear  
whom they will raucously cheer for,  
but they'll drink too much. We're staying  
at home with a case of Blue Moon and  
a vast array of microwaveable Indian meals.  
We'll survive the coming avalanche. We'll  
survive the postgame riots. We'll survive  
close quarters and dry-clean-only getting wet.  
Listen to the rumble of the washing machine.  
Doesn't it sound like muted victory?  
I'm going to press this red button again.

John Buckley  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Dinner on Water  
*(for Yael, on our first anniversary)*

The ahi on our plates  
swam under us once. Here  
they're seared, peppered  
in sesame, mustard  
and mint sauce drizzled  
on top. Far as we see,  
water holds us, sways us  
like infants. White wine tilts  
as we try to sip it.  
Our waiter's limp is righted  
by the tide. We decide  
it feels good to be nowhere  
in particular, between piers,  
knowing the ocean  
swallows what it will.

Jared Harel  
Rego Park, New York





**From a Sketchbook 2**  
John Loree  
*Drawing*



## INSIDE/OUT LITERARY ARTS PROJECT FEATURE

By immersing students in the joy and power of poetry and literary self-expression, InsideOut inspires them to think broadly, create bravely and share their voices with the wider world. Guided by professional writers and celebrated by publications and performances, youth learn that their stories and ideas matter and that their pens can launch off the page into extraordinary lives.

You can help give Detroit's children the joys of reading, writing and bringing their creative spirit into the world by supporting InsideOut, a 501(c)(3) corporation.

Visit InsideOut online at: [www.insideoutdetroit.org](http://www.insideoutdetroit.org)

The Project is supported by gifts of corporations and people who hope to light the creative spark in our youth. Readers of *Third Wednesday* who see the fire burning in these young poets can help with donations sent to:

InsideOut Literary Arts Project  
5143 Cass Ave., Room #225  
WSU — State Hall, Detroit, MI 48202

InsideOut places professional writers and poets in Detroit schools to help children give voice to their often turbulent lives through poetry and writing. Since 1995, the organization has served tens of thousands of Detroit students grades K-12 in over 100 different schools. This year they are serving 27 different schools.

InsideOut works with a variety of schools, partner organizations, and artists to help inner-city schoolchildren find their inner voices with which to express themselves and share their stories, which they then do at performances and events presented by InsideOut.



## Self-Portrait

My eyes are two glowing stars  
looking for the moon.

My mouth is like an ocean  
with dolphins swimming.

My hair is a sky  
turning dark.

My ears are like stereos  
listening to music.

My skin is like chocolate  
stirred in milk.

My heart is like a strawberry  
in a bowl of sugar

trying to find  
its way back to me.

My spirit is like a wild tiger  
trying to get out of its cage.

My mind is like space soaring  
through the planets.

My voice is like fire burning  
to speak its mind.

My sadness is like a moon  
trying to find the sun.

Sometimes you'll walk through  
fire trying to reach the ice.

Diamond Taylor  
(Grade 5, River Rouge STEM Academy at Dunn)



## Family Portrait

My father was a thief.  
He stole some stars and put them in my eyes.

My mom is a tree with dark brown leaves.  
So dark that they look black.

My skin is a dark brown coal.  
My friends are my umbrella on rainy days.

My spirit is a wanderer who is never lost.  
My heart is like a cherry blossom getting ready to bloom.

My mind is like a room with sticky  
notes on the wall.

My feet are fish trying to  
find the ocean.

Morgan Evans  
(*Grade 5, River Rouge STEM Academy at Dunn*)

## We Write Poems

We write poems  
because the wind blows our hair in the summertime.

We write poems because  
it takes the sadness and puts it in a jar.

We write poems because  
it makes the birds chirp in the trees.



We write poems for  
everyone who isn't able to write poems.

We write poems because  
it makes the stars and moon shine brighter.

We write poems for everyone  
who can't so that we can help them express them-  
selves.

We write poems for  
people who want their words to be heard.

We write poems for  
the sadness in the sky when the birds can't fly high  
and the trees start to die.

We write poems for  
the injustice in the world and the diseases without  
a cure and for the tree that sits alone.

Jamila Russell  
(*Grade 8, Marcus Garvey Academy*)

### **A World Without Kindness**

A world without kindness  
is like a dreamless sleep,

or a queen with no castle,  
a container with no top,



a classroom without a teacher,  
or a beehive with no bees.

A world without kindness  
would be like spring without rain,

or Cinderella with no fairy godmother,  
In a world without kindness

Where would I stay?  
Would I be alone for eternity?

Ilyana McArthur  
(*Grade 8, Marcus Garvey Academy*)

## **Never Be**

Never be a bird with no wings.  
Don't be a person with no bones.  
Don't be a kid with no eyes.  
Rise above the sun.  
Be your own self.  
Don't hide, be happy.  
Say "No" to the bad.  
Don't be a fish with no gills.  
Be who you are.  
Don't be nobody else.  
Sometimes be with the sun.  
Don't go down go up.  
Never give up.  
Don't be mad be strong.



Be the light not the dark.  
Have hope to trump.  
Remember that you mean something.  
Never say "I quit."  
Don't be a car with no wheels.

Dominick Whitaker  
(*Grade 6, Marcus Garvey Academy*)

### **The Hand That Dreams**

The hand that dreams can  
toss rice grains of prosperity  
to those in poverty.

The hand that dreams can  
hammer down the wall that holds us  
from the sunlight of freedom.

The hand that dreams can  
swim to the island of joy and take  
others with them.

The hand that dreams can  
break the window of misery  
and set us free.



The hand that dreams can  
spread the voice of hope and make  
our lives better.

The hand that dreams  
writes with a pencil of kindness.

The hand that dreams can  
throw feathers of forgiveness to all.

The hand that dreams is your hand,  
my hand, everybody's hands of love.

Celeste Barton  
(*Grade 6, Marcus Garvey Academy*)

### **Advice to Myself**

Never be afraid.  
Always follow the good.  
Don't let the evil destroy you.  
Walk in the light.  
Build a wall of light to block out the evil.

Gregory Taylor  
(*Grade 6, Marcus Garvey Academy*)



## **The Truth about Donald Trump**

Stop acting  
like a bully. The truth  
will set you  
free.

Hey Donald, you smell  
like the bottom  
of an old lady's  
feet. Why do you

have to be so  
mean? I'm asking you  
a question,  
Sir.

Terrance Hayes  
*(Grade 7, Marcus Garvey Academy)*

## **Advice for President Trump**

Be respectful. Don't grab  
the stars out of the sky.  
Always be kind. Watch out  
for the clowns. Listen  
to what others have to say.  
Never use icing as shampoo.

Arion Ballinger  
*(Grade 7, Marcus Garvey Academy)*



## The Moon

I think the moon is  
a clock with its numbers stolen  
to be written down on a golden  
piece of paper.

Or the boundary of the universe  
revolving around us.

Or maybe a light bulb  
that has had its light  
sucked out of it by  
an eager night light nurturing  
a scared child.

Lucie Putnam  
(*Grade 3, The Boggs School*)

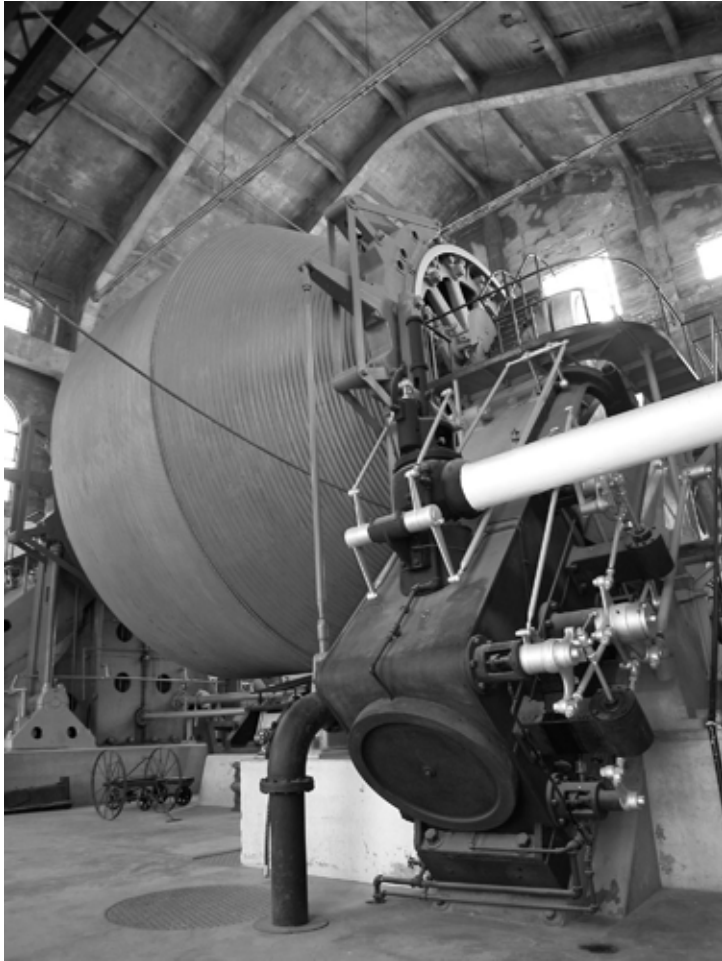
## Joy

Joy like birds singing in the morning  
Joy like lions running free.  
Joy like monkeys swinging from a tree.

Joy is like seeing the stars.  
Joy is like the moon moving like  
a little boy's shadow.

James Cade  
(*Grade 6, Marcus Garvey Academy*)





**Old Reliable**  
T. Kilgore Splake  
*Photograph*



3<sup>rd</sup>   
Wednesday



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