



ginosko

#4

ginosko (ghin-ocē-koe)

To perceive,
understand, recognize,
come to know;
the knowledge
that has an inception,
a progress,
an attainment.
The recognition of truth
by experience.

...there are also the words strewn throughout creation, stammered and whispered; the words of nature, in macrocosm and microcosm; the words uttered by flowers and the animals; words of overpowering beauty and of debilitating terror; the words of human existence, in their confusing, myriad forms, laden with both promise and disappointment...

—Hans Urs von Balthasar

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IN THIS LIGHT

Bob Marcacci

in this light
blue with doves and lavender
zephyrs
lift us toward sun
we rise on golden beams
sing and hang on clouds
sunset's dark birds
grow smaller
in thin air
our words to each other are lost
in mute atmosphere
we make no sound
touch the roof of this world
go through a glass softly
darkly gulp huge swallows
of this we breathe
at the speed of sound and light
a glint of green turns violet
on a gilded prism
this blue-black field dotted
with universes and nebulas

Dapple
Jennifer Pruden Colligan

The roaring inside her
Is water falling from
my mouth
whispered in hers to a
leaf resting on fire
dappled
a blending of lips
let out into the night

a fist of light

Jayne Lyn Stahl

for Michael McClure

Astonished as
glass shattered by
the roadside
I watch sleep
escape from you
raw as a lover
fresh from
bed. you remember
the
passing of
another
like a walk in
a dangerous
park
or fire in
a foreign
tongue
a substance you
have yet to
receive
your beauty
the makeshift
mattress from which
you descend
a room that is
nearly dark until you
enter
holding a fist of
light.

Residual Light

Sara Toruno

When she is confronted with love, Alex says
We are little pieces of thought like the mole
she gave him

yesterday, a black dot on the end of her finger,
so easily concise

from my tip to your cheek. He was, and she too,
almost imbued with the ink

but like love, skin is made of holes, and really
the ink goes nowhere. This is what she tells him

after trying to reconcile the coupling of two
unexplained bodies:

I can see you like the aftermath of light.

I see you as a thought.

Alex thinks, she wants to love, she really does.

Sweet Virginia

Jefferson Navicky

As the joy left his body, it was night. His room was dark, light crying into his bedroom window from the one droning spotlight on the side of a building. The sun rose somewhere in his chest, its rays stretching in an attempt to reach the furthest ends of his appendages. He cried out in what he thought would've been pain, but sound turned to instant joy as the vibrations left his mouth. Laughter cannot help but blend into the fabric of lightness. I have lost my soul, he thought, and with this losing, his spine arched, vertebrae bending like links in a chain. He thought of the cicadas that sang to him in the country night around Virginia, such ambient reverberation rolling in wisps and waves around his head, the voices of violins catching and sounding as bows against strings. Black, rotting leaves in the lake as he swam in the dark water. The leaves ghosted at the corner of his vision as snakes encircling him, drawing the net tighter and closer to his naked body. The essence of pain floated out over the lake as mist. Mute and vulnerable, he shivered in the water. He wanted to run, a pure escape urge, from all that inspired fear, from everything that pulled at his chest. He felt like a small, walnut-sized toad that had accidentally crawled into a snake's tunnel in search of warmth and shelter. But now at the dirt wall of the end of the tunnel, amidst the crumbling specks of earth, he waited for the return of the sweet black ribbon that would devour him. Yes, he could escape; he could leave the tunnel and continue his search, but why? He was so warm and happy where he was. The moist tunnel air surrounded and held him like breath from a contiguous lover. He followed the sensation of being swallowed by the snake, his still sentient body rhythmically moving back and forth and down the stretched-skin gullet as if returning to something that had birthed him and was now enfolding him again.

Murmur

Kate LaDew

The boy's skin was very pale. Arms turned down, thin strips of black wrapped around, mapping where the skin didn't meet. He was very handsome, and Murmur was glad. It was so much more romantic when beautiful people died. The lips looked white, burned and raw. Her father said the boy vomited continuously from the bleach. Murmur wondered if it turned his blood white, spread, making all but the marks on his arms like snow.

"A waste of life," her father said. "Maybe he had talent too, Murmur."

Murmur was sure he did. It was always the saddest people who had talent.

Her father was a coroner and sad most of the time, thought everybody died young. He named her Murmur when his wife was asleep from the drugs. Sometimes, she still was. Murmur's father believed it a very beautiful name, read a long time before it was the most fragile word in the English language.

Murmur felt she ought to be something because of her name. She wanted to do it quick too, before she got old and couldn't die young anymore. Dying wasn't so bad, she thought. Dying young was the most noble thing you could do. Gave people motivation. They wanted to do everything you didn't have time to.

Her father wasn't supposed to let people view someone they didn't know, but it was a dark night and no one alive was around.

"See," her father said. "See."

Murmur did see, and was sad. The boy's eyes were open. Faded. The silver of the gurney stabbing lights in the pupils. She wondered if anything had been lost. What had been meant. The white made her skin feel tight, her father's hand on the shoulder a weight too close. The boy would give her dreams. Dreams she'd spend whole nights waking up from.

Falling into a dream was always an unpleasant sensation for Murmur. She'd often feared the real world would never return, leaving her floating somewhere with no up and down, no right and wrong, only hazy memories amounting to nothing. It was only when she woke up that the dream seemed preferable, easy and safe. It took her a few hours to resign herself again, to forget what relief she'd given up by opening her eyes.

"I wanted you to see the difference," her father said suddenly. The dark made everything sudden. "The difference between you."

Murmur's palm stretched over her heart like struts. Arms tingled cold, thin blue veins crossing and uncrossing, tendons sharp and white.

* * *

When she closed her eyes that night the boy was everywhere, sheets curled around her like thin strips of black.

“Murmur,” her father called. “Murmur, wake up.” The dark of his body deepened under the door, steps weighing the floor down. “You’re okay, Murmur. Wake up.”

It was all so familiar now. Her eyes had given up long ago, only touch and temperature within her grasp. She wondered suddenly, in the dark, why the boy bothered drinking bleach. Why he let himself die twice, a redundancy of pain. It didn’t take much for people to die. It never took much at all.

Her head nodded involuntarily at her father’s entering, a sliver of light running across the bed, clutching the shadows of her shape. The mattress fell into its worn spaces, grooves of cotton like climbing holds.

It was all about waiting. Finding a focus that blurred the edges of her vision. The boy. A fresh snow fall sinking deep within him. Silver stretches of cold underneath the slashes of black. Eyes frozen, mirrors, lights flashing pale on the surface. It was all about waiting.

Murmur struggled, tangled in sheets like hands, feeling the rhythm of her heart under the skin. He was heavy and suffocating, moisture sliding down the veins of her arms. Hair jagged against her face, slicing smears of sweat across her forehead. The room inhaled and exhaled her father’s heaving, a confederate, shutting out sounds, protecting the rest of the house. It wasn’t over until his hand released her mouth, clammy and shaking. With her skin stretched tight, Murmur waited for the seams to break, maps forming in red and white, a legend tearing in her eyes. She was a Kirlian phantom, split in two.

Murmur watched the door close, the weight retreat, her body littered with fingerprints, depressions molded into her form. It was decided. She would give people dreams. Someday soon, a slab of white on a silver sheet, a map to see the difference, It didn’t take much to die. It was all about waiting. Someday soon, a snow spreading through her, her father watching, the only one alive around. Murmur would give him dreams he couldn’t wake up from.

The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic; and weal or woe, feels then Un-compromised, indifferent as his God.

—Moby Dick

EKG
Steve Ablon

I glance at the monitor
in panic: flat like a fishing line
when a tarpon breaks off.
I crouch on top of Mrs. P,
cross my hands, Red Cross,
Jesus on the cross. Oh Jesus
I've killed her. One, Two.
Three, I press her chest,
make it bend. Four. Five.
Make air snap from her lungs —
I breathe her mouth.
One. Two. Three. Four. Five.
Her eyes bulge. Swing
a lantern in the wind,
return the apple
to the bough, shaken.

Quadruple Amputee

Steve Ablon

Every morning Mrs. S
waits for me to draw
her ruined blood.
I fail, plant pain
and hematomas,
her body square
as a potholder denuded
bone by bone. She lifts
her crew cut head
for me to kiss.
smiles, her skin
flushed with fever,
the fire of forgiveness
in her eyes.
I rearrange the daisies
in her vase,
fanning them
like pick-up sticks
before they fall.

anesthesia

Steve Ablon

It is not the light,
 but loneliness
 that attaches a moth tremulous
 to the operating room door,
 to the stairwell's
fresh white paint.

Sometimes my patient becomes a moth
 under white sheet skies,
 smells the gritty iron,
the river cut of the scalpel,
the landslide of the hemostat
a fragile sojourn
easily crushable to powder.

I could swat one with the newspaper,
 pick it up by the wings,
 drop it in the basket.
I could smother it with mothballs
in an instrument drawer.

I will catch it in a paper cup,
 (slide a file card under,)
 shake it out the window
the taste of blood in its mouth.

ANATOMY
elena Minor

This is the body.
It tracks its own footprints.
One foot reverses direction and only one is ever bare.
The trail confuses even the seasoned hand.
What fingers it has diddle with each other.
Five fingers intertwine a thumb.
The index is useless.
Four digits curl next to each other.
They turn out so as not to scratch the hip.
A large lump defines that hip.
The other has no identity.
It hides from the upper torso.
At midpoint two breasts spin out of synchronization.
One has lost a lot of weight.
One has offered itself up.
The right shoulder is bare.
Bone is muscle on the left.
The neck begins and ends abruptly.
It blames the heavy head.
The head drops down and spots the abdomen.
It completely obscures the slight thigh.
The plump thigh thrusts itself out prominently.
It won't allow the neck to crane far enough.
The head is in no position to view the bidirectional feet.
The eyes see astigmatically and clearly only so far.
What remains is bare bubbled imagination
slathered over feral desire.

The Man in the Window

Martin Steele

The bicycle wheels keep turning and the reflecting silver spokes cast reflections on the huge, sultry store window with the painted chocolate canvas background. Shuji-san's body bends warily as he rests the handlebars carefully against the galvanic glass and for luck tweaks the bell. He peers into the semi darkness.

Through the brown stained window a man with hands on hips looks down on him as he tests the pressure in his tires.

The figure winks and his eyes follow Shuji's moves, then the dark head lowers like a fresh horse taking old hay. Next to him two motionless ladies draped in silks and panama hats stare in puzzlement.

Shuji enters the closed shop door by whispering the manager's secret codes into the rusty lock, "Can I speak to you?" he says to the dresser, who answers, "No one allowed in here — we're closed and besides about to window-dress and change scenery".

"Then may I speak to the man in the window?"

He laughs. "Speak to him? To him? He is only our old mannequin."

"But he has beautiful clothes and ovoidal, beseeching black eyes and rapid blinks and — I implore you," he shouts out in this macro Ginza store, where passersby are already hauling tempura foods.

"Can he then perhaps only join me to go riding?"

The purple dresser's face falsely fades to red.

In a high priest's piercing voice he hollers,

"Come back tomorrow when we're recycling."

Breath

Phebe Davidson

When the boy walked out of the river
wet and shining, he opened his mouth to speak.

The only sound was the soft, simultaneous
inhalation of the watchers, and the wind rolling in

from the west. The sound was full and round
like the rush of air down a long stretch of highway,

he open-mouthed and speechless, the rest of us
caught in the wind we had summoned with our breath,

everyone borne upon that, as if words had no more
meaning, and the air would carry us all away.

...there are also the words strewn throughout creation, stammered and whispered; the words of nature, in macrocosm and microcosm; the words uttered by flowers and the animals; words of overpowering beauty and of debilitating terror; the words of human existence, in their confusing, myriad forms, laden with both promise and disappointment...

—Hans Urs von Balthasar

Some things return in spring
The brave spears of the garlic
rustle in the damp hair of the wind
off the marsh brushing them:
a sound you will never again hear.

The maple is waving little russet
hands. Long brown scaled buds
line the beech twigs. Spring
explodes into hundreds of daffodils

on the hillside that was yours.
Tulips strut their brilliance bowing
to the sun where you will no
longer pass. My tears are brief

years after you died. Still
my thoughts are bouquets like
the red tulips I can never lay
on your invisible grave.

Marge Piercy

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Recollection

Craig Saunders

A thousand uncut diamonds glint dully on the dashboard. Through the window a scarred tree, and a snarling bonnet is all the man can see. Rain has washed the bonnet clear of debris. It comes in waves, like the pain. Lancing through the shattered windshield, wetting his trousers, mingling with his soil forced clear by shock, fear, the impact and the blood flowing around the shard of bone protruding from his trousers.

Pain comes sharp and clear, from his skull and from his ribs, one from the collision with the steering wheel, one from meeting the windshield head on. He takes stock of his injuries without rancor, like a man waiting to die once he has been diagnosed with cancer, acceptance instant and unavoidable. He coughs something warm which trickles down his chin. He would have wiped it, but he could not move his arms. If he could, his first action would have been to wipe the gems from his lap. But they were sharp, and he might cut his hand.

Briefly, lucidity hits him. Headlights were cutting around the shadow of the tree. He moved into darkness. A car, slowing for the bend. His hearing was muffled, and sound was obscured by the rain, but the engine of the car grew quieter, until he imagined it passing by.

It did not pass by. The man drifted for a moment, then saw a face, lurid in the rain and the rear lights of a car. The man's face seemed blood drenched but for the flashing orange which threw his face into occasional relief. The driver's hazard lights, the man in the car understood. Blinking. A warning to other drivers. Too late.

He was mouthing something, but the injured man could not hear. Could not move. Pain hit and with it, blackness, and calmness followed the wave like foam.

*

He stands like a shadow. A dance unfolds before his eyes. He is watching himself A younger version, sitting in a school hall. A hard plastic chair, at the outskirts of some minor engagements, like a cowardly captain observing the battle from afar, too aloof to fight himself, but feeling the bloody excitement pounding in his veins, expectation and hope flooding him, while unrelenting fear keeps him apart. He convinces himself he must not be seen to fall to the brutality of war, but must remain detached, like the gentleman he hopes to be. But his friends, his lieutenants, all imagine they are above the petty skirmishes on the dance floor. Only the Captain can sound the horn, calling them to battle.

The Captain waits.

But there are lights, hues of brilliance, shades as counterpoints, hiding and

illuminating a crush of teenagers clutched in first embraces, girls on heels reaching up to snatch that first kiss with unremembered loves, but he remembers this moment. It is his first kiss. He waits, watching his younger self almost quivering with anticipation but covering it with coolness, dousing his ardor, watching for the moment when she had come into his life. A man in the making, his first time with a girl, the firm intrusion of breasts pressing against his chest, and then, the softness of her lips.

He saw her walking toward a surlier, unformed him. A white shirt, black trousers with a slight flare, earrings that were silver in yellow light, but gold in the red. Walking through the press of youths in their first embrace (he could even hear the song in the background, as though through a wall, or cotton wool) untouched, headed straight for him. A nudge from a forgotten friend, a glance and a nervous smile followed by the offer of a dance.

Acceptance followed, and his first kiss. He remembered her name. He would always remember it.

And slowly, spinning like celestial bodies in the pull of gravity, holding tight to keep from falling into space, a dance, a cheek touching, cool breath on warm skin, and as darkness falls, Dana's lips on his, soft, seeking and knowing. A rush of blood to his face, his flush hidden by the strobes of color that flood the floor. A realization of a thousand youthful fantasies, perfection in his arms, slowly twirling, then slowing, stopping, as her lips met his.

A flutter of the heart, a beat and the music flows like water over his head. He hears nothing but the rush of sounds and imagines they all must be like memory.

Vision fades, and with it comes the pain of recollection.

*

Lights still flash, and the man thinks for a moment he is still in the dance, but this time his lips feel cold. There is no warmth. He has no girl in his arms.

He wonders for a moment what happened to the girl, then realizes slowly that the cold is in his bones, and the only warmth comes from his injuries.

His vision swims for a moment within the pain, and returns with forceful clarity. The lights are not from a dance, but are globes of flashing blues, and winking orange, and glowing reds. They lend the only color to his range of sights, a tree, a mangled bonnet, and lashing rain.

The rain has worsened, he thinks, and, I am still alive.

He can no longer feel his legs, and cannot move. He is sitting back in the seat, head resting gently upon the head rest. He wants to turn his head, but does not have the energy, even if he has the will. It is all he can do to blink

The pain will come again, but for a time a brief respite is welcome. Unfeeling,

with his sight blurring, he waits for the ambulance men to come. To his surprise the first is a woman. She is speaking to him, and he manages to blink. She takes his pulse, and he believes he makes out the word 'weak' from the movement of her narrow lips. She does not look like an angel, but a harridan,, sent to torture him. Her fingers hold no warmth as they caress his neck, but elicit a small, bloody gurgle from his throat. He tries to speak, to tell her to leave him alone, but this is the only sound that emerges.

For some reason the man finds this sad, and a tear trickles down his face. One solitary tear, although if it is of fear or loneliness, sadness or pain, the man cannot tell. He cannot taste his tear to know which feeling it expresses, if it is bitter or sweet. It rolls alone down his face, until it reaches his chin. He does not know where it goes from there. His tear is lost, and he is in pain again.

It starts in the center of his head, and courses through his body, stopping off at his lip, which he has bitten through. Taking stock as the pain slices through him, he counts his injuries again. He finds it helps to pass the time. His lip is torn, the pain tells him, like a messenger. His arms are broken, although, he thinks, not as badly as his thigh, where he knows, but cannot see, there is a sneaky bone trying to escape the carnage of his body. The pain traverses up his frame, and finds his chest is crushed, concertinaed like the bonnet of the car, the ribs pushing painfully on his lungs, or perhaps piercing them if he is unlucky.

When the pain finally reaches the summit of his head, lights explode. This light is purely white, and flashes just once. It leaves an after image upon his retinas, and for a moment he can see nothing at all.

*

Staring at the sun, the man blinks and looks away. For a moment he can see nothing, just a dot at the center of his vision. He blinks and rubs his eyes, and the sights return, from the outside into the center at last. A blanket, a disposable barbeque, people all around and as the vision of the sun finally fades he sees what he has been looking for all along.

Dana, sitting cross legged on the blanket. She wears a bikini like a second skin, flesh exposed in just the right amounts, but not a thong. Nobody on this coast wears a thong. It is too risqué, more out of place than topless sunbathing. But Dana never sunbathes, she just reads. She is reading a novel now, as the man watches her while she is unaware of his attention. It is a woman's novel, full of love and spliced relationships, which is the only way the man can understand it. He reads science fiction to the exclusion of all else, and cannot fathom any other stories. All the relationships in such novels seem to be incestuous, or scandalous. But still he inquires

as to how the protagonists of her novel are faring. He wants to seem interested, as she is in his novels. Even though to her his novels are flighty, and full of fluff. Neither understands the others novels, but the man just finds this one more reason to love each other. They are like jigsaw pieces. For all their bumps and crevasses, their mounds and valleys, they fit perfectly to make a whole, a completed picture, or a field flat and perfect like the English countryside, a quilt of complementary colors.

He looks at her in the sunlight, and she suddenly obscured by smoke.

The sausages on the barbeque are on fire. He twists his gaze away and rushes to take them off He burns his fingers, and is reminded of the pain.

*

A tingling in his fingers reminds him of where he is, and how he got there. He can feel his right arm, crushed between the door and the steering wheel. He wishes he could not feel it. Pins and needles make him cry out in pain, it is worse than the other pain, that which comes in waves. It is unrelenting, ferocious.

A muttering comes from a man to his right. He tries to turn his head to look, but that sets of blinding lights in his head and a terrible grinding in his neck. He rolls his eyes instead. That, he can do.

There is a man beside him, outside the window. This window, too, is shattered. Crazy towers of glass still stand tall in the window frame, the door, and water runs down them like a waterfall. As he watches, two pieces break away as the weight of water defeats their resolve, and tumble onto his right arm. He believes they should make a sound, a plink would be fitting for glass, but this is more of a tush, as they brush the soft fabric of the jacket he is wearing.

Dragging his gaze back he sees that the man to his right is mouthing something to him. There is no sound but the rushing of the rain. He wants to tell the man that he is alright. He feels that he should be telling him something else, but he cannot remember what it is that he should be saying. There is something at the back of his mind, where the pain does not explode, but it is shrouded in a dim fog, tendrils of mist clutching as tightly as they can, unwilling to let it come into the light. Instead of these words that cannot break free, the man groans, and feels the (fireman, he realizes) touch him lightly on the shoulder.

A vast machine is brought forth from the murk of the rain, and rests heavily against the frame of the door. Perhaps this is some new kind of torture. It has a gapping maw, and looks like a beast from some fantasy film, realised in metal and shining plastic. Maybe it is a time machine, that makes him recall his life with bolts of time flooding his brain while he sits unmoving and racked with pain.

Sparks fly, and he blinks.

*

A sparkler in his hand, curving on the air in elliptical circles, then making the name Dana in the darkness.

Dana laughs in delight as her own sparkler dies without a sputter, like the sun when a cloud passes between it and the eye.

The man's hand still waves it, but he sees that Dana wants closeness now, to feel his arms around her. He puts the sparkler to one side, dousing it in earth, and takes her in his arms. She is warm, the evening is cold. It is November. Fireworks bang in the sky above, showering them with sparkles of multicolored lights. There is no sound in this dream, but feelings abound. He feels an overwhelming sense that he wants to protect this woman, and for her to be proud of him. No matter the chill of the night, with her in his arms, her tight beautiful body to clutch close lest she flit away, he will be warm. If he can make her proud, she will never leave.

He strives to make her proud this night. Her friends surround her, and he wants them to know that he loves her with all his heart. Stolen glances, fleeting kisses, all add up to love. He knows that her friends are warming to him. She smiles as she breaks away from the embrace, and sound returns, a massive explosion from overhead. He looks away from her for a moment, into the suddenly bright sky, and sees a firework falling from the sky, turned into ethereal light and dying next to the moon's china glow.

In that instant, he misses the sight of her. He draws his gaze away from the sky, and looks back down.

*

Sound returns clearly and there is the wrenching sound of tearing metal. He remembers what he must say, and through bloody lips mumbles to the man whose head is beside him, doing something to his ruined body.

Is this his life, flashing before his eyes?

They were so close. So much love in his life, and he held onto it as they cut away the leg of his soaked trousers, and gentle hands lifted him from the car. There was some kind of brace, holding his swaying head rigid.

For some reason he found an overwhelming urge to look to the left.

Lift her out first. Why hadn't they lifted her out first?

No more flashes came. The rain pounded on his face, and his breath laboured to reach his lungs. Pain was intense as it ran sprints up and down his body.

Words would not come. Everyone looked at him with kindness in their eyes.

Finally, before the memory could take him again, before he was swallowed with recollection, he fought the darkness, and formed the words on his torn lips.

“Bring my wife out,” he said. “She’s in the car. Bring her out first.”

A sad smile, no doubt meant for comfort, was his only answer. Soft consolations washed away in the rain.

Then he fell to memory, and all he knew was pain.

*

Revelation, in a sense, is an invitation into the mystery of God, given that we may know not with merely intellectual enlightenment, but with that response of our whole being which represents profound personal affirmation. It is a glimpse into the activity of God, ever at work in the universe, ever seeking the happiness and deep peace for men and women which from the beginning he had envisaged, and yet, in respect for the awesome mystery of man’s freedom, ever waiting for us to accept the call and freely to say yes to the gift.

—Peter Van Breemen

Sanctuary

Leonore Wilson

The school bus shimmies to the curb and the children board. I crush the cigarette under my heel, look at the mountains blue and dreamlike, stick my hand into the open mailbox. There a personal letter, a rare specimen walk the long driveway home. Fidget and fuss over last night's dishes. Wash half of them, take my milk and aspirin, sit down at the table. Sweet ashy smell of the envelope. Inside, little streams of sentences. Praise for the manuscript I had sent nearly a year ago. I light another cigarette, take a drag. I am pleased but feel weak and beautiful like a teenager given five dollars to lift up her skirt. No, I haven't won anything. Placed third, but the judge says I deserved first. He wants to meet. Says I have promise.

I agree to see him. I feel buoyant, I write back, yes. Threshold of possibility. Days I wait for a response. The house fills with stalled air. Marooned mother calm but with an underfist. I think about the farthest future like light from some small uncharted star. A traveling toward somewhere essential, though I'm here for my boys, my hard-backed brood. I see myself as I am, thirty-one years old wanting to be valuable, irreplaceable though grease and grass blades stick to my feet.

Another letter and I burn with impatience. My heart pumps like heavy machinery. I scrub my boys, dress them for bed. The moon is untouched above us. I smile at my little family.

I meet the man in a bookstore. Every cell of my body burning with a dangerous beauty. An ordinary woman who could rise in flame. He tells me how he likes my stories, wants to read them again and again. He is merciful, benevolent, impossibly kind. I watch him steadily with my animal calm. He turns the pages of my manuscript reverently. Outside squat houses, a church with its bland white arch, shadowy nest of red madrones, slish of tires and footsteps. He asks me to walk with him to the sanctuary. Without judgment or surprise, I say why not. *A small price to pay for praise,* I say.

The sanctuary is glittering, clean and pure. Marshlands softening into sleep. Here he wants to read the truth of my words like a nursing child trying to get his mother's attention. He gives me a persimmon from his left sweater pocket. I am not frightened, but wrapped. The flesh of the fruit delicate in my fingers. Birds lift: egrets, herons, pelicans. Bright synapses of tulle grass. I notice the smallest veins on the back of his hands. I hear the warmth of my vowels, the joy of my consonants. I'm memorizing the shape of the moment, watch his full lips moving. A stranger singing to no one in particular. There is the temptation to step off the edge of the world, to fall weightless. I look at the cloud-covered shapes of the mountains. Geese ascend in their regular V.

He tells me in the sleek silence about his wife. His voice breaks once, twice. He is torn with tenderness. A woman riddled with cancer, afraid of touch. butchered like a lamb for a feast. *You can't describe the sudden shiver that comes over you when you know the one you love is dying, that soon your loved one will vanish, that you will not see her again, ever. Or be able to think of her. And then not to know the escalation of desire. Not know the sensation of flesh. Not again, ever, if only I were a rock on a hill, not to be sad or suffer.*

Oh, but he tells me, you write about the body beautifully; few of us can and not be embarrassed. Few of us can, without fear or shame.

Sorrow wells up in my throat. I put my cheek against his. For a moment it glows. *When our loved one leaves us, an endless migration begins, a certain sense takes hold of us, that all of what is finest in and around us, except for the sadness is going away, departing, not to return,* he says. Then suddenly the weight of grief is too much. His eyes are a garden of tears. *We shall not speak of this, he says. We shall go silently about our business. You have given me refuge,* he says.

And so as quickly as we came, we depart. All traces of him have been erased, the impression of our meeting swept away—all the remains effaced.

More sacred time now among the children. Though our moments scatter like broken glass. Mine is the pilot to what is fragile. Pull a thumb, open a fist. Trust me, my happiness bears no relation to happiness. The almond trees grow graceful and gentle. At dusk, another day's ardor is crushed. The flowers droop and withdraw. And in the heavens, all the bright birds disappear.

The Pilot

Leonore Wilson

It's half past seven in autumn and I'm waiting. I'm left with the sand of the day, the azure of twilight. The rain washed out his footprints. The wind wracked the hammock where he slept. The war erupt like a volcano of blood, like a deluge—blazing.

We met in a nightclub near Carmel. I watched the men at the bar. They had carved out eyes, gas burner hands, voices dirty and wet as unswept balconies. I wanted them with my fierce Lenten guilt, the heat of my longings. I blew bubbles like a schoolgirl, turned my leather, twisted my cross. I held the wine in my mouth like the coveted host.

He was stationed at Vandenberg, this man with midnight green eyes, comparable to nothing, nothing I'd seen. He brought me a rose. He was sick of the Air Force and his hometown in Kansas. He undressed the rose at the bar as if he were parting me under my skirt. "How do you hunger?" he said. "When time's running out?"

I thought of words like topaz and emeralds breaking open my mouth. "What difference does it make?" I said. "What difference does it make?" "Talk to me dangerously," I said, my words getting fainter. "I belong to no one."

He took me out to the beach, to the feathery air, to the open black void. I could see people in the lights of hotel windows like glints in a pearl. Sensual love and mutual sorcery.

"Where did the others take you?" he asked. "Tell me," he said. I smelled the tang of the sun and salt on his skin, heard the bound despair of a plane overhead. "How can you move in your clothes?" he said, removing them bit by bit, unwrapping me like the future, a fire of thin flame. The feathers fell perfectly.

"When a friend of yours dies, he keeps dying in you. Here we take root," he told me, facing my flesh.

Inside I trembled, wept, spread like a flag before him.

"You're my homeland, my creation," he said. "Creation is a stain, a change in purity."

I never asked his name.

"I'll tell you exactly who I am," he said. I studied the wild geography of his spine, the down of his ass. A white flash sliced the sky. The great roistering waves mounted us

like tattered wings. "I am what is, what was, what will come to be." "Free me from guilt," he said. "From remembering."

As he spoke and turned around, as he touched me, cruised into me, the Pacific covered our bruises under its marvelous silks.

“How long does a man spend dying?” he asked. I fed the whole world when I comforted him, stroked him like the portrait of myself.

On the strand was his shroud of medals, his professional blue fatigues. “I want to discover my feelings,” he said. “At last my own feelings. Of what I know and knew, of what I have lost along the way. Being in love is my nature. It’s you I want to keep on seeing.”

“How can brothers kill each other?” I asked. “For a fistful of dust, is that all?”

“The shape of life is the shape of impoverishment. Let’s hold each other to the shadows,” he said “Let’s wrap each other around our necks. Love is not an emotion, it is what conquers,” he said.

On breaks from the base he came. Letters were never needed. We made love on the veranda, in the hammock and in the meadow. Among sticks and rocks. Among green bushes in sunlight. In the winds of the universe. Wheat, cherry trees, apples, and smoke surrounded us. “Always goodbye,” I said. “Desire is our definition,” he said. “There is no cause, there is no effect.”

I prayed to Mary, to the god of dead statues. To skinny trees, to the forbidding mountains. My blood was delirious and wanting. My song going nowhere. All because I fell into love, fell into life. I tried to claim my independence. I tried to linger in others’ eyes. The tesserae of the world, the excess of worldliness. Beauty’s intransigence.

He’s restless in my memory. I hold onto shadows and light, among so many things lost. I call him and he doesn’t come: my meaning, my miasma, my reasonable dead.

I would trail back to him if I could. Walking or fallen. My drug of withdrawal. “Goodbye because I am arriving,” he said.

“But what does that mean?”

“Equality is disorder,” he said.

“But what does that mean?”

“We broke every rule,” he said, then disappeared.

I don’t remember his name.

Afternoon Meeting

LB Sedlacek

She holds the soda crackers in her hands a fist so tight it would cause diamonds to bleed and pierce the skin. She wipes the crumbs from her skirt careful not to smudge lipstick, break a nail. I hear the crunching but it is faint. The diamonds ground to dust. She averts her eyes to the floor, the window, the ceiling ... a hunter foraging the forest She licks the salt from the cracker and it crumbles in her hand. The diamonds glitter from her fingers. She slips them off one by one.

House Concert with Viola

Rosemeny Wahtola Trommer

Last night a mournful air,
slow and limned with grief,
carried the sun somewhere out of sight.

The aspen leaves shivered till night hid them in her skirt.
I trembled, too, every part of me aching
to become the music, something that belongs to no one.

If you had been there in that room,
would you have met me at the window
to watch the world surrender to ten thousand grays?

I'd like to meet you in that ephemeral place,
on the edge of sorrow and resonance
where we are more breath than limb.

Won't you meet me in that wordless space,
where the only thing that matters is the darkening sky
and the surprising twin seas of our eyes?

The Hand Before Their Face

Eric Bonholtzer

Outstretched a hand begs
As the uniform crowd shuffles by
With cracks weathered by age
they peer from behind glassy eyes
and still they walk by
A cup, half-empty
a beggar no one notices
pretends not to notice
The cigarette butts and empty cups
littering a concrete wasteland
of humans wasting away
They fall in suit and alike stride by
their busy schedules all that suits them
never even seeing the hand before their face.

Still Life

Eric Bonholtzer

Its beauty is in its austerity
A room cool and vacant
One part indistinguishable
From the next

Flat ground marks a path
Around a circle meditation
Calm sought for
a room of tight and beauty

Out a window that ocean
Of tranquil waves like thoughts
As I too watch
From that window, looking in

I can see myself
Through a frame of the mind
in this room as
my thoughts become clear

A Dark Path Against a Barren Plain

Eric Bonholtzer

The mountain stands like a man against the horizon of dark stars.
Dead space fills the barrens before it, the path wending
across the fruitless expanse, twisted switchbacks leading
upon senseless folding, an ever forward ageless progression.

There are no pilgrimages here, only pilgrims set against the storm torn sky
as they wend their way toward inexorable destination. Twisted thorn trees
clutter and clutch, tearing spirit, soul, body and garment alike.

Timeless lashes upon the backs of burdened beasts with their worldly
possessions Tightly gripped like crosses held to their chests, as the only choice
drives them forward. The watching moon has long since gone and come.

“When will we be there father?” It was an innocent question from impressionable
eyes
watching a man who could Only bend, a tear trickled through stubble.
A shake of the head and the boy fell silent. No one really knew.

But these were masses, the huddled tired streams of rags and tatters
torn, unmended threads tying them, not in unity but parts of a whole
Eyelets and minarets with their voyeuristic hypnotic gaze
Mesmerizing, entrancing and inviting even as they repelled.

“Will it be home again when we get there?”
The words fell upon unlistened air
No answer because he himself didn't know
Dejected eyes shaded, saying only, “Onward we go.”

Echoing Still

Eric Bonholtzer

Whitewashed fences mark the division
A shallow line of demarcation
Marring a bitter plain
Truth that too can be seen as a balance

With wispy knees whispering prayers
Of bent supplication
Looking for a smile seen in clouds
Of judgment and blurred hazes

The drum beats of life and echoes still,
In cracked addicted alleys of fairness gone awry
With a broken wheel spinning on a loom of time,
Native pains and naive indiscretions inexcusable.

Earth tells a compelling tale if you can dig your hand in the dirt
seek through the mire for truth and tales long since buried
In the sands of time, which whisk away history, books burned with lies
Imprinted on impressionable minds like miscreant clones sprung from fanatical factories
Indoctrinated with false education and breeding still more hate
Echoing, listening to the heartstrings playing a concerto of truth
An aria of sad realism, a bleating of a drum that has long since been sought to be silenced
By an oppressive progressive hand.

Incarnation

Bobbi Dykema Katsanis

It is not just an exquisite fruitful longing
nor only a body, framed in a crimson mandorla
capitulating toward heaven.
Many a diurnal beast's
gone slouching toward a place configured holy,
face smeared with starlight.
It is not even the agony of the wicked;
but the place where the little chickens
gather meal from among the gritty dust.
We are. It is an off-tempo mood,
toes tapping irritably at the overextended wait.
A hill crowned with a childlike carpentry;
the idleness of hours; a pair of glassy, flyblown eyes.
Hope springing from the blackly bubbling swamp
in the shape of a new-hatched tadpole.
The sun feathering its wings,
o Icarus, amazing to see such heights,
so labyrinthine are the leagues of man.
The lightness in the step of the young woman
who goes out to her chores singing,
and the individual held note
in every choir, of the deepest *basso profundo*.
The resonance of oaken-timbered stalls
in shadowed, magisterial cathedrals.
It is the sunset overlooked with a lover
too intent on kissing,
the embrace of the patient ancestor at fireside,
a close-clipped camel's champing at the meager grass,
turning solidly down the road toward home.

Dream

Linda Benninghoff

If the dream persists, the one
Where you are standing
Uttering nothing and
I am trying to take your photo,
We might stand like that
For all eternity,
Me praising your corn-colored hair
The straightness of your spine
Your eyes quivering in the tight.

Where is God
But in a dream where
The light between us, always yellow,
Yields like sunlight
Never fading into oblivion,
Even after you open your mouth,
I am done with the photograph and
Speech begins.

More Than The Time We Needed

Linda Benninghoff

I startled the stones
And they made a crying sound

From where I stand
You are years away
At sea,
On a lime-colored beach
The waves imprint on.

In my dreams,
You write me,
But someone wakes me
Before I am finished
Reading your letter.
I balk at the sound
Of that other voice,
Chalky and indistinct,
Pulling me from sleep,
And shun the objects in the room,
Dresser, desk,
Comb and brush,
Mirror.

The stones are oozing
From the mountain river-bed,
Making a sound like a forest crying,
So different from us,
Where we once stood together,
With what seemed
More than the time we needed
Talking.

DREAMING SWIMMER
Srinjay Chakravarti

Her sleep sculpts the water, her hands
shape the blue-gold ripples of sunshine
floating through her eyes.

The soft sand of the river bed.
Pink stones and pebbles
stain the creamy smoothness
of the sandy bottom
under the tremulous current.

Dreaming.
Her eyes closed, her body
open to the soft sleepy caress
of naked water.

Trees crouch on the banks.
Their roots, their fingers
go inside the river,
and arouse its shimmering haze
deep within her blue thoughts.
She sighs, and shifts
as fingers whisper
within the water.
The roots touch and caress
and probe naked water.

The river swims.
She lies still; she is asleep.
River, dreaming river.

She bathes in handfuls
of green sunshine
and blue water.
Leaves bend down
like thoughts,
brush their lips on the surface.

Sunshine stains her sleep,
an ache colors her white body.

an ache colors her white body.
The river bathes itself
in the morning sun.

The swimming dreamer.
The water sculpts her sleep,
its hands shape her body
to its own dreams.

Roots break through
the banks
and the shallows
of her sleep.
The curious fingers
of the trees curl around the dreams
the river dreams.

Some soft as sand,
some are smooth pebbles,
some jagged rocks
shiny with grained quartz.

She is asleep.
Her body flows gently,
water-kissed and sun-dappled,
with the river.

Dreaming, she swims with the river
and the river dreams with her.

Swimming in Cold Water

Constance Christopher

Deep lake. Up north. Twilight. The temperature has dropped below fifty every night for a week. It is late September and no one is setting foot in the water. Except me, who wades knee deep feeling the bite, and then plunges under for the full exhilarating effect. I am swimming in very cold water. Seeking even icier currents. Alive and solitary, far out from shore, rebelling like a child again the dos and don'ts. I ate just twenty minutes ago. I've told no one where I was going. My suit hugs my torso and the strap tied around my neck drips down my back. I have always felt more safe in the water than on land. Even in the dark. As it is quickly becoming. Through the trees, lit windows begin to twinkle, like little Christmas lights, in the distant houses that dot the shore. Children's voices trill and echo. The tinkling of a wind chime arrives from every direction. I swim farther out, stopping to float. A large family of crows cawing fly overhead. Silence. The sky fits snugly, like a darkened dome, on the wide, oval lake. Yes, there are stars. But also trillions of microbes feasting on algae flowing through my loose brown hair. I do the doggie paddle. Currents sweep around my ankles as small fish nibble my feet. Below, down and down, six hundred feet or more, the thick mud pulls at the small aircraft that crashed and sank on this very spot, killing its pilot, three years ago. The body was never found. The moon rises, pulling too.

Water Over Stone

Doug Ramspeck

In her memory they are lying by the creek,
the sun swelling red, besieging them
between the poplars. She believed, then,
that love arrived like the fury of the lashing
twig—blood welling, clotting.

And that if she closed her eyes, heard water
over stone, and lay down between the summer
trees—she'd know. At night he drove
from town in his wife's car and parked
beside the woods. There was a breathless
clarity at twilight. Occasionally it almost
seemed that they were chased. Their mouths
cried out. And, above, the August leaves
closed thick as scabs above a wound.

Glacial Erratics

Summer Brenner

-- for Dede LaVene Rhodes

It was a long way and we
drove all the while dreaming
of those who walked we
could have spent weeks
walking remembering those
who used to and we stopped
the car from time to
time and walked along
the ponds so we could
touch the bark and feel
the shadows of clouds
cooling our backs in the hot sun
and hear birds hidden in the
emerald profusion laughing
for that is how birds
sound in the mountains
far from the cities small
wars and grinds....

Dede's ashes blew by this
pond this mountain these trees
she was once a Sierra girl
so strong and blond
with muscles like scimitars
and dandelion hair
she withered in spite of
all her will and mine....

And we continued by car
through the pass entering
a bright dry leafless world
where birds fly long
distances from the sea
to rest on the large flat
lake a moon as a child

might draw growing
irregular tubular granular
castles as a child might draw
and clusters of sagebrush
prickly and airy with a
piercing desert smell
we wandered up and down
the shore like shades
searching for a pirogue
then we pushed off again
in the Honda....

The river is rushing
the meadows are wet
there's a sign posted
a man has gone missing
his picture says
he is old
he has survived the wars
he has survived and
traveled to the great
glacial family some
small and loose and
erratic like humans
others mighty and obdurate
testimony to timelessness
time beyond lifetimes
where is the man and
the dandelion seeds of my beloved
her pewter ashes sifted and
spread adjoining blades
rocks and ferns....
the man's family fears suicide
there must have been a note
left as he packed his tent
and drove over the concrete
network from the city that
could no longer contain him
he zoomed eastward in the wagon

now abandoned by the rangers'
station so intent to let his
spirit grow larger and
mingle with grass
and scat he's lost
the sign says and
there's a number to call....
Here numbers are unimpressive
too small too abstract
although we regard them
with wonder measuring slow
cataclysm slow catastrophe
man is swifter a mere
lifetime murders millions
with no more sense or
reason than a sheet of
ice sliding across a plain.

MESSAGE FROM THE SEA

Christine Lê

Based on a true story

For two days now I have been followed. Something has been touching my nose. In the quiet moments it has come to awaken me with the smell of rain, and a flood of almost reaching the perfect summer's day. Now here it is again, brushing past me to remind me who I am.

The smell says I have forgotten my soul, and I look at the clouds dark over the land. Gray. Black. Thick. At the horizon where the sky meets the ocean there is an opening, a rip in the clouds, and the orange light of the sun shines through. I stand, feet in wet sand, waves gently flowing over my toes.

Charlotte appears from out of the sea, her seven year old body is small, her long hair wet now, clinging to her face and shoulders. Even in the swimsuit, sleeved top, and wet suite, she seems cold. She crosses her arms over herself, small fingers shaking. "Did you see me come out earlier?" she says. "I came out, so now I can have longer. Right. I can stay long?" She curls a shriveled pinky finger towards me. "Pinky promise."

I link little fingers. "Sure," I say. "Pinky promise."

When the sky is covered, the wind blows cooler and I am free. My breath rises from my belly and soars into the sky. Spirit zigg zagging left and right across the beach, down to the ocean, out to the horizon, to the sun that has dropped further down so that any remaining blue has become orange, and thick rays of white light pierce the sky in an arch. I turn towards the mountains, to the dark clouds lingering, and rain already in the peaks.

"God's light," Charlotte calls from the ocean. Her body wobbles as the waves come up to

her chin, and her arm points out of the water up to the sky.

"God's light," I say, and I wish I had her faith. And the rain begins to fall.

Madwoman

Larissa Shmailo

here I am again walking among these vague and tepid people they evoke a slight feeling of distaste in me they smell my pain they have no idea I just hold my phone the cellular phone I use for a disguise and I talk, talk to the ultimate answering service I walk and I talk to God

when you died I ripped the electrodes out of my skull and ran away from the land of cables and TV sets great battles of television were fought here great battles were lost Soho is no different from uptown or downtown its all money and talking and bars sex and cars job job job so I went to see the trees

the trees were beautiful the leaves forming patterns of light on the ground and as the light played on my hair and my cheeks I realized that no one ever dies they just become trees even Marilyn Monroe was alive in a leaf I saw for an instant your face all aquiver in the shaking of a fern in the light of the wind and I kissed the trees so I knew you were not dead not really you would not be so cruel as to die really die

Under the West Side Highway I met all the men who lived there and one girl she was 22 and pregnant and had AIDS I didn't stay long but I stayed long enough under the West Side Highway I slept with Jesus in a cap talked madman Spanish with Tito and the dirty apostles knew there would always be enough loaves and fishes for me knew that no matter how hard got I would always be safe and held near close to God it was my destiny to be greatly loved

I chose then to be close to God to throw away my clothing and be close to God there were times when not even a shirt came between me and God

under the West Side Highway I spoke to Jesus his face always changing now Alex who lived in a tent near the wall now Panama drinking wine now Juan in his tin and cardboard hut

you followed me watched me you were worried how would I get home and back to the life I had known and I said look who's talking you died after all it's hardly for you to criticize me if I go off the beaten path a little too

and as for the others they worried too unknown to them the protection that I had and had always had I said to them all don't worry I will love you pray you home look can't you see I am your guardian angel and you thought I was just homeless

and mad as though God hadn't made the whole world just for me

well now I am cured I go to the bank I take pills I sit in restaurants have a job I worry about money and whether my new boyfriend has AIDS we don't even have sex he's too busy with his job it's just as well none of these men have anything that would compel you or keep you through the night its just banging bones after all

you see very few men have souls and very few men have courage the few who have the courage to follow their souls are mostly all dead lost in leaves people kill them you know I don't know any more I take pills and talk into the cellular phone sometimes I think I hear your voice sometimes I think I hear you and then no its just the pills I get a hum in my ear its not you

I know you are not dead but you're not here either and I miss you

I am cured so they say but you can't really ever take the gift of madness away once you have been stripped by God of everything clothing family freedom senses you are his for life and I was stripped oh yes dear lord of everything every last thing God took everything leaving only my soul but I found that was enough

and you you people think you have things but really the next breath you take is the only thing you have so how different are you from me

look at us again we the homeless and see us for who we are the archangels of God

you can not take the gift of madness away I will always know about trees will always see the arch of my lover's neck in the patterns of their light I will know that the patch of sky between the birch tree and the willow is him his azure face and I will always hear the voice of God wherever I go no pill can block him out no TV set can drown his voice no fool can block the face of God from me

look at me madwoman I am Magdalene I am Joan of Arc I am St. Marilyn Monroe and I will always be your angel baby I will always be your saint pray to me.

FEATHERED GLASS

Susan Terris

Glass panes on the door are feathered
By transparent birds

The door has no hinges

Rose madder keeps her in where she
Brushes her hair with a cedar bough

Feathered glass is her mirror

Distorted a floating nest cradles
And ice wings fold close

But a blink reels her outside

Once she's out wind strips the bough
And her body too

She knocks then knocks harder
Braided with wind the sun burns
Birds cry and strike glass

Desperate to be back in

She pounds the door but there's
No answer

The glass mirrors sun-flames

Birds are flying tangling her hair
She sees fire smells flesh

Until she strikes fevered panes

Until lost feathers buoy her back to
A rose madder glaze

COINCIDENCE

Cheryl Loetscher

Toward the end, infused
with regular drips of haldol
and morphine, her dreams
became fierce and extravagant,
dense as juniper hedges.

Roots, gnarled and billowing
rose up to enfold her,
sucked her into the earth,
graceful arms wreathed
in feather-shaped leaves.

She dreamed of olive groves
and cresting solitude,
of nature arranged for a reason,
of fires lighted from her bones.
Care for her, she would nurture you.

All the while on two continents
faithless men dropped
like manzanillo fruit, choking
on the pits of brined olives.
Water her, she would make you rich.

Finding a murderer

Patricia Connolly

Wait, quiet, for sleep to fall over that one,
Settle close enough to smell the rankness.
Do not touch him or speak your thoughts aloud,
keep a purity of space between you.
Pinch out flames, clench city sounds in your fist,
twist the night's form tight, clear a listening space.
When life is taken, whether in vengeance,
self-defense, through in indifference or greed,
the act changes the murderer's spirit
from living muscle to brittle pumice
rolling in the giant net of harsh silence.
*When you sense this stony lightness you've found
a true killer—very private knowledge.
Escape before you're entangled in that net
of peculiar silence, hauled to the sky,
drawn down so fast through a pinhole and out.*

Room cry

Patricia Connolly

A silent howl hangs, a twisting cloud in the doorway,
left by visitors fleeing scraps of their lives, fragments,
particles, parings, tiny but recognizable,
each changing the cloud's tones a little before leaving.

The brittle stillness of the room meets a metal clash,
(key in a distant lock), a splinter web fills the space,
holds fast, sunlight sparkling on the brilliant surfaces.

Loud, sudden, and heavy, metal shod feet are crashing
along the dark corridor that curves into the room.

There is a pause outside the door, an uneasy quiet,
a long-held breath, then the dense pressure of a body
pushing forward, a loud voice, together they jostle—
dust and light in the room, furnishings, and occupant,
spinning them all around, so they fly up, then settle.

The body, unknowing, is held in the twisting cloud,
elongated, pulled up to the sky, down to the earth.

the woman is seated, her back to the door, sewing.
Flowing around her, sparkling folds of cloth ceiling high,
buttonholes for world buttons—Toltec head, Avebury stones.
The woman starts the big machine for a brief flurry,
the visitor waits within the howl, his life crawling
down the corridor to hide in the cracks in his shoes.

Furiously alert in the new form of her room,
the sewer, scissors poised, waits as a sliver opens
and slices a new grand buttonhole from the network
of fine splinters that give her a new fabric to cut.

A slight movement catches her eye, and turning she sees
her visitor running away down the corridor.
Astonished, she hears for the first time, the key turning
in the big lock, and then the patter of falling glass.

The Herds are Charging through the Room

Mike Maggio

Mother is crying.

They have sensed something sinister, some danger perhaps: the snarl of a lion, the lurk of a predator on the prowl. Or maybe they have detected some force we cannot discern, some signal portending events more apocalyptic: the trembling of the earth, the violent belching of a not-too-distant volcano.

They could not explain it to you. It's something they know, something they must absolutely do.

The grasslands are a strange place: wild, unpredictable. Too many things can happen, too many things can go wrong. Not a place for civilized men, not a place to build a house, raise a family.

So mother has said. So she points out, even now.

The front door is gone. It has been pounded into nothingness, it has shattered into millions of miniscule pieces which scatter throughout the room from the thrash and sway of the animals. The house rumbles, trembles from the constant striking of hooves against the bare wooden floor.

We try to ignore the disorder, pretend it is not happening, we try to reach out to mother and ease the pain, but the din is more than we can bear.

Mother stops crying. She looks at us from behind glazed eyes, mumbles something we cannot comprehend. Her voice is low, almost inaudible against the stampede she has fostered. Her face is frozen with guilt as if she knows we too have suffered. She looks on from the head of the stairs, helpless, because she wishes to stop the chaos. She is distant and frightened, enwrapped in an eerie silence that helps her confront what she cannot control.

We try to comfort her — we, her sons, who have inherited this land, who have had to cope with the wilderness ever since we were born — we shout at her over the deafening clamor.

“Mother,” we beg, “Can't you forget what has happened? Can't you put the herds to rest?”

Maybe this is wrong because she tears violently at her hair and sounds a high-pitched wail which blends with the roar of herds — rhinoceros, she says, zebra, gnu — and becomes indistinguishable.

The beasts enter so quickly, so helter-skelter they cannot be counted. They are like unwanted guests: they come and go with no consideration for others, their voices loud and gruff, their manners so ill you wish they would leave as quickly as they came.

But they don't. Or they do, but their friends keep arriving without warning. And mother

continues to watch with the eye of one who sees what others cannot.

We try to convince her it's not her fault, that the herds have come on their own, that just as they came, they will surely leave. Though nothing will ever be the same. We understand quite well, we tell her, we emphasize that fact in empathy with her dissonance and fear.

But she wails on, on and on, and no matter what we say, we cannot stop her.

Because the beasts keep coming, an endless stream of rolling flesh and muscle whose every thunderous step destroys a bit more of what has toppled over and broken: mother's good china, which she inherited from grandmother who died on mother's wedding day (there is no relation between those two events, she would insist, no cause and effect, but we always knew better, given the nature of God and retribution, given the nature of the man she married and has lived without for all these years), the good crystal she pinched and saved for before things turned sour (how she would lie, she would say, how she would hide her savings and count them at night under the light of the moon when he was fast asleep, after he had had his filthy fill of her), the silver he bought her early on, beaten and flattened now into a shapeless pulp, before he unwillingly sired us, after she hounded him, way way before the day he up and left.

That was when she started crying, that was when the world took a nasty turn and barreled ahead out of control. And we wonder if we have had some part in all of this. And we wonder if our very presence, our unwillingness to confront the wilderness head-on has caused a disturbance that has forced the herds to suddenly run. But you can never tell why things happen the way they do. That's what mother has always told us. You can never know what horrible things will take place in the wilderness where men and beasts are bound to clash, she still warns us, where men slaughter men and women sit helpless against the violence they must endure, where any move, sudden or not, the flash of lightening, perhaps, the swift clap of thunder, is apt to spark a stampede you will surely be unable to reverse.

Mother stares across the room, past the charging herds, past the walls, it seems, past a place only she can see. We wonder if she can tell, if she can hear what is taking place around her. ~Her eyes sparkle like glass, like rich blue crystal gleaming in the sunlight, the blue of a flame about to rage out of control, the blue of a calm sky awaiting the outbreak of storm. It's as if her life rushes by like angry clouds she watches from the shelter of her room, safe behind the glass, from the rain, from the murderous lightning, the awful, vengeful thunder — God's certain retribution for something terrible she thinks she has done — and every now and then her girlhood dreams flash by like bright rainbows that appear and dissolve instantaneously from the swift movement of the black, billowing masses. Wondrous dreams, white fluffy

fantasies bouncing gently before her eyes like balls of cotton.

Then suddenly they fall, tumble down the stairs like sacrificial sheep, down to the threshing floor where everything snaps and shatters, mother's radiant dreams snuffed out under the hooves of beasts who lurch forward with no concern except for themselves.

And mother screams, darts down the stairs to chase them with no thought of herself. She wants to snatch them back before they are trampled forever, and before we can grab her, stop her from her madness, she is down with the beasts, down among the rumbling clamor. She grapples on the floor, struggles to get up. She rises, goes down again, rises once more, glances momentarily at us with a gleam in her jaded eye, as if that's where she belongs, as if this is the culmination of a life in the wilderness where men and beasts cannot mingle, except for one glorious moment.

For now she is dancing, it seems, waltzing on the living room floor, hand in hand, beast and woman, executing a graceful minuet in that split second before she disappears, falls forever under the raging hooves as we watch and wonder if the stampeding will ever ever stop.

THE LETTER

Stephen Dau

On the afternoon the letter arrives in Mrs. Henderson's mailbox, her two remaining sons will be in the backyard playing football. Or, perhaps, baseball. Or maybe soccer. Regardless, they will be outside, creating whole worlds on a sunny fall Saturday, while Mrs. Henderson bakes cookies in the kitchen. Afterward, whether or not it is true, she will swear that she heard the postman drive up before the cookies were finished, but that she did not want to go out to pick up the mail just then. Not before she baked the cookies, before her sons received them, before they smiled up at her with off-handed gratitude. Later, but not just then.

Mrs. Henderson will not have any particular interest in the people who sent the letter, their biographies, their career paths, their motivations or ideologies. She will notice, in the same off-handed way she notices good wallpaper, the official-looking seal on the corner of the envelope, the fine, ivory paper. She will notice that the envelope does not have a postmark. And that is when she'll know for sure.

At some point Mrs. Henderson calls to her two remaining sons playing in the backyard to tell them that the cookies are almost ready, but that if they want any they will have to come in and wash their hands first.

They have been outside all day. The older boy, Matthew, briefly thinks that he may be too old to be out in the backyard playing with his little brother, but he quickly shrugs aside this thought. The younger boy, Chris, knows, just knows, that this time he will be able to throw the ball clean over Matt's head, forcing him to run and get it just as Matt has been forcing him to do for about an hour. When they hear their Mother's voice the boys are torn between eating cookies and playing, but their stomachs quickly win out over the rest of their bodies and they run in through the sliding glass door that opens onto the backyard, making a show of not tracking dirt inside even as dusty bits of it fall from their shoes.

Mrs. Henderson is making two-dozen chocolate chip cookies. She bakes them, twelve at a time, on two cookie sheets placed one over the other on racks in the oven. The first dozen is nearly done baking when she calls to her boys in the backyard, and she deftly forms the second dozen from clumpy balls of dough using two floral-handled tablespoons. As they come inside she is pulling the first batch out of the oven with gloved hands, and she reminds the boys not to get dirt all over the floor.

Sometimes, the letter is brought to the door by smart-looking young men in uniforms who are specially trained, or at least coached, for the work they do. There is a knock at the door and suddenly everything changes. Other times, it's just a letter that arrives, unescorted, in the mail. Everything still changes.

Mrs. Henderson's children sit at the kitchen table. They each have a glass of milk that Mrs. Henderson poured from the carton in the refrigerator, and they wait expectantly for her to bring them a large, ivory plate of chocolate chip cookies. She bakes them once every couple of weeks, and when she does there is a minor celebration in the house. Even Mr. Henderson gets excited, and has been known to come home from work early to rescue just one tiny cookie from his voracious children.

After she receives the letter, Mrs. Henderson will remove one of the five chairs that sit around the kitchen table. She won't do this right away, but within a month or so. She won't give any explanation for why she will do this, and the missing chair will not be mentioned again.

The bright, fall sunlight streams in through the kitchen window and the steam from fresh-baked cookies rises through it. Mrs. Henderson's two boys sit around the kitchen table and banter while Mrs. Henderson carries the plate of cookies over to them. As she sets the plate down, she hears the mail truck rattle to a stop outside, notices the silence of its stopping. Under the table, one of the boys kicks the other. The other yells out and Mrs. Henderson just smiles as she pretends to take back the cookies. There is a brief moment of silence until both boys realize that there is no way she'll really take back this gift, this memory they will have for the rest of their lives.

Outside, the mail truck abruptly starts its engine, filling the silence with the sound of its mandate. Inside, the scent of fresh-baked cookies fills the kitchen and bright sunlight streams through the window. The boys begin to happily devour the cookies, and Mrs. Henderson goes outside to get the mail.

The Accident Inside

June Saraceno

8 a.m. the call
by nine you're there
no one can say
exactly what happened
no one knows
especially not her

in starchy sheets she lies
so white, so still
is she breathing?
of course, of course she's breathing

from behind a nurse appears
sterile, gray
she checks the pulse
you check her shoes
the mute soles
crepe, deceptive

she wrinkles towards you
offers advice
have a seat dear
then moves from the room
soundless as hallucinations

the tile floor rises
as if to swallow you
by the small window
the heat wavers across the pane
you see it and wonder
what else is silently here
what else
in this room is not being
said

Late February

June Saraceno

Great Aunt Lela never meant
to freeze that winter

she had plans
to plant in spring

the doctor said
she was probably asleep
didn't feel a thing

"Hypothermia,"
he rasped, "is often gentle with its victims."

it was late February
when we found her

her creased face, an enamel mask
her delicate wrist crooked
over Irish lace

through the window
a watery light washed
over the scene

she was a pearl
submerged

Blue Trajectory: A Photograph of a Cliff Diver off the Coast of Menorca for Ignacio
June Saraceno

two worlds divided/united by your body
you are suspended between blue above and blue below
one fluid movement stilled and held

we hold to what we want most
so what did she think, the one whose eye held you
then gave you those miraculous wings

there are no nets for this bold flight
no feathers, wax, nor any chase
pura vida just soaring breath and breathless pause

between the seamless sky and sea below
your arms as strong and fragile as a sudden gust of wind
against the unseen cliff behind you

Give me an oxygen tank, a cigarette, & leopard fur slippers give me
Magdalena Alagna

a rawhide bone & claws like sickles give me
your handprint in concrete, filled with rain

give me a stain of moon in a martini glass
give me the past wrapped in butcher's paper give me

a shapeshift & a green candle
give me a belly chant a go-go rama

give me belladonna in a blue bottle give me
a papal dispensation forged on 8th Avenue

give me wasabi & a seasoned wok
give me luck in jaywalking the crosswalks give me

the wick of yourself ignited give me
your skinned knees give me

grief, break my jacks in twosies
give me the floozie in you a silk rose in a felt hat

give me a cricket bat & a metal forehead give me a hotplate & a beakerful of lead give me
a groovy dirge

give me a surge of jungle gym & a striped shirt
I will not leak it to the press.

Cold

Ryan Dulude

Cold. It crept along the cabin as dusk fell around the area, creating a shadowy landscape of blacks, grays, and dark blues. Cold leapt out of the thick, white blanket of snow smoothly settled across the opening in the thickly wooded forest. It lingered in the air, swiftly running around, silencing sounds and cutting off the murmurs of the wind to a mere whisper. It snake its way across the surface of the weary planks on the porch of the cabin, drawing creaks and groans from the aged lumber.

Cold slipped its way through the crack near the door, penetrating the primitive defense the cabin and creeping along the floor. It slithered along the furniture, chilling the room and making the old man shiver over its presence. Pulling the gray overcoat tighter, he sat down in a chair. *Winter is here*, he thought, raising up with a wrinkled hand a steaming mug of water with a wrinkled hand to his thin, cracked lips and taking a sip.

The liquid coursed through his body, loosening achy joints that had felt the bite of numerous winters. The warmth spread through his body, trickling to the bent and stressed knees fighting to keep the old man's body upright. It spread to the thick workman's hands, filling the scars and calluses formed from hours of chopping wood. The warmth warded the cold off and created a temporary barrier, giving the old man a split-second rejuvenation in his confidence.

"You cannot yet," he whispered in a strong, yet raspy voice.

The old cabin held a number of items. Next to the door, there hung a coat rack with two hooks. From one of the hooks sagged a brown wool coat with dark stains; the other hook was empty. At the center of the room was a small, light brown table containing deep divots at one end. Years ago before the cold, in a sinister attack, had limited the use of his hands, the old man had sat at the table carving wooden animals. For hours on end he would toil at the table, working up a sweat. As the carvings progressed, so did the scratches and divots.

Beside the table was the chair the old man sat on. Although the chair back was starting show cracks in the wood, it was still sturdy. To the right of the chair was a fireplace. Stones about a foot in diameter were stacked upon each other with mortar caked in between, making the fireplace look like an uneven stone tower extending all the way to the ceiling and disappearing into the roof.

Turning his tiny, hunched-over frame, the old man reached a bony arm towards a navy blue scarf hung over the barren fireplace. The scarf hung limply on the hook looking as old and ragged as the man. It had thinned throughout the years, going from a strong, tightly threaded piece of clothing to now a worn, tired cloth. It was still a favorite of the old man's. It had endured for him longer than anything.

Not many things, except perhaps the trees of the forest acting as his barrier against the world, had endured longer than the old man. For years he had roamed the forest, always prevailing over whatever came his way. He had seen deer, bear, and squirrels with which he had shared a bond come and go. He had seen trees, once standing tall and proud, decay and fall to their fates. Although it was nature's way, the old man had always mourned over the

losses. They were like family to him, keeping him company in these cold, harsh moments, and keeping him entertained with the warmth of laughter. In fact, they were his only family. For as long as he could remember, he had been confined to the small opening of the log cabin and the surrounding forest area. The land had become both his mother and father, showing nothing but love to the old man. He gave back in the same loving way, nurturing the land, and helping it endure through the cold that at times ravaged it.

I won't endure for long, though, he thought. The cold has gotten the upper hand on me this time.

Typically, the old man would thumb a stubborn nose at the cold, striking a set of matches and firewood and creating a blazing inferno that chased away all signs of chill. *Not now though*, the old man mused to himself, glancing at the barren fireplace, noting the small, charred remains of firewood. *It is pointless to start one. The cold will not be driven away.*

He stood up and began to move outside. He took small, cautious steps, pausing after each to muster the strength to once again put one foot in front of the other. All around him, the cold swirled, flying in front of his face, emitting a soft hissing sound. It took carefully executed pot shots at his legs, neck, and hands, trying to find a chink in the armor of warmth that engulfed him, each time failing and retreating to gather strength.

The old man gave a gentle nudge as he turned the chilled, rusted door knob clockwise. The wooden door, showing small signs of rot along its edges, creaked as it rotated on its hinges, breaking the deafening silence that was plaguing the landscape. As the door swung open and the old man lifted his eyes towards the porch and yard, he revealed himself to the nakedness of the wilderness. The outside was a dull, lifeless gray. Dark clouds spread across the sky threatening to shut off the light of the full moon. The blanket of snow was a faded gray, and gave off even more chill than usual. The old man's lower lip trembled. *Tonight, the cold has allies*, he thought.

Moving in a slow, deliberate manner, he walked over to a rocking chair on the right side of the porch. The chair had a colonial look with a high back and elaborate armrests. The old man stood, his back to the chair for a second, teetering on his feet and drawing together his strength. Then, he started his descent into the chair. He let out a small gasp as he placed his hands on the arm rests and felt the chill dancing across them. Sitting back a whimper, he delicately guided himself downward. The chair, already old and exposed to a variety of weather conditions in its years, groaned in protest at the added weight, but nonetheless accepted it.

The old man sighed as he completed his descent into the chair, pausing afterwards as his breath, consumed by the cold, spread upwards in a tight spiral, drifting up towards the heavens. Silence resumed as he crept back inwards to visions of the past.

It had been a good life. With the imposing, thick trees acting as his sentinels and shielding him from any interference, the old man had been able to live out his life in peaceful solitude. Nature had formed with him a harmonic symbiosis, supplying him with whatever he needed. In fact, nature could probably be called his best friend as well as his family in his secluded life. Yes, the old man thought. *Everything in nature was also my best friend.*

Everything except the cold. It had never been his friend or family, nor had it made any

friendly overture. It pursued him every winter, relentlessly harassing him. It was everywhere, causing extra work and problems that had slowly drained his strength. It isolated him more than he already was, reducing the area in which he could range about his cabin. No matter how hard he tried, the cold still came back for him. Now, the fight had seeped from him. The cold had not only drained his strength but his will. He was tired of fighting, tired of the constant struggle.

The old man awoke from his thoughts. Around him, the silence now had a commanding presence; it had wrapped itself around the cabin. Something within the old man brought him to full awareness. This was it. He could feel it. Down towards his foot, the ravenous, searching cold had finally found a hole in the armor. A small chill inched inwards, drawing a sharp intake of breath from the old man. Then a spot on a finger gave way to the onslaught, opening up to allow an icy flood to freeze first his hand, then his elbow, until his shoulder began to tingle. Soon afterwards, as the chill continued to pour in through the cracks and gain ground on the heat, the scarf, the final bastion between the old man and the cold, failed. The cold poured over him. It flooded into the old man's lungs, making his breath shallow. It came upwards into his head and mind, dampening his senses and clouding his reason.

The trees around the clearing released an angry wail, balking under the pressure of the snow on their boughs and the chill in the air. Taking another sharp breath and slumping in his seat, the man stared into the endless sky as the first shot of light sprang from the horizon. After a few moments, the dark clouds fell victim to the light, brightening to a vibrant spectrum of red and orange. The old man flashed a toothless grin. The cold had found and consumed him, but the warmth would always protect others.

Still beaming, the old man closed his eyes just as the sun cracked over the horizon, bringing the warmth of a new day.

NEON BEHAVIOR

Carine Topal

Has your husband recently left you
have you lain in a fetal position for much of the day

have you secretly killed the one he left you for

have you secretly been caught holding a roast in one hand
(though you haven't eaten meat in years)
and a book of generic vows in the other

has the notion of promise, of forever
squeezed its alphabetical fist in your still sexual mouth

have you noticed the thin-lipped clock
the stenciled body that has walked away from yours

how the boulevard parts

how right now you're breathing in the mirror
testing for life or rain?

Erato

Sofia M Starnes

*I will speak to you in poetry,
unfold the mysteries of the past.*

Psalm 78

Almost a lip-read
beyond fastened panes: rain
falls, visual. What word
to echo on gray tortoise days
of slow neglect, slow regard?
I am arriving mutely

to where You are,
shadow of the stunted rose,
the undestroyed flower.
Stunted? Surely You do this
with a summer end in sight,
garden of no sequoias,

where nothing towers.
You do not tower either, or
high-hung, scrutinize the shock
of spring, stupefied under glass
pebbles. Yet,
You are enormous—

like the blush-burdened myrtle
with its month of rain,
sedge-bound, sedge-tasting
over the pruned rose.
Which of them, rose or myrtle,
set halfway, finally will point:

here, wait here?

Wet as the evening, over-wet,
dark as the hour, under-dark,
You swell, shrink, grow, bend,
leave me, ah... flecked stammel on the ribs. Tell me.

Are these rose markings
from Your ever-making rose?

On Reflection

Carmen M Pursifull

Snow soft & thick
falls like cotton — barely a space
between the flakes.
Cushioned earth suppresses sound
except for hail's *pinging*
brought on
by a sudden gelid wind.
Crystal weighted wires
flaunt dangling dagger warnings
& a shadow on the snow
lengthens towards my window.
The stalker-shadow
wind-ripples towards my doorway
& darkness crawls
through frame gaps...
an ice fog gathering itself
to thickness.
It wheezes arctic gusts
prodding power to this dense demon
awkwardly reshaping itself
into a caricature of man.
It is a tall black diamond — faceted
ready to rend a lover in mating.
It is a dark-planed mirror
departing at sunrise
hiding my reflection in its folds.

Listening With the Eyes

Frederick Zydek

As long as waters flow,
the directory of signs and symbols
will be best read with the eyes.
They are the lamp of experience,

can see things the mind has trouble
understanding on its own. There
is a basic instinct to the eyes. They
know when it's safe to come down

from the trees, enter a cave or step
just so on the ice. They also know
what a face is saying no matter what
words its owner uses during a sales

pitch. They can tell by the way
a person enters a room whether they
are looking for love or a hard time.
The eyes hear things the ears fail to

comprehend, appreciate the difference
between what a person says, what
a person does and what the rest of
them is attempting to keep under wraps.

Jesus stopped and called them,
"What do you want me to do for you?"
"Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."
Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes.
Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

CONNECTIONS

Tim Bellows

A black swift over water -
arcing absentminded flight -
calls sure as river-sound,

calls and his little string
pulls rain, moon and
morning sun along the sky.

He never wonders if a sky
full of water can someday
drown his life into so many verses and

old-fashioned paintings, the colors
changing when a knee-scraped boy
moves ribbon tabs on the pages

and captures momentary effects
of light on water.

WIDOWS

Yala Korwin

They congregate like birds, two, three, or more,
wearing masks of mirth - cover for grief,
applaud an actor, admire a design,
feast on green salad, fresh salmon, but before
order a carafe - Bordeaux - for the brief
drowning of misery in a glass of wine.
They sip some gossip, gentle or malign,
go promenading in the park, but if
lovers stroll by, they grow serene. A goad
piercing sad hearts. A gasp, a sniff,
a burst of glee relieving an old sore.
Day ends. They part. Another episode -
each to her cold nest, with her secret load,
where no one waits, where silence has the floor.

Winter Bones

Lisa Sornberger

Winter is black and white in farmers' fields.
Balance in opposites, cool comfort in geometry.
Stark stubble in parallel rows

was once corn and wheat,
planted perpendicular,
each to each.

Now there's just cow and crow,
ground holding up sky,
fence folding into field,

the way a rib cage
guards, yet exposes,
a heart.

Today seemed like a dream, and it was.
You and I reached for one another,
released each other.

Parting is itself a gift:
You break my heart
wide open.

Now the animals can run wild,
and the uncaged birds
fly home again.

Tonight I sit beside a fire, knit a sweater
to hold and warm my winter bones.
Stone and feather.

Your flesh is still more vivid than my own.
But I am returning home.
I am returning home.

THE WOMAN ON THE METRO, ORANGE LINE, FOGGY BOTTOM

Lyn Lifshin

gray face, a collapsed wafer,
an apple left over winter on
some branch glazed in ice
that's melted. Not uninteresting,
like other wreckage, abandoned
houses that seem to have sighed
and then sunk into themselves.
Startling, raved, she takes out
powder first and dusts her whole
face, a silt of fine dust before
rouge, cheeks and chin as if to
pull your eye to what isn't pale
and lined. Then, lipstick. But just
as she is about to add what I
suspect will be a tawny shade,
burnt umber or rust, a man stands
in my view, it's as if someone
stood up, a giant, just at the end
of a movie. I wanted the last
face, the transformation, see
the stylish Washington women in their
black coats, perfect skin are now
here, faceless as some Picasso
or a Modigliani face on their way to
see a lover, buy antiques. Trying to
look behind their mask, I miss
my stop

BENDING

Joel A Lipman

You bent at the knee
or dropped to a knee

For an instant
as one enfolds a child

Who kneels
in shame or pardon

It was the place
our silences poured out

Anonymous
a dozen mouths with the taste of one mouth

Each of my ten fingers
as each of your fingers

Reached the point of dying
twenty flirtations within an ace of death

Somewhere the doors of a museum
swing and latch

Nothing short of violence
will suffice

While a single woman
unchaperoned

Leans against the glass of
a blue partition

As light saturates
her clothing

So, were I your brother or a soldier
unrepentant or deserting

And not my obedient hand
writing

As you bend again
to gather your clothes

Pig's Head, Severed

Rupert Haigh

I am in a small windowless room, brightly lit, with whitewashed walls. It seems I have recently awoken, but I have no recollection of falling asleep. Neither is there a bed in the room, nor any other furniture at all. I open the door and step into the corridor.

I turn left by instinct. The corridor too is whitewashed, bare and brightly lit. At its end is a gleam of natural light, as if there is a window facing the sun. There are doors on both sides at long intervals. I try each of them in turn. The first two are locked.

The third opens. The room is the same as the previous one, but is furnished as an office. There are cabinets, chairs, desks. Three people sit at one of the desks, huddled together, craning forward as if examining important documents. They have their backs to me, and I cannot tell if they are male or female. They do not stir as I enter. I watch them, and they do not move. Minutes pass. Eventually, I say 'hello'. My voice sounds rusty, unused, the word itself unfamiliar.

One figure turns, and still I cannot tell its gender or its age. The figure is thin and upright, breastless. It has no face: in its place a blank white livid visage, shorn of nose, mouth, eyes, ears. I — I cannot say he or she — slightly inclines its head and turns back to the table. I withdraw.

Further along the corridor is a door, slightly ajar. I am struck by a feeling that the room behind it holds certain answers. The sound of children's voices comes to me. As I push the door open, I see them: a boy and girl, perhaps two years of age, playing with colorful wooden bricks on the floor.

The girl makes a tower of four bricks. She chants as she makes it: 'one brick, two brick, three brick, four.' And the boy knocks the tower down. 'All fall down,' he chants, 'all fall down.' The girl frowns, the boy laughs, and they start again. I watch them from the doorway. They do not seem to notice me. A woman appears from an adjoining room. She wears a blue uniform, rather like a nurse's. She glances at me quickly, takes the children by the hands and leads them into the adjoining room. The door closes.

I continue towards the gleam of light at the end of the corridor. Behind the next door is the sound of adult laughter, the clinking of glasses, and music, as at a party or in a lively bar. I listen a moment at the keyhole, and some instinct tells me to walk on. Yet I open the door, am compelled. The room is richly furnished in black and red. It is full of men and women drinking and talking. Many look familiar, though I cannot precisely recognize or place them. A beautiful woman stands quite close to me. Her hair is long and blonde, and she wears a white dress like a bride's. She turns towards

me, looks hard at me, and starts to scream.

The others fall silent and move closer together. A couple move forward from the general group, androgynous types with mild faces and short brown hair. They are almost middle-aged, a man and a woman so alike they could be twins. They take the screaming woman by the hands and whisper into her ears. She quietsens, and allows herself to be led towards the group.

And now I see that all of them have backed up against the far wall, as far from me as possible, and are ranged in a line, facing me. The blonde-haired woman is in the middle, flanked by the twins. The whole group point at me in unison and begin to chant slowly: 'We accuse you! We accuse you! Guilty! Guilty!'

A small man of Oriental appearance, whom I had not noticed before, comes slowly into view. He too wears a uniform, a white one. He pushes before him a stainless steel trolley, on top of which lies the head of a pig, newly severed, dripping blood. He stops in the middle of the room, turns to the head, bows towards it, and leaves the room. The chanting ceases.

The blonde-haired woman darts forward suddenly, looks quickly at me, nods, and with astonishing strength and swiftness lifts the pig's head off the trolley by its ears. She closes her eyes, kisses the snout and lets the head fall with a thud to the floor. There is blood on her hands. She wipes it on her face and on her dress. Then she takes the dress off, removes her underwear and lies on the floor. She puts her hands in the bloody neck and scoops the blood onto her belly and breasts. She is deranged, I am convinced: mad. The chanting starts again. I close the door.

The gleam of light at the end of the corridor seems brighter now, larger. I hurry towards it. There are no more doors, save one, nearly at the end, which opens outwards. It juts into the corridor. I reach it and go into the room behind it.

This one, unlike all the others, has large windows. I go to them and look out. It is light, sunny, the middle of the day. And the room is very high up. The scenery far below is familiar: there is the railway station, there is the kiosk at the bottom of the Street, there is the tricycle at the bottom of the garden, there is the tree stump by the path near the school. But it is remote, like something seen through the wrong end of a telescope, or glimpsed on the far horizon at sea. I strain my eyes but the scenery recedes inexorably. Glancing back into the room, I notice I am not alone.

She is there, reclining on a sofa in the far corner. I look at her. She smiles, rises, sways towards me. She wears a short black dress cut low, lipstick, and her dark hair is cropped short. She takes my hand, leads me, makes me sit beside her, leans towards me.

I do not know who she is, or what is to be done. Once I knew, but all that is gone. I

wait. She looks into my eyes, and her lips are slightly parted. She moves her face towards mine, and draws in breath. I watch her nostrils dilate, her pupils narrow, and there is no longer any doubt. The snout is almost touching my face. I shudder and draw back.. 'Pig,' I whisper. 'Guilty, guilty'. And she lies dead.

There is no one here. Behind the windows the landscape has slipped away beneath the horizon. The gleam at the end of the corridor has gone. Evening falls. I wait. I wait for sleep.

Love Letter

Andrew Demcak

Ascend the December twig of my arm,
that souvenir relaxed in crisp air.

It's not easy staying skyward, rubbing

past my tree shoulders, when my nipples buds
respond to quick thumbs. Mica glittering
in the lengths of my thighs, the million year

creep of basalt. A lucent fluid flows
from cockstems, a pleasure pinched from stars.
No small bald patch, no unbothered inch.

THE PARADE

Mireya Robles

Translated by Susan Griffin

The man had the exact girth of Sidney Greenstreet and the softness of Peter Lorre. But he lacked the cynicism, and the surprise in his eyes. He was lying back, in all his fatty monumentality, on a folding chair placed in the front part of the orchestra section, leaving behind him the rest of the empty stalls, clearly organized in an amphitheater with a cement floor. The man, outside the theatre's reach, distractedly dug the edge of the sole of his right shoe in the mud which comprised that strip of earth. He was alone, abandoned, and he glanced at the nails on his hand, from time to time, without having any reason for doing so. He knew that someone had taken him there and he waited without impatience, without resignation, without hope. He allowed his gaze to wander in the darkness of the night. He was wearing a suit of white drill, a fine, linen shirt. He was soaked in a perspiration that cooled in the caress of that strange breeze. His wide forehead, touched by something that had a humbling effect. Perhaps by the fact that he had been dragged to that place despite himself. Despite the fact that he knew that it was all useless. The light, yellowish, a light sienna color, began to slide, ticking a rectangle in the space that stretched before him. Fantastic lights, drowsy in old colors, violated the earth to form a stage. From the left point furthest from the audience, emerged, like a bitter and sad mouthful, all the characters that made up the parade. They were touched by that same, strange light and they moved forward dancing the Charleston, joined in an indefinable and far-off rhythm. Those women in their silk dresses with their long, infinitely long waists. With a band around their foreheads. Curly hair, stuck to their scalps. The men, with straw hats. Characters from all the silent movies that had been shown on all the screens until 1928, the year in which, irrevocably, they awaited death.

The man collected the sweat from his forehead with his cupped hand. Automatically, slowly, he drew his handkerchief from the pocket of his trousers, a handkerchief made black by the filth, wrinkled by the weight of his keys and a few coins that he fingered in the rounded material of the pocket. He carried the handkerchief to his forehead, several times. And he felt himself fall into a type of stupor. As if everything had ceased. As if everything had stopped. His bladder felt full and he wanted to urinate. He reconstructed before him, from his imagination, that passage that lead from his bedroom to the bathroom and which he followed several times during the night, when he awoke sweating, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, motionless, until he convinced himself to take one leg from the bed, the other leg, to sit up, to stand up. And to think,

while walking down the passage, why does one have to wake up and feel like death. How is it possible that one can walk heavily, dragging oneself through the night, drowning oneself in the emptiness, when everything inside is dead. While he listened to the jet, he was amazed at the miracle of urinating. Of functioning mechanically, dragging one's feet, the heavy bulk of his body.

The fantastic characters continued populating the illuminated rectangle. From his seat, the man wanted to stretch out his hand, so as to reach, so as to join himself to that odd form of life that paraded before him. But he remained motionless, sweating, like a fatty animal. You could almost say that he identified every gesture made by these beings: the blink of the eyes lined with charcoal, bordered by deep, gray circles under the eyes. Their movements were quick, like the convulsions caused by the accelerated projection of the celluloid. But there were other gestures reserved for the expression of deep emotions, that were performed slowly, in a drawn out manner, stopping at each point of their intensity.

The white suit made the large sweat stains at the joins under his arms obvious, in the cloth arms, in the drill ribs. The man felt his intolerable heaviness, as if his body denied him movement. A moment that he couldn't quite identify had arrived. In his large eyes like those of a sick animal, something began to bother him. A cauterization. As if they were burning the very center of his gaze. A light. Wires made of light. Wires that formed a figure. The figure of a man. An electric man. The same man that had brought him to this inexplicable place. He stared at him, with a slow curiosity bordering on idiocy. The ethereal and luminous character began drawing an expression of painful anguish. An expression of anguish that was independent of that large and immobile being but which, at the same time, belonged to it. And more and more he began feeling that there was something in that being that was, sadly, his. As if it were his own energy projected before him, inviting him to participate in that parade that was destined to disappear with the brevity that sows for us pockets of death. That was it. Perhaps it was about that: about taking from him the death that he had collected inside himself. Of convincing him that a loss has to be followed, of necessity, by a compensation. A compensation. One must live. One must live to await this. Of convincing him that everything is balanced.

The fantastic and luminous being pointed out to him, as if they were places one finds and points to in a map, the perfect balance in the characters in the parade who advanced with brusque, quick movements, like puppets, but at the same time projecting the intensity of their passions. An intensity that saved them from being puppets. The luminous being opened his hands like a fan, separating his fingers made of dry, incandescent twigs. Suddenly, the anguish of his gesture intensified and he broadcast an echo: "Salvation is the balance between the automation that imprisons

us and that secret life called pain”.

The large man, deformed by obesity, had understood. He had understood long before hearing the words of that electric lightening bolt humanized by anguish. Of course, he had understood, but he was unable to feel anything. He was unable to react. Autism. Autist. The curse. A curse on himself. Without being saved. That luminous man: failed. The pain of that failure could be felt in the air. Could be felt in the atmosphere. The large man: autistic. Without the bones to move himself. Made vegetable. He lowered his eyes a little like Sidney Greenstreet. Lacking in cynicism, he began wrapping his hands around himself like a chastised child. And a light, like the one in his room, like the one in that passage down which he dragged himself at night, soon fell, taking over the desolate space that surrounded him.

Clearing Out

Annie Clarkson

I find a photograph taped inside her wardrobe. Robert standing outside the cottage. White vest. Red shorts. Wellies caked with green clay-mud from the estuary. He's waving at the camera and grinning a gap-tooth smile. Behind him, the pebble beach, the sea at high tide, waves nearly reaching the wrought-iron gate.

I wonder who took the picture. Either one of my parents. Maybe they were both there, telling him to *Smile Bob-cat, wave at the camera*. That's what they called him, Bob-cat. Although none of us have used that name since.

The doorbell rings, and I run downstairs to answer it.

A young man, who's maybe nineteen or twenty, stands at the front door. He points into the garden, telling me there's a dead sheep in my swimming pool and do I want him to get it out?

He stares at me, waiting for my answer, a deep frown between his eyebrows. I realize he's staring at my appearance, probably wondering why I'm still wearing pajamas at three in the afternoon.

Yes, just a minute, I say, trying to take in the significance of what he's telling me. I shut the door, thinking I should get dressed and help him. I rummage in my suitcase for a pair of jeans and a clean jumper and dress hurriedly. I head outside to see if I can find something in the garage that might help with the removal of a dead sheep. There must be something we can use, some of Dad's old fishing or boating gear that we can hoist it out with. I find a set of oars and wonder if these might help, only when I go round the back of the house, the sheep and the man are already on the side of the pool.

It must have been in for days, he says, trying to catch his breath.

I nod, thinking it could have been weeks for all I know. I stare at the state of the pool, floating with leaves, the water clouded with sand and mud and grass and god knows what else.

You should drain it, if you're not using it, he says.

I watch him heave the sheep further onto the flags surrounding the pool. He's shivering, and no wonder when he's soaked through. Even I'm shivering in this freezing wind. I'm standing there like an idiot with a pair of oars while he struggles with the weight of a dead sheep. I realize I should try and help, but by the time I reach his side of the pool, he's on his mobile, animating what seems to be a retelling of the story.

I stare at the sheep, its black eyes staring back at me.

I watch the man, his thickset arms and shoulders, the way he gestures with his hands when he talks. Folding my arms against the cold of the wind, I wait for him to tell

me what's happening.

The sheep is picked up by the farmer. I offer to help, but he says they can manage and with some effort they sling the sheep into the back of the farmer's Landrover. They walk the length of the fence separating our land until the farmer finds the offending gap. A gap I'm responsible for apparently, and which the young man offers to fix.

He sits in the armchair in my living room, wrapped in a towel that I fished out of my washing bag. His clothes are strung on the radiator to dry and we sit in silence, apart from a slurping as he drinks his tea.

Things aren't usually such a mess, I say.

Boxes half-packed with books, crockery, picture frames. A crumpled pair of socks next to the hearth where I left them two days ago. A used plate and a coffee cup with a moldy ring round the rim.

He shrugs and carries on slurping his tea.

I'm clearing out the house, I say. My parents are selling it.

He nods but says nothing.

I'm just here for a few weeks, I say, until I sort the house out. And reorganize my life, I think, although I'm not making much progress with that either.

He tells me his name's Deryn, but that's all he tells me.

He finishes his tea, puts on his damp clothes, says he'll be back tomorrow with some wire to fix the fence.

First thing in the morning, I head along the beach in the direction of the estuary. I stop to pick up pebbles and rocks like we did when we were children.

The waves reach within a few yards of the front gates of the cottages. I feel certain the tide never used to come in this far. The coastline seems different and I can't work out whether it's the land or my memory that's eroded.

At the old lifeboat house, I stop and talk to the woman who lives there. She knows my parents from recent years, not from when we came here as children. She's sad to hear about Mum's illness, says, it's always the way, things catch up with us in the end.

Back at the house, Deryn is fixing the fence.

I wave at him from the front gate, but he doesn't see me. He's busy ripping old wire from the fencepost, only stopping to rub sweat from his forehead onto his sleeve.

I decide to sort through the garage. A man in the village has offered to take anything else useful off my hands. But defining useful isn't the easiest task.

A stack of terracotta plant pots, a shrimping net, a rusted garden hoe.

I find a clothes-horse, the one Mum used to hang our clothes on: fishing socks, thermal vests, jumpers and a dress of hers, emerald green with a belt around the

waist. I remember them dripping onto the floor, steaming up the room in the heat of the fire. She washed them by hand, wrung them outside, and slapped them against the stone of the sea-facing wall. We always had grains of sand in our cuffs, our buttonholes, our pockets.

There are a couple of old doors layered in paint. Garden furniture. A chair swing.

I find 'a striped deckchair, the canvas faded and thick with pin mould. There used to be four of them, stacked in the porch, ready to be slung out on the beach and lounged in. I remember how Mum used to sit in her swimming costume, a shirt of Dad's strung across her shoulders to stop them from burning. She watched us from behind the dark lenses of her sunglasses, or sometimes she fell asleep and we didn't realize, still thinking she was keeping her eye on us.

It's after three by the time I've half emptied the garage. I realize I'm hungry and wonder whether I should make Deryn some food. Only he's left a note on the back door saying he'll be back tomorrow.

Clearing out the rest of the garage, I find

broken slates from the roof, a lobster pot, a fire-grate.

I find tent poles fastened in a bag. A ripped groundsheet spread out on the garage floor. An orange flysheet strewn over something. It's years since we camped in the garden, our torches chasing shadows across the canvas. I remember how we dived into the bottom of our sleeping bags, our chatter drowning out the crash of waves outside.

I rub the rough canvas of the dusty flysheet, lifting it a little to see what might be underneath it. I drag the canvas back and find a rowing boat thick with spiders' webs. The rowlocks have rusted. The wood is worn and cracked.

I stare at the boat, my eyes itching with dust.

I can't imagine it's *the* rowing boat.

The one Robert was playing in that day.

He was playing with his airplane or some soldiers or a doll, the details escape me because I wasn't there. I was along the beach, crabbing or channeling water into a pit or some other thing. I don't remember because it was hot and the sun was prickling my skin and I forgot to put sun cream on and went back to the house to cool down. Mum fussed over me, telling me to wear a shirt, just a loose one so my skin didn't burn or blister or peel. She wanted me to stay indoors, she wanted me to have a drink and I had to wait for her to fetch my shirt from upstairs, pour me a fresh lemonade that was too sour and made my tongue clack against the roof of my mouth. She made me stand in the kitchen while she smothered me in lotion and rubbed it into my back. I was hopping from one foot to the other because the tiles were red hot in the sun. *Stand still she* told me smacking me on the head with the lotion bottle. *Now go outside and watch*

jour brother.

I remember running down the path and onto the beach, stubbing my toe on a rock. I filled a bucket with water and crept into the garden so I could splash Robert with it. Only he wasn't around and I got bored with looking and went to do something else like hunt for jellyfish or poke a stick into piles of seaweed or make an island of shells at the sea edge.

I don't know whether the boat was still there when I went back out. I can't remember if it was on the edge of the sand because there were too many other distractions.

I stare at the boat, thinking it can't possibly be the same one.

Still, I wonder what I should do with it.

I decide to cover it back up, lock the garage door.

A few days after, Deryn brings a tree in his dad's trailer. It fell in the storm last week and he thought I could use

I listen to the waves at the end of the garden, gulls cawing, the splintering sound of Deryn chopping wood. I think of how the wood might burn in the grate. It won't spit like oak or lime wood, or burn as well as cherry. But it's easy to chop and we've already filled half the wood shed.

I think how different he seems from the first time I met him. Then, he barely spoke to me. Now, it's like he can't talk enough.

He tells me:

How he never worked at school, couldn't concentrate because he couldn't read very well and when he looked at the words they made no sense, it was like the letters were mixed up, and that meant he could never concentrate, always looking out of the window instead.

How one of his feet is a bigger size than the other and he has to wear an insole or a heel grip in his left shoe and sometimes he tries to confuse the shop assistant so he can get two different sizes in the same box.

How he thinks people should never hit their children, like the other day when he saw a woman in Bangor dragging her son down the street, pulling him so hard he worried the boy's arm might come out of its socket and the boy cried, snot dripping down the runnel of his nose, and she slapped him on the backs of his legs and called him a little bastard.

I look at him, thinking how he can't get his words out fast enough, tripping over word after word. But then his words trail away. He chews on his lip and says, people would never do that if they knew what it was like to lose a sister to cancer, would they?

I stare at him, thinking about how easily he says it.

I want to tell him about Robert but the words are stones in my throat.

We swig whisky from a bottle I find in the pantry. My hand shakes when I lift the bottle. It must be down to the cold or the strain in my muscles after splitting all those logs. He notices the tremor but doesn't say anything. He looks at my hand, then at the bottle, then looks away when he sees me watching him.

I rub my thumb over a splinter in the palm of my hand. It's stuck right under the skin.

Let me see, he says.

He tries to force the end of the splinter out, rubs his fingernail against the backend of it. All I can think about is how close he's sitting to me, the rough skin of his hand holding mine.

It makes me feel nervous and I pull my hand away.

I can get it now, I tell him. Thanks

We play backgammon.

He wins three games and then asks me about the boat

It confuses me. I wonder if I could have told him about the rowing boat. I don't remember him being in the garage. Or maybe he means another boat.

You told me about it, he says. The rowing boat.

I nod, wondering what I could have said, wondering when I could have said it.

I never talk about it. I almost talked to a teacher once, and a counselor. My doctor arranged for me to see him, but I never went to see him.

I did tell a woman on a train on a journey to Barcelona. She sang to her baby, perhaps in Catalan because I didn't understand it. I hadn't thought about Robert for years but suddenly wanted to tell someone and because I was telling her in Spanish the words weren't so difficult, they didn't sound the same.

I wonder if I could tell Deryn.

I want to tell him about sailing Robert's toy boat in the swimming pool. How I pushed it along with a stick trying to fish it out when it sailed too far from the edge. How I wanted to jump in and bring it back but knew Dad wouldn't let me swim in the pool unless there was an adult there. I could swim, I could do five lengths of front crawl and breaststroke, but the pool was out of bounds, so I searched for a longer stick, maybe one of the bamboos Mum used to prop up the sweet peas.

I want to tell him that I heard Mum scream. It was a yell, a groan, a please god no. It made me stop looking for a stick and sit down on the grass. I looked towards the house, pulling out blades of grass from the lawn. I picked at the scab of an old midge bite, wondering whether I should go down to the house or if it was nothing I listened.

There wasn't another noise like it, only a door slamming, waves shushing on the beach, a lawnmower whirring in a neighbor's garden. I decided it must have been nothing, maybe Dad rushed up behind to frighten her. It was hard to imagine anything else.

I take another swig from the whiskey bottle.

I want to tell Deryn I keep dreaming of Robert in the boat.

How sometimes he panics because it starts bobbing at the edge of the water. Other times he thinks it's a game and doesn't notice until it's further away from the shore and then bored of his toys, needing the toilet, wanting his mum he starts crying. Just a snuffle at first, blinking wildly at the waves getting rougher, splashing his bare legs. He stands up in the boat, feels it rock and falls down again, banging his head or his elbow or his knee against the wooden seat. His eyes are raw with tears, sobs making his chin tremble, looking round for his mum or dad or sister and finding we're not there. He cries until his eyes swell and the sun burns the skin on his face.

Sometimes in my dream, the waves tip the boat. Other times he falls out of it.

But always I'm poking with a stick at the toy boat in the swimming pool, throwing stones at it, trying to make it sink.

Deryn watches me, waiting for me to speak. He's blinking in a nervous way and I want to find the words.

But, there are none. I close my eyes and realize how tired I feel.

I imagine my mouth pressing against his, tasting saltwater and estuary mud and dead leaves from the bottom of the pool.

In the morning, Deryn helps me clear out the bedrooms.

He finds a kite under the bed. It has a torn rainbow tail, two lines and a plastic handle. I think it might be Robert's kite.

We sit on the floor, untangling the lines, and I tell him how Robert always let go of the handle when the wind tugged on it, and Dad had to chase it down the beach and into the sea and we chased after him.

Deryn laughs. He says the trick to flying a kite is to keep your feet on the ground.

I think how right he is, decide I'll take the kite onto the beach later, lay it on the sand, walk backwards until the lines unwind, and run with it until it sails into the sky, the wind ripping across the red fabric. I'll hold the handle to make it dive, twisting my wrist to bring it back up when it nearly hits the water.

When the wind tugs hard at the kite strings, I'll let go of it, watch it disappear towards the estuary.

Generals

Erin McKnight

I was suffocated by the night. He dropped its cloak over my shoulders, knowing that I would battle against the heaviness. My luminous skin was a writhing reflection in his eyes as I spun myself into its deep folds and creases, the heavy fabric smothering every trace of my light.

*

That first morning, I sat beside him on the train. He shifted his *Post*, and the ripple of air caused my eyelashes to flutter. He'd missed a patch shaving, and I longed to trace outline with my thumbnail and feel his curved jawbone beneath the thick brown stubble still don't know why he caught me staring but when he did, he didn't look away.

We sped into the darkness underground, and in his eyes I found shadows. They spoke to me. They told me to ignore their presence, which they said was nothing more than the reflections of faces in the windows. For two years it mattered to me that when our eye met, the shadows retreated.

*

By the time he took me into the woods of his childhood I'd stopped looking into the eyes, because I knew what they would reveal.

We were invited in. We penetrated the wall of trees, his heavy arm draped over my frame as we avoided small puddles and fetid leaves along the trail muddied by the Virginia rain. I thought we were alone; however, my talking had nothing to do with a past I couldn't sense. I've always talked. When there was a space, I stuffed it with my inadequate words.

"How long since you've been here," I asked him.

Slipping my arm through his, I waited.

"Too long," he whispered.

We stopped walking when we reached the mound, his body suddenly rigid. I should have noticed the struggle in his eyes, the way they blinked in fear; then they ignited, raging against the darkened turf.

There was an opening in the moment that I had to devour.

"It looks like a fairy ring," I said.

Darkness crept across his face. I'm sure of it now, but unseen to me then was the shadow of a little boy playing on the mound.

This hill never belonged to fairies, but to armies, he said. Boys with the same freckled noses and large ears had faced each other in battle here, playing the innocent games of war.

“Sean was General Grant, and I was Lee.” His body loosened, and he talked. “We’ take our soldiers into these woods, line them up on the hill, and wait for the moon before going into battle,” he said.

“The Civil War had been hard on the nation, dad had told me,” for the first time, speaking of his father without being prompted. “I had to do something drastic to achieve victory for the South. After all, I was the big brother.”

Dancing in nimble, wicked slivers of flame, his eyes confessed when he reached for me. As his fingers stretched around my throat, I saw Sean: hovering like a proud creator over his rows and columns of olive-colored army troops. His men are still awaiting the order. They understand that one night they will spring into action; that they will be expected to fumble over sticks and dirt to face the enemy.

*

With their men flanked in an offensive position and waiting to prove their loyalty, the brothers had met that evening beneath a glowing canopy of fireflies.

Sean hadn’t seen the lighter being pulled from the pocket. He’d been too busy preparing his soldiers to hear his sibling’s thumb strike the ridges of the *Bic*, forcing a flame to leap.

The fire had ripped across the hill so quickly that there wasn’t time to fall back. Plastic soldiers had melted into young flesh but by the time reinforcements had arrived, Sean’s skin hadn’t felt the dirt kicked up by their feet. The choking plumes of smoke that had risen above the trees and polluted the clear sky were all Sean had seen as he lay on the battlefield, embracing the night.

*

I lie here now, wondering why our memories have a heartbeat when I think of his eyes. After all this time, though, I know his warm body sleeps elsewhere.

He left that night after darkness dropped and hasn’t returned, but I will wait. ‘I night has helped me to see that he was protecting me; he knew that someday he would break my heart, and so he concealed it. He cared for me too much to let me live with I disappointment he would eventually cause. He’d watched his father wither because of war stories he believed were responsible for the death of his younger son, and I couldn’t be allowed to shrink in the same way as the result of a simple mistake.

I won’t lie to you--I was scared at first. Shadows crawled over me, and I found it impossible to sleep with the echo of commands in the trees above. I wanted to grip the cloak and pull it closer around myself so that nothing could get in, but that would mean keeping others out. I couldn’t do it, so I listened to the darkness because it knew when h would return.

*

And here he is! He marches to this mound a general, but drops his head and melts to his knees when he sees me. He tells me he needs me in these woods because Sean is here and since that night, as brothers, they haven't ever left. Innocent eyes, unclouded by smoke, say that none of us ever will. He reaches his hands into the soft soil of this shallow grave and lets the dirt trickle through his fingers, as his clear eyes search for stars beyond the long-fingered trees.

APPETITES

B R Strahan

Nested in pearl shell
or silk sheath,
flesh that rends.

Song of hidden reef,
purr of full belly,
caress of clawed limb...

A Winter wind
shreds the nacre sheen
of Spring's camouflage.

Crab in snail's shell,
flower on white breast,
hungry waves swell
crashing at the eaten shore.

A DREAM WITHIN A DREAM

Edward Butscher

The shirtless old homeless man
walks a midnight Main Street
with Raggedy Ann dolls
crushed under both arms
a leer like a siren
warping his unshaven face.

Nights earlier, while still
wading through Amagansett dunes
I had dreamt about a Flushing
school yard (its chain fence
inexplicably invisible)
coregent lines of children
clutching lunch pails and books
to their chests like anchors
or rescued talismans
as queenly nuns moved
with mourner slowness
among them.

I tug the dog to silence
and watch the frail figure
disappear like a match stick
into the pyre of street lamps
before returning to a dead
cigarette and reveries
of summer escapes.

I saw myself there, cap askew
brown bag bulging with Nana's
meatball sandwiches, standing
in a brother's shoeless
galoshes to wave at me
(a stranger) as I passed
until the pathos dove
deep enough to shake
My heart into rags
and. I awoke, cradling
myself like a drowned son.

GLOSSARY OF LOSS

Dean Kostos

Maya, translated as *illusion*, comes from Sanskrit, meaning: "that which can be measured."

1. Architraves bear the geometry of horses, nostrils inhaling night
2. Bugle beads glint when sewn into memory's velvet
3. Cynosure is a light shaped like a dog's tail
4. Death cannot be measured, therefore, is not illusory
5. Embouchure moistens into questions for cities that bury their young
6. Falconry soars from wooden houses smelling of sex
7. Gallic flying buttresses struggle to hold up decayed shadows
8. Helixes spin into kaleidoscopic roses, fractured mirrors
9. Ideographs scribbled with a quill plucked from an angel's wing
10. *Jubilate Agno* ceased the day the cat died
11. Killing the wind, clouds bypass oceans, return to freshets
12. Lacustrine surfaces reflect faces no longer there
13. Mouths full of chocolate, mourners disperse
14. Night sky fills with the burnt taste of Dickinson's poems
15. Obituaries describe a father the son never knew
16. Pilasters are the half-life of columns; the other must be taken on trust
17. Querulous Eros writhes in sheets that will be shrouds
18. Realizations bend into question-mark hooks
19. Sanskrit twists into vines, knits over windows
20. Tholoi are round buildings: *no entrance, no exit, no entrance*
21. Undulating scents swell into waves, vanish from the cortex
22. Volutes of rose windows bleed onto abandoned tongues
23. Writing names of dead chimney sweeps, Blake dusted ash over ink
24. X-rays expose talismans in silken pouches
25. *Yawp*, said aloud, reechoes Whitman's burnished keen
26. Zeroes, from his time on, have been mistaken for open mouths or haloes

Diamonds

Prasenjit Maiti

are your eyes as they bum me inside out in rage and rage
and walk in silence along Park Street, Calcutta into an
evening that is raining and dark and cool like your eyes
like your fire that lashes me now like the rains like being in
your arms nestled in the fragrances of a woman
possessed like diamonds, expensive like diamonds and
having edges to her laughter that are sharp ever so like
diamonds that can only bum and can never cry like the
angry, desolate streets of Calcutta

She Thinks It's Falling

Matthew Joseph Kearney

She wakes in the gray of a window,
Forgetting it was the trees
She needed names for;
By herself in the purpling room,
Her veins are closed to the sounds
She craves. She gets out of bed
On two vacant legs—
It should have been different.
Perhaps, if she were naked and translucent—
But those days are gone forever
Now—detached like retinas—blinded.
The birds have nowhere to perch
And to flit. She hears the dust
In the shadows of the room. She knows
The calling of other days and answers—
Those answers echo back in reds
And browns and empty. Like an attic,
She has ideas about the world outside
Different from the way it was or is,
But the far-fetched flatness of them
Can't abide too very long.
She grasps the nothing she has
To offer as she touches the nothing
There is to hold her. Something is like
This, she thinks it's falling.

Compassion and Metaphor

There is a place of heartbreak toward which the creative process ultimately draws us, a place where we understand our glory and failure, our hope and desperation, the beauty and the suffering, and from this understanding some miracle of acceptance and identity occurs. Sometimes it comes from falling in love with an image or with a character we barely understood a moment before or from watching what was flat and impenetrable round into a world. Sometimes it comes from the appearance within us of ideas, feelings, selves that we disdain or fear yet still must accept as ourselves. These moments, if we allow them, if we struggle for the words to hold or reveal them, these moments when the intellectual struggle is one with the heart struggling to see and accept, bring us to compassion

—Deena Metzger

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