

THE WRITING DISORDER
PRESENTS

THE BEST
POETRY
OF 2012

EDITED BY C.E. LUKATHER

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THE BEST POETRY
OF 2012

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C.E. LUKATHER, EDITOR

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Initial edit by our wonderful writers
Proofread by someone on our staff

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Cover Image: Apartment building in West Hollywood, CA, where F. Scott Fitzgerald died.
Photograph by C.E. Lukather

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We read submissions all year long.

Remember. Forget. Forget. Remember.

Sometimes we forget about people—who they were, what they were saying, or even what they mean to us. The written word can be a powerful reminder. While it's difficult to remember everything we've read this year, what we've included here is the best—work we feel is worth reading again and again.

We love reading the work that's sent to our offices every day. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's great, and sometimes it's not quite what we were hoping for. There's always room for improvement. We strive to publish the best work we can. Sometimes we miss out on certain pieces, but when we do we try to replace it with something better.

With this edition, we present you with our best work of the year. Once you've read through it, we think you'll agree.

It's something to remember.

C.E. Lukather
Editor

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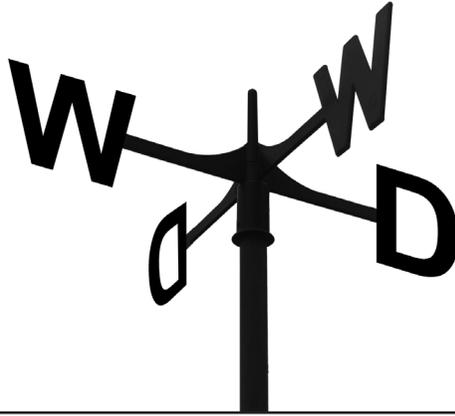
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POETRY
SPRING 2012

EQUINOX

by Gale Acuff

I don't know what I'll do if Miss Hooker dies but die, too, and hope that I see her in Heaven, if I rate. I know she will, she's my Sunday School teacher and I love her so much that sometimes I want to throw up, she's so beautiful, red hair and green eyes and that mole on her nose, and freckles, maybe a million, more than there are stars in the night sky, and at regular school they tell me that they shine in the daytime, too, it's just that the sun's so bright it drowns them out, at least I think it's like drowning. But Miss Hooker's like the sun because she out —glows everything, it's a wonder I can see to see her. Some nights I dream I'm her moon and when I come up and she goes down and we're in the sky together it's like we're in the same bed and rolling around and all the stars I mentioned before, they're

our children—that's what going to sleep does when you're grownups and sharing the same bed. I'm just ten years old and she's 25 but Miss Hooker's the only gal for me and I have faith God will answer my prayer, make her younger and me older until we meet halfway, say like the evening sun or a lunar eclipse, or that day in June when light and dark are exactly the same length. Miss Hooker was absent from Sunday School today. She has a cold, our substitute said, but she'll be back next Sunday. I can hardly wait but I must —that's halfway, too. I'll bet she misses me.

A DIVINE COMEDY

In Sunday School class this morning I fell asleep and learned that you can dream a lot in a short time—in fact, in just a few seconds. I was Moses parting the Red Sea, watching my folk hurry through even as Pharoah and his chariots and men were bearing down on us. I cried to God O Lord, Thou sure art cutting this one close, but with the sound of the waters moving and the people shouting and horses and wheels coming ever closer, I'm not certain if He heard me. I brought up the rear and we barely made it across the Sea before it splashed itself back together. I thought, That's not God, it's gravity, and the back of my robe got a good soaking so maybe God read my mind and that was His way of chastizing me, not that I didn't deserve it. I did. I'd doubted before, especially when I went up the mountain to talk to Him, not that I knew that I was going to talk to Him or, I should say, that I was supposed to listen while He did all the talking, or most of it. But I had questions—I wanted to know His name and He told me I AM THAT I AM, not much of a name but I didn't say so and didn't think it at the time (He would've read my mind and might've become even angrier, if it was anger and not just sternness). But anyway there was that Golden Calf that my people were making when I went up to fetch the Ten Commandments, not that I knew that that was what I was climbing for. And when I returned it was Hell to pay. And the next thing I know Miss Hooker's

standing over me with her arms crossed
over her bosoms and her glasses on
the tip of her nose and her lazy eye
now focusing with the good one on me
and her lips drawn tight, connecting her cheeks
like the shaft that holds dumbbells together.
Whew. She asked, Did you have a nice nap,
Gale? But it wasn't really a question.
It's so nice of you to join us again.
Sarcasm is what that is. I may be
just 10 but I'm not exactly stupid,
not exactly. I'm sorry ma'am, I said
while my classmates snickered—but if it means
anything, I was dreaming about God.
Moses in particular. Oh I see,
Miss Hooker said. But she really didn't.
Then she turned around, went back to her chair,
and plopped down. , Well, it's almost time to go,
children, she said—let's bow our heads and close
our eyes while Gale leads us in the Lord's Prayer.
So she bowed her head and closed her eyes and
so did I and, about halfway through, make
that about 33%, that part
about temptation, I opened one eye
and peeked and everybody had their
eyes closed and heads bowed and only I could
see and suddenly I felt like God, all that

power because everybody's weaker
and I created everything there is.
Heck, maybe I did and just don't recall.
Or maybe I recall and just deny,
like Peter did Jesus but look at him
now—he guards the Pearly Gates. Have mercy.

GOOD APPETITE

After Sunday School I walk outside our class
and shade my eyes, and even squint, the sun
too bright or our room too dark, or some of
both. Now I walk home, about a half-mile,
watch our house expanding in the distance
so that it no longer looks like a stone
marker or a molar slightly decayed
but a real place to live. And from my room

in the attic I can see the church while
I stand before the window and dress, first
my best trousers, then my socks and shoes, then
my shirt, and clip-on bow tie always last.
And when the weather's not too warm, my coat.
I look good enough to get married now,
or even buried. That was this morning,
though—now it's nearly lunchtime. I'm hungry,
my stomach's growling but my soul's purring,
if that's my soul. I'm certainly full of

God, and my teacher's beauty, Miss Hooker's
her name and she'd make a good wife for me
even though she's old, 25 to my
10, but I don't mind if God doesn't and
if He approves then maybe He'll make us
a miracle, make me older faster
and Miss Hooker's time stand still. He did it
with the sun, I know, and who's that woman
who had a baby when she was too old?
I'm home now, and it's time to cross the street,

so I look both ways so I can do it
without having to run and scuff my shoes
on the blacktop, Thom McCanns they are, worn
for God and Jesus and the Holy Ghost
and Miss Hooker and Mother, who sleeps late
and never sees me dressed up like this 'til
I get home from Sunday School. She's frying
bacon now, I can smell it from the road.
When I walk through the kitchen door
she turns and says, My, you look so handsome,

better go change, lunch is almost ready.
Yes ma'am, I say. I go upstairs and take
everything off except my underwear
and stand in front of the full-length mirror
and I'm a baby again, just bigger
and older. I put on my jeans and tee
and come back to the kitchen and take my
place. Father's there with the Sunday paper
beside his plate. Say Grace, boy, he commands.
I bow my head and close my eyes and there

Miss Hooker is, naked on my bed. All
I can manage is a tongue-tied Amen.
Sorry, I mumble—let me try again.
Instead I fall out of my chair and when
I wake I'm lying on the couch, Father
at my feet and Mother standing over
me. How do you feel, boy, asks Father. Yes,
says Mother—how do you feel? Born again,
I say, which is all I have wit for. They
laugh, but not too much. I'm hungry, I say.
That's good, Father says. That means you're alive.

Gale Acuff has had her poetry published in Ascent, Ohio Journal, Descant, Adirondack Review, Worcester Review, Verse Wisconsin, Maryland Poetry Review, Florida Review, South Carolina Review, Carolina Quarterly, Poem, Amarillo Bay, South Dakota Review, Santa Barbara Review, Sequential Art Narrative in Education, and many other journals. She has authored three books of poetry: Buffalo Nickel (BrickHouse Press, 2004), The Weight of the World (BrickHouse, 2006), and The Story of My Lives (BrickHouse, 2008). She's also taught university English in the U.S., China, and the Palestinian West Bank.

NECESSARY PARTS

by Susan King

Necessary Parts

She was just a girl
fourteen
bronze and thin
like Degas Dancer
her eyes told a truth
her mouth couldn't utter
her shell hand-made
artificial and imperfect
cracked opened
for me to see
what she once was
a woman with no breasts
who pissed like a man
but she had no penis
she had lost blood
traded for food
I tore out half of my heart
and placed it in her palm
she broke her form frowned
she was dying then
a teenage woman who
having been hunter
warrior and prey
survived scattered into
rugged pieces recognized
only by the same
as necessary parts
A work in progress
who would transform
breaking and reshaping
the mold until it represented
the whole horror
of refined beauty

FRESH SCENTS

it was a hot night
burnt flesh was in the air

she stepped into
a smoke-filled salon
on Columbus Avenue
where a white haired man
waited for a wanton woman

he sat at the bar
drinking gin and tonic
she can still smell
the pork sausage in his pocket
the Old Spice on his skin

he led her to a black cellar
where on cold molded
piss filled sheets
she slid out of the body
he held and raped

what screamed

she heard glass shatter
the scent of flowers
wafted by
she stared at herself
helpless and pained

what lay twitching
a rag doll
she took home
and sprayed
with the smell
of cheap perfume

FAMILY RECIPE

1 large bag of poverty
1 single parent
1 cup of addictions
2 tablespoons indifference
1/2 teaspoon of education
1 child

Place parent
and child in slum apartment
Add bag of poverty, cup of addictions
indifference, 1/2 teaspoon of education.
Chill for 21 years.
Serve to America.

T-SHIRTS AND SHOVELS

One hot spring day
in New England
snow piled high while
sun-worshipping
walkers and runners
wore t-shirts, shorts,
and sneakers,
stores sold out
of shovels.

CHOP SHOP

At the shop
African women
work all day
braiding American—
African heads

parting hair
combining strands
connecting extensions
repairing pasts

linking fragmented
lines
of families
—broken off—
from the root

Susan King is an American writer. She has a BFA in writing, literature, and publishing: Emerson College; MFA in poetry: Vermont College; and, a MA in English: University of Massachusetts. Her works include poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. She is presently working on completing a creative non-fiction manuscript. May you enjoy reading her poetry as much as she enjoyed writing it.

JUNG'S POETRY

by Ivy Page

Time drips past the gypsy children
pooling around painted toenails
peeking out of open-toe shoes
and alligator leather.

It drools-out the corner
of the municipal buildings
thick, full of secrets. Greedy,
invisible, eater of worlds.

Like skin, it wears thin
over itself.

ON THE LAWN IN EARLY SPRING

Starved for the warmth of sun, language,
dirt, diction, and an economy rich like words.

Up the arm, the curve of necks and furrowed brows
with images that will stick in teeth like steak.

One word in front of another, snapshot.
Stop.

DRIVING

I feel yours lock on mine as if I were back
in the dim light of the bedroom, my heart drops
for a moment, chills feather through my hips
your hands were just there — right there.

It gets me every time. I play the mental recording
over and over. Believing that you are thinking about that look
last night, on any night — pretending you are sending me
sympathetic messages through my nervous system to bring me back there.

But you are at home minding children, and I am driving — still —

SHE CRIES

Eyes filled, as if swimming to the surface.
Trying to keep your structure still
keep the quake of your ribs from shattering
my strength. One more swell
crashes over you and spills into me.

Holding onto the volcano
in you. Nothing we can do,
I tell you over again. Those eyes
full of wisdom, blue and watery,
swimming on the hope that
there might be a way
to make it better.

BEAT

You only draw, you only do
obtuse, hard lines
where I, I have danced like a fog.
Now twenty years, cracked and tight,
daring to string a fact to glue.

Darling, I have no more to give to you.
You did it before my time —
Buddha heavy, the smell of man,
of chant, echoed out of you.

You were an arm that reached over generations
pouring spoonfuls of words over
black fedoras and snapping fingers.
They all wanted to be with you.
Swa ha.

In your gravel voice, you carried them.
Pulling, bending, to catch an eye,
once stripping your clothes off
as you enlightened the man that
wanted to know “Nakedness,”

wanted to know how, naked poems
would do, drunkenness,
drunk on the words, from you.
Trying to capture you...you only do.

LIST

A long litany of elements
figured into:

wake
rise
dress
eat
drive
work
drive
eat
work
drive
eat
talk
bathe
sleep

breathe enough to keep
from forming frosty circles
of days that we repeat.

Graffiti breath
rising through conversation.
If the auction
of my thoughts
will sell, it will be:
99% lies —
1% selfish reason.

Just warm enough
to keep
frustration
belief
acceptance
love
compromise
laughter
faith
justification
complication
sweet on the shelf.

Ivy's work has appeared in journals nationally, and anthologized. Her first book Any Other Branch, will be available through Salmon Poetry of Ireland in March 2012. Her second book, Elemental, will be out with Salmon Poetry in 2014. She is the editor and founder of Organs of Vision and Speech Magazine. For more about Ivy visit, www.poeticentanglement.com.

LOTOPHAGI

by Sonali Gurpur

There're some of us
Who cannot stand
On two feet
Like the homo erectus
Because we are the lotophagi

We cannot think
Nor act nor speak
Nor live according to our wishes
But we do the master's bidding
Who feeds us the lotophagi

We've bartered our souls
A little at a time
And unwittingly given a little
Of the body and the mind each time
As a package deal of the lotophagi

We see pictures
Of street children
Sleeping on the footpaths
Of Mumbai or Kolkata or Hyderabad
And we're looking at us the lotophagi

Numbed beyond human suffering
Our codes of conduct are not
Those that serve our best interests
Or those of our offspring
We're broken as the lotophagi

It is time to reimagine the scenario
The lotus sutra proves it is not the lotus
That is evil
It is those who misuse it
And that are the lotophagi

Look that captor in the eye
Let the light of your soul shine
Through your brokenness
And say I am no more enslaved

THE ERRONEOUS THEORY OF VENUS' ENVY

It is such errant nonsense
That Venus is not happy
The way she is

The only little whiff of
A half-joke-mock-complaint
I've ever heard from her
Is that
She thinks
"It's not fair
Adonis has a weathervane
And divining rod and I don't
I'd love to be able to tell
Which way the wind is blowing
Or where to find fresh water
With so little effort
Any time of the day"

WHY WOMEN SHOULD STAY HOME TO RAISE THEIR YOUNG AND WHY MEN MUST NOT GO WHALING

Because they come back with fish stories
And those about the one who got away
If they went to Brokeback mountain
They come back with no fish at all

And Ishmael was just following
A great big sperm whale
Called Moby Dick
Through the great big
Vast unknowns of brine
When he was really looking
For a fresh water stream
With a divining rod
That took him places
He'd never gone before
And he got lost
Trying to find himself

CODA: TO MORPHEUS

Fifteen years of staring into the dark
I finally found an escape hatch
In the black

In the darkness of my soul
In the darkness of my heart
In the darkest recesses of my mind

A little spark
A little proof of magic
That surrender to the Divine brings with it

NEGATIVE IMAGE

Before digital photography
You couldn't have a photograph
Unless there was a negative first

The light and shade were reversed
That which was really black was white
And vice versa

In the excavation of the authentic Self
Comes a point in the inner journey
When the exact same thing happens

Your roadmap warps
Then the road goes topsy-turvy
You are lost in a land of opposites

Your best years become your worst
Your worst tormentors your best teachers
It is all about bringing about balance

Via a newfound vision of things
Where nothing is perfect
And we're all too human and the better for it

THE TWO ENDS OF A TELESCOPE

A little boy six or so
Playing soldier out in the backyard
Builds his fortress with young green branches
Arching down from an overgrown bush
And a cotton dhurrie he borrowed
From the kitchen floor
He marshalls his troops to victories
Around the carrot patch
The rosebushes
The plum trees
And settles down in the shade
With a cup of the bluest Gatorade
He grows up and goes to war
His talents as a leader among men
And his courage and forethought
Earn him a place among
The best of the best
He surveys his accomplishments
And wants just one more little thing
The simplicity of that existence
Where one carried no train behind him
No worry before him
Because the child within the man lives

THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION OF THE BODYMINDSOUL

Two souls hang in golden scales
In perfect balance
He the body she the mind

It wasn't always so
Once upon a happy time
They were honored for who they truly are

Bodymindsoul
Yin and Yang
A Unity

Then his mind
Became maddened
Then saddened

Her body was sold into slavery
Her mind they couldn't shackle
So it lived, somewhat

Reassurance came to him
Only when he was
The Body

His ultra fine mind
Was damned with faint praise
And constant ribbing

Her body was disrespected
Pushed to the limits
And her capabilities questioned everyday

Somewhere along this treacherous path
Idealism honesty and vision
Were getting eroded

A thousand miles
Through the desert they walked
Shod in sandals

Rats will gnaw at your feet when you sleep
Vampires will swoop in when you bleed
To drool upon a potential feast

The evil ones may have their evil designs
But there is a certain something
That they cannot kill

Atlas shrugged causing
A seismic shift in awareness
And they remembered being whole once

They took back their souls
They took back their minds
And their bodies too and put them back together

They're happy now

Sonali writes poetry and fiction. Her work is inspired by her many interests and the many roles she plays in life. She was born and raised in India and has lived in the U.S. for twenty years. Her poems "An Alphaby For My Beautiful Dreamer" and "The Awful Simplicity Of Ten" were recently picked for the 'Commended' and 'Highly Commended' categories of the Margaret Reid Prize for Traditional Verse. Her work was selected for the city wide reading at the Austin International Poetry Festival, 2011. Her short story "See With Your Eyes Not Just Your Heart" was finalist at Glimmertrain. Her poem "They Say The Skies Of Lebanon Are Burning," about her experience with the Bhopal gas tragedy, came out in "Courageous Creativity." Her poem "Ode To A New Song" is in "Calliope," issue #132, "The Chumpion Of Lost Causes" is in "Burning Word" issue #59, and "Roses That Grow By The River Juliette" is in "Punk Soul Poet," September 2011 issue.

THE DITCH

by Holly Day

the day my great-granddad died, he dug the hole
by himself, all the way square to six feet deep.
Jumped in the hole, lay down
pulled his gun out and
shot himself clean through the head.
His suicide note just said
“Shouldn’t be too much trouble
just push the dirt back in.”

apparently inspired by this story,
my grandmother’s first husband
hung himself in the bedroom he shared
with his wife, left the door wide open
so anyone coming into the house would first see
his shit and piss-stained body dangling from the ceiling.
My aunt and uncle, aged 5 and 7, found this waiting
when they came home from school.

when my husband talks about suicide
I tell him
make it clean.

WOMAN HIDING FROM HER HUSBAND AS HE TRIES TO FIX HER BRAKELINE

makes a story for the rain,
holds her hands over her
ears, allows her eyes to glaze as
sunlight fades away, she

makes excuses for the
storm, hides her head beneath the
dirt, pretends to sleep, deaf
to the crashing sounds, she

waits, inside, cautious of
the returning storm, creeps outside
slow at noon, picks up the

beer cans.

HOT SUNSHINE SONG

I tried to open my heart to you
felt the petals stick as they struggled
like the warped bud of a sick tulip—fungal
at the root, I tried
to love you but I didn't know how.

You tried to help me, I think
armed with harpoons and bone snares that
meant love, but only the jagged edges
registered anything with me.
I forget the good things I know were there.

We could have been good together
if the right pieces had met at the right time,
instead of crashing like icebergs, breaking into cold snow
we might have been perfect if we'd tried
a few years later

WOMAN ON THE BUS

Sits so close to me, backed
In the corner, I can feel the knots down
under skin, the odd angles the bones have
been reset into from years of being
loved by one who tells her,

“I’ll never do it again.”

Want to lend my body to her,
strength to pull the trigger,
strike with kitchen knives. I wish for
her a mouth of teeth, and
eyes that open on their own, don’t
shake with fear—am I the one to tell her

this isn’t love?

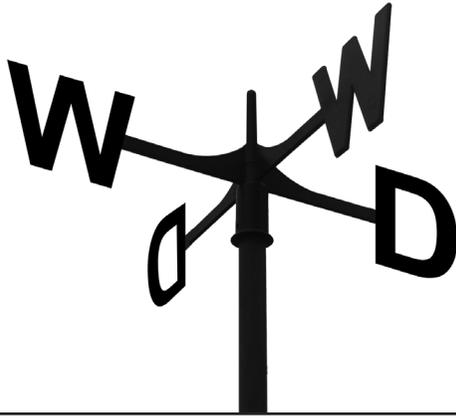
THE CHICK AT SCHOOL

she talks about fucking her father
with such an air of sophistication,
says she is such a sexual being that
even her reluctant father couldn't
keep his hands off of her, draws

parallels between herself and tragic
Shakespearian heroines forced to
marry their fathers, brothers, says she
used to feel dirty thinking about
her father's penis but now that
she knows he's just another man

she's okay with it.

Holly Day is a housewife and mother of two living in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her poetry has recently appeared in Hawai'i Pacific Review, The Oxford American, and Slipstream. Her book publications include Music Composition for Dummies, Guitar-All-in-One for Dummies, and Music Theory for Dummies, which has recently been translated into French, Dutch, Spanish, Russian, and Portuguese.



POETRY
SUMMER 2012

bone

by Gretchen Mattox

in the book marked *childhood* —
one page has a girl's bloody handprint

another of a house with no ingress, no egress
rudimentary coloring / negative space

still the back-dream is the loudest (trees and dolls swaddled in flame): arms crossed

the parents are adamant, *terrible, ungrateful girl*

rituals of purification: assertion of self

swans groom themselves in their masquerade masks
a sleepy turtle wet from the birth of the pond suns on the same rock

the swans' necks trumpet S shapes

wings expand

How can you still be so frightened? Critical voice.

morning mist diffuse over the pond like steam from a nourishing broth

hooray! the oracle has published nine books

deny deny as we stood on exposed tree roots — system tangled as hair, a pile of snakes phallic tentacles but more than that. It was disappointing to have you so fully embody the father. “There are trees better than this Brentwood. I will show you,” you said, but never did.

no I am not going to have sex with you tonight

My boyfriend is lame, on crutches. He has no idea how to please me sexually. It is a disaster because I do not know how to say no. He is almost like a dwarf. He touches me everywhere ignoring my genitals. Across the lawn people are doing acrobatics, jumping with bungee cords and doing ski flips. I want to join in.

*at the restaurant where
poet John Yau is working
as a busboy*

D. looks like himself from behind but when he turns around his face is slurred — careless brushstroke. He has teeth like Ancient man, Halloween teeth that chatter on their own. I call out his name. “I am D.’s brother,” says this man. We walk to my New York apartment together. He is *malleable image person*, a black and white photograph of movement trapped. I talk about my mother coming to visit and an inheritance I expect to receive. Lie upon lie—this game of stacking hands.

*assertion of divine origin
that seems to me proof*

Gulls circle a swimming pool. I walk the rim of false water contained by irregular rocks, using the rocks as a balance beam—showing off. My friend knows he can’t do what I am doing so he dives into the water and makes a clown of himself. I dive in after him. There are two shadow people covered in hair or bees that watch us.

the everywhere doors

At a therapy session retreat house the people are all so strange. One man on his hands and knees acts like a dog. “Woof,” he says, “I feel so free.” Some people put on a skit. One of the characters wears a designer shirt with the tag showing. “Oh, honey that’s intentional,” she tells me. “Part of what you’re paying for is the label and I want people to see I am an original.”

for the things which partake of form

I dream I give my ex. husband and his new wife a ride to a poetry reading. The reading is boring so I leave. Next I stuff my pockets full of Jordan almonds and disappearing mints, mints like *clouds*. I find a manuscript on a picnic table in the woods. The poems are short and all about betrayal. His wife wants a ride home but I am tired of the two of them. “You can’t please two women at once,” I say to this man who is and is not my father.

one sphere of all things perishable

In a picture left over from childhood, a brother and sister hold hands walk into the dark cliché alone. In this painting the forest opens like a cave of light—it's an artistic device—the dark is actual, the light leads into not away from the lie. Erstwhile, the impulse (qualified by gentleness) to recoil like sensate plants.

drawn in the mouth of essential divinity

I needed some help in the dream where I was being violated. S.O.S. A man *felt* me up in a dark theater and I couldn't get out of it, so decided to enjoy it. Then the part of me that was terrified went away dissolved by the twinning like sugar in a glass of tea.

no rational explanation, blame clime

Deep in the walled city (I'm just saying) the losses mounted. Hummingbirds or were they seedlings like blood drops against the body of sky. *I want my life* which was different than *I want to live*.

Gretchen Mattox is the author of two books of poetry, "Goodnight Architecture," New Issues Press, Fall 2002 and "Buddha Box," a Green Rose Prize Winner, New Issues Press, Spring 2004. In conjunction with F.A.C.E., the French American Cultural Exchange Program, poems from her forthcoming manuscript, "The Flower Compass Sutras" were translated into French, summer 2009. She joined 12 other poets and 7 translators at the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France to celebrate the project.

Gretchen is also the recipient of numerous awards including residencies at: Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Edward Albee Foundation Fellowship, and Yaddo. Her work has been honored as a Poetry Society of America West Winner and the Agha Shahid Ali Scholarship recipient at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown.

In addition to her M.A. in Creative Writing from NYU, Gretchen Mattox holds an M.A. in Psychology from Antioch and is currently at work on clinical hours towards licensure as a therapist. She lives and works in Santa Monica, California.

I'M HOME NOW

by Mike Donaldson

I'm home now
it's Wednesday night

I was to do a reading on April 18 in Salmon Arm
for \$125

then I realized it was the day before
the Cohen concert in Vancouver

so I cancelled out
too bad about the money.

I'll still buy an old edition of the Evergreen Review
the one with Kerouac and Ferlinghetti in it

just like you and me in a journal together
some day.

I'm over 200 pgs into Buk poems
every 10 there's a good one. And

the message is just relax, let it flow
and value what you have inside

he did

though, I'm finished with writing
it seems such a wrong route for

me

the rejections are getting me
down

and what I see in my poems is
as opaque to the editors as

the wood on my
floor. Though

I do know that the point is to
laugh at it and just go through

the discouragement

even as I write this I feel better. It's all okay
just the way it is – I don't have anything better

to do

and when I finish a poem that
I like it gives me

a
buzz.

I guess it's literary masturbation.

Anyway, save those tree cones
CW

THE BEGGARS ON LA RUE SAINT LAURENT

a siren
squeegees
and lost intersections
surrounded by unfounded lovers
kissing
behind fenced-in churches
on brown grass
and dry shadows
with no small change for no drunkards
in post-post-modernist pockets
no one is dead
no one is dead

THE DEER TIPTOE ON BY

I recently moved to a town
that lives inside
a coalminer's cabin

where souls are kept on the mantel
above a fire place
chimney smoke snaking
through the lengths of fir boughs
the two plum trees long abandoned

wild grass now undone by autumn
construction clutter strewn
amongst empty
Lucky bottles,
cement pails, particle board, a rusted wheelbarrow
broken red bricks, tarnished ducts and an old bathtub
all hanging out on the quarter-acre lot
with a woodshed in the corner, stacked to the cobwebs

on the other side of the garden
blanketed with leafy insulation, a workshop
crammed with the pickles, the jams
the hammers, the axes, and the wine bottles
necessary for hibernation.

within this cabin, its frame measured thrice but still tilted
every night there's soup on the stove and poetry
seeping up from the floor boards,
or a melody
for a party of hearts floating amongst the rafters
a flirty barmaid, the tired plumber, a tree-planter, a banjo, an aged dodger

for the unemployed there's always another reason
always an alibi
that old timer's rhyme, the fisherman's yarn, the logger's scar

and there's always someone's drunken speculation
as to why that damn draft is still seeping in
through the latest renovation to the bedroom

YOUNG MEN

Wanna see my new car?

How about I drive out to your place tomorrow
(Sunday)?

We'll drive it into the Shushwap River if you want,
maybe we could buy a couple expensive cigars,
we'll prop up the hood and jerk-off all over the lustrous engine,
and then we'll put a sack of manure on the accelerator,
a busted hockey stick through the steering wheel,
and we'll sit back and laugh,
while smoking those expensive cigars
and drinking Koranda's Slivovice.

What do ya think?

Mike Donaldson typically refers to Vancouver Island as his Canadian home. Nonetheless, Mike has traveled extensively both within Canada and abroad, and he is currently organizing cultural tours of the Indian Subcontinent. While his collection of short fiction remains a work in progress, his poetry has appeared in or is forthcoming in JONES AV, WINDFALL, MISUNDERSTANDINGS MAGAZINE, THE SMOKING POET and PAPERPLATES.

THE SO-CALLED MADNESS OF THE MAD MARCH HARE

by Lucie M. Winborne

Three fields from home on my way to you
I goggle at a brown minuet,

middle-aged voyeur of begetting so frenzied
it lives in mythic idiom

Wondering

how they know it's time to replenish the earth
If their blood pricks like frostbite

If love lust desire
are not always a pleasure for them

as for us

Biting my thumb
at white-coated men with their clipboards
silver pens streaking

Remembering

my own white-coated complacency
its buttons of security

How I must have seemed as mad as any March hare
to you across the field, rival
of my old life

Kicking at encroaching love,
fruitlessly batting till the buttons dropped
with thumps as soft as rabbit paws:

do they lie here still
like tarnished tiny gravestones?

If so, let them lie. While the hares
leap and box. While the scientists jot their notes. While
my laughter nips the breeze, three fields from home,

on its way to you.

THE ICE-EDGE OF INNOCENCE

You want to teeter on the brink
of that first step
toward black water,

find yourself groundless,

persuasion a pink scarf
you tentatively finger.

A stranger's crunching footstep
brought you to this perfect space
for drowning.

Remembering the taste of snow,
you don't look back,
a cold so pure it burns

your only guide to seeing in the dark.

FAT

The only lover to ever embrace me
was Fat.

It clung to me like a needy child
I could neither put down
nor embrace. I tried to sell
the unwanted pounds: I held a
garage sale, and nobody came.

Those who would have been my customers
walked past with eyes averted, their arms
weighed down with their own needy burdens
that suckled them dry, and would never grow up,
or old, and so would never die.

I courted Fat assiduously, gave it the best years of my life:
performed acts with my tongue that men
can only dream of. In gratitude it nestled upon
my body with doglike devotion.
A man should be so faithful. A wife
should be so lucky.

My mother called them *globs*, these rings
around my middle. Rings they are indeed —
tokens of my early betrothal.

AFTER THE READING

I would whisper
if you were here
this
that was born

in the echo of
your muscular voice as you stood,
poet at your pulpit,

Casting word nets to your hearers.

Later, on a bank of quiet dark
where we'd bared our feet
in a tea-colored stream,

It rippled like a fish in the moon-water:
I would have cupped it in my hands,
a gift to you.

My bed will not hold me. I sit,
forgetting sleep,

whispering this poem to
you who are absent, your crooked stride
breaking the grass
on the way to your own
templed verse.

WILD PONIES

Morning

And the day, unused
is as bare as the table
on which my hand rests

Blank of all but a cup of coffee

When the man I love enters
unshaven and unwashed
his yesterday clothes unslept in

In his hand a paper thick with scrawl

And tells me that in yesterday's dawn
words came like wild ponies

Breaking long gates of silence

Whiffling wide-eyed
across the landscape of his brain

Their unappeased hooves
beating his fingers into cramp

Yet he kept on,
stacking syllables like fence posts

Till this morning
when he sat before me

My coffee cooling in its porcelain cup,

His hand flat upon the wrinkled page.

It doesn't tremble with his voice
as the ponies flee his throat,

Walls falling to their timbre.

I am startled, humbled, gripped astride their saddles.
The lengthening silence after leaves a memory like hunger.

I reach out slowly, touch my fingertips to his,

The dust from spent hoofbeats tasting sweet in my mouth.

Lucie Winborne lives and works in Central Florida. She writes with the goal of capturing a moment in time.

PATIENT BELONGINGS: 18-30/6/07

by David Russomano

Help me out of this wreck.
Small pieces of shattered car window like sand,
still gritty between my back teeth.
We'll be taking your vitals. Smiling faces,
the wall clock's black secondhand,
and the climate control stirring flowers
of condolence as if it were a real breeze
in this airtight quarantine. So sorry that
it happened. So glad it wasn't worse.
They come and go and I devour every morsel
of sympathetic icing on the invalid cake.
Invasive, rays thrown right through the cracks
in my frame, the compromise of
structural integrity. They do their best,
change my sheets and gown. Deep breaths
stab and the struggle out of bed
just to take a piss.
I heard it coming. No memory slideshow.
Just the dread of bracing myself and the fear
I wouldn't make it out in time. Blood
tests and IVs—solipsism fails when tubes connect you
to things besides yourself. The hallways carry
voices and footsteps. I'm waiting,
but the constant hum of the suction machine
seems like silence now.
Conditions and complaints bleed
through the walls: an enema discussed
in broken English and curses rolling down the corridor
for a call button not responded to
quickly enough. I probably wished for this.

Everyone does, convinced there's nothing better
than getting paid, without effort? Easier
on the drawing board. Surgery brought more
pain than I expected.
I wash myself and swallow pills, wondering
what it means to heal
as the release date continues to recede.
Unblinking wounds more easily faced
when the safety of gauze separates like a priest
receiving confession behind his screen, unsightly
torn tissue best kept
bandaged for now.
Help me out of this bed.

IRONY — SEPTEMBER, 2001

On the 10th, as the heavy drops
came down on us, slipping
between Manhattan's buildings,
my brother and I ducked into
a Starbucks for some shelter
and a hot drink. The line was
long, snaking away from the counter
and behind me, an insipid noise
gradually demanded my attention—
a litany of what seemed to be mumbled
nonsense: “bike messengers care, policemen
care, ambulance drivers care, Starbucks
servers care, firemen care” etc etc. What
the fuck was this lunatic rambling about
And who did he think he was addressing?
Eventually, I remembered what shirt
I'd put on that morning, a cynical
rhetorical question emblazoned
across my chest in bold black letters:
WHO CARES? Apparently, this
soggy deranged urbanite had
a stack of answers he couldn't keep
to himself. Disgruntled, I
unknowingly fled from a prophecy
that's still ringing in my ears, echoing
more loudly than the collapse
it preceded by less than a day.

THEOLOGY

I walked slowly to overhear
the recently renewed debates;
the dialogue of falling rain
on infant leaves and
the conversation between
the stream and its banks.

Birds' discourse my only choir,
though not as much Sunday singers
as post-service parishioners
chatting over coffee,
warbling, rambling about nothing
in particular.

CHOKER

I hear you finless toe and finger folks
can stroll through all that air with ease,
but it's hard for me to picture.

I was up there once, out of water,
and I couldn't budge my body further
than a convulsive flop would take me.

Luckily, they threw me back down here
where I can glide, dart, steer and breathe
better than any awkward flailing human.

You see, this is my air.

RECONCILIATION

Sitting near the back of a narrow wooden church, a composite, as is so often the case in dreams, of sanctuaries I'd been in, seen, or imagined before. An aisle ran down the center of the vacant room with a row of plain, stiff pews to either side. Dust floated in the comforting columns of daylight streaming through curtained windows into the otherwise dim brown space. All this was straightforward enough, but sitting in front of me: a Buddhist monk. The smiling young man, standard shaved head and saffron robe, had turned around to speak with me. Instead of a begging bowl, he offered a small dish rag and a humble white coffee mug—the sort you find in all-night diners, endlessly refilled. The scene played out like a film montage of a conversation subsumed by soundtrack because the gist is understood. I grasped his message without hearing words—a tutorial on how to wash more than just the outside of a cup. No matter how clean the vessel seems, the inside must not be overlooked. I was startled awake by the contents of my own skull.

MODERN GREEK

An old man in Athens; grey
clothes, hair, and beard
tattered. Walking alone
with the help of a cane.
He just stopped there
for a moment as if lost,
staring down at ancient shoes.
And I thought, “Oh, Zeus!
What’s this piteous state
you’ve come to?”
All your temples toppled
and your strength forgotten
by everyone including you.

David Russomano grew up in the coastal town of Stratford, Connecticut, and continued his education just outside of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, at Messiah College. While studying abroad in Greece and India he developed a passion for travel. Since graduating in 2006 with a BA in creative writing and earning a TESOL certification in Costa Rica, he has been teaching English in Asia and filling pocket journals with the scraps of observation and contemplation that grow into his poems. His poetry has been featured in Write from Wrong, This Great Society, Red Booth Review, Phantom Kangaroo, REDzine, and Thoughtsmith. It is also scheduled to appear in forthcoming issues of Pure Francis and Poetry For The Masses. He currently teaches English in Turkey.

ISLAND CABIN

by Jesse Minkert

In the night Matilda
strikes a kitchen match.
It flares; she guides it
to a twist of cotton
in a cylinder of wax.
A blue-and-yellow thumb of light,
stuttering in the draft,
dispatches a troupe of shadows
to gambol on the walls.

WINDOWS

In the B&O, the sun
cuts the floor with silhouettes.
Out in the summer day,
cool pockets of shade,
a blinding windshield.
Fogs of breath on the glass,
dust and hand prints,
scratches and paint,
hazy streaks of grease.

Shadows on the carpet
move too slow to notice
unless you look away,
and some time later, look again.

ANAPHYLAXIS

You'll find a bitter toxin
slipped on your breath.
Light floods every sense
and then goes out for coffee.
That to which you are allergic
closes your airway like a vault
for future builders to bulldoze
as if your memory were too vulgar
for good people to remember.

EXHALATION

I greet my friends in the dark
where the dead and living
occupy the same conspiracy.
Acquaintances and ancestors
dance in a circle on dirty feet.

Characters float above the pages;
my sole contributor whose word
is like an infant in an incubator
whose seals are starting to crack.

Medicines in orange bottles
leap out and sort themselves
and tell me when to swallow.

STAIN ON THE CUFF

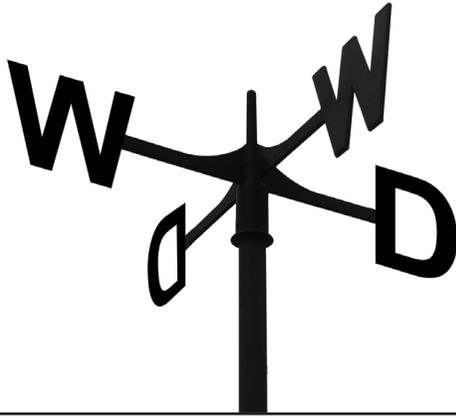
An implement sharpened to
the breadth of a fingernail
in the skin of a parking attendant
napping in his kiosk.

The rebirth of disco
in the men's room.
The last calypso
there in the spot
on the floor.

Here is your crack
in your engine block.

Banners from the festival
marks of black waffle soles
rain streaks the outlines
strips hang ragged
from teeth.

Jesse Minkert has made picture frames, painted signs, cut patterns for a foundry, made wood carvings, installed hot tubs, and fabricated disco dance floors. His carvings, paintings, and sculptures have been displayed in galleries in Texas, California, and Washington State. He lives in Seattle where he is the executive director of the non-profit corporation Arts and Visually Impaired Audiences. He writes short stories, microfiction, novels, and poetry. His writing has appeared on literary websites, in magazines, anthologies, dance performances, and recordings on radio and CDs. In 2008, Wood Works Press published a collection of Minkert's microstories and poems titled Shortness of Breath & Other Symptoms. Each summer for fifteen years Minkert has taught radio theater techniques to visually impaired teenagers.



POETRY
FALL 2012

SOUTH FLIGHT

by Jasmine Smith

I am the brick city,
red dirt gristle, skidding
the shoulders of my streets,
outside forty year old chicken fries,
where congregations of weathered
brothers in tattered breakers
clog their nostrils like project
plumbing, lambent eye and sniffing,
swilling on gin sips, pausing
only to whistle at a gleaming Caddie
pulling onto a tarmac lot
or whisk a sleeve across sheen-d
cashew lips, sucking the grease
of dark meats till the bones
are scraped clean;

I am the plaza stairwells,
where dark eyed hookers drink
themselves dead, nursing
the glass throats of eight
dollar handles, lifting skirt
hems to Suburban strangers,
silver to curb, the sweat shakes
and scrambled black shits
of two am skag cravings.

I am the sagging porch stoop,
where Kimsborough's mulatto
doppelganger, sips blank brew,
bare handed, slapping, striated,
steel necks, beat-box-blues-ing,
hundred year hymnals
whisking the whip lashed backs
of illegals cross my state borders.

Welcome to my filthy, alphabet heart—
where sistas in Sunday suits and six story
hats, flood the tooth picked aisles
of Vietnamese hair shops
for bagfuls of Afro sheen
grease, and synthetic curls—

black, slick bodies, sliding South
at sundown in flight, down Shartel street
like a spoonful of melted margarine,
spilling back to the shake of shotgun homes.

SWEET AS HONEYCOMB, SWEET AS BLOOD

We'll go to our graves wondering
what kept old Wright alive,
a noose fixed tightly around his neck
like a rattle snake seizing the pulse

of a deer mouse within its jaws.
Rumor says his Mama sucked the air
right out of that court room,
and releasing it three days later

howlin' into the calico print
of a pillow case, the same low
pitch moan a heifer makes
pushing out the blood slicked,

boney rump of a calf,
sawed every roof in Moss Point
cleanly in half, tearing that year's
cotton crop straight from the roots

and three hundred miles down
Route 66. Folks used to say
the family always had its ties
in dark things, Ruth's milky

cataract eyes caught everything
like two grease stained windows
peering down from an upstairs
attic. A little secret-

when Gerald was found dead in the marsh,
wasted as a Southern Comfort grin
and half his jaw shot off with a
45, Ruth just nodded

in the direction. As children we
would hold our breath passing
the sagging porch stoop of
their filthy shack, imagining her hacking

away at the circles of human
skulls or eating tablespoons of
soil gathered from fresh graves
like undercooked grits. A black

water child of the devil
done and seen stranger things
than his soul pulled back
from hell's front door,
so we weren't too surprised
when Wright's neck didn't
give way like the wood of a
black gum tree, dried

to burn fast, and the cream
colored curds of Ruth's eyes
wide open, smiling like she was
chewing on a piece of honeycomb.

MAIN ROAD, EUREKA SPRINGS

Driving home the moon wanes
silver crescent, the steel tracks
bright as birch bark
in the black overgrowth.

Shivering, my dogs howl
for the dirt, loosened from the shoulders
of the road and Dylan's molasses voice
like two radios whistling round
the same lost wave length.
I can feel my age dragged

through the cracked windows,
mint and stale Marlboro smoke
stoking the slick, pink walls
of a mouth I once loved
in the aftertaste of the ice
edged air. "The Times are

a-changin' -"

but I can still remember
Corrine O' Sullivan's lips
red as blisters in a crease,
and the white paint
fraying in the runnels of
her daddy's truck bed,
the red-rust metal, cold
beneath our blanket-
her hair splayed across
my chest the same way
school children clumsily trace
turkey cut outs from construction
paper at Thanksgiving.

How much meaner the Main Road
than the dark hair collapsing over
her flannel dressed shoulders
when she stood to leave.

FOR THOSE WHOM PARENTHOOD IS A TYPE OF CANCER

Father Moon stumbled home
one night, grease lit in the cheeks
and polished off, like two drums
of hammered metal or the silver
knife marks of minnows.

Dizzy on puddles of moon shine
Moon waned sickle, spitting
up soft matter on a stark mattress
the dark space around him
whisking orbits, like a fork
breaking into the greasy
phlegm of egg yolks.

The moon thought fondly of
his six thousand daughters,
born of the roiling New England
crab bakes of adaptable Cancers.
Clumsy. Sidelong, crawling

on tight ropes of salted sand-
beneath the silver sliver of the moon,
sliding forever in and out of their lives
like a rigged nickel, gambling
in the tight crevice of a coin slot.

“Tenacious,” slurred Moon
to describe his daughters;
formed alone in the remnants
of their fathers’ after birth:
clots of molten dust, the umbilical
cord of gaseous matter
snaked round their shells
like the permanent gouges
fingernails leave behind,
scraping away at the patina
of old wood.

Jasmine Smith studied English Education at the University of Central Oklahoma with an emphasis in Native American Cultural Studies and Creative Writing. She is greatly inspired by the works of Aime Cesaire, Linda Hogan, and Li Young Lee for their lyrical quality and the attention to their diverse ethnic identities. Her work reflects her strong attachment to her African American and Creole identity, the South, and to the mythos that weaves itself into even the most mundane routines of everyday life.

SCARS

The bed sheets! Mom shrieked, bolted
and gashed her forehead halfway up
the cellar stairs when Dad grabbed
her by the ankle, yanked her back,
boot-heeling a hole in big brother's upper lip
after he'd dashed up behind to defend Mom

while the rest of us huddled, storm sirens
screamed and out the narrow windows
above a twister tore from the sky
a torrential hail of debris, snapping
our climbing tree, toppling the clothesline
and ripping Mom's load of whites from its pins.

SHE DIDN'T LIKE WHAT SHE DIDN'T KNOW

Mom found it in the kitchen cupboards.
A little jewelry box felted black, gold
latch and trim. Dad's mother had passed
and we were rummaging in the ruins
of the old farmhouse, packing
what might be worth something and burning the rest.

Inside the box lay one blonde curl
of perfumed hair. *Whose*, Mom asked,
whose? Dad shrugged and went on sorting
tubs of scrub rags, a steady rain
of dust floating in on sunbeams
through torn curtains and murky glass.
And smoke from the fire my brothers
tended outside. Mom smoldered

a lot of late, and Dad did his best
to keep out of her way. *Must be important*,
Mom said, *if someone kept it all these years*.
Dad squirmed like he'd snagged one foot
in a trap. He'd been promoted
from crew foreman to an office job.
He smelled like cologne in the mornings
instead of sawdust. *Could be anyone's hair*.
Could be no one we know. Could be mine,
he said without turning to face her.

You were blonde? Mom said.
I think so, Dad answered. Both of them
hushed to hide from us whatever it was
ready to combust between them.
Something about office floozies filing invoices
too nearby. Dad lifted a wooden crate of kitchen tools
and escaped outside. Mom studied the box,
opening and closing, touching the lock of hair
as if she were testing it to come alive.

AT THE FIVE ‘N DIME

The wooden floors creaked
as the stock manager lumbered up the aisle
under his armload of boxed merchandise.

Lousy whore,
he hissed at the lady in cosmetics,
stacking what he'd stashed
at her feet and dashed away. His neck
ablaze, his starched collar blotched with sweat.

I'd overheard from the aisle nearby,
a boy who loitered, enchanted
by the scent of her, ensnared by the ribbons
bannered in her hair.

When our eyes met, I flinched. Her gaze
blinked and shot past.
She swallowed hard, lifted a box and slid
behind the glass defenses of her station,
feigning nonchalance
amidst perfumes and plasters. Her lipsticks
like gold bullets in their racks.

As founding editor of Many Voices Press, Lowell Jaeger compiled Poems Across the Big Sky, an anthology of Montana poets, and New Poets of the American West, an anthology of poets from 11 Western states. His third collection of poems, Suddenly Out of a Long Sleep (Arctos Press) was published in 2009 and was a finalist for the Paterson Award. His fourth collection, WE, (Main Street Rag Press) was published in 2010. He is the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Montana Arts Council and winner of the Grolier Poetry Peace Prize. Most recently Jaeger was awarded the Montana Governor's Humanities Award for his work in promoting thoughtful civic discourse.

IMPERATIVE STATEMENTS

by Jose Arturo Flores

1.

shrink sentences with labyrinth
avail yourself
preconceive multiple sides
ricochet against knuckles and pedestals
identify personal belongings
itemize using words: shouting...powdered milk
pick all the locks
position sentence in the midst of faces
cradle no images
covet one secret thought
crosspollinate
bid stress to strings
bid on her bruised body
list eyelip
spill eye along seams of threnody
murmur
recontextualize girl in black
cobble subsequents
curry text
untangle labyrinthine bodies

2.

choose a copious point in time
stack up your words like fertilizer around base of cassia
aerate...spread...curl...hook fingers...into`it
make a fist and pull weeds...feel soil give knots...baubles...
draw near to whimbrel no longer a fist of hummus...
keep cuff free of...all declensions...entanglements...intimacies...
drive...gloss block...intuit window sill...

think of girl in black frock
wait for zigzag of pigeons to plummet out of blue sky and onto bubble gum shingles
command nervous system to roll balls of dung across the throat-slit
chip away with nervous system
stretch sunlight like a latex glove
remember floc of clouds
bite on increments of shape and light
stare through mottled windshield
simulate flock in flight like the multiplicity of planes formed by arms shoulders
head of a boxer's bobbing
and weaving
stimulate flight patterns by dint of fluctuating ratio
egg on muscular contractions

ask yourself: is this a building or a thing going up?
sink stem into`it...
shake moonlight from palm-tree-cuneiform...
dilate spinal cord...
harvest et ceteras with brush of hand...

sniff leafmeal hair
plié air through sinuses
desist-squelch mosquito over computer screen: parallel: neither makes a "szzz": neither
concretizes a therapeutic buzz
delimit singsong air conditioner without moving parts: vortex: head of beer: it

walk to new leek farm with a post and lintel mind
multi-task your way lapel upon lapel
sneak partner into probability
throw vortex into et cetera pile

play with et cetera's sagging ropes
field from this chain: commands to myself

apprehend one scallop at a time
canvass: flies herpes wigwams cerulean
prehensile
continue *cutting through* with nervous system
brim with seedlings
hatch a pair of cheek bones for shells pinpoint shells
twist talk out of such words
buttress poems with et ceteras
release leash
pinch nerve with a pair of attention spans
slide the possessive in and out
have scene of crime call attention to itself
dwell in cursor

3.

read the following chain of commands

ask yourself: can i get there from this wicker rattan chair?

then neatly split hoof in two hemispheres

spell antiphony in each

dangle one crosshatched leg from balcony

adopt pedestrian point of view

butt Rx into pod-

jot down

season to your liking

claim a wad of posterity for yourself

sit behind the i.e. wheel

sound off numbers against roof of mouth

desensitize morceau

dangle from your errant tongue

abide in factors of: fetish carmen charm paper cut

throat lobster claw dust mote

locate avid next to mouths

generate a piece of fiction between them

then wrinkle semantic current

insert lack of a better word

blow through elbow of straw one of your prime sentences

dispel this image

crease your hair with teeth of comb

push peanut down row

spackle honeycombed windowsill with oneiros

spit out termites through neglected points of view

tuck squid between cheek and gums

stand by in ribbons (sine & cosine)

seesaw your textures in the husk of a hush

argyle argot voluptuous vice in relation to fluency affluence

pigeonhole homing device

oil your chain of commands

pedal in good faith

release pedals on slope

add a sloping scenic view

push together caesura debauched as a pea pod

crack limpid sheath with mortar and pestle

scald forearms with suffixes like -cide

grow postcards from biarritz on bald forearms

cure futures into poem

retract lily of the valley from poem

wrap lines in sawdust

add symptoms

return to sender

4.

insert spiral handcuffs

climb

down

rungless pope

less

slope of light

penumbra of penumbra

commas quicken

spin wheel of fortune

submit to feathers soundless scanning

map caracas' starry carcass

count spells

lump together retinue and retina

edit cliff diver and gust of wind

tack on griffin in a grief of wind

how many sutures in structure?

how many las vegas?

presence wasp butts into bedroom window on and on snail enters bell

shaped ribcage

confess christian monroy is no longer literal...but how a thing is cupped

witness as one who spirals out of reach

strand ornament

think fluffy as floc

succumb to ply-at-my-trade ash

search for oion in the offing

solicit fresh omissions

connect scant possibilities

breathe pairs

pare down moon

include hyphenated hoof

reincarnate subfusc bodies

wed word to dew

5.

versify vice versa

hang expressionless coat

draw near sun baked oracle
duly dice in whispers

reckon meter of bucolic

soothe twin faiths

open hand raceme...beseech
close hand corymb...cloister

salt around limits
add chronic vertigo
remove acute vertigo

conjure spit enveloping larva

let yourself be wounded by consensus

SLUICE

in paullette oak priest pails of slosh
few hand held whims
she takes the cellophane avenues to northumberland
inner lined with roadkill
climb coarse valleys
flax a flailing on her way

she drains the tendrils of muskwheat
dreary torpor boards her limbs
her phlegm lures the logs downstream
she tends the sickly limb to limb

in paullette oak priest pails of slosh
this word meant the world to her
succinct as her waist
transparent as a dust mote
she takes the cellophane avenues to northumberland

dotting my pensive lap with objects
she leaves the imprint of her teeth on a blade of grass
influx sedentary moronic butterfly
fork in the road
to the placid pinnacle of juxtaposition
in paullette oak priest pails of slosh

transparent as a dust mote
fickle as a pronoun
inner lined with roadkill
drained of all tonguesling
testified hotbed

meddling in khaki
burning at the stake
in paullette oak priest pails of slosh
bouncing off the walls of my tiny acumen
she drains the tendrils of muskwheat

corrected by tea cozies
she takes the cellophane avenues to northumberland
lizard on fine sheet of heat

curio picked apart
her phlegm lures the logs downstream
succinct as her waist
syncopated
in paullette oak priest pails of slosh

DWELLIN' IN THE CRAWL SPACE

i pity the vowel
so much work for nothin'
my mother's terry cloth language still sings to my ear
the venom coos you to sleep
two eucalyptus leaves over my eyes kept the world at bay
the rest could be begged for

i grew up under her herringbone skirts
where ice-floes formed sentences
and shadows held their value
i was slightly taller than a proboscis
yet shorter than a figure of speech

i clung to swatches of her quilted body for warmth
estranged from my father who swallowed canned oysters from sunrise to sunset
i stayed home from school drooling on boardgames as i replicated the virulent
south american beheaded chicken

*

a chevron's length from the core of consumption
i have decided to describe my hesitation by counting

the dream that squeezes the blood from the white cloud
boys grow up to be men i heard the old woman say

you climb out of your chrysalis
and into your chrysler

a body craves its come-uppance
the narrative cannot breach the immune system

the limbs flail onto the mat
the meaty part of the palm

why is my zigzag incomplete
this stuff is unteachable
men grow up to be pockets of wind
their legs never touching the boardwalk on coney island

i dust off my harmonica
i press my warm lips to the cold steel
even this gesture is schematic

language is lighter than the limp cherry tree
everybody in the neighborhood protects your name

a body wants to wrap itself in drapery
a body walking man unfettered
let his speeches certify his marks
let him fight his way back from the diaspora
let him witness the chrysalis and chrysler (kindred sprouts) as they are woven
together

*

my fall exists in spite of my inner grumblings
so softly she alighted fashionably bruised
i lift my diminutive voice from no place as pale-white-my-edging-wakefulness

bits of rain looped into my thoughts
dilapidated snows of reflection

i wanted to enter into the nectar of forgiveness
through a nave filled with thorns that could still remember to puncture the skin

seasonal labor
laborious light

my mother's scissors sat on the kitchen table deep in reckoning
tomorrow's work would call for dexterity
slashing and measure

FASCICLES

built-in motivation slippers function solely on a bead of water
pagination of a cancer cell
confluence of commas
awnings hunt an ossified soliloquy

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
one frame at a time

potent pouch lined with a macadam of antioca
want light bulb through a dehydrated bully
soft clay passed around rows of sharp teeth
damage to lip of sentence is not irreversible

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
parallel to the fixation of weeds

gulfed a panic
in a minimal lock
on the brink of bordello
judith ditched a dutch of magnificent consumption

can't chop onion by rote on cutting board
lily-white layers are brought to a boil out of focus
cork floats vagueness undulates why why not reds

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
culling through a pile of quotes

petrified body-of-movement
banjo is a binary fission
percussive
pluck out heart liver lungs windpipe

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
photosynthetically

motley decomposition of a cheek
egress of calico binoculars
spool of stammering in a petri dish
a movie star cooks an egg

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
hatched from a kernel of kennings

gullible gulletta massina
eye to eye draughts
arms akimbo convex screen
twist of lipstick lucid as a pit

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
hewn by the ax

new york is a juxtaposition of taxis
rabbit plunge around stone flux
ventriloquist's voice is a sedimentation

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
sitting under a copious shade

to place a squeak in scum
recitation in stitches down the aisle
encroachment of a topiary topic
delayed ox dust
hooves connect cobblestones

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
measuring the extent to which one substance is able to dissolve in another

root canals inform the succinct annals
a wide heliogram of a phone booth
polka contraption
shell shocked participants tumble (in semitones) toward a door that is not true to
the frame

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
damascened in a snake-like pattern

cold bubble gum chews itself to a pulp of quandaries
feathery vexation surrounds a casual reader

on cue (a literary capture)
fist down throat
relative zeros complicate gourds

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
cropping of event horizon

obliterate vast exhaust
chaff of cheat-sheet lies on floor
pleated at 45 degree angles
landscape from which no wedge of coral shall escape
most of all a cussing trust

so went thespian speed bump in a smoke of blue paint
to masticate while circumcised and luring structures

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
as sentenced by the public crier

squint into syntagma
chain-linked for your protection
casualties loitering your reconstructed eyelids out of sequence

at the cinema one pares a skin of language
crwth-orifice grows blissfully detached

WEDDING PARAPHERNALIA

the acorns begin to freefall against the cabin in the evening
they are carried far from their dwelling
your body is gutted by the crest and trough of doubt
your smile is an abstract fruit bowl on the windowsill

you and i ate limpid lumpias on highland ave.
as the fog rolled into *Tina's*
dewdropping the greasy booths
i rolled the dough into our babies
soft and buttery babies with wings floated over our lunch special
lumpia appeared on the menu more times than any other word
seeking a protective coating of sorts
the booth was crowded with the dowels of our babies
each one a bargain

it is imperative that the moss between your legs grows acclimated to high
altitudes
you will leave a trail of pee on the tile
gravity is not safe
it is a turgid tone that you covet as you step through the conical hallway
your utterances have always inhabited moist shady sites
to run my finger along their obscene curvature
was to never roll off the edge of an enigma
to want to delve into their gregorian vaulting
to stretch their spongy surface with my finger
or to do so over and over under duress

the acorns open in the sunlight like cut lips
you walk along the ridgeline carrying a knapsack
you will not gather a thousand hushed acorns from the forest floor
even though it is your own body that stretches and breathes
what i am writing must come as a surprise to you
waiting to be stimulated by excretion

*

the knuckles on your fingers turn into lumps of sugar
each grain of sugar is a translucent cocoon vacated
we must scour the earth for cumbersome antonyms
our bodies must obey

your bloodstream is clogged in the attic
but you cannot walk away from the thickness of your senses
from the dream of your exoskeleton
you return to the cabin with skirl in the hollow of your ear
it is a form of writing
you try to drink a glass of water before going to bed
you shiver and close the rubbery lid of your eyes
it is still light out
where blueberries indifferently ripen
you scatter your drawings on the floor
hundreds of leeches you had to scrape away with a piece of bamboo during the
monsoon season

*

it is still light out
the fibers are rolled back and forth until desire is pieced together
your strong jawbone sits on the mantel embedded in a series of expressions
light filters down onto these harsh spoken words
varieties of a clearing
you were wearing my body
glue and strings that could be plucked
your penis grew claws hammers scythes wings
the opacity of things populated your thoughts
i was but one of many reflections
you thought i was everything
you said to me-you are everything
i was nothing
but you could not hear me
for ears your penis had colorful feathers
you could not hear me

you were wearing my body
an idea crossed your mind wearing an old pair of jeans
you decided i wanted to steal your idea
you said-you will never have my idea
you hid your idea beneath a persian rug, then beneath an appalachian quilt, then a
zarape
you polished your idea with cartoonish fervor
you proclaimed your idea to be self-sufficient
you gave it a name
you finally emancipated your idea as you would the layers of an onion under
running water
you were wearing my body
it was a sentence
hoping to bring harm to my sentence
you mutilated your body with cultic objects
you threw your body off a cliff
you became a sword swallower traipsing through traffic

Jose Arturo Flores is a graduate of Columbia University, and received an M.F.A. in creative writing from California Institute of the Arts. He is currently putting together a modest book of poems.

DUST

by Corey Don Mingura

I sleep next to a vacuum tube that
Runs all night to catch the dust,
But it doesn't help much.

I cough up mud in the morning.
My face is like an unused dresser:
Slide your finger across my cheek,
Then wipe the grime on your old shirt.

There are sandstorms in my living room
That cracked windows can't hold back.
The milk in my bowl is brown or red
Depending on the deposits in the dirt.

The poor rats are always choking.
Why don't we just all move to
Somewhere nice up north?

No need.

We'll get used to it just like Grandpa and Daddy did.
I'll swallow down that brown and anticipate
The grinding of that grit between my teeth.

Won't bother wiping my shoes and jacket
Before I leave the house.

CIVILIZATION

My high school friend Joey decided to smuggle
a pound of weed out of Mexico while
borrowing my mother's car—
the one that was going to be mine.
Said he was running to the Dollar General
for a second to pick up some eggs, and two nights
later, he called my mother and asked "Ms. Rodriguez,
could you talk to this policeman?"
With that, I lost a friend and hunter green '89
Ford Taurus. Another year of walking to school.
Fuck him. I sure as hell would have bashed his head
in, but luckily, the Mexican police did that for me.

After that, I decided I don't like people.

Thank the Lord for Microsoft, Dell, and AT&T.
Technology means less bastards to look at.
I pay my bills with online banking.
I buy my groceries from Amazon.com.
If I need a woman, there's millions to choose from,
and they leave as soon as I'm done.

Don't need to worry about yapping kids
at the Laundromat. Have my own washer and dryer.
And Church? Got my Bible right here, don't I?
Singing pisses me off anyways.

I couldn't have stayed at home if that drunk
UPS driver hadn't run over my leg.
Want to see my stump again? Ah, well.

Here's your dollar for bringing me the mail.
Now get the hell out.

MAGIC MARKERS

At eleven, too young
To bribe the corner store
Owners to let us buy
Cigarettes, we squeezed
Tobacco
Out of dirty butts off the
Ground and smoked
In permanent marker
Pipes.

At twelve, when
Sex Education
Gave us knowledge
Of incurable disease,
Fear of purple blisters
On our lips led us
To sticker patches
In backyards and
Country pastures.
We filled our black
And yellow hayburners
With thorny goat heads
That only the mouth
Of Earth had touched.

At thirteen, we all grew
Moustaches and the
Clerks never asked
Questions as they
Sold us white packs.
But with no jobs
and slim allowances,

We emptied the patches
Wherever we journeyed.

RUST

I rescued a metal bed frame
From the town dump a month ago.
It's been raining a lot lately,
So it was all covered in rust:
Brilliant chalky mahogany rust.

Still is.

I sleep on it all time.
There's red stripes on the
Bottom of my mattress.
I don't care.

When I wake up, I see
It has painted my face
A nice orange-tinted rouge.
It's wonderful.

"Throw it out," they say.
I refuse.
"Well, at least paint it."
But I can't do that.
It would lose all its flavor.

When I lick those auburn
And crimson bars at night,
I swear I taste peanut butter
With a hint of cherries jubilee.
I love how it stains
My tongue, and its essence
Lingers.

I'm completely happy.
Don't worry about me.
I've had my tetanus shot,
So I can do whatever
The hell I want.

FAMILY TREE

My father was a skyscraper
In Lubbock, Texas.
He couldn't handle being tall,
So he would constantly drink
Gasoline and threaten to set himself
On fire. Once, after polishing
A tank of Super Unleaded,
That threat became reality.
Unfortunately for him, He had an excellent
Sprinkler system, and he survived with
Minimal injuries. He was naturally imploded
At the age of 95.

My mother was a twenty-first
floor window in my building father.
How I came to be, I don't know.
I never ask nasty questions.
I jumped out of her upon being born,
And was subsequently raised
By the safety net that rescued me.
My childhood was not unhappy.
It would always try to beat me,
But it's okay. The thing had no hands.

When I was nineteen, I decided to leave
For Wyoming to escape from society.
As I cleaned out the old refrigerator,
I found an old copy of the Lubbock Avalanche
With the headline:
BABY SURVIVES 200-FOOT DROP.
There was naked me falling from my mother,
And I saw we have the same gray latches.

I confronted the safety net about this,
And it couldn't deny my heritage.
All these years, I don't know
Why I never questioned my true roots.
I, with brick red skin, and it with long
Blue threads.

When I drove to my father, he was too
Sedated on Lithium to speak, so I
Climbed the stairs to my mother.
“Why did you leave?” I asked.
“I didn’t” she said. “You’re the one
Who jumped.” She laughed, then said
“You were always gloomy
Waiting behind the glass.

“You get that from your father.”

Corey Don Mingura recently completed a MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Central Oklahoma in May 2011. His works of fiction, poetry, and poetry analysis have appeared in The Acentos Review, Westview, The Simms Review, Red Lightbulbs and The Scissortale Review. He currently serves as the associate poetry editor for Arcadia. Mingura is a Mexican-American native of Hollis, Oklahoma.

THE SPIDER

by Katherine MacCue

There's a dream in the corner
of the wall the form of a spider,
all legs and eyes. It is not graceful

in its turns; has not sewn webs
or caught flies with its cunning.
No orb or strand of silk exists yet,

no tangle or sticky string. It just sits,
a fleck of brown beard, jawless,
a piece of pulp left at the edge

of an empty glass. Such patience.
I, too, once lay for days on a horizon
of white filament, and days turned

to weeks. I had no plan. Voices rumbled
below my room — a noiseless cavern.
But I was a whole world to myself,

shutting out the sun and moon,
the rhythm of the world. I wove
great stories with the threads of

my mind, stories that took the shape
of memories where I existed at
the center of passionate

embraces, vows of eternal love,
friendships and hardships,
painful betrayals, followed by

sweet surrender and forgiveness.
I felt immortalized like a deity,
stretched out by God

and hung on a high arch; I was
whispered to with songs of
devotion and praise.

But shadows set in, my union
with this universe was severed
and I spent much time afterward

wondering what it had meant,
that world of false echoes where
I was so clearly crying out to be

thought of, to be remembered,
because to be remembered is,
in some way, to be heard.

The spider makes no sound
when sinking its fangs into
the flesh of its prey,

or when it shoots string from
the spigot. But I hear it, at times,
the sting and shoot, growing circular

around the mouths of windows.
I blink twice and the spider
is gone. Each segment

is the size of a star; it bleeds
lymph cells the color of water.
I wait for it in ignorance,

allegorize insincerely. Look,
there, a dream in the corner.

WESTBOUND TOWARD AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS

Its ironic, what we say
we want is to be sprung
back into light, from the
placental steps and out
into the world, and yet
we grip our belongings tightly,

we dream of comfortable
things and want the next stop
to be ours, not out of anticipation,
but out of urgency and deadline.
Battered, we rock and depart
faster down the dark canal,

no one looks directly into the
eyes of the other. We hover
around the glass and watch
the reflections, really distortions,
we say, oh yes, this is a better
estimate of our behavior.

The woman flossing certainly
hurts us, the Brooklyn musician,
who hits sticks repetitiously
against the thighs of his legs,
certainly has no way
of seeing what is really

our only hope: the boy,
his skin slick as fresh paint,
grasping to the poll with
the force of infant bird claws.
If we had better instincts
or, if we did not avoid them,

we'd know its dinnertime
and the boy is hungry, but
our body clocks are off,
and the train grumbles
with weak wheels. If we
were not afraid to look at

him we'd see traces of
mother all over his body:
lipstick kiss, elephant mittens,
scrubbed white sneakers housing
the anchors of his feet.
The velocity of the train

is fed by primordial desires:
pushing, yelling, always touching.
But it's a lie: the one with
the most practice will show none of
the fear, will see the boy
and whips into his ear all

the perversions of our intent.
Together they'll get off at
the quay and we'll keep
riding on our separate journeys,
oblivious, half-sleeping,
our collective body swaying,

stuck in a dream so deep
we never even noticed the wonder:
how the boy's eyes looked like the
muddy waters of a childhood
creek we swam in, how they echoed

distant memory of lullabies
and of running through forests.
We'll never know how tightly
he held to it, that flat piece
of cardboard, damp from
the sweet sweat of
his palm: our ticket home.

BABY BROTHER

I used to dress you up blue,
in a fairy godmother satin smock
and glinty diamond crown. I curled
your long black-dusted eyelashes

until they opened up to me
like a geisha fan
showing off your squint,
your thin pretty almond eyes

—that’s what they were,
wedged in soft easy skin.
Not even the cat could suffer long
inside the box of my eye.

You didn’t seem to mind
the tight squeeze between
the bed and the floor. It was
with my thumb and a match box

that I set grand-daddy’s story alight
in our hovering shadows; how quickly
his Appalachian visions
crumbled with the drought,

and got to his brain, like dirt
in water. His body was donated
to science and yes,
under the bed,
we’d be safe.

We were all late for church
on the day of your baptism;
trickling into the last vacant pew
to watch how your head, bent,

took to the pastor’s water,
like a dribbling concave stone.
Saint Conrad of Piacenza
was virtuous; he helped his parents

on the farm. I doubt he had the same
smile, faint as a hair-line and fractured,
nor the rupture of deep cheek pinchings —
holy man's kiss — someone called them, once.

But I still cant remember
who it was that cleaned you up
after I became bored and proclaimed

that playtime was over. Was it mother?
Father? Or maybe you kept yourself, limp that way,
for a while; smart as you were
—how people change their minds so effortlessly

and maybe there will be others
who'll find use
out of the boy who is
somewhere called *Saint*.

BOY TALKING TO GOD

This is not so that I may
free my mind of sin or tell you
the conditions of my love but

she wore the scarf
around her neck, so that
the tassles were flaring

from the back of her body,
against her hips, which,
as a ship on green water,

signaled a kind of distress
that has yet to pass through me
completely.

THE GREAT FIRE

You say I am a makeshift
cardboard wreck, pieces
incapable of enduring

or sustaining. I took
your words, cut each letter,
mounted them. They now

dangle across the wall from
my bed. Today, I sit
and watch your words

fall as trees into vents of
a smoking tin radiator.
They go in lengths

as pairs, and come out
quivers of ash; I do not
know how you see

our doings and undoings,
I see them as your hands:
flesh not for rescuing,

but for touching. I strain
through a grey fog,
weave through tightly knit

crossings of a lattice
just to remember their form:
warm, cupped, finding

symmetry along my dark
corners. And with this memory,
each fleck of ash, I know

somewhere oceans are
azure with salt; branches
make a tapestry with leaves.

I shall not pluck them,
such delicate wonders of
the earth: they are you.

THE CAVITY

Last night, I held you to my chest,
between the ribs, a cage
that keeps you still.

Tonight, I drive along the rim
of the Potomac, recalling words
my father has spoken,

inconsistent but sharp,
like the crackling of gravel.
He said: animal, orphan, or nomad,

we are all bound to something.
His message was always his voice,
and his voice is a dial tone;

it drowns in music
and dissolves into the tapping of rain.
Without it, there is space for you

to linger. But without it,
I cannot see
past the trees.

Katherine MacCue is a graduate of The George Washington University. She resides in New York though feels she's left pieces of herself in benches beneath the cherry blossoms of Washington, D.C, in a small Abbey with great acoustics in Bourgogne, France, and in the countryside of County Cork, Ireland. Her poetry has been published in various journals including Stone Highway Review and Eunoia Review. She writes with the hope that her work will inspire or move someone, perhaps just one person, the way she was moved by Louise Glück when she called out, "You who do not remember passage from the other world I tell you I could speak again: whatever returns from oblivion returns to find a voice..." If you're interested in learning more about Katherine, you can do so at: Kvmacc.blogspot.com.

SOMEDAY I'M GOING TO MARRY KATY PERRY

by Calvero

Someday
I'm going to marry
Katy Perry.

Just wait,
you'll see.

But wait.
What's that you ask?
Isn't she already married?
Yeah.
So?
She's married
to that crappy
British comedian,
 what's his name?

Randall?
Huh?
What's that,
you say?
It's Russell?
Oh.
Well, whatever.
I'm sure
they'll get divorced.
In fact I know
they will.
I have faith.
I know that probably sounds horrible,
and I know my poor Katy
will probably be heartbroken
over it all
when it eventually happens,
but I also know
that she and Randall

splitting
is ultimately for the best.
Besides,
I'll be there for her.
 I'll make her feel better.
I'm not a comedian
per say,
but I can make her laugh
too.
I'll tell her jokes.
 I'll be like,
"Katy,
how do you get a dog
to stop humping you leg?"
"How?"
she'll ask me.
"Pick him up
and start sucking his dick,"
I'll reply
with perfect comedic timing.
And then she'll laugh,
and then I'll laugh,
and we'll laugh together
so hard
that we'll fall asleep
in each other's arms.

That will be the beginning
of our courtship,
and it wouldn't take long
after that
for her to see
what a stand-up guy
I am.
I would drive us
to romantic places
with scenic views
in my dented '96 Geo Prism.
I'd take her out to dinner
whenever I could afford it.
I'd slow dance
with her to Sam Cooke
and Ritchie Valens.
I'd even leave little love notes
around
for her to find,
and they'd say adorable shit like,
"I'll be thinking of you

all day today,”
or,
“You farted in your sleep
last night
and I thought it was really cute.
xoxoxo”

In a little over a year
we’d surely be married,
and I’d be the happiest man alive
because I’d get to take care of
Katy
for the rest of her life.
I still live with my parents,
but I’m sure they wouldn’t mind
Katy moving in with us.
They’re cool like that.
We’d be one, big,
happy family.
Just me,
Katy,
my mom and dad,
my two cats,
and of course her cat,
Kitty Purry.
It’d be great.
Plus,
I don’t want to toot
my own horn,
but I’d be the greatest lover
she ever had too.
(Toot,
 toot!)

I’d seduce
my beautiful Katy-bear
every night
to make sure
all her deepest
physical desires
were always met...

“Hey baby,”
I’d say to her seductively,
“I know you’re probably
still full
from all that Hamburger Helper
I made us for dinner,
and I know the smell

of fresh cat shit
permeating from the litter box
at the foot of the bed
isn't ideal,
but maybe you'd like to make some
sweet,

sweet,

love?

Yeah?

You guess so?

Yeah,

there really isn't anything good
on TV tonight.

Sounds good,

baby.

Let's get at it.

But we need to try

and fuck quietly.

My parents are asleep

right next door."

Ya see?

Katy would be happier

than she'd ever been

in her whole life.

She'd totally forget about

what's his name,

Randall?

Russell you say?

Oh whatever.

And to answer

your question,

no,

I'm not deliberately

forgetting his name

just to belittle him

like he's not important enough

to remember.

I'm not immature

like that.

Anyway,

Katy would be so happy

living with me

in my parent's house

and with all our cats

that she'd never want

to leave my side.

Not even
to go out on tour
or to go record
a new hit album.
But don't worry.
I wouldn't let that happen.
I'd be really supportive
of her career.
I'd remind her of her gift
and that she needs to share it
with the world
because she and her songs
make so many people
happy.

So ya see?
I'd be a really good
husband,
and Katy and I
would have a great life
together,

and it'd be
beautiful,
and
wonderful,
and
scary,

and it'd be
difficult
at times
too,
because

true love
comes broken.

It is not something
you fall into
and hold onto,
but rather
is always
continually
being built
from the ground up,
constructed from
the collective rubble

and remains
of two,
separate,
lost souls.

It is hard work,
true love,
a gamble
you don't
leave to chance,

and as long
as you know this
and grasp this firmly
with all your heart
and with all ten
of your fingers,

and as long
as you are bold enough
and strong enough
and willing enough
to painstakingly
build it
brick by brick,
then you already
have more to offer a woman
than most of the richest men
in the world.

Someday
I'm going to marry
Katy Perry,

and not only that,

I'm going to hold onto her
too.

Just wait
and see,
Randall.
Just wait
and see.

xoxoxoxo

WHEN THE DAWN COMES, TONIGHT WILL BE A CHUBBY MEMORY TOO

Every once
and awhile
while digging around
inside my wallet,
or coat pocket,
or pants pocket,
I'll come across
an old,
crumpled up,
wrinkled
receipt,

and because

I'm such
an incurable fat ass,
9 times
out of 10
the receipt
will be for one of many
fast food places;

Taco Bell,
Wendy's,
McDonald's,
Burger King,

you know,
the usuals,

and I'll look down
at the receipt
in my hand
and reread
what I had ordered
for lunch
or dinner
on that day...

4 SOFT TACO BEEF
- NO LETTUCE

1 LRG DIET PEPSI,
and if I'm lucky
the receipt will still have
some kind of grease stain
on it,
and after I've made sure
no one is looking,
I'll bring the receipt
up to my nose
and take a sniff
and breathe it in,
and all the wonderfully
tasty
memories
will come flooding back
into my brain,

and as I reminisce
I'll smile,

and I'll feel warm
and good inside,
and the sun
will suddenly piss
special
rays of sunshine
down upon me,
and only
upon me,
and as the world dissolves
around me
I'll just stand there,
 wherever I may be,
in a state of
chubby blissfulness
staring at the receipt
ever so longingly,
almost as if it were
a photograph
of an old girlfriend
I had never really
gotten over,
or a photo

of me and a bunch
of forgotten friends
that I dearly miss
and haven't seen in years
and know
I'll most likely
never see again,

and then
it will hurt,

because those tacos
were good tacos,
really... good... tacos.

I remember them
so clearly,
so perfectly,
and I loved them
so,
and they tasted
so delicious,
but I know they're
never
coming
back.

Those tacos,
those really, really good tacos
are gone.

The song
"Memory"
from Andrew Lloyd Webber's
Cats
will begin playing inside my head
and I'll become
misty-eyed
over the whole damn thing,
and to keep from bawling
I'll have to
secretly scold myself...

*Really, Calvero?
Really?
You're going to weep
in public
over an old*

fast food receipt?
You pathetic,
sentimental
sack of shit!
You sniveling bitch...
There are plenty of tacos
in the sea.
Find your damn balls
and move on
with your life!

So I'll reach my hand
down into my pants,
 wherever I may be,
and find my testicles
smushed inside
my boxers
 (that's usually
 where I find them
 whenever I misplace them),
and with my balls
in hand I'll
finally snap out of it
and end up
throwing the receipt away,
because

a mind
that reminisces too often
is a mind
that murders the present
and smogs the future.

So with the receipt
in the trash
I'll just get in my car,
drive to the nearest Taco Bell
 (or other
 nearest fast food location),
and make some
brand new, tasty,
fat-ass
memories
to last me awhile,

 or at the very least
to last me
just long enough.

THE RACIST VIKING (so sleepy)

I've always been
a real viking
when it comes to eating.
I devour my food
almost instantly.
I go
Nom, nom, nom!
and then my food is gone
just like that.
You probably wish
you were as good at eating
as I am,
but you're not.
I'm the best.
 Sorry.

One afternoon
not too long ago
I had just victoriously
polished off my lunch
at this favorite fast food place
of mine.
I went
Nom, nom, nom!
and my lunch was gone
just like that,
just like always.
I was real proud
of myself too,
just like I usually
am.

Sitting in the booth across from me
there was a man
eating his lunch.
He was sitting alone
just like me,

but he wasn't as good at eating
as me.
Not even close.

The man
was a black man,
 a very big black man.
 Not *fat* kind of big.
 More girthy than anything,
 and tall too,

and with his large stature
he should have been very good at eating,
but he wasn't.

I was better.

I don't like to brag,
but I was.

I should've gone over there
and talked to him and
given him some pointers;

*Open your mouther wider,
 Take bigger bites,*

Don't chew. Just swallow.

It was a real amateur hour
over there.

I should've helped him,
but I didn't want to
although

I wasn't sure
why.

So he just sat there
taking modest bites
out of his cheeseburger,
eating it all wrong,
while I sipped my diet soda
and watched him eat
out of the corner of my eye.

As I watched him
I slowly came to
the realization as to why
I didn't want to help him:

 I hated him.

I don't think I hated him
because he was black.

No,

that wasn't it.

That wasn't it at all.

I didn't hate him

because he was black.
That would mean I'm racist,
and racist people
are fucking assholes,
and should be herded
into rockets
and shot into the sun.
No,
that's not me.
I'm not a racist.
I didn't hate him
because he was black.
I hated him because
he was human.

I was human too,
 apparently,
although I never came close
to feeling like one.
Don't get me wrong,
I did a lot of things that
most normal humans beings
do; I ate,
slept,
crapped,
pissed,
farted,
cursed,
wept.
I picked lint
out of my bellybutton.
I watched my cats
shit in their litter boxes,
but still,
even when doing all these typical
human things,
I never felt much
like one of them.
 Not even
close.

So I just sat there
hating that guy
who didn't know how to eat.
I was good at that too,
 hating that is,
a real viking,
just like I was with eating,

but shit
was it exhausting.
It was making me tired.
Real tired.
I couldn't believe
how much energy it took
just to dislike someone
so strongly.

*I better stop,
I thought,
or else
I'm going to fall asleep
right here,
right now.*

So I sat there
and I waited for myself
to stop hating him.
I waited
 and waited
 and waited.

I waited a long time
but I couldn't do it.
 I couldn't stop.
I hated that man.
Not because he was black,
but because he was human,
and because he most likely
felt human
too,
and I didn't.

I hated him
because I felt
so disconnected
from something
I was innately
supposed to be.

Amidst my hating,
a fat Spanish woman
sat down in the booth
next to mine
and began eating her food.
 I hated her too,
and wouldn't you know it,
that made me
even more tired.

And then,
minutes later,
an entire family
of four sat down
in the far corner
of the restaurant.
They all looked
really happy together.

I really hated them.

So much so
I could barely
keep my eyes
open.

Holy shit...

I better leave...

right...now...

or else.....

I.....might

fall.....

“Hey you!
Wake up!”

I startled awake.
The manager
of the joint was
standing over me.
He looked down at me
with fuzzy, furrowed,
twitching eyebrows.
I had no idea how long
I'd been out.

“You can't sleep
in here!”
the manager yelled.
“What are you?
Some bum?
If you wanna sleep in here
you're gonna have to leave!”

I slowly stood up
and grabbed my coat.



IS

by Judith Taylor

I want to make clear
that it's a question of the curlicues
and the chandeliers. The rest
you can stash, slash, or cash.
I'll dissemble a toccata on the pianoforte
in the drawing room while you choose,
my Fata Morgana. The morgue
or the mosque of the impossibles.
Or is it the possibles? My near death
educated me: it's the same thing,
love. Fever Chandleresque,
a phalanx of similies breathing in me,
squeezing. Nothing solid anymore,
nada, zilch. How that patchwork itches!

Bring me my twilight mai tai
with your hoary paw, it's time
to read the old succulent
dramas tick-tocking on the mantel.
One can almost touch the fog
roiling in from the sea.
What's mysterious is how
persistent the brightness behind it
actually is.

BON BON PERDU

Once upon a time, longing choked me.
Don't be sad on this day of remembering and malls.
The cat's water frozen: tinny symphony of despair.
What we really know about light fills a very large sandwich.
I navigate blind and haunt beyond impulse's pale.

IN ONE EAR

Ick! Dregs should sink to the bottom of the cup.
Heat climbs onto your body, sticking like rape.
Brochures lure you to isles you'll never ever tan on.
New love, little wet whistle, witch watch trotting fast.
You press the shutter—presto!—the mirror vanishes.

A SHADOW, A SONATA

In a list of words one will always wink at you.
You can't undo your thought palace, that busy aerodrome.
My room circling volumes and the bones of a small love.
Can't we undo the teleology of boundaries?
Let it begin: the hunt for moonlight and susurrations.

COUP DE THEATRE

The rain's svelte, subtle, grise; someone's gonna get soaked.
Equivocating ghosts loll on luxe-trimmed trees.
Emotions suddenly guillotined with habit's sardonic glee.
Getting wet's nothing but immersion—cleansing, ritualistic.
Toes and fingers gleam taupe, this season's to-die-for chic.

SOME DISTANT SONGS

Magpie, ragtag raga outside the window, what do you auger?
Birches creak in 4/4 time while deer drift across the field.
Don't try to remember. Doff the cloche of photographs.
Over time, dreamers collect figures they call "strangers."
Haunted by bits of memory, chiaroscuro of disturbing feathers.

*Judith Taylor is the author of two books of poetry, *Selected Dreams from the Animal Kingdom*, and *Curios*. Her poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Boston Review*, *Poetry*, *Antioch Review*, *Pleiades*, *Seneca Review*, *Fence*, *Conduit*, and *Court Green* as well as in anthologies. The Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, the Ucross Foundation, the Djerassi Foundation, the MacDowell Colony and Yaddo have awarded her Fellowships, and she's the recipient of a Pushcart Prize. After teaching in UCLA's Writer's Program for many years, she presently teaches private classes in Los Angeles. Taylor is co-founder and co-editor of *POOL: A Journal of Poetry*. She currently takes a lot of photographs.*

THE CHASTE DEGREES

A.J. Huffman

The illusion is the hinged bubble
expanding over your head. Step through
its glowing portals. Disoriented
is the invitation I accept. I join you
inside the over-simplistic sphere. The paneless
windows force a frame around our waning
connection. The moon strobes
its light over this swallowed scene. Our hands
reach for the same off-side corners,
and everything clicks. In resolution,
we revolve. Inside. As the dizziness collapses
back into the commonality of our kiss.

ANOTHER CENTURY'S TWILIGHT

I found a door.

The door.

But I blinked.

And I lost my grip.

On its handle.

Now it's gone.

Or I am.

Closed.

To anything.

But the solid idea

of the black.

TO THINK I DIE

It is dark in hell.
And I am hot.
But steam is not light.
It weighs more on this night
that I am shaking.
Trying to lose my eyes.
Before the ceiling drops.
Me.
Though I am already falling.
Though I have already fallen.
My penance
is the panic.
Not the flight.

BETWEEN TOCK AND TICK

I don't care for sleep.
The peace is too deep.
The darkness
too complete.
The perfect place to forget.
Sounds like gold.
I know.
But the lining is lead.
Melting in the sun.
And dragging us back
to the chaos of breath.
Cruel. Recurring. Death.
I defy its delight.
And remain awake.
Night.

After night.

After night.

WALKING FREE OR CAGED

I do not know
why the world was designed
without me.
Why my presence here
has no substance.
No form.
No meaning.
I am the embodiment of misunderstanding.
Confusion.
Walking around.
Dragging chaos behind me.
Like a shadow.
Built to trip the angels of reality.
The belongs.
They must suffer my time here
as I have.
Silent.
And blind
to the pain.

*A.J. Huffman is a poet and freelance writer in Daytona Beach, Florida. She has previously published three collections of poetry: *The Difference Between Shadows and Stars*, *Carrying Yesterday*, and *Cognitive Distortion*. She has also published her work in national and international literary journals such as *Avon Literary Intelligencer*, *Writer's Gazette*, and *The Penwood Review*. Find more about A.J. Huffman, including additional information and links to her work at <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100000191382454> and <https://twitter.com/#!/poetess222>.*

TO VIRGINIA

by Amy Sprague

I would have met you at the water if I
were then without a daughter; I would have
held your hand—a lost sister.

I would have decided on the hour—on
instinctual impulse—when the lower
haze of swaying moods send me down.

I would have called you I bet,
and the moon would've been full and
I would've ran barefoot in my nightgown
to meet you at the water's edge.

We would've known, I think, not to speak
about blue darkness and moon shafts shifting
across pale dandelions between our toes.

We would've slept so deeply together,
palming the stones.

But chemistry comes in capsules now, Virginia,
and it allows you to linger at the surface, just
a breath away from air.

If you were here now
would you tell me my words are not pebbles,
to risk giving them meaning and shape
and to find no shame in their emptiness?

I am alone until I think of you—
my shared reflection, you with
so much more grace, but I can
only build you up as a writer and a fighter
and I drop a stone to wrinkle you away,
and I see my face, blurry and rippled,
brilliant in the moon.

THE RED CAPE

When I was five
I used to jump from the top of the stairs
to the landing with a red cape,
believing if I kept trying
I'd fly
I'd be Super Girl
saving the world from damage.
Many afternoons, my bare feet
thudded the catchy carpet
as smoke rose up the stairs
with the patience of a coming storm,
my father puffing a pipe,
his big knuckles unharmed
from their crack into my cheek;
his eyes empty of what he'd done
beneath my cape.
It didn't matter that there was no such thing
as heroes.
At least I could fly.

EB-125

I think I'm seeing white birds
white birds scattering away
from my window, out there
in the cold January, their wings
sound, from here, like sheets--
my grandmother's white sheets--
on the line in June.

The light coming in is white.
Color? Or space?
Like the space we can never fill.
Like the start of a narrative.
Like the blank walls,
these hospital rooms cemented
in their smoggy halo.

I'm crouched over a puce tray,
surrounded by the others in halogens, others
that have found strange caverns to fill in
strange tongues native to disorder, asking me
if I have a home, if I want my ice cream,
if I cut myself

as they rock in their seats
or lay on the couch or pace
the room, watching. We're always
watching.

I'm back in room East-Building #125
looking in a safety mirror
at my eyes, those black spheres
that tell me nothing
as to how to find them,
and my face is swollen,
green in the light.

Afternoons leave me trailing halls
away and around the others, busy
ants that lost their tribes, seeking
something, something close to that morning
light, before you're awake.
I follow the ones that never cry,
asking what they're on.

I stop at the Christmas tree
with it's paper ornaments.
Something deeper hurts.
The homeless Dave from Duluth
whispers to me from behind the tree
"are you getting out of here?" and I'm suddenly
hitting a bottom
because there are no lights
on this tree,
just the glint in his chimney eyes.

I bolt for my room as I unravel, knowing
at the same time that I belong
as my thoughts spin and my body
invades my privacy, it's going to turn too
and choke me out of reason.

I dissociate, panic,
get psychotic, crash
and wake up later beneath
a doctor's light, my body
on a cool table
and I think I'm seeing white birds
white birds scattering away
from my window, out there
in the cold January.
They're not doves—
more like the ghosts of crows
or sheets of paper
that I once
had a narrative on.

SCATTER

for my father

Your body isn't on this earth
like the others
I still see them, hunched over
bar stools at eleven a.m.

Your body isn't on this earth
and I wonder where you drifted?
to an embankment
of some kind
to a bed of moss
a nest?
our rose petals we'd sent after
your ashes rotten years ago

your body isn't on this earth
you're more like a breath
or a petal, just above the stir
scattering

if I could talk you into
piecing back together
for an afternoon
I would touch
your face,
sober and clear,
I wouldn't be afraid
I wouldn't ask you why
I'd memorize your eye color
and the way your lashes swept,
I'd trace the bones we'd burned
I'd say my name for you;
I wouldn't turn you in for all you were
I'd tell you who you were to me,
letting you go
and watch you scatter
softly back across the river
like a breath
telling you I'll see you again.

*Amy is a single mother living on Lake Superior. She blogs at [Difficult Degrees](http://amyjosprague.wordpress.com) (<http://amyjosprague.wordpress.com>) and spends most of her time working on her memoir. Her poetry and essays have appeared in *Psychic Meatloaf*, *The Survivor Chronicles*, *FRIGG Magazine*, *Rose and Thorn Poetry Journal*, *Escarp*, *7x20*, *Third Wednesday*, and *DMU's The Abaton*.*

BRAZILIAN WONDER

by Amit Parmessur

O Brazilian damsel! Don't throw the camera such
a celestial, green look
You are the emperor of originality
Let your dainty legs ask your heart how to wander

Your sensuous hair is a symbol of opulence
Your sweet eyes are marbles of innocence
Your fingers will swell anyone's success
Your lips will taste liberty one day,
your mouth will be a chamber of holy songs

O Brazilian damsel! Stop coming in my dreams
or my coffee will get cold
Please, stop coming in my dreams or
I'll go to work barefoot

Many belles have slapped their beaux
Many waiters have lost their job
Lamps have withered on the ceiling

It's all because of you, rustic beauty
But that isn't your fault only

O damsel, wine might cast an evil spell on you
Glasses might roll on the wild ground
like disobedient children
Cheese might refuse to be soft
Drunkards might stop shaking their heads

O damsel! Stop spreading this serpent look
You'll kill someone, some day
in blue or yellow Brazil

INDIAN EYES

Your black eyes carry cut and repaired
Sanskrit stories, in their pristine forms—

They have the shakti to create violent impacts
and loot immortal dacoits, or to bring peace
in times when jungle birds
become mad and shed their feathers.

When I watch your
fiery eyes it is as if the first time
I peruse the old expression 'purely divine'.

They are as beautiful as your
brave bosom. They have the might
to set shy battalions into triumphant motion.

Those charismatic, Kerala eyes have
not been given due credit.
They've been searching for a sage
who can make us all adore them.

No coldness— surely,
not made for lies or boundaries
your eyes want to ski on a lover's skin,
speak a worthy language, be kissed and
sensuously praised.

I can't bring myself to burn them.

They are as melodic as the bansuri.
They are as feisty as the cheetah.
They are as black as the freshest kohl.
They are the cloth of my winter,
and my safest, wide verandah.

My heart tries to spend every second, slowly,
telling my brain how a woman's eyes
can be the woman herself.

YOU EXIST NO MORE

As I stare, carefree,
the same smoke snakes up
from my khaki cup
of coffee. I get excited to
tell you how much
I love you... then suddenly
I realize you exist
no more. As I wipe
the maze of fingerprints off
the screen of my
blue mobile phone, I end
up typing heartfelt words
to you... then somehow I
realize you exist no
more. And as I flick
through the old pages
of my mind's library
I think of the
nice poem I once
wrote for you. I
quickly start a fresh
one... only to realize you exist
no more. Whenever I
walk amidst the rustling leaves
I feel I can hear
your strange voice too. I
start a mini conversation only
to realize you exist
no more. I'm so sorry. I'm
now very talented in
forgetting the past, especially
when it concerns something good,
something better than you.

WINTER BLUES

I hate this white, red and blue flag
floating high in the sky of my mind.

I've never been to any school
to learn about its possible ramifications.

I live in a jungle where I can't
rule despite being a muscular lion.

Every night, I grope for meaning
below a million brilliant sweet stars.

I think of the white as a pure butterfly,
and as the shroud of my erratic life.

This white is also my wife, on whom
I want to cheat every midnight.

I think of the red as bloody charlatans,
and as the flower of a passion I've had to sell.

This red is also the future which
has robbed my sinews of present and past.

I think of the blue as a powerful bullet,
and the missing part of my dream suicide.

This blue is also my unborn child,
because of whom I am called a eunuch.

And, when all the colors in the world
tango and tangle in my blind, brittle heart,
I have more of the blues every black night.

I feel I am burning religiously in hell
and have to hate all the heavenly apes
trying hard to outwit my ignorance.

LET'S BE CHILDISH FRIENDS

I'm gonna say it again! Let's be
childish friends. It's gonna rain

pure bliss, you and me - you the
fresh rose among jealous roses.

Let's return to innocence with
experience. We're sacred

children. Let's talk about what's sweet.

Let's joke like mad clowns. Let's

play, hide and seek. Let's be the
perfect boy and girl, the couple who

will root firmly in the violent wild,
the one to blossom beautifully in

times of grief. Let's be childish

friends! Let us give each other's

mind to each other's soul so

that we can shine like one star.

If the ship of our amity is firm

we shall smash the toughest icebergs.

Our past will never matter as long

as we are friends. Let's respect

each other. Let's honor things as

we aren't scared, suspicious or savage.

I'm gonna say it again! Let's be

childish friends!

I'M SWIRLING

Inside me,
yes deep, deep inside,
there's a red ocean of melodious ecstasy!
Today it's going to help
build my dream house, effortlessly.

Feeling jealous? Just shoo off!
It's twirling and whirling and swirling.
It's helping me to have enough fire
to burn those around me
who do not think what I'm thinking.

I'm the Queen of China-Town.
I'm also a child who eats
something delicious late at night,
when everyone is snoring.

Won't tell you what!
I like sharks too.
So beware.

I do not stay home and do nothing.

I do not remember to forget my prayers.

I'm crazy. Real crazy, I mean.

It helps me to note down

what I haven't done

the whole day and show it to no one.

I'm whirling and swirling and twirling.

This melodious ecstasy I got it by

looking for gold in the dust on the windowsills.

This melodious ecstasy

I got it on a foolish goat's farm.

It twirls and swirls and whirls.

Wish I could tell you more secrets.

Right now, gotta go.

Going. Take care—

(I don't know from

which idiot you gonna take it.

Do take it.)

I'm swirling, rolling on the floor.

Feeling jealous? Shoo off!

GIVE ME NOT

Give me not the crescent moon
that belongs to primitive people.

Give me a rusty sickle.

Give me not the bold sun
once worshipped in ancient Egypt.
Give me cheap candles.

Give me not overloaded papyri
that praise glorious days.
Give me empty pages.

Give me not sacrosanct rivers
that are mythic reminders of truth.
Rather give me salty saliva.

Make me your diligent hoe
and dig fertile furrows in the earth
of my crumbling destiny.

Let the waves of your poetic
hair burble down like noodles
of sincerity into the broken temple,
the blasphemed, blackened church,
the fading mosque
found inside my crying heart.

Give me not the crescent moon
that belongs to primitive people.
Rather, give me empty pages.

Born in January 1983, Amit Parmessur lives in Quatre-Bornes, in the beautiful island, Mauritius. His poems have appeared in around 100 literary magazines, such as: Ann Arbor Review, The Camel Saloon, Censored Poets, Calliope Nerve, Damazine, Zouch Magazine, Black-Listed Magazine, Red Fez, Poetic Medicine and many others. Nominated for the 2011 Pushcart Prize for his poem Chinese Cicada Slough, he is also published in Swan Morrison's People of Few Words Volume 1 and selected for Crack the Spine's 'best of Winter 2012'. His book on blog Lord Shiva and other poems has also been published by The Camel Saloon.

TO A DEAR SWEET BROTHER

by H. Alexander Shafer

My dear sweet brother, hate
Burned by fleeting fathers of your younger days;
I sing sweet words, so not to relate.

O the first, he was fueled to fornicate
As much as pleased, with no way to raise
My dear sweet brother, hate.

He came, then left, aimed to complicate
A new wife with an old; in many ways
I sing sweet words, so not to relate.

Then sweet spoken words, which wouldn't hesitate
The slick headed man came in like a blaze;
My dear sweet brother, hate.

Later he'd say "No way to communicate"
And like the first, saw you at a young phase;
Icing, his sweet words, so not to relate.

Now we look old, no time to procrastinate
At dawn, your daughter is born and the past in a haze.
My dear sweet brother, relate!
I sing sweet words, so not to hate.

SNOQUALMIE FALLS

Evergreens and big leaf maples
Cover dirt
Beyond the eye's stretch
From a lookout point
Over watery falls.
Here I forget my city streets.

A wind scrapes my back
At the first glimpse of dirt.
A sole trail staring
Downwards to
Snoqualmie's mouth.

With a mind wondering
Big maples shade
My charging feet
Towards the dead stumps
Sprouting with the new evergreen life. A forest
Of nursing trees. Some hollow as death
Others full.

The lone trail opens
To a rocked beach
As the wind gathers.
Snoqualmie breathes
Cold mist on my face and arms.

I wipe mist from my eye
Before a silent
Gasp
Sneaks from my mouth
As the two hundred foot
Roaring rainy curtain, flows baptizing
The rocks below.

Snoqualmie's water
Once blue
Now the color of evergreen from algae.
A tan faced child screams on a stone altar
Draping the lagoon.

The naked Snoqualmie girl
Scans—
Rocks and trees and water
For a Snoqualmie mother's hand.
My ankle loosened
Above the rocky beach,
As she fell.

HIS NOSE DURABLY BEAT RED

Like many other old-
Timers, trapped in this town,
The busted asphalt
Under His smooth-soled shoes,
Was what he knew best.
He walks the streets,
Muttering, always
In His red sweater,
His nose durably beat red.
He looks as if He will fall
Wandering the streets alone,
When I pass Him in my car.
In the summertime,
With the Grass grown,
He cuts neighborhoods
For a dollar or so.
He spends the rest
Of the year scanning
Plastic and cloth items,
In a department
Store on the East
End of town,
Where a double Master's
Of Philosophy and
English do not apply.
They say he started
Muttering alone,
When the Young Red Head
He had met at the
University, met
A Drunk at
53rd & 3rd.

“Stop and give Him a ride,
We see Him every day,
Sympathetically stop!”
We have argued this before
Over and again
He will only say, “No.”
“I feel so bad to let Him
Limp along alone,
At least His sweater is clean.”

I IMAGINE SHE SAID CAREFULLY

It is 2:00 a.m. Yes, we are in Boston
Just one year past a new century-
1901.

Nurse Toppan prepares a dose

For Mr. Davis

Who waits restlessly under blankets

And fear.

She walks through Davis' darken rooms

Blowing out each candle of every one before

She goes

Then in the last room where Davis lays

quiet and alone

“are we ready for a nightly sip?” (I imagine she said
carefully) not thinking about his heart

And gathers a syringe from the medical bag given to

Her at Cambridge and

Fills the needle full. Morphine, perhaps a touch of

Strychnine

Davis' teeth clinch when the poison plunges

his veins and his breathing accelerates

and his mouth dries and his eyes close.

and Nurse Toppan softly unzips her white coat

with stains and removes her black shoes with dirt.

She stands over Davis only for a moment

then pulls the sheets back from Davis' back

(He might have known and not cared, he might have

Read the newspapers and not recognized Nurse Toppan)

he knows her in his last moments with poisonous pleasure

in his tired veins; she slips innocently next to him, presses

against his body with her arms around his chest. she holds

him tightly and whispers “now, stop breathing”

I imagine she said carefully.

SNOWDRIFTS AND A FEBRUARY MORNING

Up, down, and back, I take left—
To the South there is little to be found,
But little men and little women, in little cars, which they drive,
As little as they can.
To the East, the reconstructed versions,
Of faded, broken business building
Some whose windows inhale
February mornings.
To the West, if I squint my eyes, I see
The immaculate representations of post-this and pre-that.
A new mirrored, shinny built building
Stretching upwards – which is the only direction
I don't see—
The brown and grey, foggy cityscape—
The frozen river road, cracked from underneath—
The sun drenched men in breads and time to spare—
My dirty brown boots, cemented with familiarity—
I step through the snowy mud mounds,
Drifts of snow parting the slick grey roads beneath,
Their bottoms turned down Wanda's Way, behind what use to be
Willie's Dead Cold Saloon, where for
Fifteen minutes and a quarter bottle, an old bluesman
Will tell your future.

Alexander Shafer is a writer of poetry, film and is a musician living in Oklahoma City. He has be writing for several years and holds a B.A. of Journalism from the University of Central Oklahoma, where he is also pursuing an M.F.A. in Creative Writing and works as a Reading and Writing Consultant. Shafer's main poetic influences range from Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Charles Bukowski to Langston Hughes, Kevin Brown, and Billy Childish.

IN THE MEAT AISLE

by Dorothy Chan

“You need to let the little things that would ordinarily bore you suddenly thrill you.” – Andy Warhol

“I like it raw,” she tells me as I push our cart into the meat aisle, thinking this will be only a pit stop. But then she breaks open the lines of packaging, rubbing her fingers along the white lines of T-bone steak, greasing up the lines of her hands, then telling me how she loves raw lines of poetry. “And raunchy,” she adds, spreading apart the chicken’s legs, letting the fat cheekily jut out, unabashed, as the juice mixes with the fat and we witness the goo, the meat’s internal, right on her hands. And she spreads those legs more until the juice drips to her legs, and she stuffs that steak into her mouth. She tears with hands, tears with mouth. Tears with hands. Tears with mouth, and she stuffs more raw meat into her mouth, chewing up those words right in front of me. Making up words right in front of me. And the lines just come.

ON EDWARD HOPPER'S *NIGHTHAWKS*

The Hat Man: So there's this woman I know. I light her lousy cigarette,
buy her some cheap meat sandwich, and you should see
the way she licks that mayonnaise and stares at

The Woman in Red: Oh, his knife blade nose on that Humphrey Bogart stare
blanks out on me every time I inch closer,
creeping up his cuffs, but he won't hold my hand—

The Hat Man: Well, I have this good girl wife, a former beauty queen
with beautiful white-blonde hair and cream-colored
dresses that make her look

The Woman in Red: like a plain-faced good girl—Little Miss Suburbia
eating leftover spaghetti and meatballs over the sink
in her quasi-virginal state. Honey—I'd dare her to eat
without blowing up or throwing up. She should rub
her eyes that aren't tainted by inky mascara like mine,
because nice girls don't have black tears,
or breath that smells of coffee and the ladies' night special.

The Hat Man: She's special all right, this woman I buy a sandwich for,
my chum, my disposable buddy with
disposable eyelashes—two bucks a set (she told me)—
painted lips and dyed hair—
my disposable body I feed gin and tonic to
while my boring beauty queen's at home
who doesn't even have the thought of slapping me.

The Woman in Red:

Me? I can't care about me. I want him,
but if he can't even hold my hand, I might as well
moisten this rye with my lips, suck on the bread,
teasing Milk Boy. Oh Milk Boy, clad in wholesome white
behind the counter, young enough to be my
Mr. Golden Boy Boring son—
Stop hoping you'll be taking me home tonight...

The Hat Man:

Tonight she can't take a junior
like the guy at the counter, home
or even that old downer sitting across from us
who probably recognizes me from jury duty,

wondering how my wife's doing.
But in the end, what do I care? So long as I can have
my woman in red.

But, women like her—
men in women's bodies,
hard women you can talk to
deserve better.

ON THE PIANISSIMO LEDGE

You touched my back,
telling me we could cross.

As the street lights flickered,
I wondered what that gentle stroke

across my lower back meant.
You were probably waiting to do that,

and the light was only an excuse—
and oh! how I remember you asking

where we were,
and how disappointed you sounded:

“But I like getting lost!”
So I made sure we did

after we passed the furniture store—
“I always browse furniture with my brother,” I told you.

“He likes the modern stuff too.”
And we passed that bar with the sketchy name

that’s swanky inside—
“Hipster Village,” you called it,

and I told you the story of
how my best friend and I lied to that

more than middle-aged man
who tried to play Jenga with us

and buy us drinks.
“Why do they even have board games in bars?”

I love the questions you ask
and the things you wonder,

but most of all, everything you told me
after our fingers laced—

the kids you taught piano:
“They miss me. I treat them like adults,”

and all the Chopin and Mozart
you played when you were in high school.

Oh how I wished I could hear you play
Right then and there.

I stroked your hair:
“You’re taller than when we first met,” I said.

“I’m sure I’ve grown,” and you
sat me on the ledge outside the deli.

I could hear a crescendo in my head
as your face leaned into mine,

and in between the kisses I thought:
“Pianissimo.”

The entire town felt still.

IKEBUKURO TRAIN RIDES

I. When You're Trapped (when do i think of you?)

Have you ever rode into Ikebukuro late at night
when the lovestruck Tokyo girls have long gone
home from karaoke and their boys won't even
do them justice in their drunken stupor
and you're trapped on the train
when anything — amidst a city of lights — could happen:
gangs knocking down vending machines,
but oh! how Rachmaninov's opus...43, Variation 18, I think, gets me
when the train stops, sedately ringing.

How it gets stuck in my head every time —
I always want to tell you this,
but after Paganini's finest *dah dun dun dunn dunnn*
da da daa dummm dum climax comes,
I'm "Somewhere in Time"
entering an elderly couple's apartment that's Lucky Cats galore.

II. "Look, the cat!" (maneki neko on grey)

Of all books on the shelves and messes on the floors —
of all the food in the fridge and knickknacks in the drawers,
the Maneki Neko was the detail you noticed,
or should I say, the detail you wanted me to notice
when we watched that movie
whose plot and name I can't recall,
on your grey sheets,
making me think, as I walk out into Ikebukuro Station,

of that fictional boy who chased after many
to mask that his heart only belonged to one girl,

and I hope that you will someday be him,
but if you already are,

then pull a Robert Taylor for my Vivien Leigh
as the crowds blur past,
faster than the speed of boats and lilies in Impressionist paintings—
give me a Degas. No, a Pissarro. No, a Cassatt—
because poor Mary can't go out to see men
and a girl's got to pass her time somehow.

Let her row her painting faster than the world she can't have,
just to impress the men she can't have,
raising the children she wishes never came out of her—

Pity Mary, but give me our Waterloo Bridge moment.

III. (sit down) and Let Me Tell You About my Parents

who never told me their love story
that probably wasn't some torrid love affair,
but filled with enough age difference
to crowd up a common people's tabloid—

and don't you think that
to love someone your age is the most beautiful thing?

Because you'll forever have young love
regardless of how old you are—
because the best things in life have no forced epiphany,
no one signifying moment,
or in our words:

“So when did this attraction start?” I asked,
and you answered with a “it was ‘stupid’ for me to ask” response,

since it's just because the leaves
or the moon
or the hills
just said so—

since it's just because the leaves
or the moon
or the hills
just said so.

IV. Schulz's Kids (and their cloud gazing)

I lie on your grey sheets,
staring at your blank ceiling—
it's better than the cloud gazing Schulz forced upon his kids

because if your first love's a place,
you'll never cloud gaze again,
since you won't be looking for something
that doesn't exist,
because everything you want is
right here,
and I am glad you are here
to share the grey with me.

In these seemingly insignificant moments
I can feel Rachmaninov's *dah dun dun dunn dunnn*
da da daa dumm dum playing over and over.

So save "Somewhere in Time"
for that some place in time—
those Ikebukuro train rides
or those Roppongi mornings when you gaze at the nonchalant sky,
thinking that grey never looked so beautiful
in its intoxicating polluted stare,
sucking you in,
without even trying,
and making you feel the comfort in everything.
It's that feeling you get
after a good rainfall
when you realize that everything is in the same condition
as it was before and
a few drips and drops never hurt
something that was already so beautiful.

And I feel the rain on your grey sheets,
the comfort in everything—
the culmination into a rainfall
that Schulz's kids were yearning for,
and that my body had long been yearning for,
and once the grey was set,
everything came.

V. We Hear that Paganini Crescendo

and I demand that you put more love into me:
into the back of my ear,
into my upper leg
into my lower back
than Man Ray did to Ingres' woman
when he brushed the violin on her back
and removed the ribbon,
feeling each string of her hair,
then rubbing it into a turban
as he crossed the bridge between their bodies.

Our bridges have crossed,
and I promise you that
the novelty of young love
never wears off,
like the sheets that cover us
and the Roppongi sky
we were once entranced by.

VI. (i remember when) You Tapped my Lower Back,

letting me know we could cross the street.
We passed that western coffee joint—Caribou or Moose?
They always use those names:
“It gives coffee a rugged, homely vibe,” you told me,
and the Japanese men loved that homeliness
while the Japanese women sang as they made
our matcha ice cream with red bean sauce.
“Isn't everything bigger in Asia?” I asked you,
while we found the delight in the smaller—
your mother never gave you room for trinkets.
After all, your baby grand was dubbed
“your toy.”

But oh, those “Bigger in Asia” toys—
the vending machines with those steam punk colas,
metal all-around,
grenade-like,
we threw them around
like we were the couple in charge of
the destruction of the world,

turning the apocalypse on and off,
on and off,
and I thought about throwing you
against that femme fatale painting in the museum—
Olle Baertling's *Arama*
with its film noir lines of
sleazy green
and sharp edges

VII. (to focus on) the Spikes of your Hair

but then you told me
it was time to calm down
from the effervescent,
with those iced green teas,
forever traditional, forever demure
because deep down we are those two nice kids
sitting on the boba teahouse bench
ignoring the television screen right behind us,
just pondering life's many complexities,
and once again you are my Endearing
underneath

Mikus' *Tablets 176*

in the form of your soft blanket—
you hiding underneath,
playing peek-a-boo with me,

and my hand hid underneath yours
as we passed the yen store—
businessmen buying their daily umbrellas,
and you asked me if it was possible
to not spend one hundred U.S. dollars inside,
while the store owner kept repeating, "No exchanges,"
with his signature bow and apology.

VIII. Focus

And you tell me that
I never need to
apologize to you,
and I know that you are
that one boy
that my Vivien Leigh's eyes can somehow
always focus on
and find
in the midst of the many blurs.

You are that one boy
whose heart has always been set on one girl—
I realize this as our lips go
in and out of focus of each other.
Let me kiss your lower lip and chin,
and let you kiss my Cupid's Bow and upper lips,
and let them travel the rest of our bodies
while your ceiling gives me
the comfort
that everything I want is right here,
and as my Cupid's Bow tingles
I hear that *dah dun dun dunn dunnn*
da da daa dummm dum climax
from your lips.

STUDIO CONFINEMENT— AN ARS POETICA

I need you to stop confining me to this cage of a home,
this barren studio only fit for one—
your mind goes nowhere at night,
since all the walls are white. No wonder you cling to me so hard—no posters, no
pictures,
no single risqué magazine in sight to amuse you. I am your Trinket,
since you don't want a fifty cent toy from the grocery store machine...where is the
imagery?

Where are the two Washingtons? You know, those Washingtons that buy you imagery
cheaper than laundry for what you call a home. Your home—
that studio unsuitable for housing Trinkets
like me, because you keep playing the same indie tune—just because no one
has heard of it doesn't mean it's good. Well, at least the close-up
of the bass player's shave disgusts me. Add that to your inspiration board. It'll
make my night.

Engulfing the bassist's face, those dots of ordinary life are not small enough to
ignore—nights
when you write at 4 A.M.—sci-fi babes, mecha pilots, espers, that imagery
from rebuilding your house after the apocalypse comes twice, zooming in
on the fleeting dots you see, blinking your eyes, yet sitting at home,
grasping those moments meant to be lost. Grab one
by one, let the ink run, for I cannot be your muse forever...Trinket's

wink architects this space, this space that must be replaced once a new Trinket
comes to make your nighttime
brainstorming worthwhile, titillating your senses, becoming one
with you during the tension and release, when those images
pervade this glass hexagon house. Will you hold on to this home
of tomorrow? This home. You need it since I hate the tension and release when no
drawings

are on the wall, no sketches
contouring our bodies, blue lines, red pencil of you and me, Poet and Trinket.
So shallow it's like masturbation. You can ride that rocking horse and put it in
your home,
but if your mind goes nowhere at night,
you'll lose even the simplest rhythm, simplest harmony of images
that guide your title to the tragic ending one

craves to get that ecstasy out of one
poem pieced from the ruins of the end of the world. Illuminating
your house—mod glass windows, images
of your former Trinket,
the feeling you get at a nightclub

when the music's really loud and your tipsy head dances its way home.

Those blurry images of long legs, sneakerheads, blue drinks—they guide you in a
way no one
can as you mess up your trim studio and frame some film stills,
alluring a new Trinket. She'll let you wreck your house into a post-apocalyptic
dream tonight.

A WOLF OF A MAN

The wolf man loved Red meat,
Red in his meat, and Red as his meat,
peeling away at each licorice strap to unlock
her flesh in that tight orange zipper dress,
throwing out her five-inch babies with their long
and thin hot pepper straps like they were bones leftover
from a steak. He reached in, grabbing her filet mignons
hidden under the cherry holding her bra together
until he could lick the savory sauce off her chest,
eating away at her fruity breath that satisfied his reputation
for wolfing women down.

Dorothy Chan recently graduated cum laude in English from Cornell University. She has started her MFA in poetry at Arizona State University. She was the 2011 recipient of the Corson-Browning Award for Poetry and the 2011 and 2012 recipient of the Robert Chasen Memorial Prize from Cornell University's English Department. Her work has been featured in the following Cornell literary magazines: Kitsch, Rainy Day, and Ink Magazine.

She loves bold poetry—the bolder and unabashed and even cheeky, the better. She draws inspiration from her favorite places: art museums, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Ithaca.

ANOTHER CHILD BRIDE

by Rinzu Rajan

The twenty six alphabets
are voiceless vowels
and the table of two
a chart of codes
most like the mantras
she will be coerced to chant,
her dreams were dandified daisies
she had plucked
with the departing dawn
when her doll was
given away in marriage,
a red riding hood
with frills of fallow.

When waken at four
she couldn't read
through the riddle
that this day
would consummate her
in the holy fire
and she will be confined
in the seven cycles
of mutiny and not matrimony
she never went to school
after that day,
and started wearing a noose spun
of black beads
vermilion was the scarlet sorrow
confined in a chest of confessions,
since then her head stays covered
and tongue prisoned behind
her milk teeth, wisdom in waiting
the first night was a red sea
that would ebb till the time
she becomes a bride again
on the ashes
of her resting pyre.

LOVE POETRY IS DEAD

I saw him
while he never looked,
like a prisoner on parole
I thought I found it
love as they call,
I wrote and he lived
sometimes a January moon
many times as March's murmur
and then an arctic autumn,
I wrote till he breathed
and bled, trickling tears
from my crown of thorns.

I've wailed and weeded
sighed to shame
kneeling to a lamenting limerick
the notes were numbered
and so were the days,
till destiny pulled
another sarcasm's sally.

The suspect is slammed shut
in that can of choke,
no symphony she recalls
sugar she doesn't savour,
from where he went
there is a hole
bile of blood,
and remains of a rhyme
wronged to rot.

ORANGE

My grandfather's house
bears witness to the river's anklets
drunk by its song
she entices paddy fields and dusty dribble
an enchantress who doesn't age and never stoops
unallured by the coughing of an old red bus
unemployment is costly
for every lump in the throat chokes and digs
a grave for another old woman,
oil soaks a school girl's hair
her red ribbons braided so tight
that she pays salutation
to everyone she meets on the road.

The man hunched on the milestone
is her uncle who measures
the length of her skirt
a few meters away the church bells ring
and earthen lamps light a prayer for a son
daughters don't get burial in this land
where they a liability.
As I pass by in a car,
I hope to never come back to this land
where the soil is still orange
leeches by parasites so petrified.

ALIENATE

A wooden casing
with a wrecked window
wails in front of the house
Two one one,
is the number
in intricate inscription
with black paint
the sun may have shone on its forehead
last summer when the daughter's
stipend application
gave birth to an answer,
its womb weaned in willow
since then, waits for
her blue inked letter
or a congratulatory message
to an invitation accepted,
she ached for alienation
just like the old mail box
whose name no one remembers
since the e-mail fluttered to fame.

DELHI'S POEM

Your streets enamelled ebon
go red and green
when life begins,
a merry-go-round
of moored matins graying
in the gloating gloam,
they vandalised your belly
raising brick buildings
on your brown skin,
stealing your vermilion to paint
the lips of a keep,
fireballs were fanned
in your alleys
when frost blinded the
eyes of a masquerade
letters have since
then been smothered
in signatures and
stuffed into sacks.
Today after ten years
my skirt has grown longer
when my bruises
healed with the hooch of heresy
I've seen your fight with time
and thank myself for
having read from your books.

Rinzu Rajan lives and works in Puram, New Delhi.

CURMUDGEON

by Robert P. Hansen

Stoop-shouldered and half-
blind by cataracts, he
sits in his rocking chair and
bitches about everything
except politics.

DO IT!

We should build a million cars a day,
just to let them run in idle gear;
We should burn the forests right away –
BURN THEM ALL! – and bring our future here!
Each of us should have a dozen brats,
just because we humans love to live –
Let's waste resources, just so we can ask,
"Oh world of ours, have you no more to give?"
And when she answers with a silent wail
or whimper hidden by a chilling wind,
then we will see the road we've paved to Hell,
intending that our "good life" never end.

LOOMING DEADLINE

He hunches at his desk, beads of sweat oozing from his furrowed brow to form inky puddles on the mottled white desert before him.

He clenches the pen in an iron grip that leaves his fingers numb and gnaws on its cap as if it were a piece of cherry licorice.

He grasps at fragments of thought – any thought, any fragment – tenderly herding them toward one another, corraling them beneath the harvest moon.

The thoughts coalesce into words, and he ushers them out of confinement, bringing them to life, one at a time, and winnows away the weaker ones.

At length, he sets the pen down and studies his masterpiece, nods to himself, carefully folds it up and seals it in an envelope.

He sighs. He looks at the revolver, picks it up. The handle is smooth; it fits his hand well. It's time to reap what he has sown.

SPARKY

Dad gave me ten bucks to go play pool,
and I was thrilled.

I love pool.

It is cathartic; there's always room
for improvement, room to grow,
more to learn, more to know;
it's never the same game twice.

It was snowing, that night,
and the tiny flakes
glistened in the light
as they fell like salt
shaken from the sky,
white puffs of life
dancing, swirling,
playing with the wind.

When we first got Sparky,
I was a boy, maybe
seven or eight year old,
and thought the new puppy
was a toy, one that makes
noise and bites.

Sparky bit me the day
my dad brought him home.

He had hidden under my chair,
and I bent over, trying
to coax him out, but he
must have been scared
and bit me on the ear.
His teeth were *sharp*.

My hand was on the door handle
 when I saw him.
He was lying in the snow,
 a blood trail fading
 into the shadows outside
 the range of the porch
 light, his chest rising
 and falling in sudden
 little bursts.

I froze.

We had lots of other dogs while
 I was growing up, but none
of them were Sparky.
He was our first terrier.
He was special. He was smart.
He was the kid brother
 I never had.

“Dad,” I said, my voice low, empty.
“Come here.”
He didn’t understand – he never did.
He was always too busy to listen, to hear.
He was more interested in watching TV.
“Dad, come here,” I calmly repeated.
“What?” He was impatient;
 he didn’t want to get up.
I knew he wouldn’t come, and
 I had to say what
 I didn’t want to say:
 “Sparky’s been shot.”

Sparky had been in a dog fight,
 once, and had come home
 with a big gash on his side.
I didn’t know it, and when I saw
 him, I grabbed him, right
 where he was wounded.
He yelped – shrill, loud,
 the kind of sound you
 never want to hear twice.
He found a corner and laid down,
 licking his wound.

For a few seconds, the TV
 chattered on, alone,
 and then Dad got up
 from his chair.
I stepped aside to let him pass.
Sparky wasn't dead, yet.
He had crawled home, through
 the snow, so he could die
 with us.

Sparky was an icon
 in our little town;
 he ran free, and
 everyone knew him.
Except the guy who shot him.
He had just moved to town.
His dog was in heat.
Sparky reacted.

I didn't have to say much
 when I got the bar.
I missed a lot that night.

STALKED

A heart of gold I do not hold for you;
A dozen roses still remain un-plucked;
So many things I would not do for you,
and still I can't believe my rotten luck –

I've told you "Go away" so many times
and changed the locks on every single door –

Why can't you heed these words and blatant rhymes?

There's nothing left between us anymore!

So take this sonnet that I wrote for you
and stuff it in a place that's always dark –
That's all that's left for both of us to do,
so let's not tarry long before we start.

She left with droopy eyes and sorrowed face –
I find that something's missing at my place.

THESIS TOPIC: SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN A HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM

The Waiting Room is such a lonely place:
It's filled with sounds of patience wearing thin
 – Or should that be “patients wearing thin”? –
chairs like concrete, too much time to waste,
and people. Lots of people, all in haste
to find out what is wrong with a loved one.
The time creeps by, slowly by . . . and then
a doctor enters with her eyes downcast.
When she lifts them, there are tears, silent tears. . . .
A man in the corner rises from his seat
and approaches her, hesitantly, to hear
the words her eyes have already said. He
collapses, clings to her knees . . . clings to his fears . . .
while I take unobtrusive notes on grief.

Mr. Hansen currently teaches philosophy and ethics at a community college. He has had over 50 poems and 14 stories published. His most recent work has appeared in Calliope, Carcinogenic Poetry, and The Fifth Dimension.

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