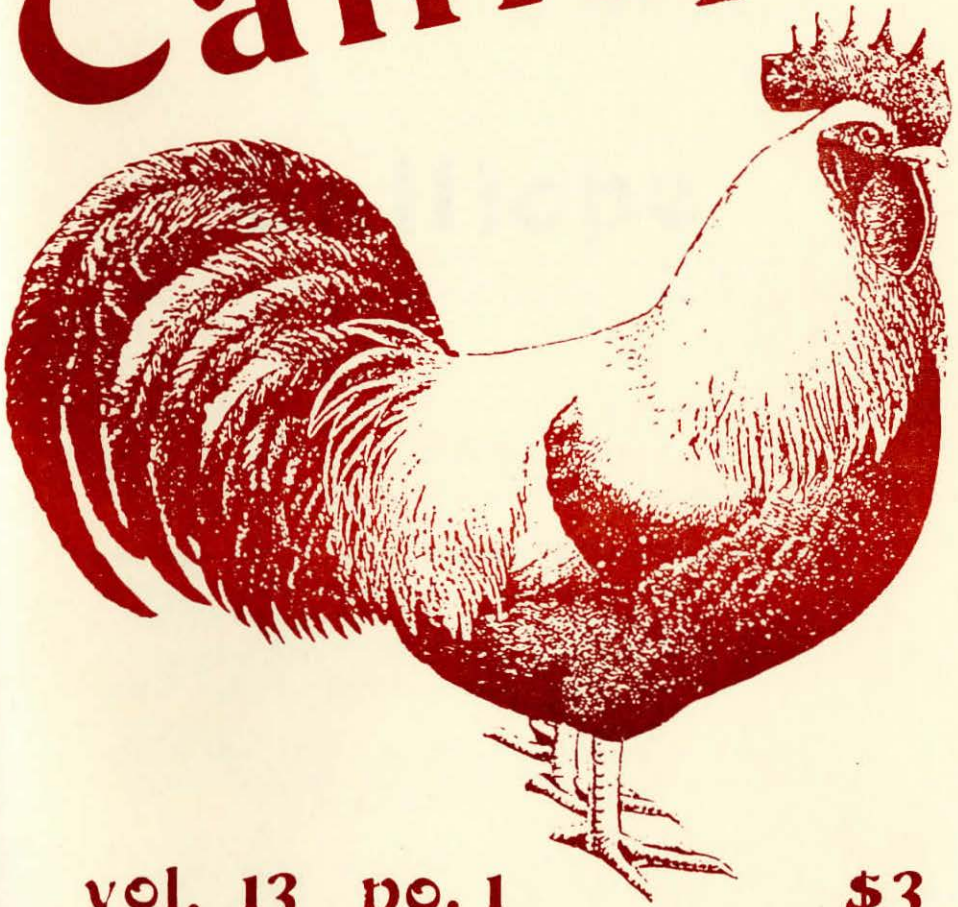


Calliope



vol. 13 no. 1

\$3

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Single issues are \$3.00, a year's subscription, \$7.00.	16

Volume 13, Number 1	17
Fall/Winter 1989	18
Submissions are welcomed from	19
August 15 - March 15 for the May issue; January 15 -	20
July 15 for the October issue. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped	21
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Address all correspondence, subscriptions and subscription	26
to Martha Christina, Calliope, Creative Writing Program,	27
Roger Williams College, Bristol, RI 02809.	28

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Chang Soo Ko

CAMERA IN THE PARK

(for Florence Harper)

Alone, it stands on a tripod in the sun.
What happens inside it, on the other side
of the lens? Perhaps on the hillock a dog spews
cobalt skies, or a young green tree bleeds.
While wings flutter against the setting sun,
a man painter's imaginary horses may stampede
across the wheat field. Or the landscapes
in my old movie-camera, the landscapes that long
for light and motion, stir quietly as summer.

Chang Soo Ko

VIEW FROM THE WINDOW

Morning

A thousand pigeons fly into the riverside church,
And disappear in the space inside.
Boats on the river shove into my room,
Flooding it with water and submarine light.

Afternoon

In the deserted public park
An old man buries himself in Sunday papers.
Stray winds casually caress
The sun's rays sifting through leaves.
And pigeons fondly linger about his feet,
Pecking at the silvery sounds
From the nearby church's chimes.

Evening

The lanterns in the public park
Flicker on like poignant reminders.
I have seen airplanes desperately defying time,
Chasing shadows that quickly devour
Miles of land and town.
But time here devoutly pauses
Under the leafless trees.

As I turn off the light,
Irrelevant images fall among bare branches
Like imaginary flower petals:
A woman drawing water out of a well
Where golden light gushes out;
A thousand fish eyes staring in the dark;
And dark wings fluttering in the darkness.

Lynne H. deCourcy

POEM

(for Floren Harper)

I am beginning to believe
that a poem may be hidden inside
almost any hour if you pry
its lid open,
even, say, on the day
of first November sleet
when the sky has not a hint
of luster and things turn bad
before you're out of bed,
not a good crisis, though,
nothing that will fill a
place in the puzzle of meaning,
its huge gaps remaining,
but the grainy irritations
like telephones, sick dogs, the P.T.A.,
the bills and broken things.
I am beginning to believe
in the irritations
buried in the center of life, slowly
coating themselves layer
by layer with the love that
lets us live on,
and growing round, into words
that shimmer, like anything true.
If I lift the lid off time
and find them
they can be strung
into something luminous
that anyone might see
and even want.

Lynne H. deCourcy

Visiting The Graves

for Jeffrey

When I was a child, the cemetery was small,
like a few scattered buildings in a country
town, surrounded by fields,
but year by year, it fills
and widens—

a tenement now, thousands of mismatched
stones with weeds between concrete,
a miniature city of the dead sprawling
to join the city of the living,
spreading in turn to meet it.

One by one, my family moves
across the blurring line
and those left alive make our erratic
visits. This time my sister and I
have brought the children;
there is something we want them to know,
though here we are, wordless,
not knowing what to tell them
that matters—not even knowing
what we want ourselves to know.
We look dumbly at the chiseled dates,
the names. So much has come
to only this.

The oldest boy has wandered off;
finally we spot him thirty rows away.
He has found a fresh-dug unfilled grave,
prone shoulders and arms of dirt spread
open, just waiting
for someone. He is jumping
side to side; backing up, he measures
his stride and takes off, exuberant,

leaping like a stag escaping
a clumsy hunter,
and I want him to do what he wants,
I want him to make it, again and again,
while he knows he can easily leap
that puny hole in the ground
What's the big deal, he asks.
It's easy; there's plenty of room to spare.

Lynne H. deCourcy

HANDS

*I look at my hands and see they are still unfinished
I look at the vine and see the leaf bud
inching toward life.*

Adrienne Rich

On the way, my hands
steering the wheel
curled around it light and brittle
as dry brown leaves imitating
their own fresh unfurlings
but barely attached anymore
to the finished vine.

Outside the courtroom I wait
with the accused. They want to be
stone, they make their mouths eyes
like dull stone
but their hands give them away
holding cigarettes,
shredding the tops of paper cups,
one girl painting her nails frosted red
blood on snow
like prints of a wounded
bird in a forest (even someplace else)
where life flaps and staggers
on in circles of fear.

Son, your hands will halve me yet
though cuffed like this they have no weapon
but the sight of them metal-bound

It is enough.

Wing-clipped birds on the gray sky
of a jail-issue shirt only each other
to fight or comfort now
as though they had never reached
or been taken

in my hand
(small bird in open hand)
or marked my face forever when
they touched me (here)
knowing it was I, they touched

Where (what place) did you learn to raise
your wrists turn the soft sides up
to the man with the key?
Nests topple birds fly (anyplace else)

I tell you, I know this: we have not touched
each other for the last time
nor the bottom of grief

My finished hands
unfinish themselves again, the
vine, how it strives to leaf.

Peter Makuck

GRAY REMOVALS

After a night of March winds,
I expect the yard to be blown away,
But my neighbor's out there with a grin,
Another squirrel in his boxtrap.
Twiggy nests that web the forks of limbs
Have withheld the night. And squirrels,
Either oblivious, or deliberately mocking,
Chase each other, madly spiral his oaks (and mine),
Leaping limb to limb, then over the roof,
Along the powerline, and into another yard.

My neighbor is determined,
Ready to transport his new catch
Deep into the oblivion of woods.
We're overrun, he says. The signs are everywhere.
Rain spilling from the upper gutter—
Squirrels do that. They'll ransack an attic,
Beat you out of your hard-earned pecans,
Raid the seed in your feeder. Rats,
Really just rats he's taking to meet
Their country cousins. Same damn family.

As a kid, I used to shoot them
And nail their pelts to the shed door.
My trigger finger hasn't had an itch for ages,
But with my neighbor's right reason, I tend to agree.
Yet early in the morning, when my body is heavy
And flexes like half-frozen meat,
I'd have them left alone, these gray ghosts,
Let them land on my roof with a slap
And wake me with a rain-like patter in the eaves.

Three feet from my desk,
On the raingutter,
Like a jeweler with a gem to cut,
It rotates an acorn—crack, then feast.
Its eyes hold mine as it chews.
The air clears, as if someone had focused a lens,
Removed a moment from the day
And made it lively forever.
Every time, I'll look up from my work,
Take the bait, and be transported,
Always confused when released, ready to run.

for Paul Tardif

Peter Makuck

SLEEP-MOTHER

You never learned how, so I'm driving again,
Our headlights pushing back the desert dark.
A saguaro looms like a penitent on the fringe.

We are not going to mass at the Spanish mission.
We are simply going and will never arrive.
The road forgets itself in the rearview

And you do something I have always wanted:
You take hold of one of my hands and resume
The broken story of your mother and father.

At last you can speak freely, as you just have.
The self-important moon is going down.
Just the story and my questions, our mingled voices,

As I adjust the speed, use highbeams and low.
Like musicians, we are able to listen, awake
To each other, the dark like a blessing that lasts.

As a kid, I used to shoot them
And nail their pelts to the shed door.
My trigger finger hasn't had an itch for ages.
But with my neighbor's right reason, I tend to agree.
Yet early in the morning, when my body is heavy
And flaxes like half-frozen meat,
I'd have them left alone, these gray ghosts,
Let them land on my roof with a slap
And wake me with a rain-like pitter in the eaves.

Kathleen Spivack

PASTELS/MEANING

As if drowsy, I begin
to notice pastels:
that fog on the harbor,
the edge of a cloud
turning pinkish grey
and the sun, a diffuse edge
disappearing already before sunset
halfway between zenith and
horizon, those delicate words.

I never used to understand
the subtleties, flaunting, instead
scarlet or bright green, young
preening parakeet, sought outlines,
ultramarine, defined. That hot
blue sky gave way at once
to night, no softness in
the going. Answers to
everything. Clarity
was my "favorite color."
Unlike Monet or Turner,
who looked at the same but
different pastel view
finding new refractions
in the endless slant of
light on water, stone.

Kathleen Spivack

TO LEAVE

How easy it is in fact to leave—
the rooms perhaps swept
perhaps not. That tumult
of clothes upon the chair
does not need to be straightened.
Once far away, you will not even
remember their bandaged
gesticulations. The sink,
the last few dishes
you didn't wash, although
they pleaded with you so
shamelessly; the open arms
of the bed, blankets pulled back
revealing white wounds,
sheets, even the dust
telling its saga, watches
undisturbed, collecting histories.
All from afar cannot now cry out
their multitudinous hurts
to you. You are gone: dead or
impatient or in another country,
not listening. You are
taking a plane, or an angel,
a beam of light. You are *going*
toward: eager as a bouquet of pink
roses. The previous rooms,
like a dollhouse, open and shut,
still trying to demand your
attention. But the child
has grown up perhaps or moved
away or is loving, all radiant,
somewhere, someone else.

Linda McFerrin

CATS

Boa of cat tails,
their gold buckle eyes shine at her from inside the closet.
The floor is littered with lizards' trick tails
and the heads of small mice.
Several fat burmese loll on her bed,
their black bodies leaden.
They've laddered her stockings, torn up her sheets.
Tufts of feather-light cat fur grow airborne.

In the chaos she tries to get dressed
pulling her skirt down while stuffing her credit cards/cash
into the mouth of the ocelot
which snaps shut behind the thin pull of her fingers.
Bone-crushing tabbies execute kamikaze leaps
from the tops of the bureau and bookcase.
A Cheshire grins from the mirror,
its face done up in cosmetics
and six sequined siamese hold open the door.

Leaving the room, she flicks off the light;
their black pupils dilate and open like windows.
They follow her out.

On the sidewalk beside her the lioness paces
that long gold gaze, like a garrote,
dictates the length and direction of every step.
The inside of her thigh is constantly licked by the malicious
pink
tongue of a kitten.
The fascination of lynxes propels her.
Her face transfigured by calico shadows,
her walk is a panther-like prow.
She is hunting the little grey men she calls mice.

Linda McFerrin

THE WATCH

To see its heart
I first removed the face,
turning it over, discarded the polished case
of silver marred with hairfine scratches.
The metal is soft, resting temporarily
in the gentle shape into which it was poured.
The hands come easily off.
I set them aside and turn the whole thing over like a turtle.
Up-ending doesn't slow it,
an introverted mechanism telling itself tales
like an old woman clucking away in a corner,
the meticulous click click of her needles.
I probe with a toothpick gears as thin as the wings of a fly,
filed into small teeth grinding together—
so many little pieces of gold.
This is what rolls the days along.
This is that old dung beetle, Horus,
pushing its ball—the sun—before it.
This is what puts young women on shelves,
pulling their bright bodies earthward with humorless gravity.
This is what lays the men in their graves.

It has no heart,
only a crystal humming silently.
It fits neatly in my palm.
My big hand cupping it, could close.
That would stop nothing.
Other clocks pile up the minutes,
drawing time into a heavy rope.
It snakes around our ankles, and we follow it, counting knots,
watches held high like candles to show us the way in the darkness.

James P. Brady

WHAT DID I DO?

The day Billy Orton got back from Vietnam his wife told him she'd been sleeping with the guy down in 110. Rose said it kind of nasty, too, as if daring him to do something about it.

"You said we were through," she said. "You said you weren't coming back."

"That was then," Billy said. He stood in front of the wide livingroom window, with his hands in his pockets, and watched the mid-October sun glint off the windshields in the parking lot. It was true. He had said those things. He'd meant them, too, back then.

Rose said, "I bet you had lots of girls."

He turned around and faced her. She'd let her dark curly hair go since he'd last seen her. Now it sprang out from her head, wild and tangled. It surprised him every time he looked at her.

"Well? Didn't you?"

He stared at her hard. "I could try and hurt you," he said. "I could say I did."

She let out a breath and relaxed her shoulders a little. Some of the defiance drained from her face. She ran a hand through her hair. "Why did you come back?"

Billy walked past her and sat at the kitchen table. "I don't know," he said. He remembered standing in the concourse of San Francisco International last night, hours after his discharge, looking at the destination board, realizing he didn't know where to go. "I thought we could start over." He dug a crumpled pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and lit one.

"Aren't you mad?" she said.

He rubbed his fingers over the table's smooth veneer surface. "Can't change that now," he said. "But we can live with it and try to go on."

"I hurt you."

"The way we left it, I guess you had a right." He drew on the cigarette. "I've learned some things since then."

Rose sat on his lap and slid her arms around his neck. "You can forgive it?"

"It's over," he said. He took hold of her chin and moved her face in front of his. "It is over," he said. "Right?"

"It's more than over," she said. She pushed his hand away and brought her face close to his. She nuzzled his ear with her nose. "I didn't think I'd see you again."

Billy stubbed out his cigarette and put his arms around her waist. "Here I am."

They left a trail of clothes across the floor on the way to the bedroom. They made love on the big double bed. It had been more than a year. They hadn't slept together for months before he'd gone overseas. Now they were awkward with each other, rough with greed. When it was over, Billy put on his OD boxer shorts and went to look for his cigarettes.

A few minutes later, Rose came into the kitchen, in a pale yellow robe. Billy had a can of beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other. He smiled and offered her the can.

Rose got a tall glass from the dish drainer and let him pour her a little. She clinked his can with the rim of her glass. "Cheers," she said, and drank it down. Then she sat in the chair beside him and set the empty glass in front of her. She picked up his lighter and flicked it on. Staring at the flame, she said, "I didn't really sleep with that guy, you know."

Billy set his beer down. "What do you mean?"

"I made it up," she said. "To test you." She blew out the flame, then flicked the lighter on again.

Billy drew on his cigarette and blew the smoke up towards the ceiling. "Let me get this straight," he said. "First you say you did it, now you say you didn't."

"I didn't," she said. She sat up straight and smiled. "Don't you see? You stayed, even though you thought I did it. But I didn't."

Billy stubbed out his cigarette. "So," he said. "I passed the test." When he snatched the lighter out of her hand, her glass pitched off the table and shattered on the floor. He watched a look of confusion spread across her face. "What about you?" he said.

She sank back in the chair, her eyes wide. "What do you mean?"

Billy got up and started for the bedroom, retrieving his clothes as he went.

Rose followed close behind. "Billy?" she said. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," he said. "When's your test?" He had already put on his shirt and pants. He unzipped the duffel bag, pulled out some uniforms and tossed them into a corner. He took underwear and socks from the dresser and stuffed them into the bag. He started to hum the drill cadence song he'd marched to in basic training.

"Oh god," Rose said.

Billy kept humming as he packed some shirts from the closet.

"Damn it!" Rose shouted. "I didn't do anything!"

He gave her a cold smile as he zipped up the duffel bag. "Ain't no use in goin' home," he sang. "Jody got your gal and gone."

"Nothing happened!"

"Sound off!" he called. He picked up his bag. "Your left!" He brought his left foot down and started to march in place. He slung the bag over his shoulder and pushed Rose aside. "Your left!" he called, and marched out the door.

Billy marched the seven blocks downtown to the bus terminal and bought a ticket on the next shuttle to the airport. There was a half hour wait. He sat on one of the long, blue, plastic benches that ran back-to-back down the center of the waiting room. An announcement came over the loudspeaker, but he couldn't make it out as it reverberated off the high concrete walls. He lit a cigarette and watched people hustle between the ticket counter and the numbered gates.

His separation pay was in his wallet and he could decide where to go at the airport. Maybe Reno. Wasn't that the quicky divorce place? Or was it Las Vegas? He wondered if both parties had to show up for one of those.

Billy watched a skinny, hollow-faced kid, prowling around the trash cans, near the exit. He'd seen him hanging around the terminal ever since he came in. The shifty way the kid narrowed his eyes and ranged them over the waiting room made Billy think of a weasel.

Outside, a bus pulled into one of the far bays with a loud hiss of brakes and a final rev of the engine. Another garbled announcement came over the loudspeaker. Billy turned and watched the new arrivals push their way through the glass doors into the waiting room. A hefty woman, fifty or so, in a tight, black-leather miniskirt and tasseled, white go-go boots, led the charge.

When Billy turned back, the weasel kid sat on the bench beside him. The kid had a black watchcap pulled down over his forehead. His eyes never stopped moving as he scanned the room.

"Gimme a butt," the kid said.

Billy lit a fresh cigarette off the one he was smoking and handed it over. The kid smelled of old, sour sweat. He couldn't have been more than eighteen, but his face was creased with dirty wrinkles and his hands trembled.

The kid stuck the cigarette in his mouth. When he talked, it wagged up and down. "Let's go, let's go," he said. "Whatcha got?"

"Nothing," Billy said.

The kid snapped his head around and looked right at Billy for the

first time. "You got the monkey suit," he said, slapping the sergeant's stripes on Billy's arm with the back of his hand. "Ain't you holdin'?"

"Not me, pal."

The kid dashed the cigarette on the floor and jumped to his feet. His body trembled. "God damn, that fucking Mendez!" He started away, then turned quickly and shoved his face up close to Billy's. "And I ain't your fucking pal, neither."

Billy dropped his cigarette on the floor and ground it out under his heel. "You'd know."

The kid straightened up, stuffed his hands into his pockets. When he darted off towards the men's room, he looked like he was going to cry.

Junkies. The world was full of junkies. It brought back to Billy his first day in Vietnam, when they'd stuck all the new arrivals in an Acclimatization Compound at Cam Ranh Bay. After evening chow, he'd come back to the barracks and found this guy sprawled out on a bunk with a syringe dangling from his arm. Strychnine-cut smack. The guy never knew what hit him.

The loudspeaker started up again, but Billy had to check his watch to be sure it was time for the airport shuttle. He carried his duffel bag over to gate nine and got on board. He made sure to get the wide seat in the back, where he could spread out. As he waited for the bus to get going, he leaned back and thought about all the junkies he'd known in Saigon. That's when he saw Rose, moving up the aisle toward him.

At a little past five, the bus lurched out of the station and waded into the snarled, Friday afternoon traffic. The sun was low and filled the west-facing windows of the taller office buildings with its blinding orange reflection.

Billy and Rose sat on the wide back seat with the duffel bag between them.

"It's not asking a lot," she said. "To try."

"And you can jerk my chain," he said. "Any time you want."

The bus halted at a stoplight in front of the Civic Auditorium. A tall, blade-thin woman in a clingy, red silk dress, was pulled along the sidewalk by a feisty miniature poodle on a leash. Billy could almost hear the dog's manicured nails ticking on the concrete. When it stopped at a trashcan and lifted its leg, the woman averted her eyes. The traffic light changed and the bus moved forward.

"You don't make sense," Rose said. "I tell you I did it, you're okay. I tell you I didn't do it, you get pissed off and leave."

Allan Peterson

"It's got nothing to do with doing it."

The bus passed over the interstate, then turned left onto the ramp that led down to the southbound lanes.

"I didn't do anything," Rose said.

The bus accelerated as it merged with the traffic on the busy highway. The squat, red-brick YMCA building came into view on Billy's side and then disappeared as the bus flew past.

Rose started to cry. "Why are you doing this to me?" she said.

An old lady, sitting one row in front of them, peeked over the top of her seat to see what was going on.

"You want something?" Billy said. The old lady's head dropped out of sight. The bus speeded up as it shifted over into the middle lane. Billy tapped his fingers on the plastic seat cover.

"What did I do?" Rose said. "Tell me." She dabbed at her eyes with the sleeve of her dress. "I didn't do anything. I just waited."

"Maybe you did," Billy said. "Maybe you didn't."

Just then, the bus braked hard and pitched everyone forward. Tires squealed and red lights flashed all over the highway as cars skidded to a halt. The passengers groaned. A din of honking horns started up. Across the median strip, the cars in the northbound lanes kept wizzing by.

Billy crouched down in the aisle and looked out the front window. Even in the failing light of dusk, he could see more than a hundred yards ahead, where a tractor trailer had jackknifed and overturned. The silver trailer lay across the entire southbound side of the highway, oozing a dark, viscous liquid onto the pavement. Billy turned and looked out the rear window. Traffic was already backed up as far as he could see.

Rose let out a sharp bark of laughter. Billy saw the surprised look on her face change to guilt, before it set in a rigid grimace.

Billy sat back down. Except for an occasional bleat, the horns had died away. The traffic speeding by in the northbound lanes produced a steady, rushing sound. Beyond the accident, police cars and an ambulance came into sight, racing towards the trailer along the empty stretch of highway. The keening of the sirens grew louder and louder. The sirens seemed to unleash the frustration in the stranded drivers. They leaned on their horns. Just a few at first, then more and more, until it seemed like all the horns had joined the sirens in one long demented howl.

Above it all, Billy heard Rose. She'd wrapped her arms around herself and was squeezing hard, but she couldn't stop laughing. By the glare of the headlights, Billy watched her quake. Her face had gone

white. She drew a sharp breath and then another. She leaned across the duffel bag, gripped his forearm with one of her hands and squeezed hard. Her eyes seemed to plead.

Billy pried her hand loose and pushed it away. He lit a cigarette and looked out the window. He waited for the traffic jam to move. He could wait it out. He could wait anything out.

Allan Peterson

MICHAEL FLYING

Holding out his arms the fingers spread apart
like primaries he reaches up a small bird
having only three year old bonework for feathers
no secondaries for lift no coverlets

So one of us must take him up
in a kind of grunting flight from floor
to shoulders or higher to look down
for a change from the family tree
He goes almost to the ceiling
just under the fan he is a helicopter

Some indians hung both arms with feathers
to contact the impossible and the rhythm
and the feathered arms in the dance
turned true the wish they floated
And this small boy like a kiwi
though he does yet not know a kiwi
reaches to his parents to relatives
other flightless birds with symbolic equipment
and he learns like it was a dance to make imagination
hard as trees by having live branches in the form of arms
bend down to fly him

M. A. Sisco

Westerly

for Mark Cox

the wind penetrates
this town like sweat
through a cotton shirt.
deer try to swim
the miles between
block island and this shore,
with the trollers that beat
against the current's
dry laughter.

the fishermen have seen it.
antlers reaching over the crests
like driftwood on a steady course.
they wash up sometimes,
drowned eyes large and black,
legs folded under a white
bellyful of surf.

they call this town 'westerly.'
no one is quite sure why.
nowhere near the westerly winds
on the coast guard charts,
it waits for the running tide.

yesterday
i wanted to drive and
drive, and drive,
until the volare's rusted
shell cracked like the airwaves
of the A.M. radio.

on the beach
the gulls were dropping

quahogs to the stones
when a barn owl took flight
from the cattails,

and as if in salute,
or bowing before authority
its gray feathers parted into brown
like an old man's silver head
left with a single streak
of youth.

it was beautiful,
but nothing real is ever this perfect

because the westerlies don't blow here,
the southern trades are not always calm,
and the horse latitudes are capricious,
kicking and tearing their way toward shore.

Elizabeth Farrell

FULL TILT

There is something about the kid on the roof
singing out at full volume, arms open
performing for the clouds.
If he should fall, the happiness
preceding his flight would be like fireworks,
the very life sparked out of him.
The magic spell he has cast over himself,
in this moment when he thinks he's alone,
is the stuff I never get to witness, eavesdropping
on his private life. I may never get another
easy chance. I take this one in while bending over
to pick cucumbers, and he freezes when he sees
I see him. Both of us standing still eyeing the other,
from our different heights.

they call this town 'westerly'.
no one is quite sure why.
nowhere near the westerly winds
on the coast guard charts,
it waits for the running tide.

yesterday
i wanted to drive and
drive, and drive,
until the volare's rusted
shell cracked like the airwaves
of the A.M. radio

on the beach
the gulls were dropping

Elizabeth Farrell

TAKING HOLD

On my knees in the garden I want to be sure
that what I dig up and send to you is
what you need. I can only guess, as I pull
at the tangled roots of overgrown herbs, what
might take hold in a ground already beginning
to harden, with warnings of an early frost.
Sending these herbs in the mail is like
sending my love to you, following the years
of promises from what history I have
read about each plant, especially the ones
offering happiness and courage, those supreme
gifts! From my own garden I can divide and
send most the pointed rosemary leaves,
tell you how after prayers, nightmares might be
prevented by slipping it under your pillow,
so you can close your eyes, not feel
afraid to sleep.

Elizabeth Farrell

WALLS

When the walls were new, smooth blueboard
with a skim coat of white paint, delicious
to the eye like a frosted cake, or the first
fallen snow, I admired their absolute cleanness,
their perfect condition, their innocence before
mouldings, light switches, dings from indecisive acts.
Tenderly, I would apply joint compound to cover up
the wounds, try to restore them to their original beauty.
The first eggshell cracks altered the way in which I looked
at the walls, fingers following their delicate lines,
map made of their own private pain, a part of my house.

Mary Lynn Ellis

MONDAY'S MAIL

It was the day after
the old woman's mailman
killed himself and his wife
and the baby daughter
whose picture he pulled
from his wallet
to show the old woman
whenever she asked, "Sam,
how's your sweet girl?"
and he would smile
such a nice smile
and she could hear him whistling
halfway down the block on warm days
when the door was open and if
the screen door was locked, he knocked
to see if she had anything today
because, you see,
he would take her letters
though he wasn't supposed to,
even the rolled up comics
she sent her great-grandson
every Monday and this was
a Monday, but she hadn't heard yet
and the letters she had left
in the slot for Sam
were pushed back in, lay scattered
on the blue rug
their white skins stiff
and lifeless, the roll
pointed at her feet
like the muzzle of a gun.

Mary Lynn Ellis

STILL AUTUMN

but winter clouds
hang heavy
on the wires outside my window
like wet laundry;
the soup left from lunch
in its pot on the stove
grows thick and cold;
my boys are in their beds
with their runny noses
and worn blankets;
from the basement
comes the dull churning
of the dryer
tumbling, tangling our damp clothes;
and the memories
that swamp me like a headcold
come stealthy and slow:

Other autumns,
other boys, thin-waisted lovers
their cheeks tanned,
their strong hands, their long
leafy hair—red, gold, brown;
the redhead strides
over square city blocks
and straight-edged lawns;
the gold one wakes on warm sand;
and the brown-haired boy
with the long jaw
squats beside a mountain stream
his sleeves undone, as always,
at the wrists, his teeth
and the water are white, white;
all the grins are easy,

dark as wet stones are all the eyes
looking into the sun
at me, shining.

Every autumn
leaves change and boys
fall into my aching arms;
even on this sunless day,
all the bright leaves in piles
by the curb, there are
fat-bellied boys upstairs
with hair as fine as new grass;
there is this house, this window,
these clouds, lifting.

Ken Poyner

COMBUSTIBLE

The man on fire wanders about mostly at night.
He knows he is a spectacular sight at any time,
But at night he can be seen farther, cast his coming
Around the edges of barns, reflect off the Sound
Occasionally for miles. During the day he is
An eyeful too; but after dark children
Will crouch on their knees in bed to watch
Through their windows for the burning man to cross a yard.
Young boys use him as an excuse to get
Girls who wish to stay away from outright agreement
To drive with them to the black backs of fields,
Or down roads whose abrupt ends have been for years
Welcome. He knows he is nothing if he is too common,
Restricts himself to just so much wandering
As will make the sight of him plausible
And rare enough to be worth the drive.
Most adults by now have come to the opinion
That the man on fire enjoys his status,
Has long since stopped thinking of how his condition
Might for his own good be put to an end.
Not many people remember what he was before
He caught fire, what his habits were, whether
He could get credit with only his word and
A right hand. When he talks to neighbors
Now it is only at distance, and by shouting, and only
Of the common information a few words in their roughest form
Can edge through wonderment or bother.
He is, in himself, still a slow sort,
Proud to be out of the crowd in his burning,
Taking the attention for as long a ride
As a man without commercial backing can get.
No one hereabouts would want him, burning
Or otherwise, to ask a daughter out, even
If she were past good dating age and worn with use.

But his burning still for everyone is thrill,
And the locals talk of him to tourists like even tourists
Should know that behind such good the purpose is clear.

Jeff Hardin

THE LONG WAIT

"It may be that there is no place for any of us. Except, we know there is, somewhere; and if we found it, but lived there only a moment, we could count ourselves blessed."

—Truman Capote

Brother and I chase fireflies,
turn our faces to search the webbing
of tree limbs, and our ears
to the sounds of bullfrogs and of
wind along the stretch of fence
down by the road. Later
we wait on the porch,
our bottoms small enough to ease
into the same wooden chair.

Papaw comes out, smoke from
his cigar rising
above the porch, into
the webbing, into the face
of the moon.

I see his eyes for a moment.
They are hard and smooth,
like buckeyes, and are searching
the farthest length of the road,
anticipating headlights.

Brother is the first to go,
head against my arm, his nose
sucking in the silence
of our wait.

Robert Cooperman

Robert Edwards

I go next, head against
the back of the chair, heart
pounding in my ears, free of
hope, of the wish for
a bedtime story. With eyes shut
tight, I imagine the effortless
gathering of bedsheets,
the caressing of fingers
smoothing them over me,
imagine the warmth
at the edge of my body.

I almost fainted in the hushed silence,
had to stagger out, used the backs
of pews for canes, and collapsed
onto a bench in the open air,
breathing the reviving dirt of life,
eyes closed, lest I be crushed
by the further beauty of architecture
more delicate than a Fragonard,
that lacework of eternity weaving
its web around a dabbler like me.

Robert Edwards

HUMMINGBIRDS

Red attracts them...

First one, then another, until there are four hummingbirds
in a buzzing ballet,
tailfeathers fanned like a lobster's, cupping the air,
dipping and darting in jade blurs,
fighting for the right to suck sugared water
from the hanging red glass bell.

Their needled beaks sew the morning with frantic stitches.
They lunge and whirl, chasing each other off,
the tiny hammers of their hearts pounding in hot pursuit—
but none will be denied.

To them,
the territories large,
the stakes high,
the rewards sweet.

So different, then, from us?

I see his eyes for a moment.
They are hard and smooth,
like hockeyes, and are searching
the furthest length of the road,
anticipating headlights.

Brother is the first to go,
head against my arm, his nose
sucking in the silence
of our wait.

Robert Cooperman

STENDHAL FLEES THE CHURCH OF SANTA CROCE, FLORENCE

Not the proximity of so many ghosts,
the marble floors trembling
under the bones of dead priests,
the cold heft of skulls moldering below;
but the paintings jewelizing the walls:
Masaccio, Titian, Tintoretto,
so much beauty staring down, pitiless,
my novels—twisted, hectic skitterings
unworthy of this immortality:

These perfections of color, composition,
the passions all bright and gorgeous
upon the faces of Madonnas, holy children,
martyred saints, crucifixions, baptisms,
an Angel radiant, robes fluttering,
the domes of Jerusalem in pale perspective;

The niched sculptings of Christ,
head collapsed onto His chest
that couldn't bear a dove's weight—
to make me sob for His agony;
or the Lord risen, the Man
before me in the spirit of flesh.

I almost fainted in the hushed aisles,
had to stagger out, used the backs
of pews for canes, and collapsed
onto a bench in the open air,
breathing the reviving dirt of life,
eyes closed, lest I be crushed
by the further beauty of architecture
more delicate than a Fragonard;
that lacework of eternity weaving
its web around a dabbler like me.

Mack Faith

"STAYING OVER," MAMA SAID, ". . .

Kelly shivered in the evening air, breathed deeply, and let the robe slip from her shoulders. Somewhere behind her, she knew without having to look, somewhere beyond the sliding glass door, and beyond the drapes, Woody's bedside clock would be turning numbers, a new one coming and going each minute, relentlessly, tediously catching up to the time just passed. Most of the night had gone. If she had slept, had just now risen, the clock would be saying, *almost morning*, would be grinding down toward the day. But she had not slept, was instead drinking in the last of a waning moon, a large yellow crescent she could barely cup in both hands. It seemed to rest for one long moment on the black horizon, then slip. Kelly watched as first one valley and then the next grew dark, until nothing had shape but the crest of the mountains and the curve of the blue-black sky. There could be no more than an hour before dawn, and somewhere behind her—she knew it—Woody would have rolled onto his side, warned by some inner clock that the alarm would be buzzing soon, would have been turned without his needing to will it, so that he would be positioned to raise his arm from the pillow, reach for the button, and measure himself another ten minutes sleep. But all that was behind her. The drapes were drawn. The door was snugged against its jam. She would not see Woody churn onto his back, would not hear him curse the second buzzer, would not have to listen until the electronic screeching had finally angered him from his sleep.

It was too late now. She would be better off to wait until Woody remembered that she had stayed over the night, until he noticed that she was gone from the bed. He would know to find her on the deck and would know to wait as long as he could before he opened the curtain and rolled back the door and apologized for disturbing her. She would hesitate as long as she could, but once he had opened the door, what was inside would come out, the night would be gone, the morning drive-time D.J. and his almost clairvoyant radio would be on her, knowing that she was listening too, would scold her gently for not getting rest, would remind Woody to shave before he showered. It would have been no different if she'd gone back inside and waited in the bed next to him. He would have kept his back to her until he'd been hammered from his rest, had started his coffee and washed his face, had remembered to check the bed for her. To have watched and listened would only have tempted them to have regrets, and there was too little

left of the night for that.

Kelly would have to go into the day without even a nap to break it cleanly from the one before. She'd have to watch for a time later, in the afternoon perhaps, to rest and prepare herself for the comforting rush of another evening, for that vitality that would come on her with the darkening sky. There would be the laughter in the bars, and there would be Woody's insistent desire that she be happy, and all of that would push her along. When she got tired she could insist he take her home to her own bed where she'd get plenty of sleep after he'd made love to her and gone. So, she danced involuntarily in the morning air, let it shake her, and tickle her, and tease up the excitement that looked so much like love. Odd that heat and cold could cause so much the same result.

From the deck she had been able to see all the way through the woods to the other side of the valley. And under that moon she had watched the yellowed fog creeping toward town like mud. There were legends that once in the time long before cities and roads and automobiles the Indians had been led up on the side of this mountain by spirits to watch in horror a great wall of water tear out a wide canyon and flow like a spilled ocean for days until it disappeared beneath the rocks and sand and soil it had brought with it. Kelly leaned against the rail and thought how easy it was to believe such a story on a night like this, and she did not wonder that those who had struggled up the steep slope to witness that sign of coming change should have felt compelled to wander, a newly born tribe, telling the stories of what they had seen, and moving on to the next unwary village, never finding themselves a home. She was sure she understood. They would have owed their lives to whatever it was that had saved them, and to whatever it was they had saved. They could no more have resisted the impulse to move than the bears could resist their winter caves or the great flocks of geese could fight the tug of the South, or she, the sad man's need of an available woman.

Closing her eyes, breathing deeply, Kelly saw both sides of the valley and its dying river creeping between them, saw a lone woman standing on a deck, naked in the moonlight. The woman had come there, she knew, because when she stayed with the man asleep inside the house she could rise from the bed and stand naked on the deck where no one could see her, where she could feel the chill in the air and the pull of the moon. The woman below her looked up, into her eyes, as if to plead, to mourn that there was so little left of the night. Seeing herself and her life from the outside was something she had learned to do, both as a way of pretending that what was happening was

happening to someone else, and as a way of remembering that it was her after all.

Most of what Kelly remembered of the nearly three decades since she had been a girl at home she remembered in that way, as if she were filming coverage of her own life. She saw herself in the grove of birches behind her mother's house, waiting for the moon to rise and light the trunks and branches with a silver glow, waiting for the taxi to cross the bridge at the bottom of the hill and begin the climb toward their house, watching as Kelly the girl ran in her nightgown through the trees to the back door and into her room so that Mama would find her faking sleep when she got home. She saw herself dreaming away the mornings in their front porch swing, inventing the excuse she would use for missing school or for coming home early while her mother still slept. She saw herself at the foot of the hill by a stream in the spring with Mama, the two of them floating wild flowers on the water, love notes for the nymphs, both of them convinced, for the moment at least, that they had come from water and could return.

Kelly saw herself standing on the deck, high on the east side of the valley, looking west. The moon was gone now, but the sky was gray with light behind her. The hill was too steep for anyone to have gotten near on foot, and the closest house was too far even for someone with binoculars. She enjoyed standing there waiting for morning to make the world real again. There were no places in town where she could feel this happen. The only times she seemed to get away were the times she came out to stay over with Woody. He knew at least some of why she came. She always gave him reasons. "It's quiet here when you've gone to sleep." "I can see the moon and the stars from the deck." "It's peaceful." That was some of it, the part she volunteered. The rest she would confess only when he wrung it from her.

Most of what Kelly remembered she remembered in that way, seeing herself and her life from the outside. Mama sitting on the edge of her bed in the rearly morning, talking her back to sleep with improvised versions of fairy tales and Greek mythology, her favorite story the affair between Mars and Aphrodite. Him, wearied by war. Her, married off to Hephaestus, club-footed god of the forge, the jealous husband determined to catch them in the act, making a golden net so fine they couldn't even see it, laying it over the couch so when Mars came to make love to her the net would go up and they'd be hanging in the air. This clumsy, angry god. Mama making her see him out there in the shop, week after week, hammering out the little links, all the while his wife in the house making love with the god of war, never able to see

himself the beauty of it, how different Mars was when he was in her spell. *I'd rather they'd call me a whore*, she'd said. *Don't be embarrassed. Women stay over with a man, refuse his money, to feel respected. But it leads to jealousy, and that's more trouble in the end.* Kelly saw herself curled beneath the covers, wishing she knew how to tell her mother that people were saying she was crazy.

Woody loved her, he said, in his own peculiar way, but she preferred letting him sleep all the way to the buzzer, standing with her back to him while he fumbled for the snooze alarm, rolled from the bed, and wove his way toward the bathroom, refusing to face him even when he drew the curtains and rolled back the door, even when he told her that seeing her standing there against the rail, naked, made it hard for him to dress, tempted him to call in sick, cancel his classes, make love to her all day. He never called in sick, but he was conscientious about threatening to.

Woody stepped up close behind her and held her shoulders in his hands.

"Coming back tonight?"

"Probably not."

"I miss you when you don't."

Kelly looked out across the valley. The fog had begun to thin and she could see smoke from the last of a fire that had burned there through most of the night.

"They'll be at it over there all day, maybe again tonight. I miss the best parties when I come here."

"It's more than that," Woody said, kissing her hair where it covered her ear. "You were so far away last night."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I shouldn't come if I'm not really going to be with you."

"You're getting restless," he said, "losing interest in school."

Kelly shrugged his hands from her shoulders. Her mother's idea, unfolded in angry sermons every Sunday afternoon, was that for a girl like Kelly—whore's daughter, no daddy—education was the only thing worth buying. But she should never, no matter what kinds of songs they sang about steady jobs and happy homes, she should never let them pressure her into a degree. B.A., B.S., Ph.D.—it was all the same to Mama. They wanted nothing more than to stuff you into a little slot, the narrower the better. And once they had you in there, they'd rather kill you than let you out. Avoid the cap and gown like it was death. Hit and run. Learn everything you can. But stay away from graduation. That was her logic and her strategy. Kelly was tempted to say it again for

Woody, that of course she was restless, and she thought she should be. It was what her Mama had taught her, but he would be too quick to remind her that those happy days were mixed with her mother's fear that the doctors or the police or some other they she could not specify would come for her and take her to a chilly room where there were no seasons, a place from which she would not know how to return.

Most of what Kelly remembered she remembered in that way, seeing her life from the outside, how she and her mother sat by the stream, floating flowers on the water, watching them disappear in the swirls beneath the bridge. And she remembered again that when Mama knew they were coming, knew that the time had come, she wanted Kelly to agree to a long list of things. Finish school. Marry a nice man. Communion every Easter. Make a home in one place. And she saw herself, fourteen, not a girl anymore, arguing with her mother because Kelly could not believe until the last moment that this time it was real, that the fearless mind that had been in her mother would flair again but never with the natural beauty of a spring rain or the terrifying power of thunder and lightning, would never again draw itself together to create, like an invisible church, those moments of wisdom and daring and compassion that were everything Kelly loved about her. That part of her was gone from the moment they took her away.

Kelly shrugged his hands from her shoulders and followed him when he turned and went inside. Woody pulled his pants on over his shorts, sat on the edge of the bed, and struggled into his socks.

"You're thinking about throwing it all in, quitting school, leaving me, leaving town." He fumbled under the bed for his shoes. "And you're counting on me not to care."

"That's your fantasy," Kelly said, "not mine." She followed him out of the bedroom, up the hall, and stood outside the bathroom door while he finished dressing and brushed his teeth. The day they came, she put one hand on Mama's heart, raised the other, and swore she would settle down. Finish school. Make a home in one place. Mama had done none of these things herself, but that was her logic. In America children are supposed to go beyond their parents. She only wanted what every mother wants for her daughter. That was her argument. Kelly knew how to resist, but the state cars pulled up in front, and Kelly suddenly believed, as she never had before, that she could help her by giving in, by promising her, at least a college education.

Mama had been warning her that the state would come. And people talked about her, said she was crazy, even in front of Kelly. But the stories they told—her battles with the schools, evictions demanded by

their neighbors, the sermon she delivered when she took Kelly to be christened and was turned away—she had been like that, no different, for as long as Kelly could remember. So neither of them was surprised, and neither of them was prepared. Kelly knew only that eventually they would come. But Mama knew the details that Kelly didn't, had known that it would be soon, had gone to happy hour at the hotel bar, as she always did, met a man, gone up to a room with him, only to discover he was one of Kelly's teachers. The cops said she threatened him, but they knew her, knew it was only talk, not to be taken seriously.

Kelly was asleep when her mother got home. It was a school night, a school morning really. 5:00 a.m. Mama found Kelly's essay on the kitchen table where she had left it out for her, first "A" she had ever gotten in a writing class, thinking Mama would be proud. But it was like a cosmic conspiracy trying to warn them both not to expect that Kelly would ever fit. The "A" was from the same teacher Mama had been in bed with, and at war with, a couple of hours before. It set her off all over again. Kelly was a sound sleeper in those days, but her mother had to have her up, right then, and broke a couple of plates to get her attention. That's when the arguing began, about Kelly's future, and that's when, as they had before, the neighbors called the cops—complained that Mama was smashing things and yelling at her kid again.

When the police and the doctors came, Mama didn't resist. The only question she asked was, "Why now, god damn it? Why now?" But they didn't answer. They gave her the shot. When the needle went in, Kelly was looking right into her eyes, saw her face open in a moment of terror and then collapse. Before Mama's understanding had all drained away, Kelly repeated her promise about the degree and made another one too, that she would get her out, take her to France. Mama only nodded. Kelly held onto her hand all the way to the government car. Mama's face caved in on itself like a balloon slowly losing air, but until her eyes fell shut Kelly repeated the pledges. Escape to France. Finish school. Escape to France, like she was singing her a lullaby.

Kelly stood outside the bathroom door while Woody finished dressing and brushed his teeth. "It's your fantasy," she said, "not mine."

"I just know you," he said and spat into the sink. "It's your mother. They're going to release her and you're going to follow her. You can't help yourself. You'll go wherever she goes, just like the old days."

"This is news to me."

Woody pushed past her and pulled his suit coat from the front hall

closet.

"Don't play dumb," he said.

"You're just thinking of my well-being," she said. "Want to see me finish school. Nothing in it for you."

"This is where I get the lecture," he said, "that a woman like you is only hard to find because most women were rocked in the cradle by a woman telling them not to let a man do it to them, writing it deep in their innocent little brains that the best way to protect themselves in this world is to let out as little of themselves in bed as they possibly can. Say no first. Ask questions later. Save it Kelly. I know your Mama wasn't like that. And I know a man who knows a woman like you and can't believe there's a god somewhere looking out for him is either brain damaged from self-inflicted wounds, or is already dead and is just waiting for his body to fall down, or is a zombie come back from hell to spread his miserable self around, and in the end it doesn't much matter which it is. Of course I'm thinking of myself."

Woody's brief case sat on the couch, just inside the front door, where he had dropped it the night before. He snapped it open, searched, and pulled out a large brown envelope.

"Yesterday's mail," he said. "A report from her doctor."

"This is cruel, Woody."

"Read it, god damn it. I'll call you from the office."

Woody slammed the door behind him. Kelly refused to touch the envelope for nearly an hour after he had gone. Until that day, the day they took her away, her mother had never asked her to do something without showing her how, and had always seen things coming ahead of their time. Even back when Kelly started first grade, her mother had already talked around to people and found out that at the end of the first week the kids were going to have to get up in front of the class and tell the others about a hobby, or a pet, or something they were good at doing. Mama taught Kelly a poem and rehearsed her on it until she could say it perfectly, even with some feeling. The other kids all squirmed and mumbled when the teacher called on them, but Kelly was ready. She stood up and folded her hands so she wouldn't be pulling on her dress.

"And what is your favorite thing to do?" the teacher asked, still looking down into the papers on her desk. Kelly waited, as she'd been taught, until the teacher looked up. Then she answered.

"I remember things."

"Like what?"

"Poems."

"Poems?"

"I know 'We Wear the Mask' by Paul Lawrence Dunbar by heart."

"And would you like to recite it for us now?"

"Yes," Kelly answered. And she did recite, stumbling only once. They all stared at her when she was finished, but nobody clapped or said anything. The teacher seemed to forget to tell her it was okay to sit down and called the name of the next kid on her list. Kelly wished her mother had been there to tell her what went wrong and what she should do to fix it. For the rest of the day she kept quiet, talked only to herself, making up her mind she was never going to listen to her mother again.

Mama was just getting up when Kelly came home from school. Kelly kept her fists clenched and wouldn't talk. Mama followed her all around the house in her negligee, yelling and yelling. She was like a big wind pushing pink and lavender clouds from storm to storm. Every time she got Kelly cornered in one of the rooms the mist trailing behind her would gather all around them both and the thunder would come rolling out, wanting to know if Kelly had been called on, if she'd recited her poem, how the teacher and the children had treated her. When it was finally too much, Kelly broke her silence.

"Why weren't you there?"

"I was asleep."

"You should have been there."

"Whores sleep in the day," Mama said. "Teachers and kids sleep at night. That's how it is."

Kelly slid down the wall onto the rug in the corner of her bedroom, wanting to fight back but not able to think of anything to say except, "You're not fair," and that sounded stupid to her even then. Her mother danced and twirled and made the nightgown billow and float all around her. Kelly tried to stay mad, but Mama was too beautiful. Kelly didn't want to go back to the teacher and the kids. She wanted to have breasts that swayed when she danced. She wanted to play all night and see the sun come up and dream beautiful dreams while the others were begging the teacher, could they please, please go to the bathroom. Slowly, her mother crouched lower and lower, her arms still moving, the silky clouds rising and falling. Finally, it was the two of them, the way Kelly wanted, close together, hiding in a cocoon, and Mama was rocking her while Kelly cried, as if she wasn't old enough to go to school.

"Tell me what they said," Mama insisted, when the crying had stopped, but Kelly wouldn't answer.

"Tell me," she said, and lifted Kelly off the floor, higher and higher

each time she demanded an answer. "Tell me. Tell me." But Kelly kept quiet. Mama raised Kelly all the way over her head and flew her from room to room, swooping low under doorways and soaring high again. When Kelly still wouldn't talk, Mama held her on one shoulder, unlatched the back door, kicked open the screen, and they were in the yard, Kelly flying and her mother not dressed.

"Mama wants to know," she whooped. "Mama wants to know." And when Kelly could see that she was going to glide with the swallows under the eaves of their neighbors' house, that Mrs. Mitchell was watching from her kitchen window, that Kelly was soaring closer and closer to the old woman's horrified face, she screeched.

"Nothing," she yelled again and again. The word grew longer and longer each time she said it, until the sounds of it stretched out, "nothing," for one whole flight around the yard and they both fell down laughing.

"They said nothing," Kelly confessed, when she had caught her breath.

"Nothing?"

"The teacher didn't even say thank you."

"Any hooker knows better than that."

Kelly's mother got up to her feet and held out her hand.

"Maybe I said it wrong."

"They're Zombies, honey," Mama said. "Half the people you see walking around are already dead. Believe me, they'd like it better if you didn't get it right."

"Do you want to hear the poem?"

"Sure, but let's go in."

Mama held the door and followed Kelly, but just before she closed it, she stuck her head back out into the yard and yelled loud enough for people to hear half-way down to the school.

"Wake up, you bunch of God damned Zombies. You ain't supposed to sleep in the day."

The report lay on the couch where Woody's brief case had been. Kelly refused to touch the envelope for nearly an hour after he had gone, but she took it with her when she tucked herself into bed. She had read them before, packages filled with long rambling diatribes against the hospitals and the doctors and the treatments. She had always been like that, but she'd be better once Kelly got her to France.

Marcelle M. Soviero

KEEPING TIME

You kept buying drinks
in two's
while I sipped Seltzer,
my word clinked
the ice in your glass
and left tiny stars
on the bottom,
tiny stars like the ones
in your eyes.

*"I'm not going to live
forever Martie,"* you said
so unexpectedly
that a chill lingered inside me
like a cobweb.
You shouldn't be so old Dad,
I thought:
why are you so old?

Next morning
you told me
I had it the worst
since I was your youngest,
you said, *"I'm quitting
for good this time."*
But your words
caged you in.

Karen Swenson

THE GHOST

Woodsmoke guides us through the mist,
trailing fragrance to
the village. Backpacks full of conveniences
western as our beliefs, we're dead set on
finding these people happy
without socks or faucets.

We wear our watches, digital signs
of contamination
by the luminous hands of time.
Like Typhoid Marys we carry progress to
this quietude hoping
here infants have no gene for greed.

Women turn their smiles and shield
children from our cameras
leaving nothing to record but things.
Palm frond roofs will lie transparent on our walls
while serious chestnut eyes
must slowly fade on memory's slide.

My pictures flash upon my wall,
bamboo weaves across my plaster,
conjuring up one little Lizu boy
who, transfixed by my repeated pallor,
pale skin, pale hair, pale eyes,
wept as though he'd met his future's ghost.

Mary Rose Dougherty

LADY IN RED

We spied on her,
my brother and I, through the garage window
from across the alley as she strolled to the waiting
red taxi. She lived
in a run-down house that leaked
rats. But as she walked all we saw was her red hair
rising above her red coat and shoes, her red purse.
We could not imagine
as we crouched there at the sill
what pain this woman went to
or left behind. Instead
we whispered, *lady in red*, and dreamed
for her an exotic life—perfume and jewels,
a smoky room, deep throaty music, and bodies cloaked
like goddesses or the emperor. This woman,
her red hair billowing,
a torch flame, rising, rising.

Gary Fincke

DOC STAVIC COACHES

Tennis is chess; tennis is war,
Doc Stavic explained to us.
Know this battlefield and where
That army is weakest. You lay
Siege on that man; you break
His will like a famine and
He'll go belly up and die.
Doc Stavic said stamina, patience;
He ran us side to side, baseline
To net. You be Russians, he said.
You endure no matter what country
Wants your land. When winter comes,
You'll be ready. Wait for
That cold snap, that first real snow.
That man will understand war;
He'll shake his head and slump
Like you've shot him. Napoleon,
He said. Hitler. Whoever
The next invader might be
You have the time and the endurance.
Doc Stavic said he was making sure
We lived; he said "I'm telling you 'Yes.'"

Joyce Odam

UGLY

These tight veins.
These bumps and protrusions.
These scars.
Come hold me while I tell you
how it was.

There were confusions
and wars.
There were stolen destinies.
I had to get even.

See this swollen body
that was beautiful.
I was never a child.
I was always and old remembrance.
No one loved me.

Why do you love me now?
I am cruel.
I am bitten through with
innocent confessions.
Keep the one you choose.

Now you must live with
its forgiveness.
Be its carrier.
Take it with you everywhere
even to the mirrors.

Come, let us touch our
frozen souls together
and weep
for all there is
to weep about.

Joyce Odam

TRAVEL POSTER

where am I missing the boat?
even though I don't know
where boats are going
I keep missing them
arriving at docks to see
the small speck in the distance...
the wisp of smoke...

others return
to tell me of their travels
secret with joy
intense with detail
I nod impatiently and sneak away
to my schedules and wardrobe
that I keep packing and repacking
until it fits small
each day is shrunken
with my anticipation
my off-sense of timing
that I keep perfecting
each day is waging
its size against me

Sweet Envy
smiles from her poster
and I, her collector,
study her closely
to memorize where she has been
for I would go there

Joyce Odam

HOME

Why do we get off
here?

I do not know this place
nor any of these people.

What kind of neighborhood
is this

with its houses

of no house-numbers

and its street-names

repeated at every corner.

I thought you knew
the way.

I have always followed what you knew.

But there is nothing here,
this old, ghost-town-of-a-place
you seem to remember.

You open a door

and go in

and after a moment

I follow, trusting you

and find

a false-front house

with fields behind

and the famous tumbleweed

of movies

rolling past.

You should have

disappeared

to make this poem mysterious.

But you are standing there

with lonely welcome on your face,

your arms extended.

Victor M. Depta

DAUGHTER FLOWER

I would never have believed
 the child could ease me out of myself.
 I was divorced, middle-aged and lonely
 and inclined to despair
 frequently wanting to die
 knowing how little hope there was
 spendthrift as it longed to be
 like weeds in the empty lot—
 johnson grass, mustard, field daisies—
 for love
 but futile, and I was close to tears
 so when she pointed to the violets along the fence
 I saw, being with her
 that patience and perseverance
 like the flower which she knelt to
 the leaves and blossoms in her small, white fist
 were enough
 and realizing that
 a gentleness came upon me.

Sweet Eavy
 smiles from her poster
 and I, her collector,
 study her closely
 to memorize where she has been
 for I would go there

Victor M. Depta

THE DANCE RECITAL

For my daughter
what choice was there of a dance teacher
our being so far from New York, Paris, Moscow
but to settle, midwest, for a munchkin
en pointe, from Munich
for civilization thin as the jet exhausts
high over the Mississippi—
it was silly, anyway
my friends' encomiums for her
pathetic frauds
Why, she could have been
and so forth.

My daughter was beautiful, nonetheless
at five, still blond, unblemished, fair
her eye-color cornflower
her costume pink sateen, with pink slippers
and in the blue, theatrical lights—
the clouds on the backdrops like clumsy cherubs—
her arms outstretched, and on tiptoe for the bow
she ran to me
but halted, in her error, at the proscenium
as angels do.

Marlaina B. Tanny

REFLECTIONS

If I held a mirror up to your green eyes
would you see only brambles with sharp
piercing thorns?
Can you not, center image,
find the tight bud of your face?
I fold you into bed each night
tracing with a mother's intent sight
your high cheekbones,
the small bump in your nose, the
same as mine.
There is not one mistake.
Your platinum hair
fans out against sheets of sleeping lambs
and soft eared bunnies
each with bows and flowers at its feet.
The sky is fluffed with perfect white clouds.
And I have followed you into your heart:
a spacious room with many windows.
Does the light not shine in
as it does so radiantly outward?
Oh, daughter of mine,
when did you lose the pebbles
of sparking colors,
the ones you have been collecting all these years?

Marlaina B. Tanny

FOREST AND MARSH

You have to respect a hillside of ferns,
fanning out—waist high, oak canopied.
To a whisper, an insect or thought
they respond with metaphoric movement.
They are partly what I came for.

Reeds shiver above my head
and the last time I could see
there were only a few wavering cloud-prints
to the sky. Several times I've become disoriented—
light and leaf all in floating diamonds.

My body tires, the trail persists
and the Joe-Pye weed doesn't blink away its color
for even an instant.

The silence can turn on you and what was
sought out peace becomes deafening solitude.

The wind touches down briefly but mostly
it stays on a symphonic level high
in the great trees.

The snake crossing the path is the stroke
of the bow against the poised violin.

Susan Peterson

THE DEER OF WINTER: EPHRAIM HILL

Silence:

like the deer that stand
in the middle of the road
at 2:00 a.m., deep winter,
and quietly lick the long
center line, licking up salt
that gathers in icy fissures,
chips of frozen stars, fallen.

And as you drive down
the steep hill, your headlights
pick up their stillness, their
delicate perfect bodies as
heads turn, innocent and staring
just seconds before
the startled eerie leap
into a blackness as swift
as hooves.

Susan Peterson

RESORT VILLAGE: NOVEMBER

Late fall
and everything here
is leaving—

hundreds of feet-up
geese honk
beaks southward
wings beating hard

and Monarches
like torn bits
of Halloween paper
drift out of town.

Handymen chain gates
as laden cars
head south,
party's over, shutters shut
to these cold, paling days.

And what of the village,
watching
the last tail light
reddden the rainy street—

Wings beating hard
in rejoicing? In rejection?
In the black evening's snow—

CONTRIBUTORS

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POETRY AND FICTION BY

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