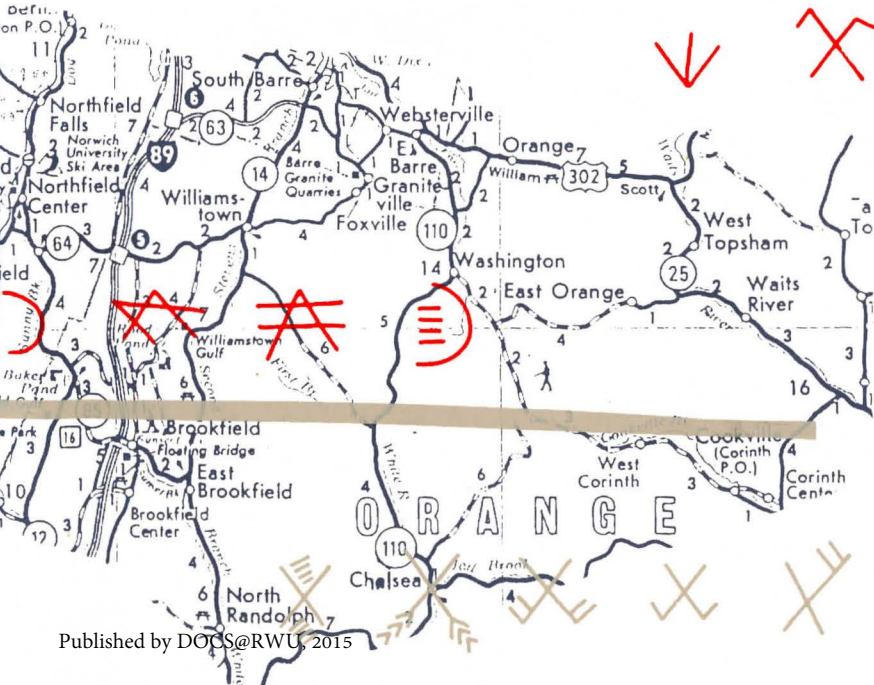
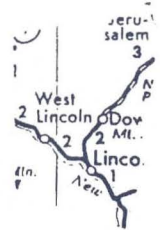
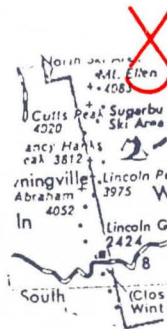


Calliope

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Submissions of poetry and short fiction are welcomed from

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Manuscripts received at other times are held in limbo.

Manuscripts should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped

envelope. No simultaneous submissions, please.

Manuscripts are discussed with the writer's name masked so that

beginning and established writers are read without prejudice.

Address all correspondence, submissions and subscriptions to

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Nicolette Nicola

SNAPSHOT, 1956

Today she is seventeen,
posing in her bathing suit
against the chain-link
fence that binds her yard

to the alley—hubcaps, spit
of grass beneath a clothesline.
She folds her long legs the way
Monroe barely contains herself

on screen, and kisses
for the Kodak box camera.
This is the barber's daughter
and this place is a sudden

center for T-Birds, boys
whistling into the warm
evening, carrying her off
to places where the music

spreads hot as the fence
against her back.
In her bag she hides a pack
of her father's Salems.

She strips the wrapper, brings
cigarette to mouth and knows
breathing this is everything,
the world is nothing else.

Martha Carlson-Bradley

TO A ONE-MONTH-OLD

See the window? landscapes
of frost, ridges and valleys
silver under clouds
packed with snow, a sky of glass

and every day it's different,
distant forests, thickets
of fern obscuring what varies
only in the depth

of the drifts,
the light:

lawns and walls, our garden,
defunct. This morning
as a curl of lupine
pierces the crust of snow

you focus on my face,
my voice; you learn this winter
the climates of tone.

David Garrison

HOLY THURSDAY

It's in the air (again) like distilled perfume,
or the rich rot of corn mash barreled
and blown forty days and a dozen years.
Like cottonwood snow or ashes it rises,
swirls, seeks the fire of smoldering spring,
is carried far into an old and weighted
land, a hammer for hearts, for breaking
gravity into something entirely whole.

But the leaves of the hobble-bush,
its bright purple berries mixed with red,
tease and turn as the May wind pleases.
And the dagger-moth too in his cutaway suit
waits on, a cool and turning dark, as the days
edge up, one and one, and our nights go on.

Ingrid Wendt

PORCUPINE AT DUSK

Out of the bunch grass
out of the cheat grass
a bunch of grass waddles
my way.

Quill-tips bleached by winter four
inches down: crown of glory dark
at the roots: a halo
catching the sun's
final song:

No way could such steady
oblivion possibly live
up to legend, whatever
fear I might have had
is gone, but still I stop

Short on my after-dinner walk, no
collision course if I
can help it, thinking
at first it's the wind,
nudging a path out of the field

Or one of a covey of tumbleweed
lost like those today on the freeway,
racing ahead of my car that whole long drive
here to the banks of the Snake, to friends
so close they know
when to leave me alone.

Wendt/ Porcupine at Dusk

As though I were nowhere around, the porcupine
shuffles the edge of the road,
in five minutes crosses
a distance I could have covered
in less than one

And disappears at last into cattails
and rushes, sunset, a vespers
of waterbirds, leaving me
still unwilling to move.

I am a sucker for scenes like this.
The slowest beauty can rush me.
And here I am,
all of my defenses down,

Claudia Keelan

DEMOGRAPHY

Because angels are in a holding pattern somewhere, I'm sure,
but this is a different country. All the music you hear
on a certain road is good, its promise filling and filling
the car, despite the road's absence of a shoulder, a frontage
road you could hear better on. Yes, it's good though
something here would force those notes into the red end the trees
proffer. It's only the body history remembers, the horse
that killed Catherine the Great, the star dimly on the Christmas
tree and everybody at your door: *is that a real star, what's
that smell, I don't see my name here*, etc. One day
the oxygen disappears in the tree's length and you throw it out
in June, shreds of tinsel trailing across the sidewalk.

If I could pray I'd ask to want less here,
to take the stray arm flung into the air of a city
street as proof enough. Once, walking into a cafe
where I worked, the day's possibility so spread through me

I could almost finger its golden wires, Isaiah, another
exile in a kitchen of America, threw down his broom and breathed
—I can only say *from my neck so deeply*, we both
nearly fainted. But we didn't. We held our ground. Instead,
the music I heard again today between us,
we danced, each taking turns with the broom. Oh, how we enter
the story and that character is its flaw. It'll suffice to say,
we were both so far from home, our dance became it.

Angelin Donohue

AFTER THE SOLSTICE

There is no more light now
than shadow and in our own sloped way
we have become faithful

to the advance and retreat
of conversation, to those moments
when the sun hesitates

in the sky and verges on some lunar
intimacy that diminishes with each moon's passing
phase. The three of us

can be viewed as a trinity
of bodies: sun, moon, and earth in simple
opposition. As if parallels

can explain or complete a thought
the way someone who has known you can see
where you're headed, even after

a month's time spent at the shore when
you're inclined to see your future laid out
before you in a meticulously

orchestrated picnic where a wind trail
crosses white dunes, scattering napkins that flap
and swirl. As you touch her hair

the sadness you feel is larger
than you expected. If you built a boat,
it would become the ocean.

Michael Smith

poem after four years on McNeil

the island I am leaving
rolls to a point,
stone sunk in the mud,
behind me.

I am a man in transit,
chained to the floor
in the hold of a ship
I share with other men.

I want burning, bananas and bare feet.

* * * *

a Chinese restaurant in a blizzard
in Sioux Falls: kung pao chicken, please,
a glass of cold black beer and then a motel
where the TV in the corner spews death and taxes:
another night of things: a woman and green weed and
warm blankets without holes. . .

muck instead and we get the bones.

* * * *

I grow my hair long and fantasize
about performing homosexual acts
with Everyman while
flaxen women
watch me.

I want plutonium to grow corn ten feet high!

* * * *

Smith/poem after four years on McNeil

Marlene B. Tenny

the island I am leaving:
blue shirts and black shoes,
wharfage and wire and cellular fire. . .

what men do with rock astounds me.

appeared, the man Anna believed
her best, last chance into a man.
Bright sunlight, so unexpected, burned
my neck raw as I waited,
fused to a green park bench

as they sprawled on the rolling lawn,
surrendered in the weather change.
Walking home, already late, I settled

to see change in my pocket like the neighborhood
near I murmured, as dusk
enveloped the windward street in umbra's shade.

Marlaina B. Tanny

93 HOMER STREET

The sun waits for me in each room
like a cool glass of spring water
filled according to my capacity.
In the afternoon, on the west side, the light
quavers against the wooden floor, the green
Indian carpet, the spindled baluster
as if it had glided through many birds' throats
absorbing each varied song.
In the course of the day
a lifetime has been mapped out before me.
The sun is the true spirit wanderer
content with the pliable shape of heart
as it resides in each temporary home.

Michael Carrino

IN THE WEATHER CHANGE

When the rain stopped, Anna
covered her old, dull typewriter,
locked Furillo's law office, and crossed
Bedford Avenue where I waited,
fourteen and anxious at last

to lie down on her small bed
one light above Delmonico's barbershop.
Anna let me
sip anisette, fold her white dress, inhale
lilac perfume; demanded I stop

asking questions with only one answer,
about last Wednesday's Indian Summer
excursion to Prospect Park
when Dominic, the grocer,
as if by accident

appeared, the man Anna believed
her best, last chance into a future.
Bright sunlight, so unexpected, burned
my neck raw as I waited,
fused to a green park bench

as they sprawled on the roiling lawn,
immersed in the weather change.
Walking home, already late, I rattled

loose change in my pocket like the neighborhood
men I mimicked, as dusk
enveloped the winedark street in unbearable shade.

Michael Carrino

CATHY DUNN, CATHY DUNN

I can't remember
all her father's rules, her mother's
gentle wisdom, the name
after twenty years, of that college play,
but remember she was blond,
polite. I remember

her voice helped me escape
the city girls' teased hair
and nervous charm bracelets; escape
my frantic parents, the dangerous
traffic on Bedford Avenue
as she described rooms
in a white house in Glens Falls,
a garden rainbarrel and zinneas.

But while actors spat flawless dialogue
I trembled, chest pounding, hands
numb, and forgot her name
the way I might forget Brazil's major export,
any anniversary.

I prayed for luck—first name,
last—but her name was a riddle.
Nothing saved me,
and with nothing perfect
to say, waited till intermission,
and said: "Listen, this is really funny. . .
I've forgotten. . ."

My memory's bad;
how I fend off big-time regret
and all trips down the gauntlet
between love and disaster. I never

Carrino/Cathy Dunn, Cathy Dunn

loved her, but her name, Cathy Dunn,
Cathy Dunn, is delicious tonight.

I'm not the man I expected: consistant,
certain. Tonight, I'm not sure
if I'll take in a movie, window shop,
just go home and shave.

I'm not sure.

I don't care.

Maggie Valentine

TWO ORPHANS

Rain on red shutters at night
in that lucky place, Yun Nan, a name
that sounds like a river,

we eat fried rice, drink tea,
talk as we always do
but tonight you feel silly and I say

I wish I had been born when you were
but anyway I have known you somewhere
before: under a willow tree

we were brothers, beginning to learn
why the rain blows, and the wind,
how we are broken, though we may grow

green again for a while. Drowned
by rain on red shutters at night,
we sound like a river talking.

I prayed for luck—first name,
last—but her name was a riddle.
Nothing saved me,
and with nothing perfect
to say, waited till intermission
and said: "Listen, this is really funny...
I've forgotten..."

My memory's bad;
how I fend off big-time regret
and all trips down the gauntlet
between love and disaster. I never

Maggie Valentine

BARBARA

Why are you buried suddenly in this walled,
black-gated Christian place,
fallen away, your arms folded on blue silk,
flowers heaped above you?
Jumble upon jumble of spring jonquils, ferns
green as tears, lilies, iris lean their wet heads,

their white pots toppled by the rain.
I try to speak to you, but I'm standing here,
under sky, wearing boots. I can't speak. I
look away. The fog on this third day,
the fields, green, and green
cut through by the stone walls of this country

you can't see now—silent.
The trees stand hushed and wordless.
Someone is crossing an abyss alone, one foot
and then the other along a thin shine of wire
strung into immeasurable darkness. The trees
say what there is to say.

Maggie Valentine

A DEFINITION OF DISAPPEARANCE: THE CAT

Missing, he takes on shapes—that round
of blackness under the garden bench,
the hunched shadow in the oak tree.
In rain he is assembled particles of fog
stalking the damp. He becomes
in the washed wind of summer a tiger lily,
orange yawn, lanceolate ears.
The eyespots of the butterfly are his.

He moves beside my feet disguised
as chipmunk flickering
into interstices of fallen stone walls.
He becomes his own prey: mole, gray silk
of mockingbird, flittering of bat. He cries
like the inconsolable gull, has been subtracted
from everywhere.

I attend to each violet leaf
flattened by rain: there perhaps
he sat, snug, breath smelling of bird bones,
tongue raspingly at work polishing fur.
My walk at dusk becomes a ritual
of calling, as if, even if he were dead
beside the road, he'd hear.

I stop, stand in quiet witness
to new mushrooms in a trail narrow
as a daisy chain, like the track
he used to make, each of his paws
placed in the print of the one
that went before. I have seen that
in snow in winter at dawn.

Christopher Seid

POLITICS

after Yeats

The way the sun exits here, scratching
Its chiffon shirttail of light
Across my naked knees,
Reminds me of a blacksnake I watched
Unfurl in huckleberry, pluck
An egg from the catbird's nest—summer's
Final prize.

I'm still not telling the truth.

The way that bird whimpered all night,
Her pea-sized heart puckered with grief,
Was like a long stare I received once
From a woman in a restaurant
Who caught me judging her—a stare
I shot with a forced grin, lying
I don't understand and I don't care.

Christopher Seid

DREAMS OF THE FISHERMAN

... the flight of the Alone to the Alone.

—Plotinus

1.

After their golden anniversary,
his wife caught a sickness of the inner ear.
Sauntering the beach Sundays
she'd crumple at the edge of waves,
as if tackled by an invisible purse snatcher.
One afternoon, steering their sloop alone
into the sound,
she nested on the foredeck with glass after glass
of vodka on ice. Back home,
on the breezy lawn in twilight,
he snored in his yellow Adirondack chair.
In the background of his dreams, halyards
rapping aluminum masts, a bellbuoy's muted,
lackadaisical clang.
When a jay's raucous cry woke him,
there was nothing he could do: dark
had drawn a hymn of calm over sea and sky.
Suzanna, he thought, where the devil are you?
With the bottle empty, she scrawled an apology.
Tying a faithful bowline
in the anchor rope around her waist,
she slipped, carefully, in.

2.

He wakes this morning early
as he has ten thousand mornings,
ambles out into first light
along the fractured granite shore.
The only difference today is
he hauls a secret he tells no one:
how much he hates this routine:
up before light, damp and chilled

Seid / Dreams of the Fisherman

from restless sleep,
to drag the black bay alone
in freezing rain. Sometimes
the bow of his boat shattering waves
is the only conversation he'll keep for days.

How may weeks

have I let rigging fray in ice?

*How many months have my traps
lain idle on the rocks?*

Am I the captain of my soul?

Lighting his pipe, he watches
his house dissolve in fog;
a small boat lost in fog.

3.

Six months to the day she died,
he was drinking coffee at the kitchen window.

On her knees in the garden, she pried
fat rutabagas from half-frozen ground;
a silver trowel flashed in her hands,
exposing every stubborn, stone-heavy root.

He shouted from the porch, but she didn't look up.

As quickly as the acute autumn sunlight bloomed
from behind a purple cloud, it vanished.

By the time he reached the garden,
only the vertebrae of weeds rattled
in the row where she'd knelt.

4.

Last evening, waking from a nap,
he stood stiffly on his back porch—
the September air cold, blue and still.

The woods around his house smoldered,
incense of leaf-mulch and spruce.

A hermit thrush chanted, clear
as a star in the throat of space,
and he started marching towards it,

Seid/Dreams of the Fisherman

bushwhacking through the woods, no
intention of returning. Suddenly,
a steel hook snagged his chest,
flinging him into brambles.
As he lay there grappling for breaths,
for the memory of her face to save him,
he watched his houselights flick on,
room by room, as if someone inside
was searching for him. Pulling himself up
against a birch tree—luminous bark,
rooted in daylight—he seized it:
a lithe, unassuming tree,
its own pulse thrumming in his ear.

5.

He lights a candle on the bedside table,
as she used to do before they'd make love.
The lace curtains, her lace, swell
in ocean breezes that intrude
through windows he's too lazy to slam.
A storm is aiming shoreward tonight.
Boats in the bay strain at their moorings
like leashed Dobermans. It's been one year
since her death, one year he's slept
in the open wound of their bed, in the hiss
and seethe of hysterical dreams
he wakes from, shouting *will the anchor hold?*
They are two seals circling each other,
sleek and cold in effortless bodies;
or two starfish, like hands entwined,
enfolding a stone onshore—
where tonight a man struggles from a dinghy
onto slick, surf-shattered rocks,
the drowned woman in his arms.

Henry Chapin, *In Memory*

Christopher Seid

STATUES

Early summer, everything unraveling
Toward the end of summer—flaccid weave
Of lilac, hem of ash, slack
Yellow smolder of burning trash—

The yard lights press our shadows upon
The house and barn, around
Skinny limbs of poplars that lunge
To snag those flutterings, our

Make-believe selves. We whirl past curfew
And bedtime, past imaginary hours,
All the way to the center of our lives,
Forgetting our lives: parents arguing

In front of TV, bedsheets
Like animal tongues of ice, our room
The spaceship prison of hallucinations.
Laughing and breathless, we writhe

Like snakes in wet grass, waiting
For our shadows, who, hiding in poplars,
Refuse to surrender on father's order: *Boys!*
Come in Boys! Come in Right Now!

for John

Tim Seibles

THE GROOM

When I first saw you I wanted
to talk to you I wanted to
touch your shoulder I noticed
how the day had gone dark with clouds
and I noticed your eyes
darker still and when I saw you I
wanted to tell you something
about a feeling I had about you or
possibly because of you how when I looked
to where you stood talking my skin
tried to walk away from my bones toward you
how my bones wanted to go along When I saw you
glance over grinning from your conversation
I noticed your mouth the strawberry red
of your lips and I thought a kiss I
thought maybe if I could balance
myself against your lips for awhile
I could keep from falling I thought
if you let me kiss you sometime I would be
happier—I might even be a
better person When I saw you throw
your head back laughing both hands
squeezing your hips I thought about
your body not something sexual
necessarily nothing necessarily concerning
sex the way some thoughts sometimes
do but about my hands landing
somewhere around your knees—softly
as though having just parachuted from the sky
just above them I thought about
just walking over
and saying *Come hither, curly-haired maiden,*
the city in my brain is burning,
and the people there cry out

Seibles/The Groom

for your mercy I didn't know
what you would think of me
How do we ever cover the ground
between wanting and having between
one nervous solitude and another
I didn't know I still don't know
I wanted you
I just wanted to ask you your name I
wanted to tell you that your eyes
were very dark that your eyes—
that some evening I would like to
walk into them and take you with me

Tim Seibles

BILLY JACK SERVING 25 TO LIFE

Well, I'm not sure how I did it,
but for a minute there was a brushfire
in my blood—like my body finally realized
exactly what rage was for and before
I knew it, the tall guy was down on his knees
coughin up teeth, and the mouthy dude
with the hat was movin toward me. I believe
sometimes there's nothing else to do
but hit somebody with all your might,
and really, it's something like kissing
someone you've had a crush on for years—
it's so perfect that first moment
of contact; there's such a hunger in it:
driving the nose bone into the brain,
the soul, in all its loneliness, finally
married to a single, well-aimed fist.

Growing up, I never knew how much I'd love
the sunset for coming without tricks,
the way a day closes with the light
giving up after trying so hard
to keep everything clear. When I looked
into my father's dark Seminole face,
I didn't think I'd ever know why
he gripped a bottle like a torch or
what he meant when he'd say, "Billy,
your mother's people—I swear! They'll
make you wanna rip the horns
offa chargin bull!" Now I guess I do.

But I don't resent my mother's white skin.
When she twined her blood with his,
she became something different as I
am different from both of them. I knew

Seibles/Billy Jack. . .

white people didn't like us, but
it wasn't till those two men from Texas
broke Eduardo's legs and poured flour
on his face that it started to reach me.
We were 15, and they had that iron pipe—
all I could do was run—and whenever
I think about it, even after 22 years,
it's like finding a gash in my chest.

There's nothing wrong with being white,
unless you think that that complexion
means everyone darker than you is here
for your entertainment. This evil
has been so well armed and so
well organized for so long, and people
seem so willing to be stupid:
white supremacists or friendly
bigots who like Michael Jordan
on their *Wheaties* box, people who
believe in Columbus, who don't see
anything *all that bad* about naming a team
the "Redskins." And after awhile you get
tired of explaining patiently, setting
the **good example**, ignoring the little jokes,
trying to squeeze a drop of brotherhood
out of a pile of dumb-ass rocks. You get
tired—know what I mean?
You just get fed the hell up.

So, two weeks ago I was in this place
3 hours west of here with Silk Water Su,
a black Cherokee woman who tells me
she gets her name from the creek
behind her house, but I say it's the way
her body washes over you when she
wants it to, the way her body shines, kinda
shimmers like a river lit late in the day.

Seibles / Billy Jack. . .

Anyway, it was evening and the sun
had just about set and we were walkin slow
lookin in store windows when some guy
shadowed in a doorway said, "Look,
a nigger and a redskin—in our town—
sniffin for scraps." Well,

I stopped and stood there for
I don't know how long,
not sayin shit just thinkin,
even though Su told me to *let it go*.
I thought about those two words
and all the history trapped inside them
like pus: the slave ships, The Trail
of Tears, the lynchings, the lies, the
slaughter at Sand Creek, women raped,
treaties broken, land stole,
backs whupped bloody over cotton.

I thought about how many decent,
hard-working, reasonable human beings
have been *redskinned* and *injured* and
niggered and *cooned* and *wetbacked* into
whiskey-swiggin, dope-suckin, dull-eyed,
pigeon-hearted people—all because some
snow-faced, cross-totin crackers could never
quite finish standin on their throats.

And I thought about Silk Water with her
smiling, high-dimpled, brown cheeks, trying
to stay calm in her steady push toward some
goddam idea of nobody's-ever-seen-it
justice, how she winces then lets it go
whenever these poisonous pieces of shit
rise up happy to spit in her beautiful face,
and I tried, I really tried to stay cool,
to roll with it, to turn that other cheek

Seibles/Billy Jack. . .

I keep hearing about but I only have
two cheeks, and so many of us have had to
"Yassir" and "Sí Señor" and grin "Heap-
big-Indian" grins for people who have
balled up our lives and watched us bleed,

that when he said nigger again, stepping
out into the soft evening light with
three of his friends, I just, I
guess I just, well, it was like
the sun suddenly turned around and
rose again, and I could see
the tall guy's teeth clearly, clenched
in a triangular smile—really,
he was smiling.

Tim Seibles

Some people were playing cards. . .and among the players was a young man who at one point, without saying anything, laid down his cards, left the bar, ran across the deck, and threw himself into the sea. By the time the boat was stopped. . .the body couldn't be found.

—Marguerite Duras
from *The Lover*

THIS IS THE REASON

This. This white railing. This almost anger. This
something like sorrow,

something like a scraped knee—
but in your brain. This long wait

with whatever's next
like powdered glass on your tongue. This.

These hands. These dead stars
tilling in the dark. This ache like ice

on a tooth, only
all the time, like a time you

really needed to say something. This
itching scab in the heart.

This something
like not breathing when

you're breathing. This. This
Pepsi jingle, the newspaper,

these insects, this evening, that cigarette.

Tim Seibles

SIMON BARSINISTER:

Simon Says, "Go Snow"

So much rain in their goodie-goodie hearts—
so many sad sighs, so much grinding in their flimsy, little guts.
And *oh, if only this* and *boohoo, why that*—
as if anybody could ever turn back these headlines.

One thing Underdog always forgets: evil is easy.
Evil invents. Evil can make something out of nothing—
and there's always plenty of that.

What does a hero **do** these days anyway—
pull kitty-kats out of big trees, snatch a baby
out of a burning house back into the world?
Take a little peek outside.

Is this really someplace you want to be?
Weather doesn't have much to do
with wind and sleet. Not really.

More with that high stupidity that sweats your cities.
(Get it?) If Sweet Polly Purebred lived in Harlem
nobody'd give a damn whether I burned or froze her.
That's the eye of the storm—my favorite season.

Evil is easy. Just keep people believing
what they already do. They'll bring the appropriate
sky. Don't ever talk to strangers.

Read the papers.
It's all my Weather Machine. I flip a switch:
I'm the only game in town. Everywhere.
Help, Underdog! Save me! Heh-heh-heh.

Francine Witte

NOW THAT YOU'RE GONE

frankly, I have never
felt better.

(I am practicing
living without you.)

But just last night
I had this dream—
me, Paris, the rest
of my life. Everything
spread out before me

waiting
for me to wiggle
my toes—only wouldn't
you know it? I'm stuck
in my shoes.

What was it
you said that time
about the nerve
of the dead

to expect so much?
First the grieving,
then the telling
of the way
they were alive.

It disgusted you
no end.

So why, my past
lover, do you rattle
my windows, hang

Witte/ Now That You're Gone

in the darkness
full and certain
as the moon?

Once, last week
I wiped your face
from the early morning

glass. By then,
you were nothing
but a thin frost,
easy as dew to remove.

Or maybe, that too,
was a dream.

Francine Witte

I THINK OF MY MOTHER

when youth was her best
accessory, when she's standing
on the dance floor, beautiful and alone.
She is waiting there

in black and white, the way
I have seen her in photographs.

Right about now, my father
comes in, nervous

and white-faced as the moon.
Of course, he too, is posed,

his better side
pushed forward in my mind.

Only this time, there is something
I haven't seen before;

maybe it's the August heat
that is making him sweat,

or the curve
of my mother's hip

as she stands there, swaying
in place. He is wearing

the look of a man
who's convinced

Witte/I Think of My Mother

he may never think straight again.

Dumbstruck, until

the music thuds him on the back

like an older brother,

when he takes that first

step towards her

and I am about to begin.

Francine Witte

I'M STILL WAITING FOR YOUR LETTER

By March, the snow had
stained its chalky rings
into every glove and scarf
I got for Christmas.
I had long since taken
the strings of pulsing lights
off the outdoor evergreen,
though I left the snowman
we built before New Year's.
I've been watching him sink into himself
at every thaw, never quite melting.
Every day, I will him to stand straight
but the buttons on his chest
are growing closer to one another.
I've propped and re-propped him
with snow so many times,
I think he must have memorized
my touch by now.
Today, I'll pick up
the broom he dropped,
build him a new hand,
curve my own around it.
Then I'll give him back
his coal, so he has eyes,
maybe even stand there
for a minute
because we all need to be seen sometimes.

Allison Joseph

PRIVATE ADDRESS

Outside my lovely house
the yellow glads bloom,
petals eager to open
beneath strong sun.
I live alone, children
grown, gone, husband
long buried, brothers
in far-off cities I never
visit, sure they wouldn't
welcome their crazy sister,
woman whose house sits
atop a pristine hill,
poised over its neighbors.
A woman who wears silk
only to please herself,
for the satisfaction
of lace next to skin.
My daughter tries
to draw me out, comes over
with cakes, casseroles,
talking gossip from town,
speaking of people I
no longer see, lives I
no longer know. Quietly,
I send her away, her face
rigid as I wave her off,
feeling she'll never know
a need for space this private,
house this empty. My son
brings his daughter,
a wild child of seven
who cajoles money and sweets,
sings loud nonsense songs
as she twitches and flits

Joseph/ **Private Address**

in my lap. Unafraid of me,
she doesn't lurk below
with her dreamy father
who lingers in the basement,
touching his father's tools.
In the garden, she'll tell
all her child-secrets,
whisper names of boys
she hates, digging dirt
with a tiny shovel.
But when I show her
my flowers, she's quiet,
afraid to touch pale
petals, green stems.
One day, I'll show her
all my real treasures:
a dark blue silk robe
from China, ruby-studded box
with seven silver dollars
inside, a fan so fragile
I'll have to open it
tenderly, just enough so
she can see the peacock
emblazoned across it.
How her face will shine
with wonder then,
the house still
except our breath.

Allison Joseph

THE TROUBLE WITH MICHAEL

Once I loved a man
whose promises rang
falsely in the air,
edgy, pause-filled.
He'd disappear for weeks,
reemerge without warning
with a bottle of gin,
the bribe of his lips.
Though his pockets
were empty, his clothes
were sharp—pant legs
pressed lean, cuffs
weighted with gold links.
Taken in by the cut
of each neat suit,
too young to know
that this would pass,
I wanted to call it
passion, to revel
in his half-truths,
explanations, the swift
rush of his fingers.
He'd call at night,
voice husky and hot,
not tepid like boys
I knew from school
who fumbled with bras,
blouses. Talking of what
he'd buy when his next job
came down, he'd call me
emerald, ruby, pearl—
all the gems he'd buy.
I didn't know what he did
for money, didn't care—

Joseph/The Trouble with Michael

all I wanted was to want
him, brooding like an adult,
calling myself wild because
of a few midnight conversations,
a few fast turns in my sagging
twin bed. I'd like to say
I was smart, growing wise
to his schemes, plans,
that I caught him with a stash
or a blonde. Instead, he just
stopped calling, coming,
bitter scent of clove cigarettes
fading from my one-room rental.
I moved out that winter,
not because I couldn't stand
to be where he was not,
but because it had grown
intolerably cold—wind
rattling heating ducts,
thin walls. All I could do
was bolt the door, leave
that cold, celibate cell
behind, knowing nothing could
grow there, in so little light.

Allison Joseph

LOWBROW

Another teen sex comedy flickers
on cable tonight, hijinks at a
prep school where the adults

have all mysteriously disappeared,
to be replaced, perhaps, by robot
dummies. I pour another glass

of wine, lean my head back
into the sofa's cushiony pillows.
My old friend Lydia sits beside

me, talks over the movie's dippy
soundtrack, painting her nails
cerulean blue, evidence of her

splendid lack of good taste.
She calls herself "super-duper
white trash," kids me when

she thinks my skin's growing
lighter. Lydia loves the true
artifacts of modern life:

drive-ins with blown speakers,
push-up brassiers with underwire
like barbed wire, pink flamingos

with legs too thin for support.
She'd chew wads of bubble gum,
if only it didn't ruin

Joseph/**Lowbrow**

her fillings. As girls,
I'd been the shy one,
studious without make-up,

sitting on the sidelines
at school dances. Even then,
Lydia was my favorite tramp,

with her stiletto pumps
and flame-red minis, streaked
hair framing her face in a

light blonde halo. Never
grudged her attention,
never called her low-class,

even when I went off
to college to learn more
subjects I wouldn't use.

I knew I'd soon be back,
due to my lack of restless
imagination, what some call

motivation. I knew this town
wasn't the best place to be,
but was far from the worst,

especially with Lydia here
to brighten my living room
with day-glo polish and her

knowledge of every stupid
seventies sitcom ever made.
Right now, she blows her

Joseph/Lowbrow

painted fingers dry, rattling
off the names of the actresses
in this low-budget feature.

She doesn't care that this town
calls her cheap as packaged thrills,
or that she's no longer cute

at three decades plus.
She knows more about actresses
than *TV Guide*, can spot a boob job

at ten paces. As her nails dry,
she offers to do mine, but I
shake my head, sure that

knowing her is enough,
loving this brash broad as much
as I love myself, with more faith.

Robert Edwards

MERMAN

I like it down here
on the river bottom.
I go for long walks
in the shoes of the drowned.
With a turtle for a hat,
I hand-feed the catfish,
or sit in the driver's seat
of sunken cars,
work the pedals and signals
and watch the boats pass overhead.

It all ends up down here:
alpine mountain tops,
the slow sifting of the stars,
the guns and coins that murderers
and lovers toss from bridges.

In winter I walk south
under a blue road of ice,
the small rivers branching into the great.
Skiers scrape and swish above,
and sometimes I ski myself—
upside down in their shadow.

I cartwheel among the weeds
all the way to Dixie,
where the rivers are brown sugar
and molasses, and the reflection
of the sky is so heavy
it falls through the current,
its clouds settling
around my ankles.

Edwards/Merman

Robert Edwards

The alligators don't bother me.
I rub their bellies
until they yawn in bubbles, ride
their knobby backs through the bayous.

I know I'm home
when one breath is fresh,
the next is salt.

Robert Edwards

ADDRESS UNKNOWN

Going to get the mail,
but all the letters are for someone
who has long since moved on. . .

So I address my letters in rain,
stamp them with a cloud
and leave them under the earth.

Maybe they'll come up
with the roots of a tree
when the farmers of the future clear a field
somewhere on the other side
of that human dawn.

Maybe someone there,
arriving at the exact time
the trains in this century could never find,
will see my face in a river
and drop me a line.

Marcelle M. Soviero

JOY DRIVING

I'm talking in the back seat—
saying how my father once took me driving
on the highway and I got dust in my eye.
Joy's arms are rigid at the wheel.
The elbows won't bend.
You, my lover, her father, are just as stiff.
You praise her now and again, give quick tips;
"This lane, Joy. Stay in this lane," pointing over the dashboard.
How can I say what it's like to be a part of this?
What an unlikely trinity we are, three scoops in a red Ford Taurus?
As she relaxes, she points out the bagel shop, her school,
the constellations of roads that make up her neighborhood—
Well, this is my first shot at loving a child,
my first chance to remember what it was like
driving with my father, pulling strings on him,
as she does to you when it's time to pull over.
"Oh, Daddy," She says, "just five minutes more."

Marcelle M. Soviero

ARRIVING

Who knew they'd be two hours early,
that they'd arrive just after we made love for the first time.
That I'd open the door to my mother's pink smile
crowning the brownies wrapped in tinfoil;
to my father loaded down with flat-topped paint cans.
I said your car got stuck last night, a flat tire on the FDR.
Somehow, in that awkwardness we got dressed,
then took my mother to Battery Park; left dad to spackle.
She and I walked arm and arm. At one point you said something
about the Ranger game, and she heard you wrong,
said she hated camping.
It was an unusually cold afternoon.
There was an ice-chip forming in the corner of your eye.
I could feel that small bruise on the inside of my thigh
and a familiar ache cobwebbed in my stomach.
I was thinking maybe we shouldn't have done it.
I should have waited. You shouldn't have pushed.
And all while my mother looked at me looking at you
gazing at the Statue of Liberty,
I knew she knew. I knew she thought so too.

Ruth Anderson Barnett

IN THE TALES

it's always the mother
who dies or disappears,
and almost before the new wife's
hung her cloak in the closet,
the daughter is sent to starve
in the dark maze of pines.
She sits on a stump, sniveling,
she drenches her shift with tears.
Poor simp doesn't know
the prince is coming, all
has been planned for, the stepmother
unmasked and withering,
the all-is-forgiven kiss
like a late-blooming rose
planted on her father's brow.

But what if the father dies,
not the mother? What if the widow
leaves on Friday and returns
on Monday with a brand new one.
He walks in with his arms full
of chocolate. He's a cornucopia.
No more mother and daughter
down on their knees together
scrubbing the hearthstones.
His bounty is so wide,
he fills the house,
the girl
flattens herself
against the walls
to get by the piles
of plush bears
big as the TV set,
the satin pumps,

Barnett/In the Tales

the stairwell clogs with blank checks
made out in her name,
although she can't be said to suffer.
She grows up, waves goodbye,
comes home for holidays.
Years later, during his eulogy,
she wants to shout *Liar!*
but she bites her tongue.
What could she hate him for?
The house like a plate of sweets?
The slight woman beside her, leaning
dangerously out over his grave?

Ruth Anderson Barnett

IN THE TALES

it's always the mother
who dies first
and almost before the new wife
hang her cloak in the closet
the daughter is sent to marry
in the dark night of winter
She sits on a stump
she dreads the night
from time to time
the prince is coming
has been planned for the stepmother
it was an unusually cold
There was an ice-chip forming in the
the all-is-forgotten
like a late-blooming flower
planned on her father's
it was a good thing
But what if the father
And all while my mother
leaves on Friday and returns
on Monday with a brand-new
He walks in with his arms full
of chocolate. He's a comic
No more mother and daughter
down on their knees together
scrubbing the hearthstone
His bounty is so wide,
he fills the house,
the girl
fattens herself
against the walls
to get by the piles
of plush bears
big as the TV set
the satin pumps.

Ruth Anderson Barnett

ANNIVERSARY

I was thinking this morning
of my mother, how thin she is,
how her vertebrae knock against my palm
when I run my hand along her back.
It's a year since my father died,
so at the florist's I chose
the miniature red roses,
not the bright bouquet
of daisies and cornflowers
she once would have preferred.
I needed an ambiguous message.
If she woke remembering
how his flesh failed
until his hand in hers was a knot of twigs,
the pert daisies would be risky.
If she'd managed a merciful oblivion,
the sweet stench of stock or lilies
would be cruel. The card
posed another problem:
finally,
I only wrote "I love you."
Now she calls to thank me,
voice bright with surprise:
"Why did you do that?" she asks,
so we don't speak of the anniversary.
The roses were perfect, delicate, clenched,
their thorns so small you barely noticed.

Elizabeth Farrell

AMARYLLIS

Blood red skin
is stretched open.
Yellow powdered tongues
loosely fall.
The flower face
stares
as we breathe
the same air.

Leaves
and lungs
exchanging
what we need
moment
by moment.

Alive
beneath
the same square
of light.

Joyce Odam

CROSSING THE BRIDGE INTO BLEAK TERRITORY

Crossing the bridge into bleak territory
fields of flowers pull away.
It is winter here.
The old illusions freeze into shadow.
One must not touch the dark until
one also becomes the dark.

There is no easy way to say it.
Illusions are everything.
They mold to agree with the changing reality.
Whatever waits has been waiting a long time,
moving, echo-like, away from you now,
pulling a soft cape along the ground
with a shredding sound.

Alan Britt

WHILE DRIVING PAST SIX COWS NEAR HAGARSTOWN, MARYLAND

Six cows.

Six visionaries.

Six angels
with large shoulders
graze in the
drizzling rain.

Six musicians
in a field
whose wet black
coats
ignore the constant
stream of cars
weaving in & out
of the civilized life.

Solitude beats
my windshield
with a split hoof. . .
solitude with
a large tongue
on my bare shoulder.

Solitude.
Solitude.

With a black glistening eye.

Britt/While Driving Past Six Cows...

Solitude with the broad shoulders
of an angel
& the steady breathing
of the afternoon's
grey torso.

Taylor Graham

BINNACLE HILL

What fire spares, wind unravels.
And then come the rains,
a downslope wash of ashes.
One man stoops to his knees,
scooping up by handfuls:
nothing promising
as seeds, not a memento saved,
but just so his hands
won't come up empty.

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