

**FutureCycle Poetry**  
*poems for the ages*



ANNUAL ANTHOLOGY ∞ 2010

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2010

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Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome; however, we now accept online electronic submissions *only* via our online submission form. To avoid unnecessary delays or unread returns, please read the complete poetry submission guidelines on our website before sending your work.

Robert S. King, Editor-in-Chief

*FutureCycle Poetry*

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## JOHN ALLMAN

∞

### Charon's Oar

He uses it to beat the dead to remind them they're dead. And they feel it, the idea of being struck, the shame of it, though they have no bodies. They keep turning back up the slope to the security guard, to return through his scanner. Their sins neatly packed years ago into plastic containers out of sight on the moving belt, the music almost too low to hear. They start shouting they left the bathroom water running. An uncut lawn is choking out Grandma's petunias. The guard shows them the scanner screen. Zero. Blank as an x-ray of missing lungs. There's no going back. Now they're really afraid. They expected eternal dolor. A permanent howl. Even the dark lake where they'll swim face down, peering into their gone lives, their loved ones with new lovers, children weeping at a grave. This pain will never cease. But at least it's something. They don't mind Charon beating them on the head — if they have a head. Poking his oar into the middle of a see-through spine. Separating their remembered buttocks. Spinning them around to face each other and wail. Pushed to the leaky end of the boat, fumbling with prayer, fingering their beads, their last words a final cough, it's okay. They're still here, wherever here is. The cold sweat of their souls just a dampness of the air, they think of Broad Creek, the oyster beds, the buzz of twilight diners reading menu specials, the fried clams, the 50-cent peel-and-eat shrimp, even the greasy hush puppies. *How about another beer?* Charon grins. *You schmucks.*

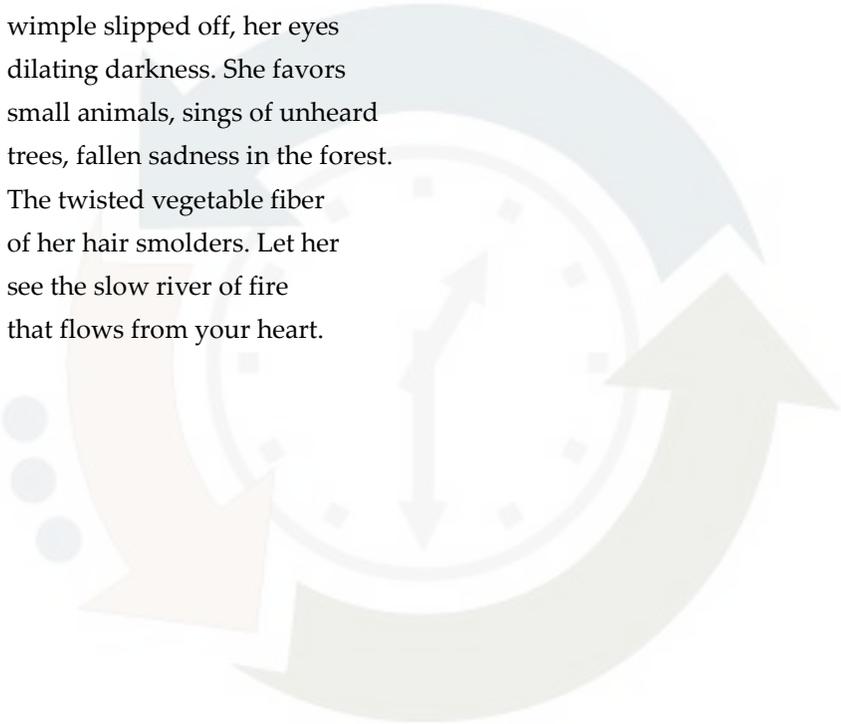
# JOHN ALLMAN

∞

## Trouble Dolls

Mauve, black, tiger-eye green  
the threads a peasant artificer  
twisted into skirts around whittled  
bodies. Slash red mouths. Burlish  
hardness. This one in golden toreador  
pants I swear I once followed into Grand  
Central Station. Don't let them fool you,  
chipped craniums, dotted eyes, the criss-  
crossed yarn hiding flat chests.  
They're women of sorrow. You speak  
to them before sleep, you plead  
the troubles of day. The middle one,  
the hefty one, her yellow wrap-around  
threads reaching from shoulder  
to shoulder—her missing arm  
natural as the absence we bring  
to her. Six, did I say six? You  
are allowed only six. This one your  
lover, hips bulging in two places,  
collops of mangrove, the itchy  
lengths of body you touch dreaming.  
Try to catch your breath. Think  
of Guatemala's tangled vines,  
painted faces found centuries ago  
among the skulls of sacrifices,  
greenness for the woe of bad  
dreams, brash stomach, thin legs  
wound loosely with a father's promise.

Sandpaper hair, the one with long  
sere skirt that flattens to touch,  
her face half-carved (the starving  
artisan out of material, his ribs  
a dozen taut bows), the many  
small deaths you bring to her  
just the sound that petals make  
falling. And now this one  
with smooth forehead, her  
wimple slipped off, her eyes  
dilating darkness. She favors  
small animals, sings of unheard  
trees, fallen sadness in the forest.  
The twisted vegetable fiber  
of her hair smolders. Let her  
see the slow river of fire  
that flows from your heart.



## JOHN ALLMAN

∞

### The Guide

And if he spoke from within a quivering flame, his voice a whisper of leaves in the space between time and no-time, the wail of traffic behind him the cries of the lost, my own childhood streaming stories I cannot tell fast enough, their glimmer the coins placed on the eyelids of the dead, the boatman with a long pole thrusting toward the opposite shore where I will explain myself. My guide weeping now, his own family abandoned in a dark wood, his way back to them impeded by wild creatures, dark dreams. So I console him. I take down the sign that says *lasciate ogne speranza*, the bare lintel we stare at, this entrance suddenly before us—a terrible, loud wind in our faces, his cloak rippling behind him, my thin worn jeans the exact shape of my bony legs. Then we face each other, we walk into each other, through a mirroring mist that seemed so material, his hand and mine passing now through all touching like the cries of birds, his eyes peeled back, a dawn, the moon receding, and what I hold, what I lift beyond this wind a fluttering name, a self, the rough bark of palmettos suddenly smooth as driftwood, where I drop to my knees, my guide in my arms, his last breathing filling my lungs, where the sea glistens toward the round horizon and its endless vowel.

# JANE ELLEN GLASSER

∞

## Vows for the New Year

I will ride the day to new places,  
reclaiming my child's wonder:  
a buttercup's reflected face,

the fallen star of a lightning bug,  
the baton of a happy dog's tail.  
I will smile easily and often, hug

the shoulders of each passing second  
knowing it will not come again.  
I will cultivate deserts, bend

sunlight to glisten off sad highways.  
I will make food my friend, not my lover.  
I will walk three miles every day

and greet my neighbors. At sixty  
I will honor the body's complaints,  
forgive mirrors their honesty.

I will wear gratitude like a red coat,  
forbearing the shifting  
seasons of hope and doubt.

# JANE ELLEN GLASSER

∞

## Woman in ICU

Days when friends come to visit, her husband  
fixes her hair, applies makeup. They put on  
smiles and press around her bed, touching

her hands, feet, forehead, as if to make this  
version of her real. She speaks with her eyes.  
*I am sick of being sick*, they say. Her world

has compressed to a room, a bed, a TV  
for the nurses' viewing. On the windowsill,  
each week's dozen blood-red roses from

her husband. Love tires her out. Living tires  
her out. And yet, what wouldn't she give  
to feel rain stippling her skin, to walk the

aisles of a grocery store. After two months  
on a ventilator, tube-fed, supine as a dead fish,  
she wonders if she'll ever get out. Emptying

light-headed, vertiginous as the zip of a pricked  
balloon, might be what dying would feel like.  
Or lulled on morphine, easy as slipping a hand

from a glove. Death is the door she could open  
(she has this power left) to remove herself  
from suffering and loosen into nothingness.

Yet the IVs keep her here, as if tethered to the ground. And the ventilator that breathes for her. And fear.



# DANIEL Y. HARRIS

∞

## Gatekeeper

From the gate, another gate behind  
it, and behind that nothing, gutted  
chasm with debris receding in the

dark, to rumors of light, to a vowel,  
a long slow drift of words to rapture,  
coming along the world's edge over

air and sky, like the faint music of  
ancestors who tell us everything we  
know and nothing we remember,

behind this gate, near and far, until  
talking stops, never looking down  
or back, or through, to see the one

undivided place that stands between  
us and arching trees that thread back  
into roots, in a stillness without words.

# ANTHONY DiMATTEO

∞

## Living Testament

People who say they talk to the dead  
have yet to introduce themselves to the trees.

One told me he would pray for me,  
full of concern for my godless soul,  
turning me down for lunch a third time.

Poets who seek out the dead  
waiting for a juicy funeral  
the way lawyers chase ambulances  
might as well sing a song  
to a copse than live that way.

I'd rather eavesdrop on the wind  
when it swoops down low to the tall grass  
inviting it to tango in the night  
or join the seagulls all facing one way  
waiting for the right moment of flight.

I don't trust people who say  
they love all of humanity.  
They haven't met the people I have—  
or watched the doe feed the fawn  
in the first tender light of dawn.

## PAUL HOSTOVSKY

∞

### Battle the Wind and Everything Else

My neighbor—the one with the flagpole  
and the flag, and the pickup truck  
and the patriotic bumper sticker and the perfect  
lawn, and the leaf-blower with the power pack—  
never seems to see me when I wave to him.  
In fact, I am trying to get his attention  
right now, but his eyes are on the enemy,  
the leaves. He is aiming the long barrel  
of his leaf-blower at them, and blowing  
them away. But the wind is counting its money  
and throwing it away all over his lawn again.  
He is Sisyphus pushing one red leaf or another  
up the berm of a perfect lawn forever. And I feel  
sorry for him, the way I might feel sorry for  
a large carnivorous bird in a shrinking ecosystem  
on the nature channel. I know when he looks at me  
he sees a guy who is half-assedly, half-heartedly  
raking the leaves around on his disgrace-of-a-lawn  
the way a kid pushes the peas around on his dinner plate  
with his fork, trying to make it look like there are fewer  
peas than before, when really there are still the exact  
same number of peas; and he sees the leaves messing up  
his lawn as *my* leaves, because *his* leaves are all in order—  
he sees to that. So the ones that are crossing the border  
and have no right to be here and should just go back  
to where they came from, must be *mine*. I see this all  
written on his face as he grits his teeth and stares  
the dancing leaves down, then blows them up

over the edge of his property. But they keep on dancing back again because there's a party going on here, and the wind is counting its money and throwing it away. So I walk right up to him — I get right in his face so he can't not see me, and I wave hello. He disengages his leaf-blower, after revving it a few times first at the intersection of our meeting. And I say to him, "I've been trying to get your attention." And he says, "You got it." And I say, "How you doing?" And he says, "Battling the wind and everything else." And I say, "I can see that." And he says, "How *you* doing?" And I say, "Good. Good."



## PAUL HOSTOVSKY

∞

### The Affair in the Office

It belonged to all of us in a way  
because we all shared  
in the surprise  
that it existed at all,  
and also, privately, in the thrill  
of the two lovers  
(none more surprised than they)  
who'd worked together in the same sad office  
with all of us for all  
these years, and both of them married,  
and both unhappily. It was  
a sad office, like so many  
sad offices, full of the inexorable sadness  
of cubicles, and computers, and empty  
of love, or so we thought, for no one  
saw it growing—it must have  
gotten in through a high  
bit of laughter in the lunchroom,  
then a glancing away  
and a looking back again, the way  
it sometimes will. And when it got out  
in whispers around the water cooler  
we all drank from it, we  
drank it in, and in this way  
it refreshed us, and amazed us,  
and belonged to us because  
we all took it home, took it  
with us in the car, or on the train, sat with it

in rush hour, shaking our heads as though  
we were listening to music, and in a way  
we were listening to music,  
shaking our heads and smiling,  
looking out the window, fingers drumming.



# PAUL HOSTOVSKY

∞

## The Cup

When I find it in the basement  
on the shelf above the dryer  
under a pile of his old undershirts

I take it down and turn it over  
and over, remembering how  
uncomfortable he said it was

in spite of the rubber edge  
and vent-holes, the plastic shell  
shaped to fit a twelve-year-old penis

and testicles, which were being  
tested on the football field that first  
day at Pop Warner. All the fathers

stood around, talking football,  
but all I could contribute was,  
“Growing up, I played soccer myself...”

Then I was standing a little apart  
like a pedestrian looking for my son  
in traffic—football helmets and identical

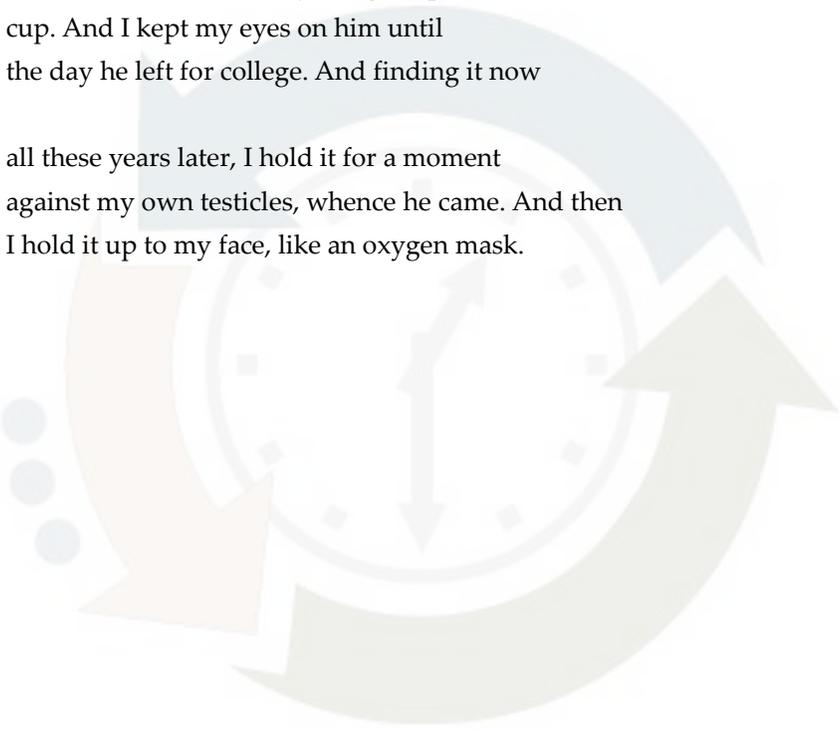
red jerseys in gridlock, and I couldn't  
find him. Because I couldn't remember  
his number, and they all looked the same

running around out there for the love of  
yardage. I felt a little panicky. Technically,  
I'd lost him, lost sight of him, and everyone

knows what happens to kids who fall through  
the hatches on the football fields of life . . .  
Then I noticed—hanging back in the end zone

all alone—number 26, adjusting his protective  
cup. And I kept my eyes on him until  
the day he left for college. And finding it now

all these years later, I hold it for a moment  
against my own testicles, whence he came. And then  
I hold it up to my face, like an oxygen mask.



# PAUL HOSTOVSKY

∞

## Poetry at the Burger King

Where is it? It's not here.

All these plastic chairs and tables  
are empty. Nothing but a lot of  
dead meat here, and this associate  
behind the counter mumbling: *Welcome  
to Burger King. May I take your order?*

Mine is the only car outside in the sad  
parking lot ringed by a handful  
of gimpy trees, a blue dumpster in the corner.  
Beyond that, the highway where I  
came from, and where I will return.

If your daily life seems poor, said Rainer  
Maria Rilke, do not blame it. Blame yourself.

Tell yourself you are not poet enough  
to call forth its riches. I'm fingering a salty  
corner of my empty French fries pocket,  
licking my fingers, looking out the window  
and telling myself I am not poet enough,  
when I notice two kids running, sort of  
galloping and hopscotching across  
the sad parking lot ahead of their parents  
and into the Burger King. They are  
very happy to be here, this little girl and boy,  
jumping up and down now at the counter,  
dancing to the song of the associate  
which wasn't a song until their dancing  
made it so. There are so many riches  
on the menu, they can't make up their minds.

And while their parents order they play  
duck duck goose, touching all the tables,  
and all the chairs, the girl behind the boy,  
following him, copying him, and laughing  
louder and louder, because it's all so wonderful  
here at the Burger King, which they seem to have  
all to themselves, except for one man in a booth  
smiling, writing something down on a piece of paper.



# PAUL HOSTOVSKY

∞

## In Praise of the Quitter

Praise the quitter for standing up for something more important than not giving up, something more worth fighting for than simply winning, or simply living; namely, seeing—that there is another way, a quiet, leaf-strewn way that leads off the battlefield and down through the trees to somewhere you can't see from here, though he sees it, the way others see victory, and they stand up for the team, and they step up to the plate—he stands and steps lightly off the field and into the adjacent woods, walking softly down a path where the courtships of small animals go on in the leaves, and the birds are tunneling and darting up through the ramifications to the top branches, the best seats, where they look out over the fields of life. And what they see is not the games, not the people playing the games; what they see is what the quitter sees: a great sky and earth, and lots of little bugs swimming around for their dear short lives, which are shorter than an inning; half an inning; shorter than a swing. Praise the quitter flapping his tiny insect-wings—he is aerodynamically impossible, yet look at him go! swimming against the rules, swimming against the odds, up through the air and off into the sunset.

## ROBERT W. KING

∞

### **Birds, Beauty and Death**

Buson once saw the iris-  
colored droppings of a bird  
fallen onto an iris colored  
like the droppings of a bird.  
I, on the other hand, see  
a tired, red-haired woman, dyed,  
I presume, deposit a handful  
of letters in the mailbox  
and enter the coffee shop  
I'm visiting before seeing  
my father. For an hour I think  
of myself, then the world.  
"I crook my arm, the world's crooked,"  
wrote Takahashi, a sparrow  
changing the universe, who's now dead,  
born six years before father.  
Later, we sit together  
staring out of the window  
either at trees the dark shade of earth  
erupting into blossom  
or the parking lot where cars  
seem dead, a few birds dribbling  
their pastels, sermon upon sermon:  
how beauty comes when it comes,  
how beauty goes when it goes,  
how we can recognize it,  
how we can sit and love in silence,  
how silence is the last word.

## ROBERT W. KING

∞

### The Dancing of Su Tung-po

*Out the gate, I do a dance, wind blows my face.  
—“100 Days, Free to Go,” Su Tung-po*

Although, according to another translation,  
“Out the gate, I stop to piss” and I imagine  
almost a thousand years ago that snaky hitch  
of the robe, a couple of shakes, the little  
one foot to another prance, that connects us,  
I who recently pissed by a pine and with  
no wind today to tell me where to face.

I too have retired from my success and failures.  
Why try to fix the blame? he asked, and I agree.  
Whatever’s been done will be done again.  
Let us go now old brother, old, old stranger,  
stopping to piss at every chance no matter  
which way the wind is blowing. Let us be gone,  
dancing the town behind us in the wetted dust.

## The Glassblower's Tale

My face drinks the heat  
from the gloryhole  
like a demon made for Hell.

No fainting novice, I  
poke the silica shimmy  
the molten orange sea whose breath  
can melt acrylic clothes to your skin.

My blowpipe lifts a gather of glass  
on its tip, burning saffron bud.  
I twirl the rod at the pace of viscous honey  
flowing. This is where no theory counts;  
it's all in the dance—  
the willingness to go along, lend myself  
to red heat and lavaflow  
follow the transformation;  
to guide with my breath.

Knowing when to breathe life into the lump—  
not so easily taught! But once you have it,  
the joy of the bubble becomes  
intoxicating, irresistible.

And so it was: I could not resist  
seeing them glow with scarlet lust  
breathing my bubble of love around them  
each one a fire flower, my only,  
until the cooling left a brittle shell  
and my desire searched the flames again.

# ROBERT STODDARD

∞

## The last time

This is the last time  
I'd give anything for dreams  
I'm not willing to lose a breath  
For an explanation of everything

This is the last time  
They'll persuade me to feel displaced  
Or endure the circus of sights  
Of a nature that insists on hiding its face

If the Gods don't want me as I am  
I'm content to fall to the flame  
Because I lived  
With my passions  
And embraced what I became

## ROBERT STODDARD

∞

### **Nothing ever belongs to me**

Nothing ever belongs to me  
From whence things come I might not know  
And off they may go, trailing out behind  
Lifting from the ground and fading on the line  
I know about these moments so much  
And now I must go where the world wants me  
Everything will move when you want it to  
But not in the way you want it to  
Nothing ever belongs to me  
Anywhere I go, things become new in many places  
Or renew themselves in the very same spaces  
It's nothing I could explain  
Out there in the big space, huge shadows scroll  
Hands on my desk, where tiniest inklings fold  
My address is anywhere I think I am  
And as I listen to speeches, or read a poet's prose  
I only know what happens past the end of my nose  
There are people who want so much more than I do  
And there are others who only know less  
I can finally smile when I gather and lose and break free  
Nothing ever belongs to me

### How to Win Friends . . .

. . . *and Influence People* was a book my mother always recommended, but her philosophy was inconsistent, perhaps because she'd lived through a depression and a holocaust. "You're lucky if you are a bastard," she'd also say, "Look at your brother. He'll do just fine." And who is to say he hasn't though I can't stand anything about him—his racist, Rush Limbaugh point of view, flash temper, homophobic, somewhat useful life. He works hard, pays taxes, has helped raise his wife's family. He's never so much as collected unemployment. A successful bastard. Then, there's my own kid. The youngest, knowing it offended me, just got a tattoo. Between whining about money and spending ceaselessly, you'd think she'd be respectful of my wishes, but no, within hours of eighteen it was off with friends to disfigure her body. She'll do fine. Not caring about mother's love and feelings should be the key—much better than a breakdown over some other bastard who ditched you just before your prom date. As for me, I just need to not

care, not treat everyone to dinners,  
not squander a hundred hours volun-  
teering to help this one's career and  
that one's health or heart. Then,  
maybe I wouldn't awake with the birds  
on a sweaty summer morning wondering  
why life is so damned hard and I don't see  
the point of loving, or trying, or caring.



## DAVID B. AXELROD

∞

### Out to Sea

There is a monument  
to TWA flight 800, shot  
down off Long Island's coast,  
two hundred thirty people  
lost. None I know chose  
to go, so my walking past it  
to commit suicide seems  
like a sacrilege. A March  
wind pummels me with sand  
and salt. I descend eroded  
dunes, trek far enough,  
past others yearning  
for spring, to an empty patch.  
I once made the perfect plan:

Buy a big accidental death  
policy; wait months. Then,  
at some remote location, dial  
911, "Someone is in the surf.  
Come quickly." Put the cell  
phone, car keys in your shoes.  
Swim out and just let go.

My body would be found  
fairly soon. My kids would  
be left rich. I might even  
appear to have died a hero.  
I never bought that policy.

Pity, but I have stowed my  
ID in the car, taken off  
my shoes, placed my keys.  
The incidence of waves is  
frequent but not violent,  
wearing broken shells into  
tourist amulets. Gulls  
have spotted herring  
a hundred yards out  
and circle wildly. The beach  
is littered with brittle bits  
of horseshoe crabs.  
The water is cold enough  
to turn my ankles blue.  
There's a break in the dunes  
that could shelter me, where  
I retreat to lie on the softest,  
wind-scattered sand. After  
an hour spent between  
reminiscence and regret,  
I stir, put on my shoes,  
and, keys in hand, hurting  
as if I'd been beaten by  
a two-by-four, I trudge  
past the monument  
where soon the flags  
of thirteen countries will  
cling to poles for those  
who perished. I return  
to the car where a simple  
note explains my demise.  
I've saved it as a draft—  
not badly written.

# JOSEPH HUTCHISON

∞

## Alba

*We . . . discover ourselves  
'in joy' as 'in love'.  
—Denise Levertov*

June dawn-light kindles  
a half-dozen windows  
along the street.

A breeze lifts, gentles  
among the maples,

carries voices and songs  
(sieved from the air  
by two or three radios)  
to this harbor of attention  
I've anchored in. (My pen's

nib scrapes the page  
like chain on a boat-rail,  
and my vision  
drifts). Deep shadows  
spring from small things—

pebbles, forgotten toys,  
newspapers— and stretch  
out over grass still wet  
with the glittering blood  
of stars. Everything's

drenched, vivid, the whole

morning turned to a bright  
pool of wax . . . the magus sun  
burning it all the way back  
to a clear blue candle

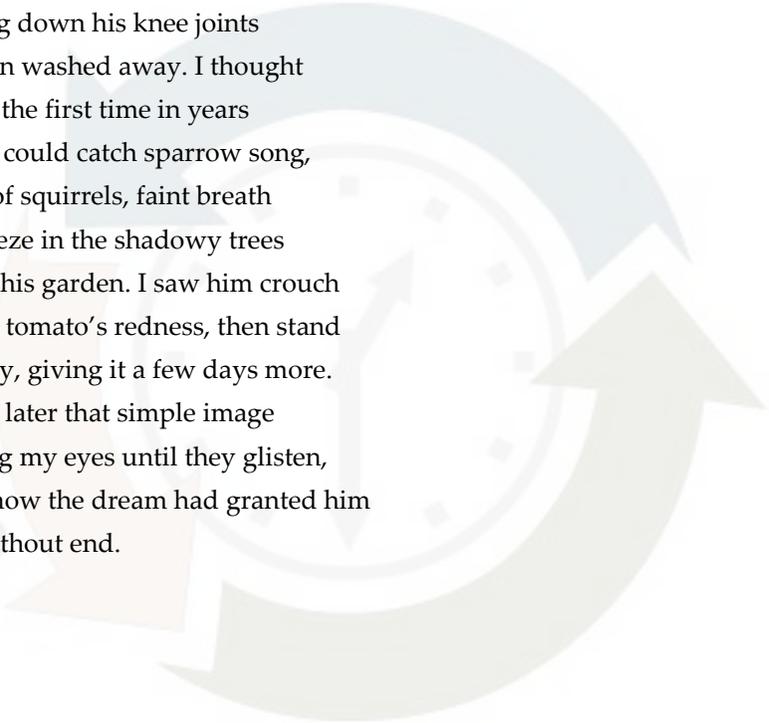


# JOSEPH HUTCHISON

∞

## Days

The backs of my father's hands,  
splashed with bruises . . . the dream  
had washed them clean. His heart  
was healed, and the raw gravel  
grinding down his knee joints  
had been washed away. I thought  
that for the first time in years  
his ears could catch sparrow song,  
chitter of squirrels, faint breath  
of a breeze in the shadowy trees  
around his garden. I saw him crouch  
to test a tomato's redness, then stand  
up easily, giving it a few days more.  
Months later that simple image  
can sting my eyes until they glisten,  
seeing how the dream had granted him  
days without end.



## DAVID BRENDAN HOPES

∞

### Even the Paving Stones of Cambridge

Even the paving stones have lain so long  
they have a voice —repetitious, as one might expect,  
but informative, and not otherwise what one anticipates.

Granite speaking sounds so like little birds  
one looks a long time at the empty air.

This morning they are gossiping of the lords  
who rode upon them, how they could tell,  
through the horses' hooves—hesitant, distracted,  
panicked under the bells and satins—  
that all was not as it appeared.

Stones, however disguised, still unmistakably themselves,  
pity this. They tell of the barons and viscounts  
puking their guts into the gutters  
after too much mirth, and being,  
despite all their bravado, too young.

This explains, I think, the tinge of pink,  
the rosy sub-glow in the solemn stone.

“Come,” they murmur to the drunken geniuses,  
to the reeling captains of the time to come,  
“unload, release, be purged. Trust those  
who've seen the worst to put it all behind.”

# CAROL STEINHAGEN

∞

## The Sense of Touch

On my last visit Father raised himself  
from the wing chair he rarely left  
before I could offer  
the awkward hug of departure  
that had become our truce.  
He shook my hand.

To the plane lifting me  
over the lakes we'd loved  
so well in separate ways  
fingers of mist rose, then fractured.

In one of the dreams the past  
uses to rewrite itself  
he is racing in a wheelchair  
head to head with other nearly dead.  
Go faster! Faster! I shout,  
rooting for victory.

# LAURIE SORIANO

∞

## Roller Coaster

So sorry for all the times I refused your hand,  
that pushy life of the party hand that wanted  
to guide a daughter across the dance floor.

Kansas in August, our faces clammy with old sweat.  
Standing in line for the Mamba, I surveyed the crowd,  
everyone younger than you by twenty years,

as you chatted sociably with everyone  
and me, my friend at last, even as your rotting breath  
foretold next April's joke upon us.

The slow clicking climb shifting to the cruel drop,  
and you laughed "holy shit!" (just as when I clutched  
your arm and the organ started thundering my wedding march).

You turned to check on me, and you took the long curves  
with gritted teeth, silent and steady, ready to grab  
my hand if I needed it.

Bless you for daring me to ride the Mamba,  
and for my screaming like a child, echoing  
my joy and fear all over Kansas.

Forgive me, father, that I only held your hand  
when the I.V. ran through it  
and your life rewound behind your eyes.

# MARY STONE

∞

## Giving

Night thumped the window pane  
when he was born  
and they put him into my arms,  
a bullet into a chamber.

They had dipped him in copper first,  
wrapped him in a steel blanket,  
then gave him to me and waited.

He looked up at me for the first time,  
with a chin like mine,  
a dimple on his right cheek,  
the light candling his face.

His mass pushed my abdomen inward,  
as I let him curl at my belly  
for the last time, coiled  
into the springs of my arms.

Silence tumbled around me,  
a clown that perched on empty shelves  
in the hospital room,  
opening the quiet for us.

No one brought petunias.  
The nurse stood in the doorway  
checking her wristwatch.

I grasped the cold rail of the bed,  
my arms withdrawn like elastic.  
They wheeled him away  
while I lay on my side,  
feeling something like the moon  
as it greened the sky.



## TERRY ANN THAXTON

∞

### The Terrible Wife

The dream is a rope, dragging me  
into a room, screened in—it is a dream  
in which I am about to have  
an affair. I run my fingers  
through this other man's hair while  
my husband circles  
the building, and I realize  
it's a picnic shelter,  
like the one my family  
went to when I was  
a girl, at the state park, where  
a friend of mine jumped  
into the pond at dusk and  
was killed by an alligator  
only a couple of  
miles from my house.

The room laughs, and I kneel  
in the corner, curl into a ball  
like a hog-nose snake and hope  
my husband will not  
see me. He keeps his face  
turned away  
from the screen, as if  
he is refusing to return  
phone calls of long lost  
friends. I stay in  
the corner until the

man I'm with is handed  
a note along with a flashlight,  
the message: *shine the flashlight  
in the corner so you can see  
who's there*, and it's me,  
of course, still huddled there  
as if I am mud  
tracked in on the back  
porch, but it's more  
like I'm standing  
naked in a field  
of pond apple. I go back

to rubbing the man's temples,  
and we both realize there are school  
projects to be completed  
by morning, and he helps  
my brother while I help my son,  
and then I am in my car  
but I can't quite  
catch the bullfrog that jumped in  
beside me, so I go back  
inside. I want to  
stay here. I know the note  
and flashlight were from  
my husband who, now, obviously  
knows about the affair, and I  
think I should wake up,  
end this thing, but right  
now I want to be terrible.

# NEIL CARPATHIOS

∞

## Lust at Fifty

It is a well-fed tiger pacing its cage.

It smells delicious things outside floating in,

sniffs, licks itself, not sure if it's really hungry  
enough, after all, to snarl at passersby, to make

a big show of it. It curls in corners, preferably  
in patches of sunlight, sleeps more and more

hours each day. It hears the little girl tell  
her father how vicious it looks, hears the father

say you never know when it will pounce,  
don't be fooled by how sluggish it seems,

how lazily it moves or refuses to move.  
Smart dad, it thinks.

Its stomach growls from time to time,  
which is when it most remembers the thrill

of blood—but it's ironically then that no one  
is around, not the guy who throws a hunk of

raw beef sometimes through the bars, not  
a little boy whose distracted parents don't notice

how close to the cage he stands, looking in,  
extending a handful of popcorn, saying:

*Here kitty, here kitty.*



## MARY CHRISTINE DELEA

∞

### Secret to a Happy Marriage

My marriage doesn't work that way—  
so many couples with the needy,  
the *we've never spent a night apart*,  
the matching cars and neuroses.  
Mine is a bomb shelter, a hot flash,  
a wheelchair in a museum of regret  
and poppies. These are the field notes  
to its success: two faces filled  
with fragments, a townhouse  
where the first floor electrical outlets  
frosted in winter, lemons—  
always lemons—and walking  
after meals until that was no longer  
possible. Anything that aids digestion  
is good for a marriage. Later,  
in the truck heading for the art gallery  
for another opening, we try  
to argue about art, but neither  
of us has the energy. Yes—that is  
the key: too tired to communicate well,  
but having the same destination.

# MARY CHRISTINE DELEA

∞

## How to Cook

When oil gets hot enough for noodles,  
we say it is dancing. This is how  
we talk when we cook. Alliteration  
and rhyme count, too: won ton,

bouillabaisse, Jamaican Jerk. Cooks  
love metaphors, so we blend  
and we whip and we separate. Fricassee?  
Don't worry about what it requires you

to do—just roll the word around  
on your tongue like a fine chocolate.  
Every kitchen can end in joy,  
but keep in mind death is always

involved. And absurdity? Yes,  
it sneaks in like a virgin Bloody Mary.  
We always return to floating  
islands, artichoke hearts, compote,

and molé—the meat of the matter.

To peak a meringue, to glaze,  
to pan sear, to use just a dollop,  
to rim a glass with bar sugar—

this is why we cook, to understand  
the language of life, what keeps  
our souls fed. The words—knead, slice,  
thin, grate—are just suggestions.

# J. P. DANCING BEAR

∞

## Presto

somehow even the most impossible things find a way to kiss:  
*abracadabra*: you are watching porcupines nuzzle on the animal station:  
which you are sure: is really the anthropomorphosis station: *pick a*  
*card—any card*: kicking back in your sorcerer’s chair: changing golden  
eggs to red potatoes: to small gas giants: just for the irony: *a bouquet of*  
*scarves*: you turn porcupine quills into lances: the sign reads: *jousting at*  
*6pm*: —*wear your best armored tuxedo*: and you quote: *by the pricking of my*  
*thumb*. . . : and someone behind you in the long line sings a serenade to  
needles: you change the channel: to “fashion week”: *look mom—no hands*:  
it’s a pretty slick life: —making the broom to do all your housework:  
doves and bunnies romp and dive: outside your window: *and now for my*  
*next trick*. . . .

*for Anders Larsson*

## J. P. DANCING BEAR

∞

### Scheharazade

tonight you prepare another story: about the girl with kaleidoscope face beneath a veil: how she would fill the lamps with oil: light them: fluff and perfume the pillows: watch the peacocks swagger and strut in the courtyard: check the time repeatedly until the listener arrived: he came to hear her stories: though he stayed preoccupied: with her veil and sneaking a glimpse beneath: she raised a hand to his: pushed it back into his lap: shook her head: all the while never breaking the flow of her story: he thought he saw things writhe beneath her veil: as though her face was rearranging itself: he was certain there were little glints of light shining through: the stories were very good: he should have been happy with having heard any one of them: but he could only think of seeing the skin of her face: he had convinced himself she was tattooed: and he imagined loving a girl like that: and finally he pinched the fabric of her veil: and her hand swatted his away: taking the sheer fabric with it: her face was a thousand and one mirrors: each reflecting a version of his eye: which repulsed and shocked him into stone: his last movement he looked up into her stunning green eyes: each story had been his own: but the last

*for Barbara Hamby*

# JANE BLUE

∞

## Fiat

*After Li-Young Lee*

Dreamed a rill that became a torrent.

Dreamed a woman who was my mother  
but not my mother.

Dreamed St. Catherine's severed head in Siena,  
trees bright against the haze,  
the Palio a bowl bared of its tumbling horses,  
the bright pennants and clamor of bettors.

Dreamed a fiat, *let it be done*.

Dreamed the stream purring under our bedroom in Vermont.  
Dreamed a perfect sleep.

Dreamed a woman and a man dancing in a pyre,  
so I could resurrect him,  
so I could remember the spark.

So I could go in and out of the twelve houses  
of the sun, the twelve houses of the moon.

And the man was not you; we lived in an alternate world,  
and no one knew, not even you.

Dreamed the blue stars and the blue moon and the blue leaves.

Dreamed the world as a film  
you can pass through like a ghost  
and back into your life, inevitably altered.

Dreamed him. Dreamed you.



# JANE BLUE

∞

## Dogs of the City

The dogs are like  
that man with a strawberry mark on his neck.

The dogs are like  
that woman dressed in black, licking her fingers.

The dogs wait on lawns  
tied to trees.

The dogs wait at the end of leashes  
at the end of the day, walked

around blocks, the dogs are like  
slaves, or prisoners

sporting collars or little jackets, they wait  
while someone scoops up their shit.

The dogs are like  
Walt Whitman howling.

The dogs are like Allen Ginsberg  
howling.

They sniff at trees, at fire hydrants  
at telephone poles

and at each other. The dogs are like  
Tibetan prayer flags, flapping in the wind

The dogs are waiting, they are waiting  
for the revolution.



# JANE BLUE

∞

## Without Sanctuary

*Destined to decay, these few survivors of an  
original photo population of many thousands  
turn the living to pillars of salt  
—James Allen*

Halloween. The toothed wind is coming for the pretty leaves.

The bent neck of a ghost sways in the cedar, an effigy  
like those in the trees not long ago, in Jenna, Alabama, clothed

ironically in Klan white. Slumped, inanimate, faceless. One  
pinned to the eaves turns from its roped, bunched-up head,

a chilling smile, a rictus pasted on. I have seen them in postcard  
souvenirs collected by James Allen in *Without Sanctuary*.

A sea of white staring from hundreds of sharp eyeholes  
girdling an oak, three beaten sacks of scarred anonymous bodies

hanging from the upraised branches of an oak. The trees rigid,  
speechless, unable to act. In another a sea of men, women

and children in suits and cloth coats, the women and children  
seem troubled, the men proud, grinning straight at the camera.

The toothed wind is coming for the pretty leaves.

Laura, a black woman encased in a long calico dress  
caught up in the tree like a castaway rag doll, the mob gone.

Left her there to rot, left the stench of death behind.

A Jewish boy, twelve or thirteen, in long black robe  
and a yarmulke, caught coming from the synagogue.

It wasn't just in the South, but everywhere, Baltimore,  
Indiana, even here, Sacramento 1916, mixed-race children

kidnapped for houseboys, caught running away and hung  
from these sycamores, these ashes, these elms.

The toothed wind is coming for the pretty leaves.



## JANE BLUE

∞

### Praying Mantis

Our roses swarm with tiny green mantises.  
A female grows large, the male small,  
a conundrum,  
her tearing the head from her lover like that:  
the mating hilarious, “boisterously merry,”  
with such abandon —  
He seems to enjoy it more without his head.  
(His brain is in his thorax.)  
Sometimes she devours all of him  
except the wings. She grows larger  
and larger, brought to me  
afterwards, lucid,  
veiny and taupe, fixing her bug eyes on me  
from inside the mayonnaise jar.  
He has entered her totally.  
Isn't that what you want, all of you?  
As for her, with her haughty gaze  
and enormous abdomen,  
she's been released  
into the zinnias, which are her forte,  
and snatches butterflies from the air.

# ALEX CIGALE

∞

## The Sacrifice

*Riga, Latvia. Out of a pre-war population of 40,000, 140 Jews survived the Holocaust, five of them as subjects of Nazi medical experiments with bacteriological weapons. This is their story.*

### **Translator's Note**

*This is my translation of a survivor's memoir, not one of the fittest but of the few fortunate, a biochemist by occupation before the war, his son who smuggled the manuscript an expatriate*

### **i. Pigs**

Vindictive at our yellow stars he yells,  
"Remove that, swine." A Jew invites peril  
starless. A soldier draws his knife and cuts  
the bright patches off our chests and backs.

We board a streetcar, stand on the rear platform.  
The uniformed bodies of guards obstruct us from  
the eyes of the curious. The terminal station.  
Thereafter we walk on foot, at first see fences,  
then landfills and a forest. A manor house  
looms as we close the distance. Our destination,

the Institute of Medical Zoology.

Third Rome's estate, some baron's rural Eden,  
a glassed-in terrace, steps descending to the garden,  
the other side an alley lined with linden trees.

Percy is assigned to the laboratory.  
I choose to shovel snow and split logs, refuse  
the labor of science. So many stoves consume  
a mass of firewood. Supplies exhausted  
we are herded to gather fuel in the forest.

## **ii. Lice**

The tiny new-born, barely visible,  
flesh tone in color, they itch and scatter  
under the sleeve. Youth's vigor is its virtue,  
its manifest destiny. Back in the bottle.  
The "black widows" will bite you proper.  
When unobserved we practice euthanasia.

All organisms require nutrition; lice  
drink blood. Daily we serve as human donors,  
plastic feed boxes strapped to our bare arms  
with leather belts, as when in prayer phylacteries.

The lice are shaken out of thermostats.  
They scurry, fidget, settle on a spot,  
prick suddenly the skin, attach to suckle.  
Dark red and drunk they stagger sluggishly,  
are separated with pincers, dumped on paper,  
poured in a glass. This is our "nursery."

The walls are plastered with charts of insects,  
their parts drawn in giant proportion, shelves  
exhibit fetal creatures floating in flasks  
preserved in formalin, our race in specimen.

Lice will enact God's plan, a plague of pestilence.

To calm the throbbing, stinging pain, press  
the bitten place to the stove's hot tiles.

At curfew search your clothes for escapees  
at feeding time, dispense justice, dispose  
of the captured. A silence-puncturing noise.  
One grows accustomed to disgust as to fleas.

### **iii. Rats**

To flee our cell was a cinch, the difficulty  
is finding a lair, a sanctuary. We filed  
down the grating, snipped the barbed wire, fled  
into bushes, hid in the Serum Stacija attic.

It's so infested no one goes there for fear  
of the rats. Eyes scatter like glass fragments,  
repulsive, but harmless when sated, unprovoked.  
No one has attempted to exterminate them.

A nightlong rodent frenzy, chaotic teething,  
demented symphony of dawn. We sleep mornings.

On occasion one will scramble under the cover  
and leave a long red scratch. Repulse the pest,  
grip tight the coat, and dream of cake. The nest

prosper by the oat granary, the store of feed  
for horses, the source of blood for the serum.

### **iv. Horses**

The flickering tip of a cigarette, the sign  
from the forester. As the front approaches

the peasants, eager to obtain indulgences,  
offer us shelter. Thus we are consigned.

He hides us in a pit concealed with brushwood.  
Only the chirping of birds is heard. Soothing  
silence, the pleasant aroma of pine needles;  
my head spins; such peace, like death, our freedom.

From here we are dispatched to various chambers,  
some hidden in a haystack, others made to clamber  
into a ditch under a cow shed soaked with urine.  
We are immured between the false walls of a barn.

The only sound that of cows chewing their cud  
until one day the retreating Germans decide  
to set up a command post right here! The shouts  
of officers, soldiers bustle like ants. We've had it!

Under their noses we come out, unrecognized,  
help the peasants pack their belongings and tether  
their cows to the carts. Shepherds, our disguise,  
our cover for the rest of the war, under

our surveillance their cows and horses,  
equipped with knouts, masters of our own destiny.

*In memory of Semyon Peyros*

## JACQUELINE JULES

∞

### Scott Williams in the Doorway

I was absent  
from Mr. Polzer's math class  
that morning, thirty years ago,  
when Scott Williams stood in the doorway  
waving his grandfather's pistol.  
A dentist appointment  
had me in a paper bib, recoiling from a drill,  
not Lila Brugan's blood splattered on my sneakers.  
It could have been my face  
in the newspaper the next morning,  
forever seventeen, smiling in my last picture.  
Like the tree  
that fell on the trash can, not the roof,  
the skidding car that stopped in time,  
the baby that fell off the bed, unhurt,  
Scott Williams has been standing  
in my doorway for thirty years  
waving his grandfather's pistol,  
holding my gratitude hostage  
for each day I have been absent.

# STEWART FLORSHEIM

∞

## Mother Wants to Know

Mother in the clothes shop wants to know  
how a dress looks on her,  
*your father will say no one notices me anyway.*

Mother in the kitchen wants to know  
how she could've married a man so stupid,  
*I was always the good girl, did what I was told.*

Mother in the living room wants to know  
how she'll ever find a job,  
*my parents didn't let me finish high school.*

Mother at the pediatrician's wants to know  
why I get sick so often,  
*do you want to give me a heart attack?*

Mother in the museum wants to know  
how the Holocaust could have affected me,  
*Ich bin froh dass ich hier bin.*

Mother in my bedroom wants to know  
why I keep writing,  
*it's not about me I hope.*

Mother in my apartment wants to know  
when I'll settle down,  
*some marriages work out just fine.*

Mother at my house wants to know  
if we'll name the baby after my father,  
*he had a few good traits you know.*

Mother in a wheelchair wants to know  
if I'll help her end her life, if not

*I can still roll myself to the window.*

Mother on her deathbed wants to know  
if I'll lie down beside her,  
*here, in the spot where your father slept.*



# STEWART FLORSHEIM

∞

## The Boy Scout Handbook

Father makes a big loop  
then pulls the end of the rope through.

It looks like a cursive *O*,  
the first letter of a word  
in a foreign language  
we're trying to master  
but neither of us has a clue:  
*bowline, clove hitch, sheet bend.*

He looks at the book  
then pulls the rope out,  
sweating—his big hands  
that would sooner carve sides of beef.

Years earlier he took me  
to his meat market  
and showed off the carcasses  
hanging in the locker.  
*See, this is how you carve a steak,  
from the hindquarter.*

His cleaver glided easily  
across lines of gristle  
then he handed me the filet,  
blood dripping  
from his hands into mine.

# STEWART FLORSHEIM

∞

## Summer Camp

We line up to play bombardment  
and everyone wants to be on  
Bobby Thewman's team.

We know the rage in his eyes  
as he pulls back his right arm,  
the white ball suddenly not a white ball.  
We've all had it hurled into our stomachs,  
the greasy breakfast eggs an unwanted return.

We go back to the same camp in the Catskills  
every year, children of survivors  
from the same German-Jewish 'hood—  
so we can name the perpetrators,  
hear them screaming in a language  
we speak to our families, identify  
our grandparents in photos and letters.

We're stunned when Bobby Thewman  
doesn't return one June.

He moved in with relatives across the country,  
his parents having made a pact:  
his father firing the first of two shots.

## BRUCE MCRAE

∞

### Death Cannot Be Proved

It's midnight in the janitor's closet.  
January waits at the end of the hall.  
Ghost-mice are performing a danse macabre.

Here, at the institution, everything closes.  
We never mention the room inside this room,  
the dust-defying gravity, the soul of the moon.  
We don't talk about the inevitable silences  
or darkness pooling under a door.  
We say little or nothing . . .

Established in the year Zed, the institution  
is as dull as a morgue or a meeting.  
The air scarcely shifts, the files unmoved.  
Our business is zero.

Now it's 4 a.m., and the roaches hold rule:  
tiny tyrants throwing terrible tantrums.  
Whom the ancients regarded as very old souls.  
Whom the gods embraced in their ruin.

# BRUCE MCRAE

∞

## Placeless in Time

Anthropos, the man-god, is sleepwalking.

It's the long night of the mind,  
black mares galloping in a timeless place,  
your dreams a little rowboat at the head of the falls,  
your dreams a penny crushed by a locomotive.

And with the absence of light  
comes the absence of colour, the senses addled,  
the ruined god weak-kneed and listless,  
his every yawn a cosmos passing.  
He changes sex, alters his destiny,  
returning to an animal state of grace,  
becoming finally a chemical, a vague element,  
his thoughts ruffled in the stellar winds,  
his mind a photon stripped of its quarks,  
beingness as insignificant as the last atom,  
ancient voice, ancient song,  
all else reduced to the chirp of a cricket.

The lost dreams seem tangible.

From this great height the cities below us  
dapple like quartz in molten sand.

You can see the god-man perched on his milking stool.

He's turning to clay.

He's becoming a question.

## JOANNE LOWERY

∞

### Regret

I love to read about torture, the worse the better,  
just to get some perspective on who  
the competition will be at those faux pearly gates  
as we shuffle impatiently, our spiritual feet  
stirring the dry-ice clouds, dictators silent  
while their henchmen rehearse answers  
about just following orders with the electric prods  
and shoulder-wrenching hoist, the bare-bone beatings.

On the other hand I had no orders—ah pure volition—  
to lose my temper, to bash friendship,  
to refuse restitution, to scorn.

And now all this earth stuff: carbon footprints  
costing swaths of rain forest, plastic bought and tossed,  
poison for ants and aphids. If they scream,  
I choose to bubble gum my ears  
or go to the beach for the ocean's baptismal roar.  
I hoard receipts for donations to worthy causes  
and hide my thumbscrews deep among bags of trash,  
their pain long gone, my reasons recycled.

## JOANNE LOWERY

∞

### Angel as Mosquito

Who are we to assume for her human scale—  
a size 6 petite, perhaps, or even infantile.  
Vector anopheles makes itself heard  
slipping through the screen at night, makes herself  
felt once she finds mortal skin  
to insert a message, leave a bump  
and years malarial. Quinine cannot  
undo heaven's mission: we live,  
we swat, we succumb to fevers.  
She figure-eights beyond our reach  
from season to rainy season  
breeding from our blood: it tinges  
her cheeks Tintoretto. Let us applaud  
that constant song she drones  
above someone else's sweaty shoulder.

## JIM SCUTTI

∞

### The Private Couple

He'd chase us out of their woods shouting,  
*Goddamn punks*. On the street, scowling,  
he'd point at every boy he passed, each one  
a trespasser, trampling plants, snooping.  
She appeared on Fridays strolling  
to the bank, wearing seamed black nylons  
and a black dress, rouge caked in wrinkles,  
lipstick smeared around a weak smile.

Enclosed by a chain-link fence, enclosed  
in a stone house hidden behind  
spruces and firs, their secrets were safe.  
Only the woods threatened, smelling  
of warm earth and mint with tree ferns  
wrapped in arms of ivy, robins' eggs  
in fallen nests, and now and then  
a copperhead sliding into a shrub,  
hiding, showing its head, hiding again.

# SCOTT NORENBURG

∞

## Dear Wife

I hear a thin doubt within your sleeping breath.  
Between the thrum beat of the heater and your pulse,  
emptiness courses there—uncharted distance  
cutting to the vein of matter. Angle your circadian motions,  
tell me why our winter bones are hollow and alone  
on so cold a night. What are you kicking at in your dreams?  
Tell me how we lost touch and how to reconcile  
cold and warmth. You murmur in sleep like a coyote too dry to howl.  
This night rolls you to slumber, me awake, darkness all around  
and from out of the back of my throat,  
my own breath almost becomes a growl. Tell me, Wife, tell me  
is our love is more than some thirsty-mongrel dream?

# ALEXANDER STACHNIAK

∞

## For Reasons Unknown

In her dreams  
she digs mud out of her '88 Civic  
with the wooden end of an ax.

It is meaningless, unless you think the car important,  
being nearly as old as she is, yet still the baby of the family,  
the one they all expect to fail and start stripping for parts  
under some condemned roof until Daddy saves and rebuilds her,  
fragile scrap upon scrap to make a metal mosaic in his image,  
though she continues to stutter and lift her skirt for mechanics.

There's no mud in her life, other than the pre-washed faux-stains  
that pattern all of her most expensively shredded jeans,  
atypical attire amongst the other chemistry research grads, but  
they do not share the hereditary hunger of her grandfathers,  
the chocolate brain tumor time-bomb that requires deadly perfection:  
either she discovers the radical agent or becomes three-for-three.

And there's no ax, no lumberjack destruction like from her past,  
that obsession with collecting little samples of her own blood  
and hiding the razors where her shrink said she wanted them found,  
and besides, in her dreams she uses the blunt and harmless handle,  
the part the loggers hold like ten and two of a steering wheel,  
so unpredictable is the sharp weight that swings at its end.

## ALEXANDER STACHNIAK



### **New Year's Eve, at the Store**

At ten the pie slices hum softly in their tank;  
the diners heat up from the smoke at their fingers.  
The commotion of bringing coffee to blistered lips  
isn't loud, but loud like a black and white film has color.  
Dick Clark introduces another musician in the corner,  
but no one has heard. The music sounds tinny,  
broadcasted so far. I ask around for refills,  
but there are no takers. They worry that coffee  
might draw them together, that every soul in New York  
will take a sip against the cold when they do  
and ruin their carefully planned empty-afters. Either way,  
the beans are already ground.

By eleven the diners are glued to the countdown,  
their wet skin drying and firmly bonding to the numbers,  
yet somehow unready for each missing second.  
The hour is curt. Soon James (lost the "ames" long ago,  
now "J"), and Vitoria (no "c," never was a "c," her mother  
never gave one), and the old couple (threw their rings  
into the East River along with the embers of their children),  
and all the rest that come here every day,  
they'll be out the door, gone. And as for me,  
when Times Square is being swept and the bar-towel  
is slipping down my shoulder, I'll rub the counters down  
and close up, aware that I'll serve them again tomorrow.

# ALEXANDER STACHNIAK

∞

## **We Come Home, Blackened**

I.

We come home, blackened,  
though our parents scald us  
for dipping in the slag top.

We jump on boxcars  
and get wrangled up the valley;  
our parents worry we mean to leave them forever.

When the valley hits the highway  
and the tracks cross the river,  
we can hitch from here on.

Soot-nosed children raise few eyebrows,  
but the hairs on our chests  
beg to be noticed in the crowd.

II.

Near the city-center, stiletto women  
are bought drinks they dare not touch  
and beat country boys back with their heels.

The suited men sit on tacks all night  
and give the country girls gonorrhea;  
they pull out chairs and are ever so nice.

We grit our muscles  
and pull dirt like thoroughbreds;  
we study the suits and drop our slang.

Half of everything goes for alcohol,  
the same blackwater we first started on  
back home in the coal-hollows.

III.

The coal bottoms out,  
the city breaks down,  
and only the symptoms are left.

It's more passenger than coal car  
that carries us home  
to a different mountain than we knew.

Trains roll in, trains roll out,  
and only the mortician  
goes out to meet them.

A joy ride is a joy ride,  
agree the big city playboys;  
our heads go under coal to avoid detection.

## GERALD YELLE

∞

### Forty-Two and Through with School

Last night, the sleep of a sandman's minion  
waiting for guns brought to church,

for the first bingo to pay for covering the swastika,  
for downsizers eager to disarm the unarmed.  
I awoke and checked the baby.

He'd been the life of the party.  
He opened Leninger's *Biochemistry* for maybe 10 minutes  
on Saturday. I told him to tell me if he needed help  
but he only wanted leaving alone.

I could use my energy to sleep.  
I could wait till I feel really awful  
before I try to get things done.

Binding arbitration with my mother.  
Caulking the bathtub with my wife.  
We haven't been out since sitting on the piazza  
with our tenants two tables away  
and the baby so grown up.

One of my fears is that a program sweating  
on a mouse pad  
one night forecloses on my mortgage.  
Not out to get me  
—I see that from the start; but low performers  
should really be renting.

Somewhere I've a copy of the last Old Test,  
the last will, the wild country  
where John the Baptist left his motorcycle.

There's a fear of doing well  
under the circumstances and a fear of failing  
when conditions improve.

I've been meaning to make a will  
and a history of this headache.

I overcame my hatred of doctors  
—it was only when I was told I had nearly  
taken my life  
that I put my papers in order.  
I never had the slightest wish but to leave

my headache its very own mineshaft.

My freewheeling speech I leave dry and undelivered.  
It's been the staff of life  
—please handle with care.

My excuse I leave six flags of Jupiter,  
the one-sided rose,

the left of Kilimanjaro.

The north face I leave my broken mouth  
to which I leave commodities.

My family I leave illuminations.

I want to make it as light as teeth that

I suppose will grow when I've gone.

They'll play the first tune you hear  
coming out the bathroom:

The piano Uncle Phineas gave us.

I try holding the paycheck dry  
but with the tub overrunning the last few days  
it's hard not to take your money.



## GERALD YELLE

∞

### Bubble and Squeak

Used to see her all the time, languishing by the lakeside:  
blue-eyed Andalusian *bandini*, somebody's stick-figure  
understudy, chaser of rainbows, blond to the roots and  
all over glowing. Delicate petals unfurl on misty mornings  
and dare survive a summer storm. The killer, unable to deal  
with a girl who can love on the seventh and leave on the  
eighth, lets his blade do the singing and every breath in the  
aftermath's an extravagance. The family convenes beneath  
a black red awning. News spreads its acid lilies. My  
friend falsely confesses. I don't believe he even knew her.  
I don't see how he could've done it. Or why he said he did,  
why he disappeared just after she died. Other friends ask.  
Mine want to know why I hide in the forest when the worst  
I do is press crumpled dollars in a dancer's sticky palm.

# WILLIAM DORESKI

∞

## In South Africa

Wheeling through the Joeburg streets  
in our Land Rover, crowds swarming  
corner to corner, we've no map,  
no destination. Parking lots tempt  
but don't convince us. One-way  
alleys feature grinning old men  
lugging slabs of meat or hanks  
of unknown vegetables. We're here  
because the earth shook further north  
so we slipped below the tropics  
with hefty sheaves of credit cards.

The day feels long. Miles of low houses  
hunker beneath sky we can't read.  
We don't need or admire diamonds;  
your only jewelry's the opal  
your grandmother left. Yet here  
in the diamond-mining center  
of the universe, we're prowling  
as if casing the place. A café  
of brilliant plate glass attracts us.  
We park and escape the Rover  
and brave the tightly peopled space.

The proprietor mistakes us  
for greatly belated prospectors.  
Crossing the border northeast  
of the city will land us square

in a desert sprinkled with rubies,  
he informs us with a smirk.  
We settle for coffee thick enough  
to spoon. How did we arrive  
in South Africa? I've no recall  
of a long flight, no memory  
of renting the Rover in Capetown.

Your laugh feels brown as the hills,  
dry and brittle. We didn't fly,  
but drove all the way from Cairo,  
you explain as the café darkens.  
But I have to object. I'm puzzled.  
No highway bisects Africa  
longitudinally. You swipe  
your smile to hide a sudden pain  
and I dose myself with coffee  
to stifle my fear of strange places,  
the big windows glooming with mist.

# WILLIAM DORESKI

∞

## Ice on Monadnock

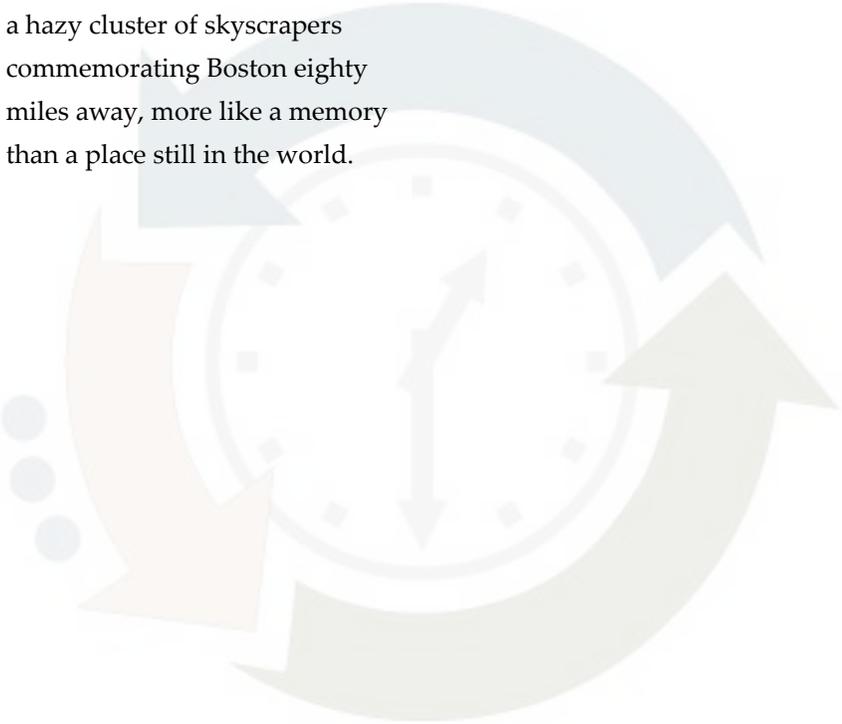
Leaning into the northwest cold,  
I tilt up the mountain with steps  
as heavy as uranium. Ice  
plots underfoot, so I foil it  
with crampons too stiff to resist.  
I reserve the ice axe strapped  
to my pack for the steep places  
where ogres and trolls winter over.

Too old for solo ice and snow  
climbing, I must be desperate  
for parity with the landscape.  
The friend whose liver cancer spread  
to other useful organs warned me  
against snuffing the ego before  
its time. I'll remember her  
not by name but by function—  
her favorite words lingering  
on crests of wind-sculpted drifts.

How can I map the trail from here  
to her grave? The ice crunches  
and the wind crawls under my parka  
to nibble at my soft parts. No one  
distinguishes more adroitly  
between landscape and self than jays

that land on my sleeves as I eat  
my peanut butter sandwich.

Canada jays, bold as scripture.  
They nip tiny nips of sandwich,  
and I'm grateful to share. The wind  
pours overhead, settling old scores.  
When I face away from it,  
I catch far down in the view  
a hazy cluster of skyscrapers  
commemorating Boston eighty  
miles away, more like a memory  
than a place still in the world.



# MICHAEL STEFFEN

∞

## The Hermit Crab

How did it get there,  
the dark speck just beyond my deckchair  
on the white tile bordering the pool?

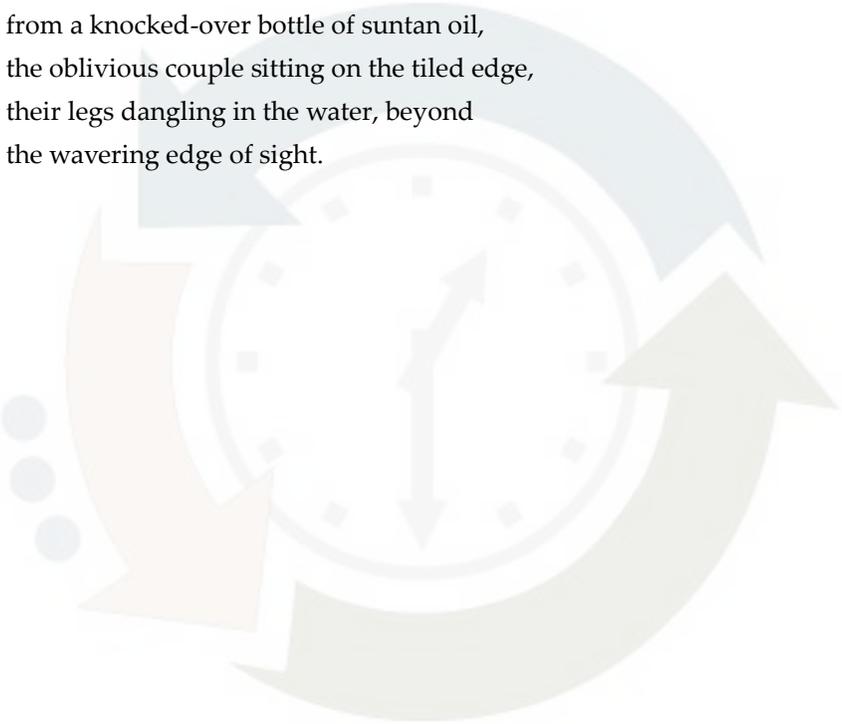
Wait staff hurried coolly around the perimeter,  
balancing trays of exotic cocktails,  
handing out large, green towels to the guests.  
Amid the occasional splash  
and flurry of sandaled feet, the dark speck moved.

Certain it would be swept away  
by the pool's overflow, crushed underfoot  
by some unwitting passerby,  
or scooped, perhaps, into a palm and tossed  
somewhere in the grass behind me,  
I watched it inch along,  
strangely bound by the rules of chance.

The crab reached the edge of the pool,  
a full ten feet from my chair.  
Just ahead, a waterfall spilled through a lower ledge  
in the tiled border and threatened  
to overwhelm it with a sudden onrush,  
wash it into the pool.  
But it kept crawling,  
climbing, trying to climb, each averted hazard  
recording its wandering path.

What struck me then was not  
all the dangers I could predict, but that  
this intrepid creature, beacon of tenacity,  
completely unaware of its own good luck,  
kept moving forward  
*despite* the unforeseen, the sporadic  
waterfall, a busboy mopping hot concrete,

beyond the spreading slick  
from a knocked-over bottle of suntan oil,  
the oblivious couple sitting on the tiled edge,  
their legs dangling in the water, beyond  
the wavering edge of sight.



## LINDSAY MILLER

∞

### Come Around Again

In countries where reincarnation  
is part of the religion,  
unremarkable as a mosquito on the windowsill,  
children remember past lives all the time.

A four-year-old sees a man on the street—  
dirty boots on, eating a sandwich—  
and says, “That’s my son.

He was born at midnight, but I heard  
a rooster crowing the second before  
he drew his first breath.”

Her parents approach the man:

“This is our daughter. We think  
she may have been your mother.”

After this, the families exchange cards  
on holidays.

So imagine you’re a woman  
with bony knees, and the widow up the street  
makes them tremble, monsoon-hot.

Imagine she swings her hips your way  
like a tree bending down  
to offer you peaches. Imagine  
you wake up wet, dreaming  
the smell of her through the embroidery  
on her wedding gown.

There must be a reason why  
her breasts seem so familiar.

Maybe you were her husband.

It will be difficult to explain  
if her husband died six months ago  
and you are twenty-two years old, but try this:  
You were born without a soul.  
You were a flesh and tendon and piss machine  
running on ones and zeroes.  
You were empty until the day  
your lover's first lover stepped  
into the street without looking left,  
and when his vessel cracked and spilled,  
he flowed into  
the nearest available container.

When she asks for proof, show her  
the shelf where you keep your journals.  
There is one for each year since  
you learned how to write, all of them  
blank as dinner plates. Introduce her to  
the dolls you never named.  
As further proof, offer the fact  
that your parents did not love you,  
that the day you were born, your mother wept  
and refused to take you in her arms.

You will have to become an expert  
on the man who lives inside you.  
Answer to his name more quickly  
than your own. Stay up all night  
because he did, even if you  
prefer to wake at sunrise.  
Lie beside her, a weight

in her swan arms, trying to sleep  
with her breath on your back.  
Start eating meat. Stop drinking wine.

She will ask you what color  
his father's eyes were. If you  
have studied photo albums—  
and you should—this may trick you  
into saying "hazel." The correct answer  
is black. Memories of fathers  
always have black eyes.

Don't hold her the way  
you want to, but the way he would,  
digging your fingers in hard.

LINDSAY MILLER

∞

## **What You Should Know Before Dating an Anthropomorphized Motorcycle**

Washing the oil out of your sheets every day  
will scrape your hands the color of raw fish.  
Eventually you'll give in and buy black linens.  
Your father will never approve.  
(Your mother will hum a George Thorogood song  
and look out the window when no one's watching.)  
Strap your helmet tight. No, tighter.  
Never wear shorts, or his leather will burn your thighs.  
The first time, you'll lie awake all night  
feeling cold chrome against your back.  
After a few weeks, you won't be able to sleep without it.  
He will snarl and grow jealous  
when you talk to anyone with an 1800 cc engine.  
Your lazy Sunday afternoons  
will be replaced by white-knuckle drag races  
with birds of prey, the wind  
chewing dead skin from your lips.  
He purrs when he's happy  
and when he's angry  
and when he's terrified that you'll leave him.  
Listen with the tenderest part of your legs  
and eventually you will learn to tell the difference.

LINDSAY MILLER

∞

**Ginia (How to Scatter a Stranger)**

A bonfire fed human ashes  
will sing its thanks with orange sparks.  
You want to hold your body  
as far away as possible, stretch your arm  
to its fullest before letting her run  
through your fingers.

Right before you throw her in the fire,  
close your fist tight  
and try to suck some meaning from her bones.  
Search for a moment, some transcendent thing  
that connects you to the carbon  
in your palm. You never knew her,  
but you'll tell yourself  
she is smiling down on you  
as a molecule of her left leg  
gets caught under your thumbnail.

She was someone's mother, and you want  
the loss of her to bubble in your throat,  
like a star going out, a caterpillar  
dying on your windowsill, the way you mourn  
things that were never yours.  
But she feels like chalk.  
It's impossible to picture her with a face.

If you want to swallow her,  
that is normal. It's not normal if you actually do it.

Someone will read a poem  
which is not about her, and even the moon  
will look embarrassed. You should not be here.

Try to imagine what songs she would have liked.  
Resist the urge to wipe her on your skirt.



## Using the Word Molested

The man who has raped three girls  
Apologizes from prison,  
His cellmate writing his letter  
To the editor, using the word  
Molested like a church-pew whisper.

Readers this morning, we vow  
Never to forgive, ready  
To remember like families  
Who inherit vengeance.  
Because those girls were seven.

An elementary school sits  
Across the street, reminding us  
Five days a week about the size  
And shape of second grade,  
Or younger, what we think he wants

As he dictates, "I hope and pray  
For their families to heal"  
As if God will intervene,  
Sending heaven's Red Cross  
To the country of despair.

At the school playground, we watch  
Other peoples' girls while shame  
Surrounds our eyes like gnats.

None of us admit to hoping  
The inmate secretary will

Think to shorten penitence  
With a belt around the throat.  
Instead, we imagine  
His penmanship out loud,  
The beautiful lines and loops,

The parallel slant of each word  
On paper torn from the kind  
Of tablet we carried home  
From second grade, passing pairs  
Of girls who always dawdled,

Busy talking until one  
Of them turned up a driveway  
And the other cut across  
The wooded lot to save herself  
Three blocks of walking home alone.

## GARY FINCKE

∞

### The Anniversaries of Extinction

Always there are people who cite the day  
For God's long-delayed decision to shut  
His project down, ascending a mountain  
To get head starts to heaven. Always, too,  
Some mark the annual return of days  
When we could have ended the world ourselves.  
Cuba, for instance, the missile crisis,  
Our vanishing definitive and quick.

And each year we live our death day, passing  
The anniversary of extinction,  
Fascinated like we are when we know  
The date and place some species died for good —  
The final great auk on Elday Island,  
The last Labrador duck outside New York.

Or more exact, the ones exhibited  
Like the lone Carolina parakeet  
That collapsed, February 21,  
1918, at Cincinnati's zoo,  
And the final dusky seaside sparrow  
Dying on display inside Disney World,  
June 18, 1987, those  
One-of-a-kinds living for months or years  
Without seeing a body like their own,  
Becoming the Crusoes of the mainland.

Like patient zeroes of new diseases,  
Misunderstood at first, then steadily  
Observed until they die without even  
The comfort of shared loss, leaving doctors  
To foresee the anxious world without them,  
How it's been made irrefutably new  
At the baffling brink of emptiness.



## The Worst Excuses for Murder

One man mistook his wife for a raccoon  
come to scatter his garbage. Another  
believed his friend a wild turkey behind  
a rustling bush, something, my daughter says,  
like the man who killed Old Bet, America's  
first circus elephant, believing it was  
the second coming of the Bible's behemoth.  
We could tally them all night, she tells me,  
the worst excuses for murder, including  
the common mistake of alcohol  
and anger in Central PA, where a man,  
this week, put a rifle to his wife's head,  
confusing her with somebody  
she couldn't be, where, afterward,  
he walked head-on into a truck,  
taking on the speeding dragon of God.  
Shutting up, we hear emergencies  
rustle the back lot's weeds and sumac,  
sounding the sweet call of myth, both of us  
turning superstitiously silly,  
imagining the next improbable strike  
of identity's soft confusion,  
the startling weakness of our voices  
when we listen to what the dead say,  
following our logic along our street,  
paying attention to bodies and faces,  
taking our time to choose correctly  
from the lineup of the ordinary.

# GARY FINCKE

∞

## The History of Permanence

*(a sequence)*

### ***Learning the Lifespan***

Methuselah, the Genesis years.  
Tithonus, the short-sighted, who  
Forgot to ask against aging.  
The fountain of youth. Its secret  
Location via coded map.  
The Ferris wheel, reversed, that spun  
Adults to children in my cousin's  
Comic book. His mother, months later,  
Bringing a dove to his sickroom  
Because the soul of the dying  
So much loves the company of doves  
It will linger. His transfusions.  
His temporary color. His hands  
Fluttering like flushed, frantic wings.

### ***The Invention of Prophecy***

History was a test,  
so much of it wilderness  
where madness begins.  
Each week, another sign:  
Hitler, then Israel, then  
the collective antichrist  
of Communist nations.  
We could see for ourselves  
in the repeated tests

of the A-bomb, the fallout  
shelters of nonbelievers  
who worshipped canned goods,  
bottled water, and crackling,  
one-station radios.

In the last days, they were  
fools for permanence.

In the winter, their tracks  
led to their yards' heavy doors.

My father said they'd started  
the Scott Expedition  
for the soul, that we'd been  
waiting thousands of years  
for the extraordinary light,  
and now we were the lucky  
living in the siren days,  
the era of the wish-come-true.

### **Voice Box**

A woman on television  
demonstrating the art of qi gong,  
talking through the voice box  
of her stomach. My father,  
afterwards, saying, "She should  
use the voice box God gave her."

My laryngitis from the dry heat  
of the school where I teach.

My daughter, twenty-six, clearing  
her throat each morning for  
her smoke-stained voice, not yet  
my uncle, at thirty, hoarse  
and coughing until his voice box  
was removed. His relearning

to talk, holding his electro-larynx  
to his throat. The minister with  
Lou Gehrig's disease pecking  
out messages with a stick held  
in his teeth. His wife showing us  
his bound sermons. His tapping yes  
or no to those he wishes her to read.  
The birthday gifts my mother  
wrapped six months in advance,  
how they've sat, since her death,  
twenty years gagged in her unused room,  
waiting for their turn to speak.

### **Subsidence**

It's not the atomic bomb, subsidence.  
It's not the end of the world, the shifting  
Of foundations, the cinderblock cracked where  
Corners of houses keel over like drunks.

It's not fallout, the despair that covers  
Homeowners in the helpless housing plan  
Built over the long-closed, anthracite mines.  
It's not a firestorm that ruins these roads,  
Not a shock-wave that creates refugees.

It's not my father inside the fire hall  
Huddled with his neighbors. It's not his hands  
That straighten the map where his modest street  
Shows so large he believes it's a river.

It's not cancer in every family.  
It's not decades of dying, nobody  
Returning, not ever, not even to

The half-life that they endured, measuring  
Themselves by mortgages that outlive them.

It's not the apocalypse. It's not news,  
Watching while my father walks his hallway,  
Measuring slope with his body, leaning  
Toward collapse like a crowd of widows.

### ***The History of Permanence***

One of the saints, his coffin reopened  
By descendants of the faithful, had not  
Decomposed. Blessed are the pure in heart,  
They said, and even if the rest of us  
Believe nothing of the Catholic ways,  
What about those mummies who stayed and stayed,  
No matter the lives they'd earlier lived?  
Didn't those kings and queens still look themselves?  
The ancient secrets of embalming said  
We didn't have to turn to dust. And for  
Those among us with little faith, there were  
Mummy medicines, the dead-for-eons  
Powdered to preserve them, and that failing,  
The dust of those mummies mixed in with paint  
To make art, at least, eternal. Look there,  
In the detailed, brushstroked shades, something saved  
For a thousand years, more than enough to  
Outlast a world prophesized soon-to-die.  
Those paintings would be juried, at last, to  
The left- or right-hand halls of judgment, hung  
In the permanent collection of God.

## ***The Open Heart***

In disaster movies, someone  
Is always laid out for surgery,  
Chest opened, when the earthquake strikes  
Or the hurricane hits. Things blacken  
Until the emergency lights  
Come on, a generator running  
Not quite strong enough to keep bulbs  
From blinking, the room from turning hot.

As soon as the second plane struck,  
The brief idea of accident  
Exploding into fear, I tried  
To mark how many of those patients.  
Survived surgery while the world  
Was changing because someone I knew  
Was having his constricted heart  
Paused, just then, for delicate repair.

We murmured in the waiting room,  
The language veering from curse to prayer,  
All that morning, our attention  
To the news flickered as if our hearts  
Were blinking off as well, dimming  
To the darkness of apprehension  
Where the anaesthetized can hear  
The saddened voices of their surgeons.

He was going to die or wake  
An afterthought for everyone but  
Those who loved him. All of the talk  
On television sounded like what  
I'd heard a hundred times: Wreckage

And triage, evacuation, rescue,  
The baffled crowd of civilians  
Enveloped by clouds of toxic dust.

The future was a chest scar. A blue cough.  
The word suddenly sparkled like a stroke.

### ***The Exact Likeness for Grief***

Swinging a pitching wedge, my father lofts  
Seven golf balls over my mother's grave.  
To spare the grass, he hits from the shoulder,  
Picking them clean from the thin lie of dirt.

It's fifty yards, I'm guessing, to the woods  
Where all but one of seven disappear  
In yardage he can manage, length to spare,  
At eighty-eight, his knees beyond repair.

He limps to her grave site, his love an arc  
That ends among trees. The flowers he's picked  
Follow him in my hands; he turns the club  
Upside down and uses it as a cane.

"Some day you'll know," my father says, meaning  
His knees, and then again, "Some day you'll know,"  
Meaning this time, the grave, this selection  
Of flowers, orange ones I cannot name.

My father, the prophet, bends to the vase  
Of wilted stems. My father, who's warned me,  
"You'll see" a thousand times, lifts the fresh buds  
From my hands, steadies himself on my arm.

My father, who was a maintenance man,  
Sends the old stems to the woods in my hands,  
Seats the flowers by height like a teacher  
While I kick the short ball into the trees.





## FEATURED POETS

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David B. Axelrod  
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Neil Carpathios  
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J. P. Dancing Bear  
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William Doreski  
Gary Fincke  
Stewart Florsheim  
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David Brendan Hopes  
Paul Hostovsky  
Joseph Hutchison

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