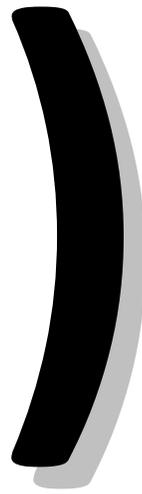
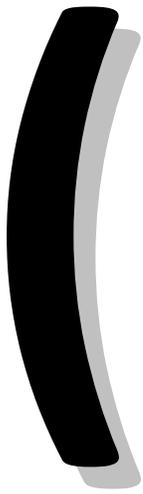


ASSISI



AN ONLINE JOURNAL OF ARTS & LETTERS

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ASSISI

AN ONLINE JOURNAL OF ARTS & LETTERS

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()

Between our hello and goodbye
exists a parentheses where
Patience lives
Conflict flourishes
Fear develops an adult sensibility
and loving you makes a man smile
without the assistance of a violin

Reality resides above me
just out of reach
Like the sun
Like clouds
Like happiness

I am what you see here
not what you want
unless you see what you need

I wonder what would happen
if you never
left
If you stayed
awake
If you kept being
here
If you kept breathing
my air
If you kept me
in your space
If you left your perfume
behind

All I have to give are these polite anecdotes, these clever metaphors, these safe similes
Of
Why your hair, your eyes and your skin
are never around long enough
and why God can't gift wrap
A parentheses

THE CREATOR CAUTIONS THE OTHER ANIMALS

We know no time when we were not as now. -Milton, Paradise Lost

I made him last of all, remember. He has not seen me
in the act of making as you have and will believe
he has come among you like a god—
 that you were waiting for his arrival
 and will obey him.

He will depend on you for much, yet in his eyes
you were contrived for his use above all. Some here
he will charm, they will come to believe they are
 dependent upon him. Remember, you
 are wild in your souls.

Bite, maim him if you must, if he maltreats you in his
innocent arrogance, but respond to gentleness—
for how else is he to learn it? But be ready:
 as he multiplies he will abandon you—
 you will earn no place in his imagined heaven.

Fear not, you are mine. His interpretation of dominion
cannot change that. You will creep under or soar above
his boundaries, his abstract, paper worlds.
 He is younger than you are,
 perceptive, self-centered, clever:

like unto myself, alas, I who know no time
when I was not as I am now.

THE WORDLESS NAME

For Edward Scott

Adam peers sharply
then speaks –
cat/chat/gatto
and so on
ad infinitum.
Each being exists
before name,
just as Adam himself
was created before he was named,
but could not answer the question,
“who are you?”
without the signifying word.
And just as Adam
took his name,
so he gave a name
to everything,
except his Namer,
whose name is
Word without word.

DIVINESTRA

Now observe the tilt of the rainmaker
Topsy on burgeoning storm:
As far as moments go, this too is eternal.

The people, they make their wishes in the wind
None doubting the powers of the man
Born to bring rain from lightning realms.

He tilts like a flagpole sunk in sand
And the people, they also mime the tilt
As if to read the mystery hid

Somewhere between the upturned brows
Of the rainmaker. First son
Of the first son of the first son.

DRU MACAUTHOR

AN EVENING IN TINTERN PARK



AGAIN THE RAIN

Again the rain –
like amber flecks,
like blackstone,
damp earth,
shivering
fire --
it tasted cold,
made whispers hard across the surfaces of grassblades,
spoke its name into the earth without abatement,
spoke its name
until extinguished.

ELEMENTS OF FIRE



ALL HALLOW'S EVE

All light is gone;
the saints have been toppled

into cardboard boxes stuffed with newspaper.
Books rise into neat stacks

of his and hers. Only mirrors
still cling to the cold, white walls

reflecting the ten thousand kisses
we cannot offer through these masks.

And though I know we are both awake,
we lay in separate rooms listening

to what could be the wind,
as the souls of who we used to be

crash through the trees outside
trying to find their way in.

ASLEEP IN OUR LIGHT

For some months, she barely notices him Pen and inkwell, felt and moleskin. Breathless how a path changes directions. To trace your way back exactly as it was. Almost impossible. Instead, she will learn that a person might spend years addressing the trees, but they will not answer. Barbed velvet smell, delectable poison. She will learn “asleep to what is before, a glance behind.” To memorize the four hundred and eighty-three postures of retreat. Charlotte was reputed to have wept a considerable time the first time she saw the sea. Him, always him. A voice, then two legs, as in a psalm, moving upon her. Even the strongest glasses not strong enough. She pressed her dim eyes right up to the page. She wrote her sister Anne of the garden behind the high, narrow house where she did, on several occasions, walk with him: “The trees, which are the trees anywhere, only more so.”

RELICS

Half way tempted, minutes after you leave,
to sweep up the trimmings from your last
hair cut
off the bathroom floor, the sink, the countertop, and save
them in some sacred box, the way I've saved
each fallen tooth, last
bits of blood still clinging to their worn roots,
I brush my hand across blurred glass, remove

the curled lock pasted there like a scrap-booked valentine,
yellow-edged, from someone who no longer calls,
transport this bit
of you that's left on the end
of my upright fingertip, careful not to let it drop until
I reach its final resting place, the trash.

AUTUMN FLIGHT

Stella Star, Belinda Blue, Helena, Pandora.
Climbing roses clinging to the doorframe.
Garden gone to seed.
Puff a dandelion and ghostly slivers fly.

Her red Chow Simon strains at his leash
when I walk him today. He bares
a Buddha dog smile at me—black gums and tongue.

I chose the green dress to bury her in.
Her shroud. Archaic word.
Archaic as Ozark cemeteries. She took death photos
of her loved ones. She would pull out
the picture of dad in his coffin. *Handsome, isn't he?*

Today I toss white geraniums someone has sent.
She hated geraniums.

Put geraniums on my grave and I'll come back to haunt you.

Calvary Cemetery. Walk past the graves of Saggy
who owned the Skelly Station,
Cleta who played the church organ,
aunts, uncles, brothers.
Raucous geese pass in a ragged V
and are gone.

THE FIRST GREEN THING

My brother-in-law moved to Costa Rica,
leaving his winter coat behind
in our closet. A coat black and yellow
as a toucan, an anorak I wear
sometimes. Long walks on cold days.

This morning, snow begins its thaw,
white meadow dimpled with blue tracks.
I skirt the field's glare, look
at what's written on the edges:
rabbit and fox; deer, dog, and vole;
struggle, escape or death,
the light calligraphy of birds.
Patches of mulchy earth.

In the hedgerow, an arc of vivid yellow
juts from receding snow, a teakettle.
Bulging, rusted, its brash enamel
paint gleams above ground-heave.
Spout and wire handle twined in dead vines—
inside, a large oak leaf laced with decay
lies frozen around a wad of dirt

and sprout: winter speedwell, announcing
itself the first green thing of February,
snug in a tatty cloche and bright
as my borrowed coat. Exulting.

REST NOW... AND SING

For Sue Holloway

There is a Celtic saying that heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in the thin places that distance is even smaller.

She lived her life
a breath away
from the numinous world

hands cupped
like the wings of a swan
gliding on morning's
red pond

living richly on morsels

in her eyes
clouds of snow geese
lift off stubbled fields

the lessons
of the winged ones
in the wind
Make your bones hollow.
Follow us.

until the thin place,
so rarified,
was no longer
a place

the edge melting

to bone ash
singing on water.

WE'RE GROWNUPS, AFTER ALL

Dennis saw her picture in the morning paper. He knew it was Maggie—she still had her dark red curls and the freckles along her cheekbones. Maggie's new bakery had opened in Soho, the article said, a sister location to the flagship on the Upper West Side. Dennis jotted down the contact information and tossed the newspaper onto the kitchen counter. The obituaries, he left untouched. He poured a cup of coffee and rubbed at his knuckles. *Osteophytes*, the doctor had said. Dennis referred to the bone spurs as nubs. He blamed typewriters, the constant poke and impact of finger against metal key, and he took any opportunity to inform people of his theory. Once, his niece asked how long it had been since he last used a typewriter. Dennis took a moment, touching the nubs to her cheek. *Twenty years*, he said. *It's all computers, now.*

Dennis called the bakery and found he was nervous. A young girl answered the phone. She identified herself as Angela, and Dennis asked if he could speak with Maggie. *Margaret Oliver?* she asked. *Ms. Oliver will be in later today, but she's very busy.* Dennis paused for a moment, unsure of what to say. Angela sounded like a sweet girl, sweet but curt. He asked her to pass on a message to Maggie. There was little he could say after so many years. *Dennis Seaver would like to have coffee*, he said. He left his phone number. Angela thanked him for calling, and the line went dead.

Dennis grabbed the Sports section and sat on the couch. He hadn't been retired long—a bout with cancer pushing him there faster than he would have liked—but he already didn't care for the new writers the *News* had hired. They were children, Dennis thought, who knew nothing beyond Bonds and A-Rod and steroids. Dennis remembered

when the Mets, in the 1981 draft, took a junior college pitcher in the twelfth round who wanted an extra \$10,000, but they gave the bonus to Steve Phillips, a fifth round pick, instead. Dennis called the Mets for comment, but few paid attention to the move, at the time; Dennis knew, in his heart, that the Mets had made a mistake. Like they always do, he had thought: Phillips was a *bum*, but this kid, this Roger Clemens, man he was going to be something. Dennis floated the story to his editor, who quickly shot down the piece. *Nobody cares*, his editor had said. Moments like that were burned in Dennis's memory. He loved sports writing above all else. He was a damn good writer, the best the *News* had for years. He was sure, though, that nobody would remember in the end.

Dennis returned from a bike ride along the Hudson to a voicemail from Angela: *Hello Mr. Seaver*, she said. *Ms. Oliver can meet you later today, at the shop. Two o'clock. If this doesn't work for you, call me back.* Dennis thought perhaps Angela wasn't curt but, rather, direct. He liked that. Dennis pulled a hard-boiled egg from the refrigerator and walked into the bathroom, started the shower. He chewed and let steam fill the room. The heat helped soothe the nubs. Dennis stepped in cautiously. The beating water felt good against his sore thighs. He remained in the shower longer than normal, finding solace in the rhythm of the beads falling on his pallid skin.

Dennis read the sign above the bakery, *Oliver's Twist*, and chuckled. He wasn't a man prone to a private laugh, but the irony of the name was too much. He had tried, he remembered, to get Maggie to read Dickens several times in college. She preferred Bukowski and Kerouac. *Dickens*, she had said, *is dead. Let his books die.* It was around that time, near the end of college, that Dennis considered proposing to Maggie. He picked

out the ring during his summer semester in Galway; he made a date at their favorite restaurant, one along the water that Joseph Mitchell had written about; he ordered her favorite wine, a semi-dry Sauvignon Blanc; there was a rose on her plate when they arrived. Then, Dennis left the ring in his pocket. The choice didn't feel, at the time, like a conscious one. The ring simply remained in his pocket. They had a lovely dinner, and Dennis believed that was all he deserved. Maggie, as far as he knew, was none the wiser. Dennis remembered the feeling in his stomach that night, like the wine was acid, searing away at his insides. As he opened the door to the bakery, a small bell ringing, Dennis felt much the same.

Maggie stood behind the counter wearing a green apron, her red hair pulled back in a ponytail. Dennis thought little had changed. She still smiled that bright smile, the one that could pull a person in from across the room. Dennis chose a table in the corner and sat down. He ran his fingers through his hair and took long, deep breaths. His hair had gone silver in recent years, and Dennis was self-conscious that he looked older. He caught Maggie's eye and waved. She held up one finger and walked into the back of the bakery. She emerged a few minutes later, a brown sweater supplanting her apron and her hair no longer pulled back. Dennis thought she looked like autumn. She stopped at the table and grinned.

"Dennis Seaver," she said. "My god."

"Hello, Maggie." Dennis stood and nodded. He wanted to hug her, but he wasn't sure how.

"Please, sit." Maggie turned and raised two fingers to a young girl behind the counter. "Still drink coffee?" she asked.

“I do,” Dennis said. “By the gallon. Doctor keeps telling me to cut back.”

“He obviously doesn’t know who he’s talking to,” Maggie said. She smiled from the side of her mouth.

The young girl approached the table holding two mugs of coffee. She smiled at Dennis but kept her eyes down. Dennis noticed her freckles.

“Thanks, honey,” Maggie said. “Hold down the fort for a bit.”

As the young girl walked away, Dennis smirked.

“Angela?” he asked.

Maggie nodded, sipped her coffee.

“I knew I liked her. A real firecracker on the phone.” Dennis took a drink and tensed his eyebrows. “Yours?”

Maggie sat up straight in her chair. “My one and only.”

Dennis nodded and kept the mug on his lips.

“She’s sixteen. Thinks I’m the devil.”

Dennis rubbed his nubs and leaned forward, as if to say something. He wanted to say something clever, but he wasn’t that sort of man. “As she should,” he finally said. “It’s her right as the daughter.”

Maggie and Dennis smiled, simultaneously. For Dennis, it was an uneasy, nervous motion. He was suddenly unsure why he had called, why he wanted to see Maggie. So many years had passed.

“How about you?” Maggie asked, interrupting a dialogue Dennis was having only in his mind. “Any kids for the insatiable Dennis Seaver?”

The question sat on the table. Dennis drank his coffee, enough to see the grinds floating at the bottom like bits of earth. He wanted to talk to Maggie. Dennis felt a warmth in his stomach before he spoke.

“A son,” he said.

Maggie’s eyes were large and comforting. She sipped her coffee. Dennis knew she was waiting for him to say more. He slid the coffee mug from hand to hand across the table. Angela appeared and refilled the cup. Dennis winked and thanked her.

“Ever get married?” Maggie asked.

“Briefly,” he said, grinning. His failed marriage, comparatively, left him less apprehensive. “You?”

“Angela’s father died a few years back.” Her voice was very matter-of-fact, as if she’d answered the question countless times before.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Dennis said.

He hated death, which felt like a silly thought. Didn’t everyone? He remembered a ballplayer, a spunky kid in the Mets farm system, who used to say, after every game: *It’s a good time to die*. Every time Dennis heard him say the words, he was confused. They kept him awake some nights. Finally, after his last assignment with the farm team, Dennis asked the ballplayer why. The kid looked at Dennis, pulled off his cap, and put both hands on his shaved head. *‘Cause Denny, without my cleats on that field, I ain’t got nothin’*.

Maggie leaned forward and held her mug with two hands. Steam from the coffee drifted up and created a hazy screen between her and Dennis.

“What are you doing here, Dennis?” she asked, her voice suddenly stern. “Why did you call me?”

“I don’t know,” he said, unable to fabricate a response. “I saw your picture in the paper. We’re all grown up now. But you, you look the same. I wanted to see you.”

“Why?” She put down her mug, the ceramic clanking against tabletop. “It’s been thirty-three years.”

Dennis took a deep breath and tried, unsuccessfully, to filter his thoughts. “My son, Andre,” Dennis said. “He died.” He closed his eyes. Saying the words out loud, it seemed, made them real.

“I’m so sorry.” Maggie held Dennis’s hand. “When?”

“Not long ago,” he said. He kept his voice steady. “His friend called me. It was an overdose.”

“Oh, Dear,” Maggie said. Her eyes were again large, but Dennis found no comfort in them.

“I didn’t know he was using drugs.”

“How old was he?”

Angela walked towards the table, but Maggie flipped her hand to keep her away.

“Twenty-nine.”

“Such a baby,” Maggie said. She put her hand on Dennis’s cheek.

The touch felt incredible. Dennis wanted to laugh and cry and scream all at once, but he wasn’t a man prone to such things. He could feel Maggie’s fingers causing goosebumps across his wrinkled neckline. He was, suddenly, twenty-five again.

“He wrote me a letter a few months back,” Dennis said. His voice cracked. “We didn’t know each other very well. Spent most of his life with his mother on Long Island.”

“Like his father,” Maggie said. She smiled, and it pulled Dennis in.

“He told me about this girl he loved,” Dennis said. “*She’s it*, he kept writing. Then he lost her. I think that was everything for him.”

“Did you visit him?” she asked.

“No. I got the sense he didn’t want to. He just needed to let me know that he was still there.”

Maggie nodded but said nothing. Dennis stared at her. He wanted to lean over the table and kiss her. He had countless questions to ask her, probably countless more to answer. Things had never really *ended*, at least not in any way that could be explained. Maggie, their life together, his feelings—everything had become too much and not enough and beyond reach. Dennis wasn’t the kind of man, ever, to demand. Instead, he just let her go. But none of that mattered. He hadn’t seen her in three decades yet, at that moment, she was his closest friend.

“It’s a good way to think of him,” Maggie said. “Still there.”

Dennis allowed himself to smile, really smile, and become caught up in the woman sitting in front of him.

“At the end of the letter, Andre asked if I remembered a particular baseball game—game four of the division series, when the Mets played the Giants. It was years ago, but of course I remembered. *That Bobby Jones*, he wrote. *What a bum*. It made me laugh out loud.”

Maggie was smiling when Dennis looked up at her. “That’s your word.”

“Yeah. That’s my word.”

The bakery had grown quiet in the late afternoon. Dennis found he had little left to say. There was so much still unsaid, but today wasn’t the day. Dennis wanted another day with Maggie. He pulled a business card from his pocket. The matted paper rubbed against Dennis's rough skin. He stared at Maggie, whose freckles seemed more vibrant than when they were young.

“I want you to call me,” he said. “I want to see you again.”

Maggie grinned and ran her fingers over Dennis's knuckles. He allowed himself, for a moment, to imagine a life with Maggie, one they hadn’t, but perhaps should’ve, lived. They’d both had children, made the best of their choices. It didn’t seem like enough now, not to Dennis. Somehow, he missed the son he barely knew, wished he’d been a better father. He wanted more than settling. For his whole life, he feared not being good enough, not being the sort of man capable of greatness. But there, in front of him, Maggie sat. She always made him stronger, he thought.

Dennis’s stomach began to settle a bit. He wanted Maggie to know there were regrets in need of disclosure. Decisions that should’ve been made differently. He thought of that young ballplayer, his cleats on the field. Some things weren’t worth living without. He turned the card over, and he wrote.

LAUREN LINN

IN HIS FOOTSTEPS



BOHEMIAN WAXWINGS

Here huddled on the cypress mulch
below, hurled from the silver maple
our parents planted, a flutter
and a hop –

four poor waxwings
sprouting charcoal fluff.

The grass the nest was is trashed
ten feet from the trunk.

She had not planned this, the mother,
dressed as she was for the recital,
her delicate shawl trimmed in ruby
drops, her cap flattering and pinned.

So adorned, she soars about
desperate for berries.

Another week,
and they'd have flown, ready.
She cannot know how another squall line now
lumbers mile by mile across the state.

This morning, the nestlings have learned
a new thing to sing, each mouth open
to the gullet to sound the notes.

And all day there is feeding, feeding –
wild strawberry, blackberry, mulberry.

She searches the length of the river,
down to where it blooms to a lake,
where she scours each bush along
the shores and wings her fruits back
to the burgundy chirps.

Never mind that tomorrow her babies
will straighten in the sun, tossed out
to the hot bed of the work truck, right
along with the woven grass (come un-
woven) by hands in garden gloves.

Never mind that.
Today, nothing is too late,
and the bounty of this world is all
that is too much to carry.

KATHLEEN GUNTON

THE FROST ROAD



CATERPILLAR ON ORANGE AND BLACK PLAID SHIRT

A caterpillar writhes along the back of an orange and black plaid shirt. I see you as I pass. The old man in the shirt walks the little white sandy dog with floppy ears. The caterpillar moves like a mountain range, peak and valley, flatline across the shoulder blade unseen, unfelt. There he oscillates on the shirt of the old man. I wish to see nothing more than your transmutation, there on the back of old age. With a twinkling of the eye, swivel of your cane and tip of the hat you sprout wings and leave your shell for an eternity. Fluttering just above the ground you land on flower blossoms and tickle the fingers of children as the wind kisses your orange and black wings. All begins on the shoulder of a man in plaid, walking a sandy dog midmorning, a caterpillar rising and falling with each breath, there between the blades of metamorphosis

MAPUTO OLIVE

-For Lisa Combrink

Your poem nails home horseshoes
wears hat, mounts steed
does not look back.
And longing strives but cannot cross
the field. Like Zeno's arrow.

From now on, the miles
are marked with milestones
of sapphire and a bush
of flowers each
a different fragrance, each a note
from your music that wore a hat
and spurred my wistfulness

Into the terraced twilight.

DUST UNTO DUST

1.

Dust unto dust
has always
left me wondering
who might be
suspended
in that shaft
of light
angling
through
the window.

Moses, Caesar,
my old friend, Marie;

A galaxy
of souls looking
for the head of a pin?

I pass my hand
through the gathering
disturb
the dance
and
some
motes
cling.

2.

When
the Rabbi
and his mother
left,

it's said
they left
completely,

body & soul.

We may breathe
the same air,
but we're not
the same dust.

3.

When I was a boy
I hated getting
my hands dirty,

I'd wash them
in the middle
of whatever
I was doing.

As an adult
I still can't stand
dirty hands.

I could never be
a mechanic.

I won't garden,
dirt under my nails
drives me crazy.

Into dust,
you say?

How will I ever
stand myself?

CAN YOU LOVE ME

I come to you, fragile as flesh on an infant's skull-
Can you love me?
You say, "I do."
I say, "I do."
The judge closes the book.
There is laughter.
And clapping.
And photographs.

It's only the four of us on this snowy afternoon.
My maid of honor who's flown in from Atlanta
Maurice, the black poet you've known for years.
Outside the courthouse, reindeer leap frozen mid-flight, Santa waves his jolly hand.
Decorations from this Christmas past: And a New Year two days gone by.

You can't tell from the picture all that we've brought with us. All that lies before us.
Your hand in mine we smile. You in your black tux, movie star handsome.
Me in my London Fog coat and white dress lined in pearls, fit and trim.
I've had an abortion sure that there will be many children to follow.
You've suffered a childhood illness that has left you sterile, none do.

Nearly two decades on you've added a hundred pounds to your small frame.
I carry with me a chronic illness that's left my once athletic body flabby and less agile.
You work so I don't have to.

We have a house that sits by a river and a new cat to replace the one we've buried in the
backyard. It's just the two of us now-except for the cat.

We sit at the kitchen table, you with your day old coffee, I with my plain yogurt and
banana. Spring brushes across our window with scent and song.

You stare across at me eyes still blurry with sleep and age. The mouth refusing to form
what your soul aches to say. "Do you still love me?"

I reach my hand to your hand, like lace on skin I leave it there. And smile as if to say, "I
do."

PRAYERS

small words
phrases
repeated
over and over

will this
change
the world?

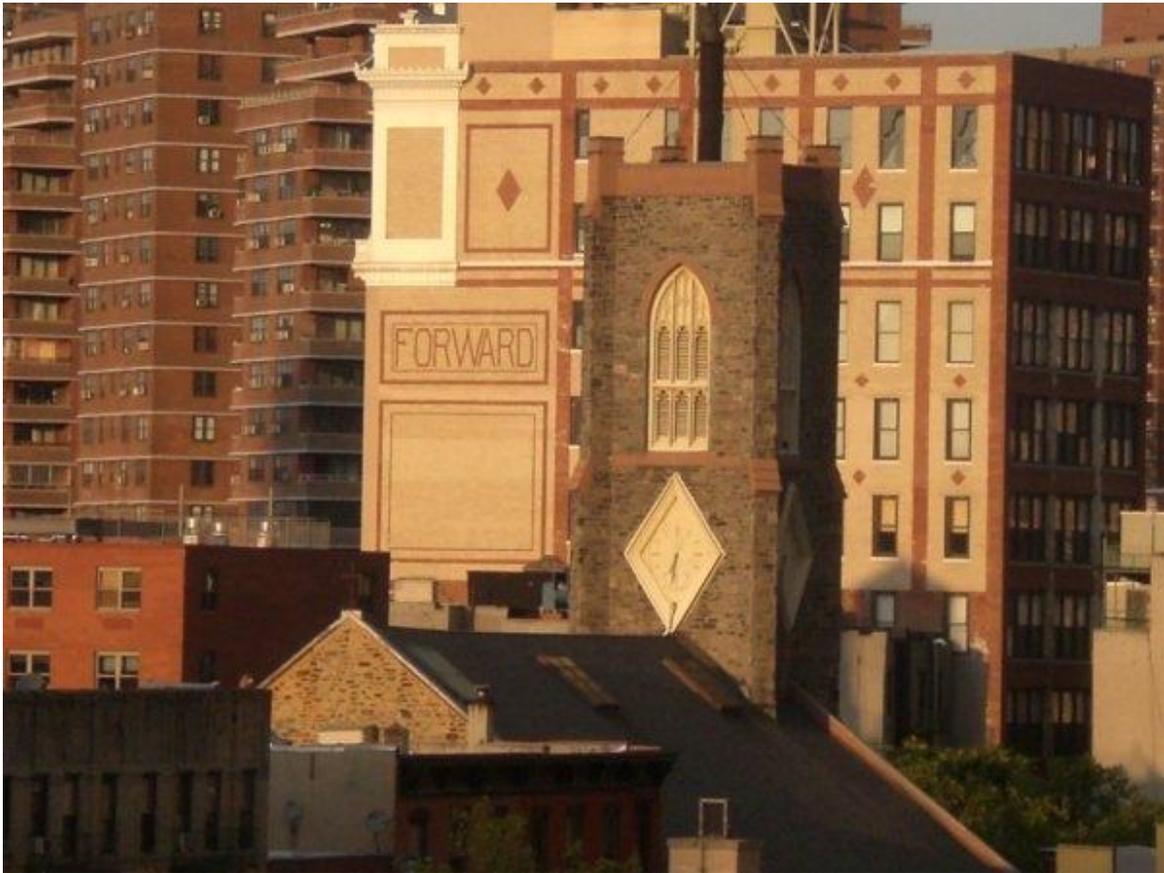
will this
change me?

inhale
exhale

begin
again

JOSEPH B. RASKIN

LOWER EAST SIDE 1



THE TAILOR

made his small repair,
stitching graft to gum
to save the smile

we love to see you wear.

SESTET

And maybe then she shifted in her chair,
or clouds you don't remember cleared the sun.
Whatever happened lit her eyes so blue

you broke off speaking and could only stare;
she looked annoyed to see you so undone.
A moment both to cherish and to rue.

NOW

You say, one clear-sky summer day,
and out of such a happy blue,
that there are things you never say.
What else, then, should I say to you

but, "Tell me what you've never told"—
a plea you twice, three times ignore.
The sky clouds up, the wind blows cold.
And now you tell me nothing more.

CAUGHT

Her face
inverts all space,

'til I
end up upended,

feet suspended
high

above
my stranded sigh:

old head
too tipped to think

and old, old heart
too full to fly.

UNE ROSE D'HIVER

Voici une
vieille fleur

qui rêve
d'un jeune coeur.

**AN UNFINISHED SONNET
TO A BEAUTIFUL FRIEND**

The thing is, see, he's not sure words can say
daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM
daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM
or what it's like to watch her fingers play

with necklaces or strands of blonde, the way
daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM
daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM
the moonlight in that single wisp of gray.

daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM
to find the right words, just to lose his head?
daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM

will leave her this abandoned frame instead:
daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM daDUM
is something surely better left unsaid.

EARTH'S CRIES RECORDED IN SPACE

What is heard is the shattering
of language
as by a cosmic blast, black holes
ripping stars apart.

The onslaught is steady,
reliable as the confluence of day
and night;

brightest in that night
when a doomed star bursts like an oration
in a riptide of roiling dust and vapor;

most grievous in that instant
when madding lingo splits the azimuth
in fiery temper,
the glowing remains of caustic arguments
lingering until lost in infinite density.

The redeeming apology,
yet to be recorded in space,
is abstracted in *The Tale of the Right Mind*.

What is now known
is that it is possible to draw nearer
by piercing flux and fold,
sending a cable to The Ace
or a poem to the universe

without fever

as when Earth was young
and dawn innocently brightened.

Feasts/Week 13

st ludger

our family tree's axed:
all God's children are father-
less, exiled at birth

Feasts/Week 14

st richard of chicester

we tried tears & then
fig leaves & then mud again
& God knows floods failed

Feasts/Week 15

st macarius

little to go on:
you tell them how much trouble
it is just to talk

FIRST FEMALE KEEPER OF A LIGHTHOUSE

All day he hauls molten slag to the Ohio's edge
and dumps the fiery rock down the bank.
Tongues of sunburst marigold radiate
until snuffed by black water and fuming steam.

Afterwards, he drinks for hours at the 9th Street Bar.
He staggers the three blocks home,
and spots her in the backyard, crouching,
squat as a slippery jack mushroom,
in her hand, an empty jar.

As he approaches, a tiny finger rises to her lips.
His woozy waltz across the grass ends
in a crawl to the hedges where she waits
for the setting sun to dissolve,
the day glow, gray as cooled slag.

In silence, she points to dots of light,
flickering like comets on the blink.
With a wink he signals he understands.
A rising star, she moves across the universe,
searching for kindred brilliance,
her abstract dance accompanied by crickets
and cicadas, their mournful clicks
ticking like so many clocks mindful of the times.

Like a punch-drunk prize fighter,
wanting to contend, he flails the air,
his fists opening and closing in palsied fits.
When he returns to the canopic container,
he wipes the dead from his palms,
the gild of their souls incriminating his hands
like a Judas corrupted with gold.

He tells her he didn't mean to,
tells her not to cry.
But she has weaned herself.
Backing away, he stumbles into the dark house.
After the screen door slams, she hears them yelling
again, their words indecipherable as the locusts.

When she has captured the last dwarf star,

she knows to leave the jar outside before entering
a place where even the most radiant will not survive.

LISA MARIE PAOLUCCI



FIRST SENTENCE, NEW PARAGRAPH, CHAPTER I

*And there was evening and there was morning, one day. Genesis I:5
for Daniel, my grandson*

Your face is a calm lake, broken
only by flickers: frowns, smiles,
grimaces; clouds scudding by
in a windy March sky.

And suddenly, it's Spring:
forsythia twirling wands
of gold, daffodils playing
fanfares and flourishes,
and everywhere, a green
carpet of sweet fresh grass,
unscrolling, just for you.

Trees without leaves, winter trees, are best for me, standing like souls made magnificent by living each day, every night, as no other soul has managed to live.

Their prayer, I would imagine, is unceasing and confident – not of themselves but in the One who hears and accepts the beauty of their being. Like all true saints, they will never comprehend the mystery of their own holiness.

MY FAMILY AS A GROUP OF TREES

in a field near Concord

How often have we passed here?
You, moving slowly, with the earth,
And I, somehow against it, faster.
Each meeting's a surprise, rebirth

And reckoning, and, like a child
With a mirror, I'm glad and troubled,
And go (inside) a little wild
To see myself, and all things, doubled.

Still, what could be more natural?
Tall trees in a flat field—but for me
You rise out of the ancient pastoral
My past, myself, my family.

Copse, covey, choir, raft
Of the wrecked, the saved, the still at sea,
The first time I was here, I laughed.
Now I know the joke's on me,

Or *is* me, though we share the laugh
And rise together from the chaff,
Now at evening, now at dawn,
Afloat above a burning lawn.
At various times, in every season
I return, and with no reason
I could easily explain
To people who are not trees, sane.
But I'll try:

Nourished by a common spring;
Rooted in remembering;
Vertical our inclinations;
Lateral our support and patience;
Mutual and diffuse our hope;
Though at times we seem to grope
Like the blind bird for its mother,
This is how we reach each other
And the sky.

FRANCIS AND THE SAINT

My grandfather loved his birds.
They weren't really his, of course –
flying to him from the trees and bushes,
out of the sky above, from behind
houses
lining the cobblestone,
and in-between awnings and light posts.
Alighting upon his shoulder
or a finger or two
never outstretched
nor enticing,
they must have sensed
safety, security,
calmness of mind.

He attributed that to his namesake
the deacon,
the patron saint
the one who gave what he had
built what he could
and became rich in poverty.

And now, as grandfather's birds
return to him
this final time
from behind the clouds
and rain-soaked pillars,
sparrow, robin, wren
descend,
perch upon his bed
and grandfather
in quiet requiescence
smiles.

A fat bumblebee came near
and lazily moved away,
his crooked path

dizzy and
glad.

He has no flight plan except
to be at some place
at some time –

coordinates improvised
but exact.

This, for him, is enough –
more than enough,
in fact –

everything,
a life.

Could I live like him – a perfect creature,
a creature perfectly himself,
wanting no other thing

than to be some place,
some time?

TO BE HOME AGAIN

I remember Ruth's parlor and how the corridor of her apartment smelled: candle wax and perfume. Every Wednesday evening, my grandmother walked me four blocks up the hill from home and deposited me in the lobby of Ruth's building. Sometimes she would wait for me on one of the cushioned chairs in that expansive lobby with marble floors, or run errands and come back an hour later to take me home.

I sat next to Ruth on the hard piano bench and tried to shake out the nervousness in my hands. The old-fashioned clock hanging on the wall behind me chimed, deep and resonating.

"Play it first," I would tell her, when she picked out the new piece we would be working on.

Her bright blue eyes would crinkle and her lips spread into a knowing smile. She would say, "No. It's too easy for you that way."

She knew I was a lazy student who wanted to mimic a song after hearing it once. My penchant for this was not too impressive, but it helped me avoid the grueling work of deciphering each note. I would do the treble clef under my breath, *E,G,B,D,F*, or *F,A,C,E*. The bass clef always troubled me the most, and as I pressed the keys tentatively I would look up to Ruth, my eyes guessing the notes.

"That doesn't sound right," I said.

"Forget about what it *sounds* like," she said. "Is it the right note?"

Sometimes I would look at her brooch. It was the white silhouette of a woman's profile embedded in a dark green stone, and Ruth wore it every time I had a lesson. Her

short red hair fascinated me. Although she seemed ageless, I knew from my mother that she was a widow and Jewish and had survived the Holocaust. Yet she seemed too young to be my grandmother's age and much older than my mother.

I would go home afterwards and do my homework. I could hear the muffled sound of the television coming from my parents' bedroom, where my mother would be lying in bed with the door closed. Late at night my father would come home from work. I would hear his truck groaning into the driveway and then the soft slam of the driver's door.

My parents argued frequently, and at any time of day. My room was adjacent to theirs and I would hear them late at night. Sometimes my mother cried for a long time or there was a queer silence that eventually drifted me off to sleep. If my grandmother heard anything, she never showed signs of knowing, and woke me up every morning to get me ready for school; my mother stayed in her room or was seldom at home when I returned.

"I miss my mother," I told Ruth one afternoon. It had snowed heavily the evening before, and my boots were on the mat in front of her doorway, my mittens and coat draped over the radiator. We had just sat down to go over the piece I should have practiced during the week.

Ruth raised her eyebrows, "Is she on a trip?" she asked.

"No," I said. "She's always in her room."

"Is she sick?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said. "If she's sick, then she's been sick for a long time."

We went over the piece, and I fumbled through it. The less Ruth corrected me the more self-conscious I became of my mistakes, and by the end of it I was in tears.

“I guess I didn’t practice enough,” I mumbled when I was done.

“So we’ll practice it now,” she said. “Let’s start from the beginning.”

On one particular afternoon my father had come home very early, surprising my grandmother and me. We were sitting at the kitchen table going over my math homework, and he just walked in without saying a word. We heard him head towards my parents’ bedroom and when he closed the door behind him he started yelling. He was so loud that I couldn’t actually hear his words. Suddenly there was a huge crash. Before my grandmother could stop me, I scrambled out of my seat and ran. It was as if the door flew open when I gripped and turned the knob, and there I saw the scene: the bureau turned over onto the floor, the picture frames scattered and broken, my mother’s hand-mirror on the other side of the room. My mother was sitting in bed with her face in her hands, making no sound. My father’s back was to me, and I don’t know if he knew I was standing there, but he would not turn around. His fists were clenching and releasing and he stood quietly. When my mother looked up and saw me, she immediately covered the side of her face with one hand and I could already see the large red welt that would form into a bruise.

At that moment I expected my grandmother to say something. She had never interfered when my parents argued, and although she was my father’s mother, I wondered at that moment if she cared for my mother at all.

“You don’t tell her anything, okay?” my grandmother said. By “her” she meant Ruth. It was only minutes later and we were trudging up the hill for my piano lesson.

That afternoon my grandmother waited in the lobby for me.

“Hello,” Ruth said, opening the door decorously. Standing in her apartment and taking off my winter coat felt peculiar after what had just transpired. The gray sky had dimmed the room, and all the lamps were lit. There was a phonograph playing jazz music softly in the background, and from her window I could see the snow falling.

I sat on the piano bench next to her and opened to the piece I should have been practicing during the week, “At Home.” I pressed each note reluctantly without looking at her. When I was finished I stared at my hands in my lap. It was very quiet and the snow was now falling thickly like short feathers rushing down from the sky.

“You know what?” she asked. I could hear the smile in her voice. She touched her brooch lightly and said, “I miss that other piece you were playing this past October. I would really love to hear it.” We both knew how easy that piece would be for me, but I found it and started playing it. I didn’t rush through it like I usually did, but played each note clearly without pausing and was elated by the familiarity of it. I didn’t make any mistakes.

She started clapping immediately after I finished. “That was *wonderful*,” she said. “Just wonderful.” I smiled for the first time that afternoon. I spent the hour playing all the pieces I had already learned.

When I was dressed and turned to the door to leave, she said my name, “Emily.” I looked at her and she knelt down and gave me a hug. “I’ll see you next week, okay?”

“Okay,” I said.

My grandmother was still in the lobby and stood up immediately. “Did you tell her anything?” was the first thing she asked.

I shook my head, and we walked back home without speaking.

One morning my mother wasn't in her room when I woke up. I knew because the bedroom door was wide open. I walked in and felt the immediate cold from the wind. My grandmother had opened the windows, and she was in the middle of stripping the bed sheets.

"Where did she go?" I asked her.

She didn't look up and started pulling off the pillowcase covers. "She'll be back soon. She left on a trip."

"Where?"

"Emily, have you even washed your face and brushed your teeth?"

I was furious that she thought of sidetracking me with such mediocre distractions. "I want to know where she is!" I said, stamping my foot. I had surprised the both of us; I was not a demanding child.

My grandmother sighed and stopped what she was doing. "She wasn't feeling well. When she gets back she'll be feeling much better."

My daily routine that week felt more monotonous than ever. I felt myself rise in the morning, get dressed and wait for the school bus from the kitchen window. I sat through my classes wordlessly, and when the day came my grandmother walked me to my piano lesson. "I'll be back in an hour," she said, and looked at me hard with warning.

"How are you today?" Ruth asked as I positioned myself on the bench.

"I'm okay," I said, shrugging lightly. I wouldn't look at her.

"What's this?" she said, surprised. "Not even a smile for me today?"

My hands were in my lap. I stared at them for a while. I felt the warmth of her hand on my back. "Emily?"

“I’m fine,” I whispered. I clenched my teeth to keep the sound escaping from my throat. “I’m fine,” and then without warning I started to sob. I kept my head down, letting my hair hang by the sides of my face, my hands still in my lap. She kept her hand on my back and let me cry until I finally stopped. She gave me tissues and waited. Finally I turned to her. “I don’t know where my mother is,” I said. “My grandmother told me she went on a trip and but didn’t tell me where she is. She was always in her room before this, and my father and her fight, and one day he pushed the dresser on the floor...” I told Ruth everything. Her face was frozen in disbelief as I spoke, and then just like out of a fairy tale her clock chimed, and I knew I had to leave.

I didn’t have to say anything when my grandmother saw me. “You told her, didn’t you?” she asked, and without waiting for a reply she grabbed me by the arm and dragged me out of the building. She walked quickly, the snow and ice crunching beneath her boots. I staggered behind until finally I stopped and let her keep going. She didn’t notice until she was halfway down the block and turned around. “Let’s go, Emily!” she called out. I looked at her, unwilling to move. She marched back and stood over me, “Emily, let’s go.”

“Why?” I yelled. I had never raised my voice to her or my parents. “Why should I? I want my mother!” I screamed. “I want my mother! Where is she?” A passerby stopped to stare. She grabbed me by the arm tightly and tried to pull me down the block. I was only nine years old, and I resisted mightily but she had me stumbling next her until I started walking.

I went straight to my room when we walked into the house. I threw my bag on the floor and ripped my coat off. Perhaps my mother would never come back. Did they think

I would eventually forget her and they wouldn't have to tell me the truth? I pictured my mother a few years before, how lively she was and the dinner parties she hosted. Her long brown hair fell to her shoulders and the dresses she wore were beautiful and bold and her laughter carried through the house. My father would be sipping a drink and talking to a friend in a corner of the parlor, quietly watching her but not smiling. I sat on my bed and stared out the window, watching the sky darken. The snow continued to fall; the soft flakes visible under the singular lights of the streetlamps.

It would be months before I would see my mother again. One summer morning after my father had left for work, my grandmother told me to get dressed because we were going somewhere special. I put on a blue and white seersucker dress that my mother had bought me the year before. We boarded a bus and I sat next to the window, marveling at the intense clear blueness of the sky, the sunlight coloring the leaves of the trees whizzing past us.

I had continued going to Ruth during the months following my mother's absence. I suppose it was a relief for my grandmother, who had grown visibly tired of my protests to do anything I was told. Occasionally, my father would intervene during dinner and tell me to behave, his voice flat and withdrawn. At first I had refused to leave my bed to get dressed and go to school. With what strength she had left, my grandmother would carry me into the bathroom and I would kick and scream in her grip, pushing away the toothbrush she brought to my lips and spitting out the toothpaste without even brushing.

"I'm tired too," she said once, sitting on the toilet seat cover. She took off her glasses and placed them on her lap and looked at me plainly. "I promise you will see your mother again. She is not ready yet. You can't understand this now, but you may one day."

Those afternoons sitting on the piano bench with Ruth were what I had to look forward to. I seldom played the piano. We never spoke about the day I had cried to her, but when I arrived at her door she ushered me in and hung up my things as if nothing had happened. We still sat on the piano bench together, with my book propped open as if we were beginning a new piece. But instead of playing the piano I talked. I missed my mother. I wanted to see her. As I sat next to my grandmother on the bus, I thought about Ruth and our afternoons together, the moments blurred in time, none of them in the permanent sequence of my memory. My grandmother and I were quiet throughout the trip, neither of us attempting a conversation, both absorbed in our own thoughts. Briefly I glanced at her, and saw her gripping the handle of her purse, her thumb rubbing back and forth absently.

The scenery changed and the rows of houses turned into large buildings, gray and ordinary, their numbers made of sharp glistening metal. Finally my grandmother stood up and I followed her out of the bus down two blocks. There was a building recessed on top of a hill that stood on an expansive green lawn. As we approached the entrance, we were ushered in by automatic sliding doors. I felt my skin prickle from the sudden chill of the air-conditioning, and my feet squeaked on the shiny floors as I continued to follow my grandmother to the reception desk. She leaned in and spoke quietly to the woman sitting behind the desk. I looked around and saw a large room with a television set in the middle and a piano off to the side. Some people were sitting around a small table, playing cards. Others sat by themselves staring at nothing, and I watched them hoping to catch any faint expression that might flicker across their faces.

My grandmother kept muttering something under her breath as I followed her again down a narrow corridor. “Three-seventy-two. Three-seventy-two.” We almost walked past the room. The door was slightly open. My grandmother knocked and without waiting for an answer, walked in.

She wasn’t facing us. She was looking out a large window that overlooked the gardens behind the building.

“Rosemary,” my grandmother said and cleared her throat. “Look who’s here to see you.” My grandmother nudged me and I walked over to her.

“Hi, Mom,” I said.

When she turned to look at me, her eyes seemed familiar, but nothing else. And then she smiled. “Emily,” she said. “Emily.” She hugged me and then released me and said, “Stand a little back. Let me see you.” I did as I was told but was too busy looking her over, absorbing the shortness of her hair, the blue housecoat she was wearing that I had never seen before. It would be years later that she would explain to me – my father’s jealousy and abuse, her nervous breakdown.

I don’t know when it was that I stopped seeing Ruth. Sometimes I walk past her building and find the window of her apartment, the same window I looked through from the inside as a child. Once I even walked inside, searching through the names listed next to the black buzzers, but she wasn’t there. I want to tell her all about my mother because I know Ruth would want to know. I wonder if she always did, but was waiting for me.

LITTLE SISTER

I did not sense it in you, not then,
as we sat musing together, two kindred spirits,
lovers of language and the dog-eared page,
the quiet ones seeking always the confirming voice, the *yes*.

In a gesture as familiar as my own, you peered at me
unblinking through thick lenses, pushed them back in place
with your pencil. "I know I am just a Jennifer, brown-haired, brown-eyed,"
you said. "I know I will never be special." I said nothing,

stunned silent by your skinless pain,
shamed silent by my own unvoiced longing--
desperate, futile--to be the extraordinary one.
Years later, many miles apart and lost to each other,

I heard that you had tried to shed this life.
I recognized it then, the beast that had coiled strangling in you,
felt it strike once more across the long years, tasted
the bitter poison of the words unsaid:

How lovely was your shining hair as it lay, warm and unaware
of its own animal beauty; how the unshed tears that brimmed
behind your glasses had been magnified beyond themselves
into diamonds; how *loved* you were; and I remained silent.

HOW TO BE COURAGEOUSLY SIMPLE

“Without courage, we can never attain to true simplicity.”
--Thomas Merton

Whatever you do,
don't do what they expect you to.
Consider the most rational,
practical, lucrative choice,
then shelve it—no, better,

throw it over the cliff.
When they warn,
Keep a stiff upper lip,
make a deliberate effort
to make yours quiver.

Whatever they expect you
to deliver, come through
with the opposite. When
they say run, sit. When they
advise, *Buy this and that,*

sell all you have and give to the poor.
You've heard this all before,
and though something about it
entices you, you cannot bring yourself
to do what would lead to a life

free of all their trappings.
What with all your mappings
of simplicity's routes, you've
given in to the deadly doubts.
But there's still time:

get out, get out!
Be courageous—
do the simply outrageous
that will shock them
and liberate you.



MEDITATION

It is from recognition that you weep
“I was here!”

(you were here)

not quite so near
as dream but near as sleep
and the memory you could not keep
calling, “You were here!”

(you are here)

—do not fear
but wakefulness, and seek

out that which forged forget
fulness and lying
—the crying rags of regret (and regret
that lies crying)
—and, from the silence of your own hollow
self, listen to the echo.

JOSEPH B. RASKIN

CAPE MAY, NEW JERSEY AWNING



MILKWEED DAYS

Across the Fremont land the wisps
of milkweed flutter like strands
of exploded cobweb. I palm
a half-pod and crumple it
to feel the papery compression,
then feed the fragments to the breeze.
When I was six I pestered

Joanne Szluc with sticky tangles
of milkweed filaments. Armed
with the milk squeezed from the leaves,
I pawed the mess into her hair.
The cottony fibers were white
as Grandma's earnest and faintly
senile gaze, so Joanne cried

that I'd made a hag of her.
We stared at each other a moment,
thrilled that she'd used the word "hag."
The tattered milkweed stalks relaxed
as we ran off laughing; then later,
to punish, she pushed me face-down
into garden mulch, and I let her.

I'VE NEVER BEEN MUCH GOOD AT IT

I could easier drain the Gobi
one hot grain at a time than sit –
an idle spectator –
as my ochered father
barely indents his hospital bed.
An antique engine, he chugs
a little harder, a little farther
before rattling to a dead halt.

Yet for my son's unfolding journey
I welcome the wait.
When did he drift to sleep without my story?
When did his timbre thicken like honey?

Always in the wait, a certain balance:
with every exhalation,
another breath.

THE IMAGE OF HUNGER IN THE IMAGE OF A FISH

you don't even see the fish at first: only the forks: almost marching: laying out the silhouette of the fins and tail: how many a body can feed: how each metal hand is reflected in the wet sand: a slicker side: some of them so shiny as to reflect the sky: others giving way to rust: the salt song of the sea: this corrosion: blood of the fish: not-fish: the yin-yang: what pangs lay in the negative space of the prongs: the song in the surf: wave after wave: rushing through the body: not-body: the sun is a lemon slice: flavoring everything: yellow and tart: it makes your lips pucker: thinking of the tang of it: so much so you see the body's scales and fins again: until: there is only the hunger of the fish: and the hunger for the fish

for Justin Courter

SHIPSHAPE

He lives in an elevator.
When he's too happy
he descends and inhales
as the doors open onto
radioactive gloom.
Other days his guts
drop as he rockets up
to the penthouse.
His gun rack folds
into a microwave,
his computer desk
into a bunk, and he
can watch himself sleep
in the radiant chrome.
No more mileage
on his sneakers, no
more lateral yearning,
just blushing rows
of buttons and
a clean electric room
with space for one.
How simple
it is to regulate
his hours. He thinks
about emergencies
once in a while, who
might answer if
he picked up
the blister-red phone,
the crises they might discuss.
Missing parts.
What to do in case of fire.

TWO ROOMS

One for bluebirds, one for crows.

One to sleep in.
One to air.

One for shadow, one for snow.

One for noise;
one for color.

One to weep in.
One to listen.

One for poems—one for hats.

One for Veuve Clicquot; one for ash.

One for butter cookies.
One for a clock.

One to polish, one to lock.

One for indecision—
one for Mondays.

One for camellias, one for a banjo.

One to wait, one to knock.

One for orange water.
One for a bitter leaf.

One to empty, one to fill.

THE BITTERNESS OF BEER OVER THE SWEETNESS OF HONEY

When I was seven I would taste so many sweet things,
like a glass of honey in water before bedtime.
But when I was eight, at last, finally,
in the backyard that hot July evening
after catching fireflies and putting them in a jar
with tiny holes punched in the lid to let them breathe
so they could flicker green in my dark bedroom,
and after mom gave me my ration of yet more teaspoons of honey,
after all this, at long last, dad let me have a sip of his beer

In my imagination beer was bubbly honey,
an amber sweetness I wasn't old enough to taste
until dad saw I was a man of eight.
Dad always seemed happier after drinking a glass or two
and I just knew that I would also after tasting it.
And so I let the bubbles tickle my nose but then
my tongue touched the bitter foam, an antihoney
so bitter I made an ugh face and dad laughed
and said that grown ups taste many bitter things
and that one day I might grow to like
the bitterness of beer over the sweetness of honey.
Then he sent me to bed
but the acrid taste made me forget the fireflies,
so I passed that night in near total darkness
without the comfort of flickering green.
I'm as old now as dad was then and since then
I hardly remember mom's honey water,
but I've tasted a daily smorgasbord of so much that's unsweet
that now I'm a connoisseur of bitter beers.

THE DOG'S TAIL

A day to sit around the room
and hang in repose
and study shadows clinging to walls:
a gloomy oak rocker,
a bowl of cherries,
the dog's tail tapping rhythms unseen.
The trees bend to let through light
and I'm unmoved as a candle unlit –

Shifting potentially,
flickered off.

That is not you subtle as the curtains;
you're among the bees upstairs ordering their places:
bathrobe to hanger,
sheets to hamper,
two shuffles and a stir –

Tap,
tap.

A stranger to this noise,
I was invited in.
Dust through the open door,
the tigers bid me farewell.

But for the fly on the wall,
exiled to the chair and chased to the door –
a thousand delights this afternoon:
apples ripening by a window,
birds visiting through glass,
an orange peel folding like a prism
and inside its rind,
someone else's labor –

Ripe,
fruit.

A PRAYER

Silence me.

Stop my words,
Eternal Word,
before Whom
not one of my own
is sufficient
or even necessary.

Let me be.

In Your presence,
Stop my breath,
O Breath of Life,
by Whose breath
we are born, and burn,

and occasionally soar.

THE PLEASURES OF THE BOOK

Assisi contributor Lesley Wheeler's new poetry collection, *Heterotopia*, is breathtaking. A simple explanation is that Liverpool, England is the heterotopia of the title, and Wheeler's poems examine that city from myriad angles and during many different eras.

This collection (winner of the Barrow Street Poetry Prize) deserves so much more than a simple explanation, however. It is lyrical and vigorous, engaging and challenging, with a depth and breadth that constantly surprise the reader. "The Calderstones," the crown of sonnets that is, in many ways, the emotional anchor of the work, is a tour de force, breathing new life and vitality into the sonnet form.

The sonnet sequence alone is reason enough to read *Heterotopia*, but it is only one of many pleasures to be found in this book. Wheeler's poetic vision is clear-eyed and merciful, unsentimental and kind. She presents, without frills or fanfare, the deprivations of poverty eased by a mother bathing her youngest son; the terror of the Blitz endured by clever, hungry children; and a poor, nursing mother casting a jaundiced eye at a judgmental Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Heterotopia's perspective is not merely historical, however, for Wheeler beautifully weaves together the interconnected stories of people from Liverpool's past with her own, contemporary experiences. Formal and free, lyric and down-to-earth, personal and historical, the poems in this collection astonish and amaze.

INFORMATION ON CONTRIBUTORS

Priscilla Atkins grew up in Illinois and has lived in Massachusetts, Los Angeles, and Hawaii. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry London*, *Poetry*, *Shenandoah*, *The Southern Review*, *The Dirty Napkin*, *Juked*, and other journals. She makes her home in Michigan, near the big lake of that name.

Sheila Black (MFA from the University of Montana, 1998) is the author of two poetry collections, *House of Bone* and *Love/Iraq* (both CW Press) and a chapbook, *How to be a Maquiladora* (Main Street Rag). She is currently editing (with Jennifer Bartlett and Mike Northen) *Beauty is a Verb*, an anthology of poetry of disability. She lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

DA Covington was born in Georgia. Lives in Vermont. And Writes.

Barbara Crooker's books are *Radiance*, winner of the 2005 Word Press First Book Award and finalist for the 2006 Paterson Poetry Prize; *Line Dance* (Word Press, 2008), winner of the 2009 Paterson Award for Excellence in Literature; and *More* (C&R Press, 2010). Her poems appear in a variety of journals, including *America*, *Christianity & Literature*, *The Christian Century*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Tiferet*, *Windhover*, *Sojourners*, *Perspectives*, *Relief*, *Ruminate*, *The Anglican Theological Review*, *The Cresset*, *The Basilica Review*, *Literature and Belief*, and anthologies, including *Good Poems for Hard Times* (Garrison Keillor, editor; Viking Penguin) and the *Bedford Introduction to Literature*.

Matthew Daddona is a senior at Brooklyn College. He has written for publications in Philadelphia and Long Island and has received honorable mention from the Academy of American Poets. He currently works at Donadio and Olson, a literary representative in Manhattan.

J. P. Dancing Bear is the author ten collections of poetry, most recently, *Inner Cities of Gulls* (2010, Salmon Poetry) and *Family of Marsupial Centaurs* forthcoming from Iris Press in 2011. His poems have been published in *Mississippi Review*, *Third Coast*, *Natural Bridge*, *Shenandoah*, *New Orleans Review*, *Verse Daily* and many other publications. He is editor for the *American Poetry Journal* and Dream Horse Press. Bear also hosts the weekly hour-long poetry show, *Out of Our Minds*, on public station, KKUP and available as a podcast.

Mark DeCarteret's work has appeared in the anthologies *American Poetry: The Next Generation* (Carnegie Mellon Press), *Brevity & Echo: Short Short Stories by Emerson College Alums* (Rose Metal Press), *New Pony: Collaborations & Responses* (Horse Less Press), *Places of Passage: Contemporary Catholic Poetry* (Story Line Press), *Thus Spake the Corpse: An Exquisite Corpse Reader* (Black Sparrow Press) and *Under the Legislature of Stars—62 New Hampshire Poets* (Oyster River Press) which he also co-edited. In 2009 he was selected as the seventh Poet Laureate of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. You can check out his Postcard Project at pplp.org.

donnarkevic: Weston, WV. MFA National University. Recent poetry has appeared in *Convergence Review*, *Earth Speak*, and *Off the Coast*. Recent short story publications include *Colere* and the anthology, *Seeking the Swan*. In 2005, Main Street Rag published *Laundry*, a poetry chapbook. Also in 2005, *The Interview*, a play, won 2nd place in the Playwright's Circle competition.

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. His most recent collection of poetry is *Waiting for the Angel* (2009). He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals, including *Massachusetts Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Alembic*, *New England Quarterly*, *Harvard Review*, *Modern Philology*, *Antioch Review*, and *Natural Bridge*. He won the 2010 Aesthetica poetry prize.

Matt Forrest Esenwine started writing at an early age - primarily poetry, short stories, and radio skits, which he would then record onto his father's Panasonic cassette recorder. As he got older, Matt moved into acting, radio, and voiceover work. His passion, however, was poetry, and he has had several poems published individually in numerous independent collections, including *The Henniker Review*, *Changes*, *Visions*, and the Tall Grass Writers Guild's *Seasons of Change*, among others. Matt lives in Warner, NH with his wife, son, and one of two daughters, and is currently seeking publication of a children's book of poetry.

Joseph Farley edited the *Axe Factory Review* for 24 years. His books and chapbooks include *Suckers*, *For The Birds*, and *The True Color of You*. His poetry collection, *Longing for the Mother Tongue*, is forthcoming from March Street Press. His poetry and short stories have appeared recently in *Sketchbook*, *Schlock*, *Sci-Fi Stories*, *Pyrta*, *BlazeVOX*, *Word Riot*, *Blue Crow*, *Folly*, *Ginosko*, *Clockwise Cat*, *Prole* (UK), *Turbulence* (UK) and *The Fringe* (Australia). Farley is a byproduct of 16 years of Catholic education, and three years of secular education, resulting in a BA from St. Joseph's University and an MA from Temple University.

Jeff Fearnside's creative work has appeared in more than two dozen national publications, including poetry in *Permafrost*, *Blue Earth Review*, and *The Los Angeles Review*; nonfiction in *The Sun*, *Etude*, and *New Madrid*; and fiction in *Rosebud*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Many Mountains Moving*. Twice his poems were named finalists in *Glimmer Train's* national poetry contests. His chapbook *Lake: And Other Poems of Love in a Foreign Land*, winner of the Standing Rock Cultural Arts 2010 Open Poetry Chapbook Competition, is scheduled for release in February 2011. He lives with his wife and two cats in Prescott, Arizona, where he is at work on a novel.

Richard Fein was a finalist in The 2004 Center for Book Arts Chapbook Competition. He will soon have a Chapbook published by Parallel Press, University of Wisconsin, Madison. He has been published in many web and print journals such as *Southern Review*, *Foliate Oak*, *Morpo Review*, *Ken*Again*, *Oregon East Southern Humanities Review*, *Skyline*, *Touchstone*, *Windsor Review*, *Maverick*, *Parnassus Literary Review*,

Small Pond, Kansas Quarterly, Blue Unicorn, Exquisite Corpse, Terrain Aroostook Review, Compass Rose, and many others. He also has an interest in digital photography and has published many photos. Samples of his photography can be found at www.pbase.com/bardofbyte.

Stan Galloway teaches at Bridgewater College in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. His poetry has appeared online at *vox poetica, Loch Raven Review, Caper Literary Journal,* and *The Atrium: A Journal of Academic Voices*. In print, his work is in *WestWard Quarterly, Midnight Zoo, the Burroughs Bulletin,* and the anthology *Edgar Rice Burroughs: The Second Century*. His book of literary criticism, *The Teenage Tarzan*, came out in 2010.

Sandra Giedeman lives in San Clemente, California. Her work has appeared in a variety of journals including *Critic, Poetry, Pearl, Press, Bellevue Literary Review* (NYU School of Medicine), *Cortland Review, Prosetoad, Paris/Atlantic, Poemeleon,* and others. Last year, she read at Shakespeare & Company in Paris. She won the Mudfish Poetry Prize judged by Charles Simic and is working toward having her book published.

Mark Goad was born in Ohio but has lived in New England since graduate school days in Boston. His academic background includes studies in English and German literature, theology and philosophy of religion. Both he and his wife, Margaret, are ordained clergy. Mark comes to poetry as a published author of short fiction and non-fiction religious writing. He very much admires the work of Rilke, Levertov, Milosz, Oliver, Berry (among many others). Of poetry, he believes "few words are needed if you know the right ones." He is currently in search of the right ones.

Danny Goodman suffers from an overactive imagination and unhealthy yet glorious dependence on coffee. He holds an MFA from the University of New Orleans and teaches both creative writing for the Gotham Writers' Workshop and English for SEO's High School Scholars Program in NYC. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in various places, most notably *Flatmancrooked, Brevity, Found Press,* and *Up the Staircase*. A two-time recipient of the Samuel Mockbee Award in Nonfiction, he runs the online literary journal, *fwriction : review*, and lives in Brooklyn.

Kathleen Gunton is a photographer and poet, who is never quite sure if photos feed her writing, or if words invite the picture. In either case, she is happy to be involved. She believes that one Art feeds another. Her images appear in publications such as *Folio, Ellipsis, Blood and Thunder, NCR, Shenandoah, Inkwell* and *The Healing Muse* (now in their online gallery). Kathleen teaches part time in Orange, CA.

A.H. Hofer lives in Covington, Kentucky and teaches English at Brown Mackie College - Cincinnati. He is a graduate of the MFA Program at Wichita State University. He has had work published in and/or forthcoming in several literary journals including *Willow Springs, Ascent Aspirations, Barrier Islands Review,* and *Willows Wept Review*.

John Infortunio has been teaching Literature at Bishop Ford High School for the past fourteen years. He began writing poetry in high school after being introduced to the Collected works of Pablo Neruda. During his years of study at Saint Francis College (Class of 1995) he was mentored by Dr. Stephen Marino and Dr. George Bush for his thesis in Poetry and American Literature. He currently holds a M.A. in American Literature from the College of Staten Island and has been published in various Poetry Anthologies. His most recently published poem, entitled *Circumstances, Alternatives and Road Trips*, was nominated for Best Poem of 2010 by Eber & Wein Publishing. Mr. Infortunio resides in Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn with his wife, Miriam and their seven year old son, Kevin.

Tade Ipadeola is a Nigerian poet. He has also published short stories. In 2009 his poem “Songbird” won the Delphic Laurel in poetry at Jeju, South Korea. He is currently working on his next collection of poetry, *The Sahara Testaments*.

Adrienne Lewis is a full-time faculty member and Department Coordinator of English, Communication and Social Science at Michigan’s Davenport University. Her creative work has appeared in numerous online and print venues, including her two chapbooks: *Coming Clean* (Mayapple Press, 2003) and *Compared to This* (Finishing Line Press, 2005). She continues to focus on issues of work and class that have led her to write and present about her own class experiences and current life in academe.

Lauren Linn is a mother, psychologist, writer, and artist living in Connecticut. She has taught at several institutions, including St. Francis College. Lauren recently assumed the position of Assistant Director of Counseling and Psychological Services at Fordham University. “In His Footsteps” is an original photograph of the glass floor of the Pequot Library in Southport, Connecticut. Lauren was struck by the photo’s emergent message that God’s light and love are truly in and all around us, and can be found in the most unlikely places.

Dru MaCauthor is a Virginian artist. As the current poetry editor for *RED OCHRE LiT*, she spends days reading and uses the accepted poems to inspire her evening paintings and photography. Her poetry and artwork has been published in a number of print and online venues, with the latest accepted photo, “Pregame Perfection,” being displayed on the Events page of the *RED OCHRE* website. For more information, please email: dru.macauthor@gmail.com.

Ian S. Maloney is Associate Professor of English at St. Francis College. He holds a PhD in English from the CUNY Graduate Center and is the author of *Melville's Monumental Imagination* (Routledge 2006).

Ann E. Michael's latest chapbook is *The Capable Heart* (2011, FootHills Publishing). She is a poet, essayist, librettist and educator who lives in eastern Pennsylvania. www.annemichael.com.

Irene Mitchell is the author of *Sea Wind on the White Pillow*, published by Axes Mundi Press (New York, 2009). She has taught writing in New York schools and now conducts a series of seminars on how to write better poetry. Mitchell, 2003-2006 poetry editor of *Hudson River Art* magazine, has published poems in literary reviews in the U.S. and England, and has been a juror in international poetry competitions, as well as featured reader of her work at various venues. She has collaborated with visual artists to create broadsides, and with composers who have set her poems to art song, the marriage of music and poetry.

David Derbin Nolta received a BA in Art History and English from The University of Michigan, where he won several Hopwood Awards. He received an MA in English from The University of Chicago and a Ph.D. in the History of Art from Yale. The recipient of Kress, Fulbright, and Mellon fellowships, Nolta is currently Professor of History of Art at Massachusetts College of Art and Design. He has lectured on topics ranging from Caravaggio to contemporary art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Wadsworth Atheneum, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, etc. Published work includes articles on the Rossettis, 17th- and 18th-century Italian painting, and contemporary art. Nolta's first novel, *Grave Circle*, was published in 2003, and his second, *Lostlindens*, appeared in 2005.

Lisa Marie Paolucci graduated from St. Francis College in 2006 as an English and Adolescence Education major and taught high school English for five years. She also completed a Master's degree in English at Brooklyn College and is coming to the end of her Master's degree in Information and Library Science from Pratt Institute. Lisa will be an adjunct lecturer for the English Department at SFC in Spring 2011. Deeply inspired by her visit to Assisi, Lisa continues to examine the many facets of her Italian/Italian American experience.

Joseph B. Raskin is a resident of the Cobble Hill section of Brooklyn. He is a graduate of York College, CUNY and has a Master's Degree from Queens College, CUNY. During the work week, Joe is the Assistant Director of Government and Communications for MTA New York City Transit. At other times, he prowls the streets of New York City looking for interesting views of the urban landscape to photograph. On rare occasions, he will travel out of the City. Joe has a 16-year old son and a 13-year old daughter who have the patience to stay with him while he takes his pictures.

Sarah Rehfeldt lives in western Washington with her family. She is a writer, artist, and photographer. Her most recent publication credits include: *Windhover; The Awakenings Review; A Prairie Journal; Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction;* and *Sketchbook*. Her photography web pages can be viewed at www.pbase.com/candanceski.

Tracy L. Seffers lives with her family under the shadow of the Blue Ridge on the Shenandoah River in West Virginia. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English from Lyon College in Arkansas, and her Master of Arts in English from the College of William and Mary in Virginia. Her poetry has been selected for public reading by the Jefferson

County WV Arts and Humanities Alliance (2008) and the West Virginia Writers podcast series (2010), and has been published in the *Bluestone Review* (2009) and the *Anthology of Appalachian Writers* (2010).

Linda Simone's work has most recently appeared on the travel/writing website, *Borderhopping.com*, and in *Assisi*, *Mandela*, *Alimentum's* Menu Poems, and the anthology *Lavanderia*. Her poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. *Cow Tippers* was a winner of the Shadow Poetry Chapbook Competition.

Wendy Vardaman, www.wendyvardaman.com, has a Ph.D. in English from University of Pennsylvania. Co-editor of the poetry journal *Verse Wisconsin* (www.versewisconsin.org), she is the author of *Obstructed View* (Fireweed Press 2009). She works for the children's theater, The Young Shakespeare Players, and does not own a car.

Richard Wells writes: I was born in Wyoming, and raised in Pennsylvania. I'm a south-westerly at heart, and a north-westerly by geography. I served in the US Army, cooked my way around the SW, organized neighborhoods in Seattle, and traveled the globe for Amazon.com. I'm currently organizing neighborhoods in Seattle around energy efficiency and sustainability. I live with Reggie Bardach, my wife of thirty plus years, and my latest good dog, Sam. I write every chance I get, rarely submit, and am very pleased to be included in the *Assisi* online journal.

Robert West's poems, essays, and reviews have appeared in *Able Muse*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *Poetry*, *Southern Poetry Review*, Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*, and other venues. He is the author of three poetry chapbooks: *Best Company* (Blink Chapbooks), *Out of Hand* (Scienter Press), and the forthcoming *Convalescent* (Finishing Line Press). Originally from the North Carolina mountains, he now teaches in the Department of English at Mississippi State University, where he also serves as associate editor of the scholarly journal *Mississippi Quarterly*. See <http://www.english.msstate.edu/faculty/West.html> for more information.

Lesley Wheeler is the author of *Heterotopia*, winner of the 2010 Barrow Street Press Poetry Prize, and of the 2009 collection *Heathen*; her most recent scholarly study is *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present* (Cornell University Press, 2008). Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Slate*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Wheeler has won fellowships from the Fulbright Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and other grantors. She is a Professor of English at Washington and Lee University and lives in Lexington, Virginia.

Diana Woodcock's first full-length collection, *Swaying on the Elephant's Shoulders*, won the 2010 Vernice Quebodeaux International Poetry Prize for Women and is forthcoming from Little Red Tree Publishing. Her three chapbooks include *In the Shade of the Sidra Tree* (Finishing Line Press, 2010), *Mandala* (Foothills Publishing, 2009), and *Travels of a Gwai Lo* by Toadlily Press (2009), whose editors nominated her for a Pushcart Prize. Recipient of the 2007 Creekwalker Poetry Prize, Diana has had her poems appear in *Best*

New Poets 2008, Nimrod, Crab Orchard Review, Portland Review and elsewhere. Currently teaching at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, she has taught in Tibet, Macau and Thailand.

Aida Zilelian is a NYC writer. Her short stories have been featured in *Pen Pusher* (UK), *SN Review, Visions, Slushpile, Wilderness House Literary Review, Suss: Another literary journal, The Fertile Source, Halfway Down the Stairs, The Writer's Block, Ararat Magazine, Lowestoft Chronicles* and the most recent issue of *Memewar*. She has written two novels and is currently seeking representation.

Claire Zoghb's full-length collection, *Small House Breathing*, won the 2008 Quercus Review Poetry Series Award and was published in fall 2009. Her work has appeared in *Connecticut Review, CALYX, Saranac Review, Mizna: Prose, Poetry and Art Exploring Arab America, and Natural Bridge*, and in the anthologies *Through A Child's Eyes: Poems and Stories About War, Eating Her Wedding Dress: A Collection of Clothing Poems, and CRUSH*. Twice a Pushcart Prize nominee, Claire was the winner of the 2008 Dogwood annual poetry competition. She lives with her husband in New Haven, where she works as Graphics Director at Long Wharf Theatre.