et al.: ICON Spring 2010

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ICON

magazine for literature and art

is student-produced since 1965 at Kent State University Trumbull campus and published yearly at the end of the Spring semester.

Poetry, fiction, and nonfiction: We accept all forms, themes, styles, and genres of 700 words or less; we limit the number of submissions to six (poetry) and three (fiction and nonfiction) per author per issue. Submissions must be typed. Fiction and nonfiction should be submitted in standard, double-spaced format. Send submissions to: Dr. Michael Lynch/ICON/Department of English/Kent State University/4314 Mahoning Ave. NW/Warren, OH 44483 (mlynch@kent.edu). Enclose SASE (self-addressed, stamped envelope) if you want submissions returned; disposable submissions are preferred. Include e-mail address. Pays one copy. Deadline February 5.

Artwork and Photography: Submit copies, not originals, in black and white or color; 5 x 7 inches. Limit of six submissions. High quality photocopies accepted. Pays one copy.

Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest: Annual award of $100 for best poem. Submit a maximum of two poems to Dr. Gary Ciuba at ICON’s mailing address c/o Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest by February 5. The winning poem is published in ICON.

Subscriptions: ICON is available free to Kent State University Trumbull campus students, staff, and faculty. Those off campus may purchase individual copies for $4.00 or subscribe for $8.00/year (2 issues). http://www.trumbull.kent.edu/Arts/ICON/index.cfm

Special thanks to Marion Wofter and Arlene Rosemond of the campus copy center, who take special care in preparing ICON; and to Dr. Gary Ciuba, who coordinates the Hart Crane Poetry contest.

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Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest
2010 Selection

James K. Zimmerman

Kobayashi's Quest

his mother weaned him instantly at six months
when in a fit of howling need he
devoured her left breast whole

and then at three he gulped down
his favorite tricycle in one sitting
leaving only the bell to ring as he
finished off the second pedal

at eight he discovered that when he ate
his brother's pet akita the fur at the neck
tickled the back of his throat but still
he kept it down

and unimpressed by goldfish-eaters or
gobblers of live carp and koi his hunger
called him not to break the bank in Vegas
or the Dow on Wall Street but to

conquer Coney Island's boardwalk and
the dogs of Nathan's Famous
fifty at a time and then to
perfect his reptilian technique on

burgers brats and brains
pork buns and rice balls
girlfriends and lobster rolls

in secret his mother
now an amazon was proud
of his ability to unhinge his jaw
like an anaconda and morph into
the greatest professional eating machine
the world has ever seen
Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest
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Artwork

Olivia Devorich front cover; 27
Bret Matula back cover
Jaime Shuster 11; 34
Eva Lawson 12
Victoria Van Horn 17
Allyson Hibbard 18
April Dunn 28; 33
James K. Zimmerman

time he was just a little one
I could see it in his eyes she said
from her breastless trikeless akitaless home

he wants to be the needle’s eye
through which the camel goes

Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest Honorable Mention

Matt Schumacher

On Behalf of the Silken Yet Difficult Lives of Spiders

Why simply pity the fly when this world
Spares the spider so little hurt?

Only a fortunate dearth of fear and nerves
Partly disarms the war the earth has reserved

For the arachnid, tethered to its masterwork.
Holding still all the while, waiting for prey or a mate

With many eyes in array, it is blind,
A hanging decoration at which fate may take aim and fire

Shot after shot, suspended regardless of bad weather.
Its webs must ascend, pressured to resolve wings,

To rise and evolve. Try to hide, and a scientist decides
To solve your problem by striking a powdered sock:

Matt Schumacher

All your plans, your webs made pale, visibly public.
But at least you won’t feel parasitic wasps

Needle your insides with eggs of devouring larva
Or the boiling acid squirt from bombardier beetles,

The booteel or shampoo bottle in the shower.
There’s small comfort for the harvestman, or daddy-long-legs,

Harmless stiltwalker onto beach towel and picnic basket,
Who strides by on its handful of broken guitar strings,

Its body little more than a quixotic dot: it never fears,
Even when caught by inquisitive child.

The male jumping spider taps, scrapes,
Dances, and sings for a brief interlude to preserve his kind.

Afterward, like a true nihilist, he feels nothing at all
As the hungry female of his species eats him alive.
James K. Zimmerman

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Elizabeth Taryn Mason

She’s Done Talking

She’s known about the pregnancy for fourteen days, my sister, four nights without sleep, four months off Lexapro, and her voice is thin and low, each syllable a sigh, each breath a whisper, each silence haunted.

I am two hours away by car; seven thousand two hundred seconds from saving her, if I knew how. She’s four nights without sleep, four months off Lexapro and for fourteen days she’s thought about ending this pregnancy, ending her life, just ending. It’s a Wednesday afternoon and her voice is thin and slow and we make a plan for the rest of the day. She’ll set up an appointment with an acupuncturist, take a shower, go for a walk, call me if it gets bad. But, she says she’s tired of talking. After all, it’s been four nights without sleep and she tells me that she can’t make it through another night and she doesn’t know what to do anymore; if acupuncture will work or if a massage would work better and she won’t, doesn’t want, to hurt the baby, but she does want to terminate this pregnancy, end her life, just end all of this. She wants to go back in time and change her mind. She wants her body back, wants it to belong to her alone so that she can take whatever she needs, wants to stop letting her husband down, wants to be a better mother to her daughter, wants to stop disappointing our parents. What does a little sister say in return, when her sister’s voice is thin and haunted,

when she hasn’t slept in days, when she’s pitching the phone into the kitchen counter, when she’s so far away from the woman she imagined being, when she’s screaming, I have ruined my life. I have ruined my life. I have ruined my life.

Rose Jakubaszek

My Mother is Still My Mother

Whenever I spend the night my mother is a silent, tiny leaning sentinel over my childhood bed in the early morning hours. Motionless she just watches until I feel her breath on my face.

“Ma, I’m OK,” I say groggily, and she whispers, “Are you warm enough?” “Yes, I’m fine.” “Can you sleep?” “Yes, I’m sleeping.” “I’m making you French toast for breakfast, sweetheart.” “Thanks, Ma. I’ll see you in the morning.” Satisfied, my mother slowly turns, and does the senior citizen shuffle back to her own room.

And then I get up to bring my mother a blanket and a cup of chamomile tea, and I do my own shuffle in the dimly lit cold kitchen for the ingredients and pan I will use in the morning to make my mother French toast.

Because my mother is still my mother even though I do the caregiving now, and she doesn’t know how to ask her daughter for anything, never has, never will, so she speaks in code to get what she wants and I’m learning the language of dementia.
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and I'm learning the language of dementia.
Middleton Watts

death in the bay

how the loveless fall from that
Golden Gate Bridge. how all their
final words go unheard, their fingers
failing to find one last embrace to make
more living bearable. and as they fall
as they tumble over and over
and down toward that dark gray grave
some have their limbs spread wide by velocity
spinning out like ragdoll stars, like shattered human kites
while others tuck in close to themselves
chins pressed to broken hearts
arms and legs together, perhaps wanting to enter
death with no more of a splash than they made in life.
in 2004, 24 people jumped to their deaths from
the Golden Gate Bridge. 3 were never found.
the rest were pulled from the bay by
Coastguard crews in hazmat suits and masks
hooking on to the bobbing corpse with long white poles
while pleasure boaters rode the whitened crests nearby
and tourists looked through shrouds of fog for Alcatraz.

Middleton Watts

sunlight splits the gray

a quick summer shower.
one minute the skies are elephant gray,
folded in and upon themselves, fattened
with moisture, covering this minute section
of earth like the dull guts of a storage room.
the rain falls in arrow straight lines, a billion
strands of silken web affixing themselves
to the sunless ground. and then, like an
unsubstantiated memory, the gray is
gone, the skies now split by brilliant spears
of sunlight, drying the wet sheen of the earth’s
countenance in seconds, and with the quick
turn of a page, a new image is revealed.
blue skies, a few albino clouds, drifting like ducks
on an infinite pond, and that ever glorious sun,
resting in the deep black of space, a deep black
where such blue is never known.
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Patrick Carrington

A Letter to My Grandfather

This is the doorway you squared, the oak you planed
and hung, the diamond of glass your wife
misted over, waiting. When you walked in, it
separated the two of you from out there, from them,
their probing headlights from your life. This is
the threshold you carried her across and yourself
the other way, to factories with the weight
of the world, and the pears and pennies you earned
or stole and repaid as soon as times allowed. When
I step out I feel your calloused palm on my shoulder
and try to move as you moved--always
with purpose, with a stride that accounts for the fruit
and meat of my father, that reveres your hands, your
blisters and scars, your broken bones, that hopes
to find a hint of how a god advances, how grace
becomes as close, as simple, as a splinter in the skin.

Patrick Carrington

Voyeur

A storm is very much a human affair. Not
simply a force of gigantic fans and faucets
where one must maintain distance
and a resignation to impotence,
but a partnership in mischief. You can
trespass, eavesdrop on seduction. Catch
her in the act of removing his clothes.
It is foreplay how she unbuttons
landscape and teases it with rakes of nails.

Have you ever seen her windfingers fondle
a hard elm? Seen not only the earth
splayed naked but her hips ride and rage,
her hands tear the branches of his hair,
her sky-eyes wild with passion? Tonight
through curtain split I spy her entrance.
There is that special sway, that naughty
purr. She is prowling. I feel a bit dirty
when I see her eyes stare back at me.

She wants me to watch.
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A Trespass of Radiance

I believe in ghosts.

I have seen their shadows shifting through the blurry center of night. Squinting, I know they are there, bright inside the moonbands that softly wrap their edges. And I have heard darkness ache with their nightmares. I have listened, as if my unscarred ears could share their song, my throat capture courage so cheaply to sing of everlasting wounds that leave them that stricken and white. I, in my safe bed, worried by the tiny rages of day, its petty holocausts, have reached out to touch their light. Arrogantly trespassed the thorns, not understanding midnight is a deep, dark thing, or that privacy bolts and braces their beacon.
Patrick Carrington

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Shari O'Brien

Bulletproof

I have learned
that nothing
is bulletproof,
not the bricks which surround me
in the feeble fortress I call home,
not the bedclothes
beneath which I curl,
fetus-like, half-snug,
and not your arms,
proven to be no shields at all
against the slugs you once were sure
you could protect us from.

What Is Left of Us Who Slept

And while I slept you folded flat
my heart among the clothes you packed.
And while I slept you scrawled a line
that laid it out unflinchingly,
the truth for once—love died, goodbye.
And while I slept you signed it Me
(your cockeyed logic yet at work)
implies you're still somehow half
of what is left of Us who slept.
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James Doyle

Beachcombing after a Storm

The waves should have coughed up
onto the sand old wine bottles
from yesterday’s drunk, and 16th century
casks from the Spanish galleons.

There should be Chinese junk
-cracked in exhaustion from their trip
halfway around the world, and shark
cartilage betting itself against cancer.

There should be invisible bodies
that have fidgeted in the water
for centuries to wash up
and pin their bone fragments on the shore.

I should be able to build
a sea wall of the sea’s moult
to fill the wind with sandpipers
and the linings with feathers of rust.

But there is nothing, nothing at all,
nothing to interrupt the sand
steadily gnawing away at the water
like a swarm of army ants.

David Sapp

Grateful

I am grateful for the cold,
relentless rain cast from clouds
so low the deluge doesn’t have far
to fall upon house and head,
assailing shingles, panes, and walk,
filling gutters, downspouts,
Old Woman Creek, and the wide estuary.

Today there’s no gathering
the white pines’ fallen limbs,
victims of the winter’s ice storm;
no cutting and dragging of carcasses
heavy with sap; no heaving
branches across a meadow and over a bank;
no new summer warrens for rabbits.

There’s time, a luxurious epoch,
for Chopin; a Nocturne would give sound
to the thick mists sifting through damp woods;
but let it be a Mazurka,
a bright, voluptuous dance
from the Polish village of his youth,
gaiety from a close, overcrowded cottage,
the piano as unpredictable
as the rain’s pelting notes.
James Doyle

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gaiety from a close, overcrowded cottage,
the piano as unpredictable
as the rain’s pelting notes.
Goodnight to the skies
Goodnight to the stars
Goodnight to the near to the far
  Goodnight to the forgotten
  Goodnight to the lost
  Goodnight to before to after

Goodnight to what is white
Goodnight to what is not
Goodnight to every color quelling
  Sleep as the night quietens
  Sleep as the milk whitens
  Sleep as the breasts of Goddess Hathor

The eyes of the night
have closed like windows
upon the doze of an indolent mobile
  A spoon glints a bead of moon
  A washcloth naps upon bibs
  A pat of soap dreams of a star

Sea shushes the beach quiet
The night is composed
The dark is even
  Two gloves clasp to say goodnight
  Two knobs on a door bid adieu
to a water-blanketed riverbed

Time pours slowly from denseness
An hour is like a day
The horizon is always waiting
  The dawn is lost in sleep
  The morning cannot be found
  Tomorrow is forgetting to wake
Dennis Saleh

Coo

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Goodnight to the stars
Goodnight to the near to the far
    Goodnight to the forgotten
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    Tomorrow is forgetting to wake
Michelle L. Felicetty

The Longing

If the rain could cleanse all the things that I’ve done, and bring me back to where we’d begun, could I do it all again? even if it caused me pain? would I do it all again, and let the same song be sung?

If the rain could wash away every moment I withdrew, and erase all the hell you put me through, if the rain could wash away, leaving only the good memories behind, would we ourselves happiness find?

Would we see together the lives that we grew, or was the rain the only one who knew? would my life still matter even without you? would we shelter ourselves? what else could we do?

Would you hide away with me under a spring tree, and let time melt away, as still the rain would stay?

Would it prove my point? would it all disappear? could the rain make it all become so clear?

Could I do it again even if it caused me pain, or should I suffer here forever? Left standing in the rain.
Michelle L. Felicetty

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Could I do it again even if it caused me pain, or should I suffer here forever? Left standing in the rain.
Stanley Radhuber

Postcard from Fall River, Oregon

Up 5,000 feet, 200 miles from my pepper patch, in Kubla Khan dreams, fishing all day, the stream quietly hunching out of the mountain at 37 degrees Fahrenheit—constant all year—an even flow. Trout frolic in their holes, feed facing the current. Birds stuffed with insects glide from branch to branch. Morning is blue—clouds at the far horizon over the valley, and the lingering vibrations of the village bells we heard before the ascent; airplanes intrude, hum, and are gone. Noon spreads thinly; the afternoon hangs on the hot trees. We are afraid of bears and burn the fish heads. The blue curtain lowers. A coyote calls together softly the ribbed woods at evening; the moon dreams; static pours from the radio; the desert is far away—pillars of fire in Gaza. Birds disappear in the darkening branches; color gives way to shape and the whole swaying shadowy world. Morning, afternoon, and night sing together and we are soft, full of lore, walking high on pine feet, remembering things we haven’t lived. A bit of bourbon to ease into sleep; we are innocent. Fear slips away. Weed my pepper patch. I will be back.

Stanley Radhuber

Lines for Those Who Mourned

--at a cocktail party the day after a funeral

The bright room
accents of soft quince, flowering plum
a dark abstract
and strawberries floating in the punch

Sunday afternoon
traceries of vines—ivy, wisteria—
light like a buoy
(we have just come from the dead)

She weaves
among the figures standing there
heads tilted
attentive as sculpture,
her face soft from weeping
her eyes a tapestry of grief

She moves
across the French doors
by the dark cores of the conifers
into and out of shadows

And I rise,
follow her in this bowl bright chalice
on a Sunday afternoon,
slipping into air
quietly taking us
from the dead,
feeling now for light, we are
fingers feeling for the light,
feeling for each other.
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And I rise, follow her in this bowl bright chalice on a Sunday afternoon, slipping into air quietly taking us from the dead, feeling now for light, we are fingers feeling for the light, feeling for each other.
John Sierpinski

De Noon, Wisconsin

Lake De Noon sprouts rippled waters within flat alfalfa fields. De Noon, brandy filtered sun, yellow weeds, pee warm springs, box turtles and dung. I spit water after it plunges into my nose, burning. Water drips down my skinny legs, and bird wing shoulder blades. We have come out from the hot city with neighbors, in our tail finned Chevy. Behind the sandy beach inside the adjacent tavern the light is dim, the weather is cool and damp, and the beer flows with the sound of wooden pop guns. The glow of a girlish cigarette illuminates my mother's face. "Quit flirting with that barfly," my father says to her. "I am not," she replies. Then, "Order me another drink." I am a shadow that steals into the "Men's Room" where it smells of rotting piss. (The dark hole sucks my own down like velvet, like liquid glass.) I try and hide my penis with my fingers from the man next to me. Then, back outside to the beach, the sand, and the pregnant water. Pauly has fallen in--face first in six inches of lake. I'm on a towel a hundred feet away. His three-year-old arms and legs flail. Before I can move, Stanly, his father, is running. He is all bouncing, white skin. His sand-coated

John Sierpinski

trunks stick to his rear. He scoops up Pauly in a clumsy grasp, and the child ends up shivering in a towel within his mother's arms. Later, a black inner tube bobs next to the white, paint peeled raft. The raft floats on rusted oil barrels. Black Flies are biting. They leave pin holes in my body and hurt. Blood. I dive in again and again to escape only to come up and see the flies waiting on the slippery wet rubber. Each time I surface there are blue shouts and red squeals. Kids jump off of the diving board. I sink down into the wet mist over and over and over.

Richard Dinges, Jr.

This Side

She washes sun porch windows, stands outside among withered garden plants stomped flat underfoot, wipes a towel across cold hard glass while I sit inside and watch, wondering if she sees me or just grime to be cleansed, rubbing hard until glass is so clear it reflects the world around her, her own face in the middle, replacing images on this side of the glass.
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She Arrives

She arrives at inconvenient times, comes into my dreams day or night, in the middle of sit-ups when my mind is occupied with sweat and gasps for air, those long smooth legs and tanned calves losing focus beside my knobby knees, a face imprinted on gray tiles above a urinal, my hands busy with other tasks, that soft swish of loose skirts, that billow through a leaf pile caught by wind that I can never gather quickly enough, always a few escaping my grasp, so that when I am done, more leaves drop, gently floating away with my thoughts lost in a sky too deep and blue to see anything more.

Sharon Doyle

The Silverback Gorilla's

brows braid
deep into his face--
score the flicker in
his burnt-out eyes.

His leaden knuckles flirt with
his two-way picture window,
sharpen the bristles of his beard,
drop to the floor of his room and bounce
back in fists on muscled arms
that drag his walk--sidle, even--
up to industrial-strength reflections
of our faces.

Like dolphins,
who let us swim with them,
gorillas behave like kin, so
maybe it is not perversion
when I peer into the eyes and
see--always--more than I think I should.
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Lorraine Tolliver

Deep Dust

Autumn eyes
sweep back to summer
here where
Santa Monica mountains
hug the California sky,
car engines beat the air
into a yellow froth.
People, people, people
step off curbs,
shift shopping bags,
smile at the thought of dinner.
Ah, the face and form
of the friendly amalgam,
the green stem of being--
beloved eyes,
gestures, voices,
touches of welcome.
The hurrying crowd
pulls back the flavor
of forty years ago,
those ever-ever days--
spinning on hope
and heartbreak--Oh so digging--
into the red core of wish and will
yes--the song, the rhythm
of days and nights,
the glances that love and hate,
joy, death, and simple breath
here, now,
to greet old visions
with new seeing,
to sprinkle time over them,
coating them with a glimmer
of what is to come.
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James Valvis

Donuts

The clerk is a young girl with earrings on either side of her lower lip, makeup all over her eyes like a perfectly planned bruise. She must do this to draw attention to herself, maybe from parents, maybe others. He’s here for the donuts, donuts the size of Ohio, a dozen of them babies, but now he’s ashamed. Good God, he’s so fat the ground says ouch whenever he steps.

If they have self-serve gas, why not self-serve donuts? He stares into the glass case, the donuts singing to him like chocolate frosted sirens. He looks at the counter girl. How in hell does she eat with earrings in her lip? She probably doesn’t, which is why she’s so thin. Maybe he should pierce both his lips, he thinks, then tells her it’ll be a dozen. While she’s boxing the donuts, he says they aren’t all for him. She shrugs at his dull lie. He thanks her for that, glad that the bigger he gets the more invisible he becomes.
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John Randolph Carter

Go Away

Far away where
no one can find you.
Hide under a log or
behind a tree.
Pretend to be a bush.
Go to a land of rocks and boulders and
be medium-sized and inconsequential.
Go to a land of water and
be a warm current.
Grow a beard, wear a toupee,
speak a language no one understands.
Live in a cave with furry creatures.
Lie just below the surface of a lake and
breathe through a straw.
Move through the forest, changing
from light to shadow and back again
so quickly that even the
squirrels are not sure
what you are.
Go far away to the distant mountains.
Find a land without
roads or trails or paths.
Wander about aimlessly.
Leave everything.
Leave everyone.
Go.

John Randolph Carter

Preposterous Monkey Balls

The rhinoceros leaps high in the air.
Soldiers fire their rifles in the ground.
The moon makes a groaning sound,
heard throughout the solar system.
A bird chooses to walk rather than fly.
Cowboys with nothing better on their minds
forage for wild tomatoes behind the corral.
Infants with extreme ambition begin
studying for their college entrance exams.
Buttons pop off the chests of proud parents.
Nobody is perfect.
Monotony is suspect.
Trials are leaky.
Nobody is amused.
Somebody misses the boat.
Art Linkletter is late for his appointment.
Birds follow suit.
Cameras catch the action.
No matter.
A minor annoyance.
A near disaster.
A sad state of affairs.
A groom with several teeth missing.
A monster disguised as a peninsula.
John Randolph Carter

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Rebecca J. Barreca

Ode to Patient Care

(a warning to nurses concerning proper patient documentation)

Greeting patients, saying “Hello!”
patient care, you’re ready to go

opening curtains
tucking sheets
fluffing pillows

washing hair
bathing skin
massaging lotion

cleansing wounds
smearing ointments
wrapping gauze

puncturing arms
drawing blood
sending labs

checking labels
verifying wristbands
dispensing meds

consoling hearts
teaching minds
advocating rights

all noble work, but when you’re through it
if you didn’t write it, you didn’t do it!
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Family Gathering

We get together every holiday and sometimes just to maintain friendships more than family. This January, we gathered again.

In the hospital for days. Saturday was the worst. At the funeral home, then the hearse.

We could see each other’s breath as we gathered around the coffin lost in our thoughts. Prayers said, flowers given to kin.

Matthew says, “Are you all waiting on me?” Let’s remember him, but start anew. He is finally free.
Linda Fuchs

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Let’s remember him, but start anew.
He is finally free.
Katherine Murphy

before I finish living

a kitchen door closes behind me
I carry fish and vegetables
steaming hot from the oven
the table is set with silverware
crockery, glass tumblers
candles luminous

beams of light through the garage
amidst furniture
rooms rearranged
filled with wings
something’s hidden
someone’s calling
I cannot remember

names or faces
the lake in full view swelling
outside the window
things fly apart
without forewarning
before I am ready
before I ever sit down to eat.

Katherine Murphy

Deprivation

If you look
you will see them
everywhere but
mostly they go unnoticed
on darkened street corners
along underpasses
outside back door alley ways
across from fast food restaurants

while the others sip champagne
or Absolut with a twist
discuss the morning’s editorials
the stock market
the right college for their kids
the next day’s regimen at the gym

while ordering chicken pate
lobster bisque and chateaubriand
to carry home in doggie bags
to throw away
to starve themselves
come morning
because they can.
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Robert Cooperman

The Sign

His sign reads, “Must get to brother’s funeral, have run out of money. This is not a scam!” Genius or genuine.

“What can it cost?” I ask myself; worth it, to keep my conscience clean of well-fed cynicism.

But an imp whispers for me to demand, “Where is it?” and offer him a ride: to see if he fumbles, or ignores me, or tells me to screw myself; or if I’d really be obligated to drive him all that long sad way.

“But what if it’s all a ploy for him to get into my car and then pull a gun?” I panic at the thought of that equalizer of wealth pointed at my head.

But before I can ask, “Tell me the truth, you get the buck either way,” the light changes; I ease into a left turn, put blocks between my curiosity and my guilt.

William Dauenhauer

The Woman without a Support Group

Brief were my days among you, and briefer still the words I have spoken.

--Khalil Gibran

She chose the nonconformity of one not craving the quite costly support of others--

she knew conformity smothers at once creativity and the loneliness love demands.

She sensed that as with death and birth one drifts alone toward an unguessed consequence--

and tendered sympathy can only serve as sticky net to hold those less courageous, those less bold.
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Lowell Jaeger

Along the Trail to Hidden Meadow

A Swallowtail perches on my blue bandana. Stays with me through paintbrush, lupine, yarrow, as I catch my breath in the rippled shade of an alpine grove.

Waits while I think back to butterflies, whole Julys without school I zigzagged, swinging my long-handled net. Clumsy fingers crushed wings. Glittered scales gone pale chalked my prints on the killing jar.

I worked hard those summers to be proud of the mounting board, species labeled rank and file. And felt sorry, too. Lepidoptera are sweet people. Natives. Some say holy.

This one fans his wings against my bandana. Whispers, as the aspen quake. Like no specimen under glass knows how.

Lowell Jaeger

Amidst the Green World Turning...

...early geese bound southward, alfalfa baled and frosted as I drive into the sunrise, sip this semester’s first paper cup of java...


And again I enter a new roster of names, their faces searching mine for...what? I’ve survived--fall to winter to spring--and offer hope our bones know the way.

I chalk our course one morning into the next. As we begin again winging our way blind.
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. . . early geese bound southward, alfalfa baled and frosted as I drive into the sunrise, sip this semester’s first paper cup of java . . .


And again I enter a new roster of names, their faces searching mine for . . . what? I’ve survived --fall to winter to spring-- and offer hope our bones know the way.

I chalk our course one morning into the next. As we begin again winging our way blind.
Joan Colby

Western Minnesota

Balsams throng the river's edge.
Lovers of poverty, stark
And ascetic in black needles.

A communion of the faithful.
Thin soil, dark water.
Bristly nuns chanting plainsong.

Ice curdles the shoreline. Fractured
Slabs. Midstream the river
Runs freely, a cold snake.

A rounded barn crouches
On the far bank. Smoke plumes
From the farmhouse chimney.
This country
Is large and vacant.

Two hawks circle
A dull January sky. East of here
The land flattens and pours
Like batter as far as you can see.
Anchored by occasional houses,
Its pretensions are of use
Not beauty. A woman in a door
Calls to a man on a tractor
Pushing snow
Into neat clumps like bumper crops
And a dog crosses
The road purposefully
Carrying something dead.

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Joan Colby

When You Wake in the Night

The world returns to its simple goblet
Of tree and water.

A half hinge moon
Creaks the dusk as insects crescendo.

I believe
In the one star I wish on
Traveling its burnt-out path
Forever away from me.

The bushes hide terrible secrets
Of massacre and decay.

White iris and mulberries,
A toad shaping silence
Among the gravestones.

A deer wanders into the clearing
Wearing socks of mist.
A bat swoops like a devil's kiss.

The wind shoulders the world
Shifting on massive haunches.
Death is nothing.

Every night we audition
For oblivion
Dreaming how light melted through our pores,
How our hair danced
In a waterless deep, how far beyond our grasp
Our breathing alters.

The maple leaf's lifeline.
The inquires of mourning doves.
The mustangs that gallop
The mountain passes.
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Lyn Lifshin

My Father Leaves Vilnius

On the night we leave Vilnius, I bring goats next door in the moon. Since I am not the youngest, I can’t wait pressed under a shawl of coarse cotton close to Mama’s breast as she whispers “hurry” in Yiddish. Her ankles swell from ten babies. Though she is only thirty her waist is thick, her lank hair hangs in strings under the babushka she swears she will burn in New York City. She dreams others point and snicker near the tenement, that a neighbor borrows the only bowl she will bring that was her mother’s and breaks it. Tonight every move must be secret. In rooms there is no heat in, no one puts on muddy shoes or talks. It is forbidden to leave, a law we will break like the skin of ice on pails of milk. Years from now, a daughter will write that I didn’t have a word for America yet, this night of a new moon. Mother presses my brother to her, warns everyone even the babies must not make a sound. Frozen branches creak. I shiver at men with guns near straw roofs on fire. It took our old samovar, every coin to bribe someone to take us to the train. “Pretend to be sleeping,” father whispers as the conductor moves near. Mother stuffs cotton in the baby’s mouth. She holds the mortar and pestle wrapped in my quilt of feathers closer, tells me I will sleep in this soft blue in the years ahead. But now I’m knocked sideways into the ribs of the boat so seasick I can’t swallow

John Brantingham

Let’s Hope We Fit In

In our front yard, we have a pomegranate tree sitting there waiting for Persephone’s return in Spring, and in the back there’s a bay tree for any Olympian from the classical age of Greece who might happen by. We have an olive tree too, and I don’t know the myth about that one, but one of those Greeks must have been into olives. Anyway, Annie and I seem to be preparing for a return to some age of heroes and gods, and I don’t know if they’ll be bothered by the ten freeway running nearly through our yard, or the rap music thumping down the streets or the planes taking off from Ontario Airport or the buses, the smog, the dogs barking at kids high on whatever, the strip malls or the concrete rivers, but Annie and I are just fine.
Lyn Lifshin

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Charles Tisdale

When I Was Sick

There is an island in the river
Where the marshes steam; the sun cannot find
The trees, your voice like the noise of gulls
On a distant shoal, accusatory screech,
Beaks bothering the mollusks at their feet.
My nails are too much conscious of themselves,
Pressing white their ivory on skin,
Clawing for a place above sea level,
My throat being so many sand spurs,
Bones so many shells. Is it possible
To be so sick of the ease of your comings
And goings, the swish of your feathers
Preening themselves for my attention,
Circling your wingspan around the limits
Of this otherwise unpeopled landscape?
Those who cannot fly have nothing else
To climb but the bone of their own misease,
Skin of a selfish texture, ivory the same.

Slowly the sea dissolves to the sponge bath
At my neck, my shoulders, cool water mixing
With the drops of an ordeal that has been
Left behind, crumpled bedclothes like heaps
Of flotsam forsaken by the waves washing
Me up on shore, a piece of driftwood
Buried partly, partly free. When I close
My eyes I hear only the soft rustle
Of palmettos, smell only the odor
Of bay myrtle, its burning sweetness,
The gentle pressure of shade drawing me
Out of myself yet inward to a place
The mind can focus on its horizons,
Lifting myself from this dependence
On the body’s relentless fever
To survive. Yet still I cannot look you
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Neal A. Zirn

Exposed

Her hair was like whiskey, reddish brown (burned going down) a small frame with a big move to the outside.

She owned a trailer the size of a hatbox, that resided in a nudist colony surrounded by a forest, birds, and a high, clear sky. The inside was like a gypsy parlor, with hanging beads, plush pillows, and air perfumed by exotic incense.

We had been a couple for a few years, and on weekends, when the weather was warm, we’d hang out at the trailer, me in a cap and flip-flops, feeling free as nature meant me to be, she a patch of curls on a canvas skin.

Since there was nothing to hide, we didn’t. Mood, body, mind, and desire, all visible.

Like the naked truth, basking in the sun.