ICON
spring 2014
ICON

*magazine for literature and art*

is published annually in the spring semester at Kent State University Trumbull campus since 1965.

**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 (mflynch@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 for the annual Spring issue is February 1.

**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. Include a letter stating submissions are for this contest, and a maximum of two poems to Dr. Carol Robinson, Hart Crane Poetry Contest (address above) by January 15. 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

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Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest
2014 Co-Winner

Jeffrey P. Beck

Pharmakeia *

Up and down, her naked body, up and down, caressing the loom frame, glittering Circe of the gorgeous hair, tiny hands fluttering the weft threads up the warp to the beam, weaving Helios, All-Seeing, with his fiery mounts, up and down she moves, falling and bending for new threads, and up and down he watches, a man never at loss for words, the scarred leader of the scarred band, but now his tongue suddenly numb, his head tossing in the wide sea, his eyes glazed as a school boy's, his ears bewitched by song, her song of wayward men blown to uncharted shores, while scarred ones sup sweet poison from her lips, now rooting pigs and snarling dogs, so he crushes slowly the moly capsule in his molars, tasting the bitter, his only weak antidote to her wild power.

* Sorcery or magic; related also to Circe's pharmakon, her skilled use of drugs.
Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest

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James K. Zimmerman

The Day the Vultures Moved In Across the Street

the old oak wondered where in hell they all came from
dozens of the old buzzards squatting on his aching limbs
playing pinochle and slurping muddy black tea

sometimes they would spread their craggy wings
and try to sell stolen watches from underneath
or just sit there thumbing through tattered photo albums
telling cute little stories about their perfect grandchildren
like the time little Mirabella dragged a squirrel carcass
all the way home from the A&P parking lot by herself

and sometimes on days when the sun overpowered
the afternoon clouds we were certain we saw the craven
profiles of starving cattle or scraggly cowpokes
lost in the desert heat while our new black tuxedoed
neighbors leered down from their oaken balcony

but maybe we were just making it up

and one time three or four of them posed for mug shots
in exact imitation of the symbol emblazoned on the flags
and coins of Kaiser Wilhelm or the Third Reich or something

they denied it of course
insisting they only meant to be sunning themselves

but most of the time they just sat there weighing down
the branches of the sainted oak with their carping gossip
nudging each other forward in the food-stamp line
wishing they could shave and shower before dinner
in the soup kitchen
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James K. Zimmerman

please, they said, none of this undertaker's friend or
harbinger of death or embodiment of evil crap anymore
we're just cold and a little hungry and the money's gone
and those plum jobs in Hollywood hanging around
waiting for the cowboys to die of thirst in the Mojave
are pretty much a thing of the past

yep, they just don't make westerns like they used to
Saul Zachary

Anniversary

Seven hundred thirty
insomniac nights
staring at memories
since you died
but I still walk Manhattan
streets with you, talking
to you, hoping, though I know
it’s impossible, you’ll come home
as you used to, slamming the door
and asking me if I remembered
to take the chicken
out of the freezer.

I hear the clock
ticking in double time now.
You’re becoming an
abstraction day by day.
First, your smiling face
on the wall that I have
to memorize so I can
remember it, then your voice
starting to trail off,
and last to go,
three-sixty joyous years.

Perhaps your likeness
is intact somewhere; then it’s me
who’s fading into the mist
like a figure on Charon’s
ferry waving to a lover
on the shore, but which
one of us is on the ferry,
which one is on the shore?

Saul Zachary

Sky Tag

Addicted to each other,
there was no way
it could go on,
yet it did, crowding out
everything else,
each day getting even better
or was it worse?

Mindless, we’d push
apart to breathe
then snap back together,
magnetized, but kept
soaring
like two seagulls
playing tag in a sea
of sky on a crystalline
day in Montauk,

our wings outstretched
to catch every thermal,
drifting
in lazy, effortless
circles until we were
tiny dots
in the azure. Blink
and we were never there
at all...
Saul Zachary

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to memorize so I can
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starting to trail off,
and last to go,
thirty-six joyous years.

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at all....
Saul Zachary

Traveling Between Rooms

I go into the kitchen--
has it been four or five
times? maybe six? to write
something important on the
calendar that I'm anxious to do,
but, oddly, it never gets
written because a more
pressing thought always
intervenes while I'm
traveling between rooms;
an emergency bulletin
in my mind preempts--
stopping me cold.

Then I go back where
I was, sit down and try
to recall what I had
forgotten as well as the
second thought that came
from who knows where but
seems a greater loss than
the first.

... I think it's now many
days--or is it weeks or
months?--since I first
started for the kitchen.
Time has zipped by
pleasureably, for no sooner
do I remember what's
forgotten, my pen hovering
over the calendar,
than a splendid idea
I've never thought of before
overwhelms me and I waver,
cought between priorities.

S.M. Kozubek

In the Stillness

The snow leopard settles
in stillness.
Smoke streams whirl
up chimneys,
slowly swirl, then
dart on the wind
westward to linden trees
and vanish in the air
like souls returning
to galaxies spinning
in the stillness
of the silent All.

Night whispers
as the ashen cloak
of smoke
settles in the air
and drifts
down
where others lie
at rest.
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Pigeon Flight

Carefully gather again my dust
and place it on the dry wings
of a scrawny pigeon
that has survived
amid garbage heaps
and muck,
yet dreaming itself a peregrine,
the fastest of all creatures,
has also glided
in the splendor of sun,
diving downward,
speck of shooting star.

I shall live in the wind
above fields, alleys and streets
before
plummetering
peacefully again
to rest.
S.M. Kozubek

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Alice Wagoner

Fear and Knowing

"I have a fear of white men," she said, a twilight evening illuminating large brown eyes set in dark face, as we waited for the bus. Two young white boys carrying no fear, no hesitation approached, "Do you have any cigarettes?" Her eyes widened in fear, anger narrowed mine, knowing these two white boys thought we would possess their drug of choice; knowing as men they would continue to expect among us loose, willing females, dope-dealing, shifty-eyed males, knowing perhaps they would never learn from blacks about God's wisdom—how He can fill a need, move a heart away from hatred of the white race; yet have that heart sift their culture, and adjust the mirror so we can both humbly peek without fear.
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Alice Wagoner

Hair Talk

“May I touch your hair?”
asks she who has hair
paraded on television screens
night and day, on billboards,
in magazine pages, on Barbie dolls,
tresses flowing, blowing, teased by the wind
or languidly sifted by a man’s fingers.
Her hair is the defined standard
of beauty in America.
My roots stem from Africa,
woven with some Indian, some white
and God knows what else,
growing to be my crowning glory.
Other African-descended females attach hairpieces,
hot comb, or mow down virgin growth with chemicals,
acquiring straight, long locks:
another embrace of European authority,
and tap shoe requiem for the “Dark Continent,”
as I once did until I caressed tendrils ’round my finger,
changed my mind and fixed my gaze on what God gave me.
“May I touch your hair?”
another one asks
when my hair in its natural state
curls to full, billowy nappiness,
twists to tight, springy, long coils.
I am puzzled, embarrassed for her
but manage to shrug, “I guess so.”
“It’s so soft,” she says.
What did she expect?

Lyn Lifshin

Mother’s Nicotine-Stained Clock

round as an Art Deco
mirror, a Heywood
Wakefield vanity’s
curve, flowers of smoke
in the dial. If it moved,
a burst of Marlboro
or Herbert Tareton
cigarettes would unravel
in Virginia, ten hours
away from where it
soaked up smoke and
dust 40 years. The cool
marble burns memories
into skin. If I licked the
glass I’d taste my mother

The Mourning Ribbons in Boxes of Jewelry

crushed in a tangle
of pearls and cameos,
the black smelling of

her cologne and
old lace huddled
in the plum velvet

like old men under
an eave in rain,
their night cloth

sleek but crumpled,
each wing cut,
wounded blackbirds
Alice Wagoner

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sleek but crumpled,
each wing cut,
wounded blackbirds
Lyn Lifshin

**The Red Sweater**

skating sweater she called it. I mostly shivered and stumbled on the wrong kind of blades in the rink behind the grade school. Itchy, not my favorite color, the sweater choked my neck. I was sure it smelled of whatever sheep it was sliced from. Like other rarely worn clothes it hung in my father's closet even while he was still around. My mother stopped wearing turtle necks, hating to be more suffocated than she was coming back to her home town. I wish I'd asked if my mother had it in college, if she chose the red. After the garage sale I packed it up for the woman who does costumes, marveled that like so little here it's without a hole. Two days later, re-boxing photos, my mother is still wearing it, pressing me to those still bright threads, me, 1 year 2 months, my mother smiling, her teeth perfect, showing off every thing that mattered to her
Lyn Lifshin

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thing that mattered to her
Mike Pulley

The One

She was tall and slender,
an artist who liked to use a gun,
a Scorpio who spoke of phallic symbols
as ordinary phenomena,
and she didn't shave her armpits
or smoke grass or drink liquor
but kept red wine for cooking.
She had moved into the vacant half
of our duplex, a roach-infested millhouse
with cheap rent.
It was still in the era of free love
and the war in the jungle was finished.
First, Forest went for her
and he shared with me
his fondness for her fine, small tits
and her frankness.

Then he went on the trip,
leaving me alone with her in the big old house
with the telephone that rang upstairs
and when I ran up the steps to answer it,
the board fell out of the fireplace
lighting the floor on fire,
filling the house with smoke.
We extinguished the flame
and tried to suck the odorous stink
out the doors and open windows.
With my half uninhabitable,
she invited me over to the other side
and I guess the rest was inevitable.
After a day or so, the smell was gone
and we switched sides again,
using Forest's waterbed.
He caught us floating
but took it like a man.
She teased him mercilessly
as we sat around the hissing gas heater.
He just turned back to his latest novel
with a Buddhist grin on his face.
Mike Pulley

The One

She was tall and slender, an artist who liked to use a gun, a Scorpio who spoke of phallic symbols as ordinary phenomena, and she didn't shave her armpits or smoke grass or drink liquor but kept red wine for cooking. She had moved into the vacant half of our duplex, a roach-infested millhouse with cheap rent. It was still in the era of free love and the war in the jungle was finished. First, Forest went for her and he shared with me his fondness for her fine, small tits and her frankness.

Then he went on the trip, leaving me alone with her in the big old house with the telephone that rang upstairs and when I ran up the steps to answer it, the board fell out of the fireplace lighting the floor on fire, filling the house with smoke. We extinguished the flame and tried to suck the odorous stink out the doors and open windows. With my half uninhabitable, she invited me over to the other side and I guess the rest was inevitable. After a day or so, the smell was gone and we switched sides again, using Forest's waterbed. He caught us floating but took it like a man. She teased him mercilessly as we sat around the hissing gas heater. He just turned back to his latest novel with a Buddhist grin on his face.
Mike Pulley

Maybe it had something to do with the way
the morning light shone through her kitchen window,
or the way the cubes of avocado tasted
after she diced them with her knife,
or maybe it was the way she spoke of matinees,
meaning sex in the middle of the day,
all this in the land of suppression,
and the land of many church bells and deacons
and the blue laws that made the Sunday bootlegger necessary.
Every night we coupled like starved children,
our limbs sinuously entwined like a helix.
Then Sunshine rolled into town.
He was a former lover,
and now it was my turn to take it and I didn’t.
She couldn’t understand my disdain
and accused me of being a one-woman man.

I got even by going home
with the eager girl in the dark, barn-like bar,
someone I couldn’t share ideas with,
only skin and pills, only cocaine and copulation.
I followed my rebound to the country,
to a town called Prosperity
and got a job in the lumber mill
pulling fishtails on the night shift.
But I still wanted her.
I tried scotch and Wild Turkey,
but no amount of liquor
could ease my ache for her.
Soon she headed west
and wound up in Tuscon.
I followed a year later,
landing in San Diego,
and then I wrote to her
and she wrote back
and said that she had changed,
that monogamy had a place in the world after all.

I read her letter again and again,
but I didn’t respond.
I had what I wanted,
but I ran away.

Mike Pulley

Imprisoned by pride’s grip,
I hitchhiked north to another city.
I married an older waitress.
I became a stepfather.
I got lost in the burbs,
but I could not forget her,
and years later I would lie in bed,
nuggled next to my wife, and wonder
why I did it, and why was I so afraid?

Once, on a return trip to the East,
I stopped off in her hometown,
a soggy place where military jets
filled the sky like huge metal birds.
I tried the operator to no avail.
I tried the alumni association
at the university but received no reply.
I stopped at a strip club,
as if the flesh of fantasy
could somehow resurrect her from
the dead vault of abandonment.

Twenty-four years have passed
since I last saw her face.
I have no photographs,
so I have to rely on my diminishing memory.
She relished in telling me the story
about how she lost her virginity.
He was an older man.
“He just sort of led me down
the garden path,” she said.
But then she decided at such a young age
against children.
She tried to get a doctor
to tie her tubes, but he refused,
and she was so furious at him.

So now I wonder
if she ever changed her mind.
Mike Pulley

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the morning light shone through her kitchen window,
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She couldn’t understand my disdain
and accused me of being a one-woman man.
I got even by going home
with the eager girl in the dark, barn-like bar,
someone I couldn’t share ideas with,
only skin and pills, only cocaine and copulation.
I followed my rebound to the country,
to a town called Prosperity
and got a job in the lumber mill
pulling fishtails on the night shift.
But I still wanted her.
I tried scotch and Wild Turkey,
but no amount of liquor
could ease my ache for her.
 Soon she headed west
and wound up in Tuscon.
I followed a year later,
landing in San Diego,
and then I wrote to her
and she wrote back
and said that she had changed,
that monogamy had a place in the world after all.

I read her letter again and again,
but I didn’t respond.
I had what I wanted,
but I ran away.

Mike Pulley

Imprisoned by pride’s grip,
I hitchhiked north to another city.
I married an older waitress.
I became a stepfather.
I got lost in the burbs,
but I could not forget her,
and years later I would lie in bed,
snuggled next to my wife, and wonder
why I did it, and why was I so afraid?
Once, on a return trip to the East,
I stopped off in her hometown,
a soggy place where military jets
filled the sky like huge metal birds.
I tried the operator to no avail.
I tried the alumni association
at the university but received no reply.
I stopped at a strip club,
as if the flesh of fantasy
could somehow resurrect her from
the dead vault of abandonment.
Twenty-four years have passed
since I last saw her face.
I have no photographs,
so I have to rely on my diminishing memory.
She relished in telling me the story
about how she lost her virginity.
He was an older man.
“He just sort of led me down
the garden path,” she said.
But then she decided at such a young age
against children.
She tried to get a doctor
to tie her tubes, but he refused,
and she was so furious at him.

So now I wonder
if she ever changed her mind.
Mike Pulley

One More Morning

The sun is deflected
by a cluster of dark green leaves,
its light diminished to the muted glow
of an end table lamp.

Above, feathery clouds in skinny shafts
stretch across the sky like long limbs—
Nearly imperceptible, the movement
of these willowy white fingers.
One by one, they undo themselves
in the blue, become unknown animals.
One is a shaggy, white anteater—
another, the thrusting snout of an unwanted gar.

In the far trees across the street,
cicadas claw at the quiet.
The air is gaining warmth.
Birds gibber and join
the lull of late cars
on the unseen highway up the hill.
Seneca, the sweet brown dog,
lies on her side on the worn, brown boards
of the deck. In her expression,
she is at peace.

The sun has shifted
to the thicker upper branches.
The big eggplant still gleams
in the diffused light of the garden.
I can relax now, inhale, and drink my tea,
thinking of things I might do one day.
Mike Pulley

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thinking of things I might do one day.
Colleen Hernandez

Sometimes I Try So Hard

Sometimes I try so hard,
and sometimes I am so on it.
I can get up and face the day
knowing
I’m going to do what I should.
What’s expected.
Needed.
These days are bright and positive.
I’m warm in my toes and the air is fresh.

Then a switch will flip
and the good me is gone.

The me that wants to hold and nurture
turns into resentful and bitter me.
My skin is grey and the room is close and
dark.

If I can find the switch
I think I will be okay.
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Joan Colby

Relics

Alas! Not John the Baptist as was first thought. This body has a head. The monks, aghast, Presume to question The wisdom of opening graves.

What legend can bear Investigation? Still, there’s something queer About a body "intact, undecayed and uncorrupted By time." There's speculation

It might be the corpse of Elisha Or some unnamed saint Though John the Baptist Would have proved a greater find.

There's still an unopened coffin In the cave below the monastery In which the remains of John Might languish, properly headless.

There's still a knucklebone Of a saint in every altar. A sacred bit of cloth From the tunic of the virgin.

Slivers of the true cross sufficient For a Siberian forest. Enough unidentified bodies To fill a calendar of saints.

Joan Colby

Attire

I
All love stories end like this. Mother refused a widow's Walk neck-high in black As if a tide kept going out and out Into a moonless gulf.

II
Father died in the indecency Of a hospital gown. Years later, Mother seized in old age's Casual sweat suit.

III
Consider fighters faraway Dead in camouflage Or the uniform of a hundred wars. Working men in overalls, Infants in sleepers.

IV
Today a bride is slain In her wedding gown. In the morgue of passion Desire, in its dress of rotting flesh, Says amen.
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Desire, in its dress of rotting flesh,
Says amen.
Joan Colby

Muggers

I
Broke his jaw without
Even asking first for cash,
Then bashed him again
For its lack.

II
Dropped his Ipad
On the subway. I'll
take that, one said. Then
Smashed his eye socket,
Knocked out two teeth.

III
Leaving a bar. Two kids:
Give us the money. She laughed,
How old were they, 13, 14? Said,
What: you're going to shoot me?
Yes.
Joan Colby

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Yes.
David Sapp

Snow and Rain

In the frozen marrow of winter, the snow comes mightily from icy heavens, a lumbering man in a coarse, woolen coat wrapping thick arms around the barren woods and sod in a sloppy, stolid embrace, his huffing breath, white and frigid, heavy upon the neck.

In the slim space, the narrow hips between winter and spring, the snow comes timidly, a shy, sweet boy speaking in small gusts, tossing flakes from the sky with deft hands, each bit melting soon after grazing brow, leaf, or petal.

In the tender place of summer, the rain comes quietly, lithely from a gossamer sky, a girl in a diaphanous shift whispering in warm, breathy splashes, mingled with sunlight and caressing the smooth, flat belly of clay with slender, ringed fingers.

In the deep, implacable heat of August, the rain heaves fiercely from a black, stone firmament, a buxom, zephyr woman dragging her weighty, dousing gown ragged across rock and soil, her squall a clamorous, ugly fist beating about our heads.
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David Sapp

Precipice

Above the ravine,
at this high precipice,
I could be this soaring oak
abiding at the cliff edge,
rugged, fluted skin,
straight, granite back,

this resolute column, misplaced
from an ancient, exotic temple
at Luxor, Karnack, or Athens, taken
from the smooth, polished edge of the Nile,
its sculpted pediment,
its heavy, lintled entablature,
its capital foliage, the lotus,
papyrus and acanthus missing,
wild bursts of viridian,
now stemming from the pillar crest.

After a century of grasping
at precarious layers, shifting, sabulous stone,
compressed history, forgotten, dead strata,
this column will plummet
into the chasm, the chaos below,
the roiling waters of Old Woman Creek.

How long will I cling to this ledge,
endure, a solitary word
on the lip of the abyss?
The rain, the frost and wind erode,
loosen the soil around my roots,
loosen my elusive composure,
until the plunge is inevitable
and headlong, limbs flailing,
until I am hurled into the stream,
until I am returned, shard by shard,
to my quarry home.

David Sapp

Baubles

These gold leaves
are trinkets gleaming;
these baubles jangle
around rapid, naked ankles,
roots dancing among lanky weeds,
around the field’s fringe,
a small, neglected wilderness of
briar between road and wheat.

These baubles jangle
when a gauzy veil
of frigid wind and rain
is tugged from quick hips;
bobbing trifles caper
around a smooth belly,
a curving, vivacious waist.

These baubles jangle,
gamboling at fetching boughs,
dazzling old, loitering stones,
venerable cousins of an exotic glacier,
robbed in gaudy mica,
quartz and pinkish granite,
and thrust to the margins by the farmer,
where gnawing machines do not come
for fear of chipping steel teeth.

These baubles jangle,
bangles brightly clinking
around swift, bare wrists,
thin twigs in the wild bramble,
where the primitive thrives,
where nervous birds and rabbits dart,
an unkempt place before becoming
the inevitable, tidy suburban yard.
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David Sapp

These baubles jangle
around the neck,
adoring the slight hollow,
a soft throat arabesque,
where ivy tendrils overtake limbs;
theses baubles jangle,
dangling at the ears, caught
in a tangle of tresses;
these gold leaves
are trinkets gleaming.

Maura Gage Cavell

Abandoned

"Again?" she asks.
The vulture
who was
circling
her

insisted
on taking
what
he could not
have.

He drank
at the well
of love,
circled her
until

Maura Gage Cavell

he captured
her,
his wing span
wide.
Lost in feathers,
she danced
and flew
along with him
over the water,
over the sand,

through the sun,
into the face
of a slivered
moon with
star tears.

She danced
in the air
with him
until
the sudden
drop.
David Sapp

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Sinking

Caught under glass,
she cannot find
the love that turned
the ebony world
into the blue hope realm
he offered with each kiss;
she falls back under
the dark ocean,
the dark burial,
lights so far removed.
As she drowns,
she dreams of the sapphire
gleam of his eyes,
the random magic
of his arms;
the glow has dissipated
as he pulls far, far away,
taking her life-line
with him,
turning all into cold,
dark glass
as she goes
under the waves,
sinking
into the crystal
world of despair.

John F. Buckley

The War on Drugs

Let's agree to disagree about that righteous uncle
chopping down the finally mature pot plants
hidden so well in our grandmother's backyard.

He wore his old Boston College windbreaker
and a handkerchief tied across his mouth
like a stagecoach bandit afraid of contact highs.

He dumped the plants at the curb for the trash men
and scrubbed his hands carefully with soap and water
and pontificated about disrespect and illegality
to the other aunts and uncles gathered in Foxborough,
the Vegas smiler who was alleged to be a mean drunk,
at least when his brother-in-law was around,

the gourmet cook who execrated John Kerry,
and the pharmacist with the endless prescriptions,
who explained family realities I didn't fully grasp,

while cousins complained about Boy Scout rectitude
and recovered the last few baggies of buds
tucked away on the wooden shelf above the dryer.
Maura Gage Cavell

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Caught under glass, she cannot find the love that turned the ebony world into the blue hope realm he offered with each kiss; she falls back under the dark ocean, the dark burial, lights so far removed. As she drowns, she dreams of the sapphire gleam of his eyes, the random magic of his arms; the glow has dissipated as he pulls far, far away, taking her life-line with him, turning all into cold, dark glass as she goes under the waves, sinking into the crystal world of despair.

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John Grey

Lady Luck

They've drawn the night patrol,
two hours from now.

They're gathered around a table,
another round of poker.
They're into the game
as if here, and here alone,
is where the rules of chance apply.

No guns, no body armor,
just white undershirts
and fatigues,
broad shoulders mostly
and an array of rough and delicate,
sure and trembling hands.

They play for matchsticks,
sometimes coins.
Winners rake in their loot.
Losers empty out their pockets.

In the deal of cards,
they temporarily forget
what unfriendly neighborhoods
are meting out in preparation
for the coming dark.

One holds two fours,
another waits on a seven for a straight,
a third stares down aces high,
a fourth is looking at a total randomness
of royalty and low numbers.

All lean over their unpromising hands.
Lady luck is saying something.
They listen while they have the chance.

Richard Dinges, Jr.

Walking in Fresh Snow

Once again white
erases a world,
my soles buried
in cold purity.
Softly dissolving
into eternity,
I must ignore
lifting each foot
in turn. I destroy
the blank slate,
leaving my mark,
a series of damp holes
in a narrow path
to follow home.

Snake Skin

A snake sheds
skin between
two stones,
a reed for wind's
frail whisperings,
a single thin phrase
abandoned
discovered
when I wander
off my normal
path, look down
at my feet
and witness what
I have crushed
beneath my sole.
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Robert Cooperman

The Waiter and the Pastor

In this business, you meet all kinds of jerks throwing their weight around like wrestlers whose turn it is to win: guys who think if they put the waiter down with a sneer, their dates will have sex with them on the table.

This guy, a minister yet, smirked he gives God 10% so why would he give me 18? I wanted to point out that maybe he shouldn’t embarrass his companion—young enough to be his sexy niece—and not his wife.

I also wanted to point out that if he paid the bill with his credit card, his wife was bound to find out, but he didn’t deserve that courtesy of men-covering-for-men; and further that if he paid with that plastic he was waving like a gun, the restaurant took half, so yell at them.

But then I said the magic words, “Do you want to speak to the manager?” and suddenly he recalled this meal was just a first course to the main-motel-dish.

When he paid in cash, leaving the full 18%, I hid my smile, but the smile she shot me and the quick touch of her warm hand on my wrist as she sashayed out—sexy as a cheetah—lifted the rest of my shift

of screaming kids and their parents, who shrugged it wasn’t their fault if their brats were as out of control as some middle-aged husbands.

Purshia Adams

Three-Quarter Turn

Windows firmly shut against range fires, amber-tinted uncleanness;
locust leaves curl orange early from water-starved senescence.

Spent blooms from carbuncled elm limbs drop, crushed on the pavement;
windows open: winter staleness gone, a rush of night air.

Sycamores

... audible breezes affirm predictions disturb leaves soft with fine hairs
left listless, heat drained, jaundice washed by
dry days, light length, and fever
although brief showers pinprick worn-weary persistent sycamore leaves
until cold winds swirl, return, and collect things shrunken and tanned beneath

limbs still and leafless welcome threats of dull afternoon skies
    cleared at dusk by bronze sunbreaks, tangles of
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Purshia Adams

Quarter Turn I

Pink confection clouds at dawn, snow-covered
pale crisp clarity until
fog comes in off stockyards blanketing the
valley in featureless chill.

Dawn kindles grubby haze, sharpening
far off pines that soften for
one bashful cloud wisp paled gold in clay skies
while blue fragments wash pink.

Plum

An unusual dawn tune--robin ends
weeks of silence this
restless afternoon: damp soil,
robins root through dull grass;
unrushed this imperfect ornament
sheds reluctance at dusk:
two-minute shower,
birds hushed and still;
wine-colored leaves camouflage starling cliques
seeking quick cover this
blank lit morning: sprinklers strike
cedars slats and crowds disperse.
Purshia Adams

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Pink confection clouds at dawn, snow-covered pale crisp clarity until fog comes in off stockyards blanketing the valley in featureless chill.

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