magazine for literature and art

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ICON

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Michael Lynch 17, 28

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George Bandy

Return from War and What We Fought For

Momma called them government girls,
But there was a salacious theme
Which ran through their stockings,
Up their thighs,
Into their eyes,
And all the while their jet-streaked highlights
Haloed.

They called to me,
And I felt a sudden emptiness--
A hunger,
When I thought of the allure,
The opportunities
Of restricted and studied
Offices;
Typewriters clacking
Unseen,
A wall of perfume
Holding them tight
In esteem
Of junior clerks
And the commanding presences
Of those
Who stayed behind.

I wanted what was mine.

I wanted all.
I took them singly on dates,
Working the quotidian,
Until they saw into me
And knew
They were afraid
Of a hunger that burned,
Hunger that demanded
More than a government girl
Could plan for
Allyson Hibbard

Trigger Intention
(inspired by Aly & AJ Machalka’s Rush)

can you feel it?
rushing through your hair,
my back’s pushed up against the wall,
and you squeeze me,
pushing till all my air exhales.

can you feel it?
like a bullet through the brain,
realization comes;
enlightenment has become trite
yet squeeze the trigger
till I understand your intention.

can you feel it?
rushing through your heart,
that sickening pang,
knowing what you’ve done
was oh so very wrong.

no turning back
when all the air is gone
and only blood comes

can you feel it--
the admission of wrong
from your blackened conscience.

can you feel it?
Allyson Hibbard

*gold dust*

Powder me in gold dust
that I may sparkle
in the moon light

Powder me heavily till
my skin turns pale
and I am mistaken
for an angel

Long tresses of my onyx
hair are changing
strand by onerous strand
to silver

Most do not see it but
I can feel it
I can sense it
I know it is there

So if I sparkle and I'm
mistaken for an angel,
then it won't matter
the color of my hair
James Doyle

Ugly Bird on the Windowsill

When the first thing I see
after a deep night’s sleep,
my eyesight scratching awake
through its grey cheesecloth

quilts, is a speckled
blot with hunched shoulders
bent over my windowsill
like a monk in mis-matched

robes and loose tufts of hair,
I immediately think carrion,
vulture, mud, the kind
of malign day coming up

that nature in its cynicism
had to drag the bottom
of a murky lake for
I know that even if the bird

flies away, it will sit
on my shoulder looking
for dead things all day
whether it is a vulture

or not, and I’ll be hungry
enough to feed it, a brain
cell here, blood there, a word,
some names, memory, futures.
The Bell Tower

When the bell rings, the air
scatters its leaves.
Those the town buried always there
for the counting.

The baker stretches the dough. Sweet
eough to catch
the stray Vines inside the houses
letting go.

Postman at the kettle with unopened
notices, horses
at the troughs. Along carriage
sheaves unopened

coffins, budding through the afternoon.
Marble brimming
on its haunches in the civic park,
rearing back.

When the bell rings, the town walks
its streets. The night
breezes try to catch the women’s shawls
on the doorways

going past. The fences are buckled up
like belts,
windows shuttered. Cobblestones turn
the wheels
of the procession. The bell pauses again and again to let each new death down the path catch up with the last.

**First Solo Flight**

If I place one finger on that button, one hand on this lever, switch the horizon around to suit me, loose change of the clouds, mountains reshuffled over me, and rivers running backwards past their shores, I can surely qualify, without breaking a sweat, to live ahead of myself, displacing air before it arrives, younger and younger, back into the earth rushing towards me and graves turning points of the compass to accommodate me. The great lie streams in all directions, the sky sails at me like a mirror that can never shatter
Rick Gooden, the Ranch Husband, Comments on the Short, Violent Life of Marvin Harms

Sure, I’m broken up, just like Ellen, but it’s not like he was our son, only a troubled kid whose drunk daddy kicked him out; his mother long gone. Marvin was Ellen’s idea. If I let her, she’d harbor every stray in the county, though she says we’re not a charity for abandoned dogs and cats.

But if Ellen thought I saw a bit of my wild young self in Marvin, she’s wrong as pioneers led by a blind guide: I got into fights as a kid, but feistiness, not fear someone’d sneer I was a sissy.

To Ellen, Marvin’s tagging after me was cute. To me, it was, you know, stuff no man should ever think or talk about or do: why I sent him into town for supplies that could’ve waited for the weekend, all of us driving in, me treating him and Sheila to cokes, while I stopped for a quick beer, and Ellen gossiped.

Had I seen the football team shove his face into dog shit, I’d have torn into those bullies. Still, when I was in high school there was one kid more obvious than Marvin, we were lucky his family moved away
Robert Cooperman

My luck quit when Marvin took my rifle and shot the ringleader, Ted Simmons. I could understand that killing, but Marvin murdered Ted’s family, even his pumpkin-innocent little sister! At least Marvin took a man’s way out, though I’ll hear his last rifle blast till I can’t hear anything, anymore.

Nathaniel A. Fincham

A Lovely Prize

I will chase me a pretty life like an insect pursues a star, by flirting with seductive words and passionate phrases.

My pretty life will be beautiful indeed, loving me for the lies I have told and the games I have played to win my lovely prize.

One day my pretty life will leave me, as do all wonderful things, sending me in search of another pretty life to pursue.
Ed Kline

standing still

on an overpass
in a small town

looking down

the highway strives
for the horizon
like a sunbleached
yellow brick road.

I do not think
it leads to Oz.

carsandtrucks
rush towards me,
flee from me
passing through
for home or holiday
growing and shrinking--
a trick of the eye.

carsandtrucks
rush towards me
flee from me
until the sun
buries itself
for the day
and the sheer
tangibility of
carsandtrucks
is reduced to
streaks of
redlight/yellowlight.
Bank of Days

My mother-in-law was done living for ten years, then wheezed out several months more, telling everyone who would listen she was ready to die.

We called my stepfather a medical miracle: a ward of the state, growing bloated from daytime TV and vodka, making prank calls to his ex-wife every couple days. I’m starting a bank of days, underused living, donations get a tax credit and something named after you, maybe an angel wing.

We appropriate the days to Walt, who, at 83, had to stop gliding so he could die of cancer, Julia, full of new bone marrow and prayer who writes for me on lavender paper from Brazil, my brother’s too-small baby who has lived long enough to say our names, Betty, pulsing her life out on machines, with a book and a marriage to finish.
First Peach

My favorite jeans slip on, fit
after cold months' lethargy, new
music in the kitchen keeps me
there after dishes are done.
Snipped-tag gloves, fingertips
unpierced by thistle
thorns, new garden fork slides
nice like a mason's knife,
plaintain gives up
with an easy pull. Clouds
have fallen from my childhood
drawings, sheep walk in sky blue,
a plane overhead has left me home.
Home, Saturday soft, a place I can't
always find but never stop looking for,
the way the kitchen mice walk
past the squash and potatoes
all winter, waiting for the first peach.
This plat of houses and lawns and streets can be seen from a satellite, or an angry red smear of radar beams on TV screens under a thunderstorm, or in phone books, simple red lines on yellow paper labeled by criss-crossed names. We sit snug in our cushions, comforted by order imposed on our yards, duly noted and surveyed, unaware that someone is always watching, looking for where we are, while watching the storm pass from underneath, untouched by the wind within our walls.
Prayer

First words dim
peripheral lights,
focus on central image.
Light resolves into leaves.
Among leaves, fruit.
Toward fruit blurred
movement of skin
settles into fingers.
Fingertips touch
apple, suspend belief
by unknown force.
Unseen mouth waters.
Lips form into a promise.
All that was missed
was to speak, instead of bite,
the single word Amen.
Hello, Ms. Sexton

Hello, Ms. Sexton,
If you could possibly lift open that coffin lid for a moment and listen?
In the land of death flies and electric bodies, so you stand, taking your place by the adepts.
I was there for your transformations, and read your letters to Dr Y.
I know about the exorcists, the gold keys, the wonderful musician, and read about the ringing of the bells, the addicts, and all the angels and furies you tend to enjoy so much.
Sometimes I still pass 45 Mercy Street, and still hope I can see a lingering presence of your shadow, but, like Hemingway, Woolf, Crane and Berryman before you, you cut your own umbilical cord, and set yourself free.
Always, your text lives on, as if written in stone, and all of us can still read these Jesus papers which are so acclaimed.
Thank you for your time, Ms. Sexton, close those eyes once again and return to your slumber, and as torrents pour down on your tomb, you once again show us the imitation of drowning.
The Blue House

1
The river wants to taste my house,
the river of thousands of blue mouths.
It's an everyday hunger
repeated by rivers throughout Earth:
like Moses,
seeing the land but never tasting it.

I want to wake up at this address--
I've earned that much.

But the river keeps singing,
without shame, without shyness,
a blue lure
dropped from the naive blue sky.

2.
Boats sleep
as if the tethering
is a kindness after all.

The pier is a shaky sentence
in the mouth
of someone who no longer loves me.
My steps on it send ripples
that startle
turtles, lovers in leaky rowboats, images
of stars.

I look to the east, the sun's manger.
Then west to Italy where
statues have foreskins, a reverence
for all things human.
Fish jump to scare themselves
with glimpses of what is
not water

3
Good friends cure the bad music
of radio. It’s a party
celebrating nothing,
what better reason?

Greg and Linda jump into the river
and theirs is
the friendliest divorce,
my oldest friends refusing to be old.
Hank chases the moon that flees
window to window
Janice is determined to bring back
the rumba into our reality

Sammy runs to town for real music,
something without commercials
for funeral homes, aspirins, home repairs.
We are ankle-deep in cheap wine
from Australia when Linda bursts in
wearing see-through rags.
Greg is in trouble.
Oh my love, oh my great love.

We run to the dark shores. I dive in
and nothing, nothing, nothing.
Then Jake finds Greg on shore, driftwood.
We exhale and exhale.

How astonishing:
breath from one man to another
Glenn Sheldon

can revive him,
return the Earth to him.
Adrenalin heard our prayers.

4.
I don’t resign the lease.
My father’s death, the claw of it,
inspired me not to live in the wild.

The house by the river
isn’t sentimental,
doesn’t understand betrayal,
won’t yearn for my shadows.

Still, my secret chandelier,
I’ve regrets. no skinny dipping,
no enlightenment, no stillness.

The blue of a river isn’t
for any of us to nail down
like slats on the side of a house.

Carol Smallwood

A Strand

of hair fell from my bandana to my lap.
There weren’t many left since chemo and
when I put it on my paper it
disappeared, proof it’d turned white.
A movie in the next room made it hard
to hear the professor lecture about
Wittgenstein--about how he was
convinced he was going to die each
night.
Beginning Gardener

The tomato seeds sprouted in clumps, crowded into their incubator cups, reaching their infant arms to the sun. Each morning, I fed them their formula of water and plant food on which they thrived, quickly outgrowing their temporary homes.

The plot of ground where they would soon reside was cleared, fertilized, and prepared for their arrival.

On planting day, they clung to each other for support when I tried to separate them. Exposed and vulnerable, they lay down looking exhausted and betrayed, the shock too great to bear.

Once reunited with the soil, propped up, boosted by nutrients, they drooped and sagged.

A few days later, having re-anchored their roots, they began to revive.

Now, restored and fully grown, they have forgiven me for the trauma and, in a gesture of good will, offer me their gift of sweet, abundant fruit.
Moon in Haiku

Half a moon better
than none an old saying goes
half a loaf of light

Imagine where moon
is the only light at night
its significance

Important as sun
Night blossoming flowers Moon
harvesting the sea

Erase the chalkboard
the gravity of the moon
remains White not there

End-stamped printers do
impressed in a proof of sky
without ink of light

Star clouds mass up drawn
ornamentally even
orientally

In the East the moon
is the staked net pole rattan
bamboo the lantern

The orderly moon
spends time each month in haiku
one syllable long
Dennis Saleh

A song one sound long
in pantomime in white face
lunescent music

Imagination
sets in What haiku complete
without June or moon

Felicitous rhyme
Starfish sea and sky a rhyme
Moon chimes agreement

Too much moon Moon struck
How long before moon turns you
into a woman

Or a lunatic
rubbing his head to a moon
incanting moon words

Thesaurus of whites
Moth of months circling itself
Idiot savant

Waxes wanes is wan
Everyone knows the words
Silvery a spoon

A loon dips its head
beneath the heavens to feed
in tapering moon

Tomorrow promised
Quarter moon a down payment
White undiminished
One Housewife's Creed

She believed in herself-cleaning oven, and in polishing the top of the grandfather clock.
She believed that margarine is no substitute for butter, and that only Granny Smith apples should be used for apple pie.
She believed in white linen tablecloths, pressed to crisp, creaseless perfection, and in serving dinner on china, since paper plates spoil the taste.
She believed that wearing stained and ragged underthings is a public health menace, and that the demise of the thank you note poses a threat to the very foundation of Western Civilization.
She believed that charging $3.50 for a latte is criminal and that paying it is lunacy.
She believed that her mother was a saint and that, next to loyalty, doing one's duty is the highest virtue.
She believed that 100 lbs. of woman could move the entire Appalachian mountain range into the Atlantic Ocean if that is what it takes to help a loved one.
She believed, finally, that life should not be sustained by machines, and that some things are worse than dying.
Shari O’Brien

Half of What Is Left of Us

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)
implying you’re still somehow half
of what is left of Us who slept.

Jane Stuart

Evening Cinquain

Dewdrops
fill the irises’
velvet beards that shimmer
when lavender moonlight purples
their roots
Barry Ballard

The Weight of Last Night’s Air

The incalculable glaze on the slate
countertop is supposed to mean something,
like an emulsion already extracting
its imprint. It could be the faint image
of someone who lived here, or the heavy weight
of last night’s air, the thick scent of sex. It seems
the blinds are telling me: Truth’s always acting
itself out in layers; trading rage

for forgiveness (waiting for the glimmer
of a new mood in the leaking dawn). The sink
full of beading debt I owe to myself
glistens inside a moment already blurred
in the birth of another, clinging like ink
to its satin brushed ledge, and the light it held.
Isaac

Sometimes the bare sidewalks are like altars,
and the Absolute gleams above them
like a fiery tower of mirrors, hard-edged
and filled with the heavy sky
The end has already come for some (and waiting
for others), though we all walk undisturbed
as if the blinking neon sign creating
new meaning (warnings with its half-burned words)

shouldn’t mean something. Even the sirens
are ignored as we move from one corner
to the other, through the blinking knives
of light as if our own mind was a kingdom,
and our eyes like the eyes of a father,
trusting the sure escape of his hidden sight.
Lana Hechtman Ayers

Dear John

The night I told him I was leaving
and never coming back, the June bugs, early,
hurled themselves against the window glass,
the clack of each one’s body like a tooth
cracking inside my mouth,
and he launched
the blue reproduction Ming vase.

The flimsy thing flew up like a pigeon,
careened off the ceiling fan,
bending a cheap blade into what looked like
a broken bone, changed the vase’s trajectory
to a collision course
with the television screen.
The destruction was awesome.

I stayed,
and later that night, I imagined
that between his snores,
I could hear peepers crooning for love,
even in the urban landscape.
But I knew it was only the bed-coils
droning beneath his shifting weight.
Coffee Blues

you the sugah
I don't put in my coffee
'cause I take it black

but if I didn't. oh lord

so sweet I'd eat you up
'cept I'm diabetic
and I'd go to shock

but if I wasn't. oh lord

you the sugah,
melt in the rain.
Don't you come close.

'cause I'm cryin. oh lord

crying' without my sugah
I got the coffee blues
the no sugah coffee blues
Amber B. Weinrich

_Torn Limb from Limb_

Torn
   limb
   from
limb.

Pieces
   and
   fragments
of toppled once living bodies
lie
   strewn
   and
   scattered
by those consuming
   that which is
Not
   Rightfully theirs.

Male
Female
Young
Old
tossed to the fire.

Name
Kind
Color
Complexion
mean nothing to the destroyers.

Survivors
   Weep tears of gold
   Reach toward
Heaven
and
Hell.

And receiving no help or acknowledgment, the Trees mourn.

Arth u r W infield Knight

Blood in My Eye

There’s blood in my right eye coming home from surgery
It was my left eye four years ago, but not much changes.
The cataract is sucked out. This is the way it happens.

A friend drives me home in the red world.
My wife holds my hand. I keep telling myself,
Everything’s going to be all right. I’m not going blind. Believe it.
Self

Now way beyond
full grown, would
I, coming upon myself
--at the age of eight
totally absorbed
on hand-slick
monkey bars
at the playground,
at sixteen talking
nervous in the quad
at high school,
or thirty-five
with my children
at a fast food
weekend breakfast--
be kind? Loving?
Overcome? Pleased
by my smooth skin,
jaunty half-smile
to mask worry
present, past,
and all future?
Or would I be as
I am with myself
now---matter of fact,
worried, impatient,
almost as if dealing
with a stranger?
Summary

Like idly watching a pill bug wander, early this morning before waking, I reviewed my life from beginning to end with white chalk on a yellow outline black globe map of the world tilted right, starting with squiggles near Detroit for visits to Belle Isle and Lake Saint Clair, long meandering summer lines in Buick touring cars with screw-top cans of emergency water, oil, and gasoline web-strapped on the running board all the way to Wyoming, San Francisco, Zion, then zigzags for their divorce and my schools, love, war, marriage, assorted jobs--all the time me being nothing more than a moving line confronted at every point with where to go, who to love, what to be, learn, do, feel, think, and never with enough information or capacity to make such astounding decisions with any degree of confidence.
I Shall Write

When all light has settled into a darkness that steals the sustenance of birdsong, when day is a mere flickering across the screens of minds, when paper has retreated into the corridors of memory, I shall approach the blue smoothness of water, and lie there beside it; savoring its wavering coolness, I shall write upon it as someone else may have done before words began making poetry, before there was music, before love and understanding tried to live among us.
Enjoy That Silence

When all the leafy branches have closed behind me and my footsteps have drifted into nothing, I hope there will be no searching parties sent to seek new meaning in what I was trying to say I had no hidden agenda, no secrets in my surface-dwelling statements. So when the silence descends, as it surely must, please accept it. And enjoy
To Keep Me Still. To Keep Me.

My driven ribs poke through my soft skin
with everywhere, now, to go.

They pull me toward places I never want to be again,
places where one thought cannot follow another
Between thoughts I see only details--
a glint of light; a controlled crack in the asphalt that is too small
to fall into.

I want to fall, I want falling to be the way
I want gravity’s recorded pull to govern me, too,
for scientific laws, for notes on the board,
for laws in texts I’ve memorized
to do their work inside me--
to keep me still. To keep me.

Quick-Eyed Girl

The small equation that is myself,
the carried remainder
often left outside
when all of me doesn’t fit
as placed inside the smalls of my bones.
It is hard sound when they crack open.
Even in the whites of my nails
all the children can hear it
in all the whites of theirs.
They know something has come off;
maybe they will be sad. And maybe they will think of me
inside their warm nests of bed,
or maybe they’ll just go back to sleep,
leaving me alone with the white sound of my bones.
Katie Wisniewski

I break a piece of me off
and place me under soft light.

In the soft cleavage of my bones
meet my
quick-eyed girl
skinny legs and all
with her paper cuts and baby teeth
possessed by the tuggings of her heart
and all little directions.

She wished she had someone to know
and to embrace when it was cold outside,
for she often forgot her jacket in the winter months.

She waits outside, little remainder,
lets ugly witch trees
whisper portents to her

Dennis Saleh

Obsidian

The black
flame
of the
future
consumes
time
A mirror
runs away
to itself
Ruby

a glob of blood
on my finger
There, like an
ex-boyfriend,
hanging around,
lost without
that red, that
piece of heart,
cold and stony
as he was. He
doesn’t know it,
thinks he was
the Valentine
in exchange for
the one between
my legs. He
sees himself as
a donor heart.
Couldn’t under
stand giving any
of his body as
a gift, as a beating
gift from a stranger
gift wrapped in
sutures and
bloody gauze,
or the heart I
couldn’t get to
open as long as I
have waited for
this ruby
**Afterwards**

I slept in the curl
of your skin
as I never had.
Or have since.
Maybe the cat,
a fur spoon against
my belly  But
first your blue
eyes, azurine,
the blue of a
child’s dazed
eyes being fed.
As if your need
was as wild. My
wanting you,
as greedy, glue-
ing myself to
your mouth as if
what was there
would run out
Spring Cleaning

(Paris, 2004)

In your kitchen nook
one touchy daydream hour
your tri-color apron space
carries Cezanne’s parasol
and April sunflowers

You wash a blue vase
above a sparse tablecloth
an uncorked wineskin bottle
or avidly eat a blood orange,
you wish upon the porcelain glass
dripping in silkworm jade
on a busy shelf

And you, like china, wake
to the restless silence
only words can flash freeze.
B.Z. Niditch

Berryman

Off the Cape
you are a dead weight
when the windy night
wrestles like wooly dragons
you cannot sleep alone
whispering on your bleeding pillow,
"Restore me your Johnnie
from my tangled past
exchange me for art
and impressions at the auction
puncture me with pleasure
wound me again
with Dear John letters
in missives I throw
in the stall
by inkwells of phone numbers
that amount to child’s play”
Allan Douglas Coleman

Penguin Highway

Sitting at the periodic table,
below the salt but well
  above the monkey,
  drinking black coffee while
avoiding malicious furniture,
my joy is whiter than snow

I store stray memoirs
in the vacant gaze,
  a chinchilla of fear
  runs up my spine:
Nina’s dead cat
barking in a dream.

John Doe’s signature style
evades me, phrase slaves
  abound, muscles aching
  from yesterday’s body pump,
I look for words that work.
Without them, the world cries.