

Michigan State University Libraries Short Édition

Home



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Home

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Home

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ANITA SKEEN

The Teenage Babysitter Walks Home Across the Mountains At Midnight

Close the door, then down the steps from the stoop. Trudge up the bank, grab the skinny sassafras to pull me uphill. Feel the sap on my hand. Porch light flicks off behind me, though I don't hear the click. I've always loved the dark, being alone in the dark. No monsters under my bed when I was little, no hatchet murderer closed up in my closet. Only the dust, only my clothes, and maybe Tippy, hiding so as not to have to go out to her doghouse at night. Tonight there is a moon, Heaven's steady flashlight, as I head up over the first ridge. But not always. I know these hills, I know the paths the deer take, the openings in the tangled brush they rush through, leaving a gap where I can pass. No wild animals, though Stevie swears he's heard a cougar over by the Muddy Mountains. How would he know a cougar if he heard one? Probably one of the Whittle kids yowling. They're the worst to take care of. Leaving the lights in their house behind me, the dark is safety, not terror. And it's quiet, so quiet when I come out through Devil's Den and cross the gravel path. The stars don't chatter non-stop, don't need to go pee or hear James and the Giant Peach for the hundredth time. The Big Dipper is empty, but I don't have to fill it from the fridge. Almost home now, just the trail by the round things, and sometimes, in the distance, the lights in the Cline's house, if they're still up. My feet can feel every blade of grass, every pebble I might pick up for my pocket, if there was light. Walking home in the dark, I am not my body: leaves, scurrying animal, wind.

CHERYL WALSH

Spaces Between Stars

Space was tight at the farm in Ohio, and worry piled up in the small rooms, even though Win's grandparents doted on her and were pleased to have her daddy back. It was 1934, and Win's Uncle Ray was back on the farm, too, and he and her daddy, Spencer, set about building two new bedrooms at the back of the farmhouse. Then, to supplement the farm's nice big outhouse, they also built a bathroom, complete with a flush toilet and a big claw-footed tub they bought cheap at a foreclosure auction two counties away. It was good to have more room, but sometimes it seemed to Win that it just made more room for worry.

That first summer her family spent in Ohio, eight-year-old Win was frightened by the night sky. In their town back in North Carolina, where Spencer had to close his once-thriving haberdashery, it had never been so dark. There were street lamps, automobiles, lights from neighbors' windows. Sounds, too. Nights in Ohio were so quiet beyond the crickets, and the quiet amplified the darkness. Even with a moon, the sky was a huge black basket full of stars tumbling over one another, and Win felt like they would tumble down on her, or she would tumble up into the blackness between them and get lost. She wasn't afraid of the dark, but she was afraid of the night sky, and she had hated having to run to the outhouse on clear nights, even if she had a lantern. She was probably even more relieved than her pregnant mother to have an indoor toilet again.

As the summer passed and autumn crept in, the darkness came earlier and earlier until it was truly nighttime well before Win went to bed. She would make herself stand at the window of the darkened parlor and look out at the night from the safety of the house. The longer she looked, the more stars she could see in the sky, and the dizzier it made her feel inside.

One evening, Win's mother, Eliza, came looking for her. She pulled a straight-backed chair up to the window and sat down heavily next to Win. She was tired and huge with the baby that was due that month.

“What’re you watchin’ darlin’?”

Win could hear the worry in her voice. “Not watchin’, really,” she replied. “Just lookin’. There’s so many stars, and it’s so dark out.”

“You wanna go out ’n’ see the stars?”

Win shook her head solemnly. “It’s not like North Carolina. The sky’s so black, and even though there’s so many more stars, there’s always more black.”

Eliza nodded and pulled Win close to her. “The spaces between stars,” she mused. “My mama always used to tell me that’s where the adventure is. The things you don’ know and can’t see.” They both looked out the window for a while, and then Eliza said, “Let’s you’n me take a walk.”

Win looked at her suddenly, almost in alarm.

Eliza laughed. “You woul’n’t be scared with me, would you, darlin’?”

“No, Mama. I don’ think so.”

Though the days weren’t too cold yet, it got chilly after sundown. Eliza bundled up in two sweaters, and she brought out Win’s winter coat from a cupboard high above the stove. The girl had grown over the summer, of course, and it was a little small. Eliza frowned her worried frown, but she smiled beneath it. “It’ll do fo’ tonight, but we’ll have to find somethin’ else fo’ you this winter. Gets very cold up here in the North.”

Win nodded. “Yankeeland,” she said without thinking.

Eliza laughed, but Grandma Kellogg clicked her tongue behind her front teeth and shook her head. “This is America, Winifred, not Yankeeland. We’re all one country, don’t you know.”

“I’m sorry, Grandma,” Win said. “I forgot.”

The older woman had never known her father because he had died in the Civil War. Living just over the river from Kentucky, she was very sensitive about the Union and slavery. Win knew not to say “Yankee”

around her grandmother, and she didn't say it at school, either, but she sometimes forgot when she was talking to her mother.

"I'm sorry, too, Mother Kellogg," Eliza said. "We don't mean any disrespect. Just a bad habit we're tryin' to break. We are tryin'."

"I know you are, dear." She smiled, but there was still a furrow between her eyebrows. She shook her head and that seemed to clear her expression. "But why are you two going outside in the cold?"

"Winifred still isn't used to it bein' so dark, or the sky bein' quite so big out in the country. I thought we'd take a little walk, so she could rest a little easier with the nighttime."

"Ah, the night sky." Grandma Kellogg smiled then, looking wistful. "You had better hurry up, then, if you want to see the stars in their full glory. The moon's about to rise."

On the flagstones outside the kitchen door, Eliza and Win stood for a few moments to give their eyes time to open wider and let their ears adjust to the quiet. They walked across the yard toward the chicken coop. They could see it outlined against the sky, outlined with the absence of stars. There was a gate in the fence next to the chicken coop, and a pasture beyond. They followed the trail that led out to a pond.

"Watch out fo' cow pies," Eliza said. "That's the biggest thing to be 'fraid of out here."

Though Win's shoes were well-worn and too tight, she didn't know when she would get new ones, so she picked her way with special care around the cow pies, focusing on the ground rather than the sky. But she could feel the sky, and something else, too, something looming behind her, and a sense of dread grew within her. She looked back toward the farmhouse and saw a huge ominous mass welling up behind the house, blocking the stars. She couldn't imagine what it was, and it felt like her parents' worry, some unknown mistake or tragedy sneaking up on her family, something she didn't know and couldn't see. She tightened her grip on her mother's hand and

shivered. Eliza stopped but didn't say anything. Then she squeezed back and started walking again.

They reached the edge of the pond and saw the stars reflected in it. There was a bright fuzziness on the farther edge, and Win realized it was the glow of the moon from behind the trees on the horizon.

Eliza let go of Win's hand and turned slowly around and around, looking up. Win followed her lead and did the same. It wasn't enough to make her dizzy, but just enough to feel the rotation of the universe all around her. She made herself look into the sky, and she kept the stars moving above her, slowly. They didn't fall. She heard her mother's feet moving next to her, and she stretched her arms out wide to brush her mother's sweater as she turned.

The moon slipped over the horizon a moment later, and suddenly there was light in the landscape. Win could see trees and fields, hills, the corn patch next to the house. She could see the house itself, and the chicken coop and paddock fence. And, towering majestically behind the house and buildings, there was the old oak that shaded the drive to the road.

Of course, Win thought, that's what that big black monster was! In the growing light of the rising moon, she could see the trunk and the golden leaves in their autumnal glory, lit up clear as day.

"Oh, a magnificent thing," Eliza said. "We are in a magnificent place."

"A magnificent place," Win echoed, and she understood that light did reach into spaces between stars, and the darkness would not smother her.

SONNET MONDAL

The Curved Road Home

Yesterday the lights went out at midnight
and the slackening ceiling fan
added music to my heavy-eyed muse
stretched like a wire between the two shafts
of anguish and faith.

I couldn't move. The dragged-up stillness
failed to give me back my stolen sleep.

The ticking wall clock felt purer
than the falling dusk of winter.
Its pulse took me to the narrow curving road
leading to my old house in Sripur
from the village bus stop.

All these passing moments
broke through my window like snow.

They kept refreshing me
like wafts of rain-soaked air.

I thought
not to visit that road ever
for I cannot be that child again
walking to the door
I expect someone to open.

My legs were not on the ground
and I was not flying either.

SONNET MONDAL

A Breeze from My Childhood

On an afternoon
during my summer vacation
Mother made me a few small clay figures—
and painted them with a red dye.

The bargain was, I should bathe
in the well and eat my lunch
before I could have those toys.

Placed on the edge of a charpoy
the toys fell off and broke
as I was executing the deal
with rice and curry in my mouth.

From a distance, I felt water splashing
the freshly painted walls of my mind.

The dye was the colour of my thoughts.

After decades now, I wonder
about the exact moment when I grew up
and the exact moment I would grow old.
It's like a glint vanishing through rolling wheels.

I am still at some distance and can see
the walls of my house falling off
like those clay toys Mother made.

I feel an air cooling my shadow.
It must be travelling from the meadows
surrounding my childhood home.

MARK BRAZAITIS

West Virginia

On his way from Washington, D.C., to appointments at the Cleveland Clinic, my father would stop for the night at our house in Morgantown. My wife would make something he liked or we'd order pizza, and our older daughter would ask him to give her one of his Famous Flipper-roos. At three, at four, she was light enough so even when his cancer had nibbled the strength from his arms and legs, he could hoist her onto his shoulder, somersault her over his chest, and ease her down his legs, her feet meeting the hardwood floor with a thump of delight.

In the early stages of his cancer, he could still play golf. I would take the day off to be his partner on the Mountainview course at Cheat Lake. In memory, all of our days on the course are the same: warm sun, cool breezes. He'd always beat me, and not because I let him. But in his final summer, the closest he could come to playing a round was to stare at his library of golf books and swing a nine-iron in his front yard—twice, three times—before the pain in his spine made him think he'd broken his back.

When his cancer began to shoot out the stars in his brain, leaving him in a gray twilight of forgetfulness, he thought all his visitors, after offering their false-cheerful goodbyes, were going home to West Virginia. (With the strange candor his illness inspired in her, his wife admitted to being annoyed by his fixation on a state to which she felt no attachment.)

To the end, my father had all of us returning here. I wondered why. Was it the golf? His daughter-in-law's cooking? His granddaughter and her eager laughs?

Was it the song about "almost heaven"? Was he wanting us all close to where he hoped he was going?

He was an atheist, though—a fervent one.

It is I, sixteen years after his death, who inhabit a kind of afterlife. I dream so often of him it's as if he has a guest rewards card to my subconscious. I use his favorite words and phrases—indeed, indeed I do—and my gestures, from placing a contemplative finger to my forehead to swinging my right arm as I walk, faithfully follow his flight paths. And only yesterday, as I was about to mow my lawn, I found a golf ball—brand new, one of his favorite brands—sitting as plump as an Easter egg in my backyard grass. It was the perfect fall day to play: warm sun, cool breezes, the trees aflame with color. It was as if he'd dropped the ball from the heavens he didn't believe in so I might recall a round of golf we'd played or imagine us playing anew. If so, the gesture was unnecessary, redundant.

VICTORIA KORTH

The Olmsted Bridge

*Genesee Valley Park, Rochester NY
for Hal*

Standing on its slight arch in midsummer dusk,
I smell the air this upstate park exhales
from oaks he planted, now knobs and knees two centuries old.
Acorns lodged between the bridge's shattered joints remind me,
you would have eased them out
and held them in your palm while leaning over to watch the carp.
There are still yellow flags on the bank, and planes
coming close as they approach the airport. There is still
the wish that you have held this place inside you.
Now parks are called green spaces.
Now your tie drags on a Brooklyn window sill
as you lean out to assure me, hey, the street is lined with trees.
Yet I worry whether you can breathe, so look up, as Olmsted may
have,
and picture what he planned, you under his watchful oaks
rubbing clean his children's children—
your way across Long Meadow after work—
fringed acorns in your pocket.

VICTORIA KORTH

Mailbox

His grandfather would have been adept, helped
decide exactly where to dig the hole, which kind
of post, wood or steel, concrete or gravel fill, or dirt,
metal box—regulation style—but not his father,
not that I recall. He'd hire someone
or work so fast I never saw it done, or frowned
so much I blocked it out, his talents close as cards,
buried well until well after he was gone.
Maybe I was too efficient, maybe not.
Most likely not. I'd rather read and watch
for signs of spring, make cocoa, cut the vegetables.
Where did he learn, my son, to put a mailbox in?
I focus on the negative, trash among the trees
at his new house, driveway thick with slush, broken
downspout, unraked leaves, evidence of invasive weeds,
fox den nearby and deer, as everywhere; I make a list
then try to sleep. Yet there it was today, sturdy, stern,
and useful. And here am I, trying to resist small sadness
on the other side of effort, up-creep of helpless certainty:
as long as men are men, I will be a mother,
and time that lets him build small structures
to keep birthday cards from getting rained on
will be the stuff of stories, boxy truck ebbing
down French Road, pulling partway on the grass.

CINDY HUNTER MORGAN

The Speed of Light

After W.S. Merwin

So gradual in those summers was the going
it seemed the apples would always be
almost ripening, the pasture always
thick with clover. Days were green
with snap peas and wild tendrils.
Clematis curled through its trellis,
snapdragons bulged like the throats of frogs
until every blossom sang. I assumed
the breezy song of the veery would spiral
through every afternoon, would loop round
the orchard forever and float through
all of our days. My grandmother baked cookies,
lining the blue counter with round suns
we ate without counting. I thought
she would always only need a twenty-
minute nap, would always move like a bee
from room to room. I did not hear the soil
growing quiet. It was only at night before
sleep when I listened to my grandparents
listening to the weather radio
that I began to hear something increasing
like the height of waves, the chance of frost.

CINDY HUNTER MORGAN

Strike

My nephew flies a drone
over my grandparents' empty house,
over the orchard and empty barn,
and past glazed windows – sun igniting
the stained wallpaper of empty rooms.
Every day the temperature slips –
minus five, minus ten, and still
the fire department plots to burn the house.
We wait for the match to strike –
a flame as slender as a finger.
They'll bring in hay bales and wood
pallets to kindle what is empty.
It hardly makes sense, the scale
of what will come. My grandpa
lit one match each autumn, put a log
on the fire every night before bed,
stoked the fire every morning
with apple wood until apple trees
blossomed in May. He kept his fires
small, cleaned his chimney.
My nephew flies the drone
with insect certainty – sends it
through the breezeway and over
flagstone steps, and for a moment
it's my grandma – alive, running –
her boots, unbuckled,
flapping past the picket fence.
Then her arms are wings again,
she's 400 feet above the back door,
and I stand in snow and ice, knowing
how heat will rise, that hawks
will glide on thermals.

CINDY HUNTER MORGAN

Far Company

After W.S. Merwin

At times now from some margin of the day
I can smell apples cooking in a pan,
for a moment cinnamon or maybe only
the memory of cinnamon until all of it
blows away and I am left remembering
not apples but what apples help me
remember – my grandmother at the stove,
her apron tied behind her into a bow,
the bow like a swallowtail, and I'm afraid
if I move I'll spook the butterfly,
but I move anyway – there is no way to make
anything last – and then I'm outside
another house with another open window
where the scent of apples has floated
and settled in a pot of bubbling oatmeal,
and my mind, which like a child
had stayed behind to remember
the calico print of the cotton apron,
clambers up behind me, tugs
my jacket sleeve, and wonders if
we should walk home to the garden
and wait by the zinnias.

JIM DANIELS

Center of the Universe

Detroit recession, 1979-82

I dreamed I lived on Rome Street again
and touched the streetlight pole, safe at last.
The goal for hide-and-seek and all other games.
Safe again. My palm against splintered creosote

and rusty staples or thumb tacks of ancient
announcements of yard sales and lost dogs
and Jesus visitations. Wizenened. Like the face
of my unshaven father who planted three trees

out near the curb, one after another. They all died
but the pole remained upright, its own branch
of light keeping us safe under its close, constant
moon. That branch was not olive.

Hands on the tree overlapping each other,
skin brushing skin without slivering.
Grown, we scattered like kids scatter, ants
on the globe searching for melted ice cream.

We didn't get far, landing at the dead end
in the constant distant haze: the factory
that never closed until it did. And so
left to our own devices, we searched

for new devices, reverse-raptured into
cracked concrete street slabs, imaginary
sinking, sinking into the general *we*
of the identical cars we built.

I left when the retraining funds
and unemployment ran out. Crashed
into mirages of security at half the pay
and naked mannequins with no genitals

and made it as far as Ohio where Jesus
had retired to a farm off the turnpike.
He waved as I passed. I know I'm off
track in my ancient gas-guzzling

transportation special. I can blame it
on dead trees or the telephone pole
or the lack of adequate recreational facilities,
or my tolerance of alcohol and funny pills,

but the truth is embedded in that light pole
of my dreams, turned into a large pine chain-
sawed down. Timber! It fell in the forest
of abandoned three-bedroom ranches

and no one heard it. Our stories—my story—
hijacked by ancient terrorists
from the old naïve days of D.B. Cooper
parachuting to safety, getting away

with it—the communal dream
we shared, with slightly different referents
for it. I awoke holding up my hand
bitten by the lost dog, finally come home

to claim its bowl of nothing.

JIM DANIELS

On the Edge of Detroit

In the woods behind Schofield Elementary
skipped over by levelers and pavers
bulldozing through to the Further Away,
we built nests in the swampy lowlands,
the only hiding place for miles.

Lush fluorescent algae stink, elusive tadpoles
and toads and frogs and rabbits and leaf rustle
and boy tussle over the biggest sticks,
the heaviest stones. Old trees tall enough
to drop dead out of, rampant sprawl of weeds,

cattails, stray dogs, rumors of deer, and birds
that were not sparrows. Our streets ran straight,
new and treeless yet. Our houses stamped out
like auto parts our fathers made—count mattered,
not craft. The fetid water could not carry us

to Further Away, but we could sink there, muck
oozing up into evidence of trespass we could not
wash away. What fear we could muster, we invested
in that small square of trees. Our first bank accounts

of spare change and squalor. Beside the school, factories
of our fathers squared off, surrounded by the smoking
guns of parking lots, waiting for us with their metallic
jungle of the terrible promise of security.
When we brought pollywogs home in glass jars

they died quickly into the limp punctuation
of our futures. We threw mud and cattails
at each other in random battles, learning
the company message of turning on each other.

Our mothers washed us off with hoses

and sent us to our rooms. We did our first things
in those woods, in that swamp, until they called
it a city park—cut down trees, drained water,
erected swings and a globe you could climb.

Even a tennis court that quickly earthquaked
into cracks, and a fence that shrugged into rust—
keeping us out, or protecting us from that dull
game exposed to summer sun. Holes in the nets
too big to catch anything.

I climbed that globe to be atop that tamed world,
unable to resist its perfect roundness
above all the leveling. We searched in vain
for the rumored rough beasts.

JIM DANIELS

End-game Small-talk

My oldest friend has a cold, and his mother
is dying. I might be catching it over the phone.

The cold, I mean. My mother? Also dying.
Anything on TV to cure a cold? A child riding

a bike up a hill paused when he called. Sentimental
tale—wise grandfather, tough, single mom.

His mother's forgotten his name, and the many names
of death. My mother is blind, but sees it coming.

We are the same age for one day each year: June 7.
We call each other for luck, for answers to the test

we're both failing. Briefly on the same page
without instructions. A shadow passes my window

blurry through glass block. Next time we talk,
it'll be about somebody's mother's funeral.

Nevertheless, when are you coming home,
he wants to know. A handyman now after

losing his bar. I'd hire him if he weren't
300 miles away. Mold stains my wall

behind the TV. We lived in basements across the street
from each other on Detroit's serrated edge amid semi-

regular floods. Our parents crammed kids into tiny
box houses, one after another. Our mothers,

best friends for forty years, stopped speaking.
That's water in the basement now, and we're

living upstairs with our own kids. Happy Birthday,
a day early, by the way. Harder to shake a cold

these days. I turn off the TV—I trust the boy will get
up that hill. If Jesus walked on water,

he didn't do it in a basement on Rome Street.
He got out the mop like the rest of us.

ZILKA JOSEPH

What We Wear

ma when I miss you most I bury my head
in your old chunni or kurta or nightgown I smell your
smell and the dust

of the city of my childhood
city of your death
the dust of the house of burdens
no rest for you no one to care
properly for you even
as your aged body crumbled

the saris you stored away in overstuffed
cupboards were too tiresome to wear
so you wore salwar-kameez
soft pastel cotton prints but mostly
because of the heat you
wore only a loose flowing kurta

sans the pajamas but you would hurriedly
pull them on and drape one of your colorful
chiffon chunnis over your chest
only if some vendor or visitor
unexpectedly
showed up at our door

ah those days when I lived at home
we lived in worn-thin
sleeveless cotton nighties and dad
wore his ratty shorts and his faded
but favorite one pocket *Fruit of the Loom*
T-shirt I brought for him from America

how swelteringly hot it was in summer

we could barely
breathe

heat bearing down
from the roof the fans
slapping humid air there was
only you and dad and I
and life was slow slow slow

who cared about what we wore at home
or what looked good or shabby
those kinds of things never
bothered us anyway
and how on those muggy afternoons
after lunch we would draw the curtains
and settle down to sleep in a row
like little children
on your joined beds

we slept like the dead
three old souls becoming one
softly rocking
on a raft on a peaceful and infinite sea

one day
you died suddenly
I returned to your empty bed

alone when I was tidying up
I found
in the drawers under your bed
chiffon chunnis of every color

gleaming like a shroud
of rainbows

did you watch ma as we dressed you

in your apricot-colored salwar-kameeez
draped your head and shoulders
with a matching chunni

covered
you in rose petals before we
gave you
to the flames

it's burned so deep
the wound
never heals

your feather-light chunni
this scarf of fire
I wear around my neck
bury my face in it
search for your smell
for home
see how heavy it sits
this ring of fabric
this weight waiting to be lifted

ZILKA JOSEPH

The Beetles Are Eating

the beetles are eating
the pine trees further
and further north
filling the bark with larvae
resin drips onto the ground
and moths drain
the birch trees dry

how hollow is the oak tree now
when even the great horned owl has fled
to who-who-who knows where
or does she hide in plain sight
telling us she is just a ghost
waiting to return
to earth

and the female gold finch who is drawn to my windows
everyday this summer will not stop
tap-tapping knocking
knocking at first this window then that
east, south, west
then she hangs on the hummingbird feeder
or on the screen and peers and peers
head moving side to side
up and down
contemplating nothingness sometimes
for minutes on end through the glass door
flaps up and down trying to find
just one crack just one break
though the glass
that holds her back
from this world
she's at it again

breaking my heart
with her persistence

I want to say I'll let you in
how will you survive in here
free spirit return to your open sky
even though the heat grows
and spreads higher up the latitudes
and desert temperatures
are now in cities
shaved clean of trees
and birds

and this year's scorcher summer
closed schools in India
for two weeks
unheard of when I grew up there
but the sun is getting hotter everywhere
and crows around the world know it
and the sparrows
and the pistachio-green Diwali flies
that descended on us in October
when I was a child
have turned pale as dust
clinging to faded walls
and gardens that once knew
flowers

and here the insects that travel north
to once cooler climes
once inch at a time
now begin to call it home

we are heading towards the poles
all of us
eating our way up slowly
or faster than we think

northward here
southward there
east or west
how hungrily we look
at Antarctica
the moon
Mars

barren-ness is what we create

oh little one, you who look
at me with innocent eyes
we are looking
through glass walls
wondering what's out there

will there be anything left at all

we have to repair the earth
every waking moment

child, if we do not shake the blind
kings from their thrones

where humankind is headed
is a hot burning place

keep your cool
hold my hand
on our journey we will
all need shade food water

JAMES VESCOVI

Central Park

Off the boat she trudged, a tall woman in a strange land married to a strange man, who'd returned to the old country in 1925 to find a wife—her. He had red hair, an overbite that made her frown when he ate apples, and a wandering eye—not a rare oddity in Italy's isolated mountain villages, where the gene pool needed refreshing.

He brought her to a tenement on East 61st Street, told her to unpack her trunk, left her alone to discover the marvels of America, and went out to the bar he owned on Lexington Avenue.

She went to the faucet and twisted the tap: running water gushed into a deep enamel sink.

To her left was a gas stove. She should feel lucky; he'd told her that most American stoves burned coal and; as a child in Italy, her peasant family cooked with wood.

An icebox squatted in a corner—to be replaced when they had money to buy a Frigidaire—soon, her husband said. He'd found her a job cleaning offices at night. After their first child came, she'd quit.

Behind her was the bath tub, for which he apologized because some apartments in the tenement had a full bathroom.

She stared out into a dusky airshaft. She thought, What is this existence where a woman trades family, clean air, and scent of flax for modern gadgets and crowds?

An hour later, she'd finished unpacking and waited in the bedroom, watching traffic pour off the Fifty-ninth Street Bridge under snow flurries.

A key turned in the lock. She hurried to the front door, but it opened before she could reach it. Her husband entered with a white box tied with string.

“Tonight, my sisters and their families will come to meet you,” he said, smiling. “You’ll serve this cake with coffee.”

He hung up his coat in the bedroom. He opened the armoire where she’d hung her clothes, then closed the doors softly and reappeared in the kitchen.

“Let me give you the run down on this building.

“Sit,” he added, pointing to a round table.

“One flight below us on the third floor is Toton. He’s a drunk, but harmless. If you find him passed out in the hallway, step over him.

“Hannah Makevich, on the first floor, keeps her door open to see who enters the building. She’s a spider who’ll draw you into her apartment, which is filthy. Smile and pass by quickly.

“The Swede, Anderssen—he works at night at the post office. On warm days, he sunbathes on the roof, sometimes with his cazzo showing. If we have daughters, keep them away—maybe sons, too.

“Finally, Gelsomina—directly above us. She’s a widow, from a village not far from yours. If you don’t knock on her door today, she’ll knock at yours tomorrow.”

He kissed her and went out to the bar, where a liquor delivery was arriving. She rattled around her new home, hesitant to visit this Gelsomina.

The following day, she descended the staircase to visit the local shops. Sun poured down through a skylight.

Outside, a woman sat on the stoop, whose handrails ended in sharp-beaked gryphons.

She stood up and smiled. Her hair covered her head like a sea shell.

“Are you Gelsomina?” asked the young wife.

“Yes. Let’s walk.”

The two strolled towards Second Avenue. A block later, under the Third Avenue elevated, the new wife felt the need to duck when a train roared by overhead. They passed fancy townhomes near Park Avenue.

Gelsomina whispered, "The bankers live here."

They entered Central Park.

"My children played here," said Gelsomina, pointing to a playground. "The sprinkler is turned on Memorial Day. The trees are bare now, but in summer the benches over there provide shade. Get here early. And the vendors—don't eat the pretzels; rats nibble on them where they are stored at night."

They observed nannies with large prams and immigrant mothers with modest ones and moved on.

"This way," Gelsomina said, steering the wife down a flight of steps.

"I hear music," she said.

"That is the giostra. In English, 'carousel,'" said the widow.

"My father let me ride one in Bologna once."

Gelsomina took the new wife's arm. "Now, I want to show you something you may need."

They turned down a winding path and after a brief walk stood before an outcrop of black rock forty feet high. The silica within it reflected the sunlight like slivers of diamond.

"That's what is called Manhattan schist," said the older woman. "It allows the skyscrapers to stand up tall. Place your hand on it."

"It's warm."

"Even in winter it gives heat." Gelsomina took a deep breath. "Now we will walk backwards in this direction"—she pointed—"across the grass."

"Indietro?"

“Yes, backwards. Don’t worry, we’ll hold each other so we don’t fall. Keep your eyes on the schist.”

They took one careful step at a time. A grin spread across the new wife’s broad face—her first since boarding the ship in Genoa.

“Watch the rock take shape. Tell me what you see,” said Gelsomina
The outcropping was jagged and peaked on top.

“How will I know?” asked the wife.

“Because you’ll immediately stop,” Gelsomina replied, laughing, “and the sorrow you feel at leaving your people won’t hurt as much.”

A few more steps and the wife cried, “Madonna!”

“You see it?” said Gelsomina

“I do! It’s Mount Cervillino!”

Gelsomina nodded. “Forty villages wake up to that mountain. Even when its hidden by clouds, we strain our eyes to see it. When we leave home and come back, it’s the first thing that we look for. Come here, when you feel homesick.”

On the slow walk home, Gelsomina added, “Well, perhaps one day, you won’t need that rock anymore. You will be American.”

“Did you come here often?” asked the new wife.

“Me?” asked Gelsomina. “I have never stopped coming.”

NAN BYRNE

Duplex: The River You Cannot Cross

This is a hard country your mother is not here
Your father is not here

A father is not here
Maybe a cousin or a friend assist you

Sometimes a cousin or a friend
but not for long

They say not for long
Names that are more than family

Forget the names of your family
Dream they are a river you can not cross

The river you can not cross is a dream
The one you can not wake up from

Wake up from the dream
To be deprived of them is to make them appear

NAN BYRNE

Detroit Morning

On the ruined road
that runs along the lake drive
where the laughing gulls shriek
and the invisible fish swim
as if they had invented silence

in my blue coat in the warm wool coat
I first wore when you were still alive
still walking cautiously in your bedroom slippers
across the living room carpet
your gray hair combed in Detroit style

Still a great city to live you said
even now, but not for the haircuts
but for the dogs and the zip sauce

Some things change,
others remain the same
like the cold bite of winter on my fingers
as I place them one by one
the rocks I gather into a cardboard cup

Each one as you would have said
alone except for the others
because that's what we are

EILEEN CLEARY

Mass for a Foster Brother

for George Burke

Most of my fellow playmates are white haired
fifty years later, alive but
closer to rising silence.

One, today, gave his breath
into a crown of pneumonic splendor
and ignored the warm porch light,

of the house I'd learned he built
after giving five years to the Navy,
where I think his parents sent him

because of his shenanigans. Once
he managed to lure the neighbor's
pony into his backyard pool,

just to savor the commotion
of his mother chasing him
with a broom before he led

Daisy's colt safely out.
Who can know the mechanics of that?
George must have been, after all,

very bright. He filled in as umpire
for our little league before he had facial hair.
And we all knew he was fair, and

would call a ball a ball because
of how that ball lopped
nowhere over the plate, and not

because the skinny girl at bat lived
with his family, and was his sister
for a few years between

shag haircuts and hot pink culottes.
And not because she would
lug a whole gallon of Zarex

to his high school football field
just to watch the boys sing “YMCA”
at half-time; Georgie, always in the thick

of it, picking himself off the ground
whenever the village people advised.
It’s been years since I saw George,

and in the meantime, he called
a lot more games and was
his family’s favorite uncle,

always up to pinch-hit,
until a few days ago, when he
left his body behind in a hospital bed,

then floated past the purple grapes and fresh bread
resting on the wooden countertop
his once warm hands carved

for his children, who are older now
than either of us will ever be,
when last we met.

MARA ADAMITZ SCRUE

Easter Sunday 1963

It might have seemed eerily sacrificial if you didn't know what you were looking at: a 50-gallon rusted steel drum – its once-shiny red paint now burnt crusty and peeling – resting on a faintly raised berm of packed earth some distance behind the detached, lopsided garage sitting at the south end of our lot. A postage-stamp-sized remnant of a one-hundred-sixty-acre former farm – the highest elevation for miles around – our half-acre place was sold to Mom and Dad by a semi-successful old farmer who knew an opportunity when he saw one. Eventually the wide-open countryside around us would grow up to nascent suburb, former corn fields giving way to block-after-block, rectilinear tracts of three-bedroom “ramblers” – the mid-century Midwestern term assigned those ubiquitous, low-lying, single-story residences – each featuring a picture window positioned at the front like a huge eye overlooking the street, and every one of them plopped down at the same time on contiguous, treeless, one-eighth acre lots. The houses were nearly identical except that during construction one side of the street was excavated with an eight-foot-deep, block-long ditch to provide basements, while the dwellings opposite them were built on formed concrete pads poured directly over leveled soil. I was a toddler when we moved from the inner city to the country. And by the time these modern, up-to-date domiciles popped up all around us – the result of a local and national 1950's and '60's post-World War II building boom – our one-and-a-half-story, stucco-sided, 1914 Tudor-style farmhouse seemed old, tired, and ramshackle.

* * *

The four of us – Mom and my two sisters – stayed in the house after Dad's multiple hospitalizations and their subsequent divorce. Mom did her best to make ends meet on a 1960's secretary's salary despite “our situation” – that's what she called it – and she was determined that we present an upbeat and happy face to the world. She did

everything she could to make us seem like “a normal family” – again her words – notwithstanding the scandalous facts of my father’s frenzied drinking, my mother’s full-time job outside the home, my parents’ break-up, and Mom’s eventual and discomfiting designation as the neighborhood divorcee.

* * *

Saturdays at our house were reserved for baking, cleaning, and disposing of trash. Mom woke up early to start the bread to rise and sometimes, to get us out of bed when unwelcome tasks awaited, she made fresh donuts, deep frying and then rolling them – still almost too hot to handle – in sugar and cinnamon so that her “three little dolls” would have something sweet to eat before moving on to the morning’s main chore of collecting our household rubbish and hauling it out to the backyard. Sanitary pick-up was available, but the town service cost extra money we didn’t have, and Mom – a country girl born and raised – knew just what to do about that.

* * *

Only a year or two separated in age, my sisters and I always shared clothes and we expected to wear hand-me-downs even for holidays, with one exception: Mom made sure that each of us had a brand-new hat to wear to church on Easter Sunday; a tradition we counted on and looked forward to. That Saturday – the day before Easter – we woke up early and excited knowing that, before we started in on our work for the day, we’d each receive a new hat to go with our new-to-us Easter dresses. I can still see my mother, slim, decidedly pretty, and always moving at breakneck speed – her thick head of wavy, copper-color hair cropped short and brushed back efficiently from her face – handing me a paper sack emblazoned with the stylish gold and black logo of Dayton’s Department Store, one of the nicest in the city. A frugal farm girl in most things, Mom loved pretty clothes, and my hat was no exception; a molded cap made of canary yellow felt adorned with a matching veil, I understood, even then, that it cost much more than we could afford. But it fit me perfectly and,

Mom said, the sunny shade looked especially attractive next to the full head of strawberry blonde hair I'd inherited from her.

Later that morning, the four of us gathered the week's trash and piled it up out back of the garage: one heap for burning and the other bagged up and ready to hand off to one of the neighborhood dads who periodically stopped by – sometimes more often than was strictly necessary – on their way to the local dump. Mom packed the steel drum – with holes drilled toward the bottom to facilitate burning; Dad must have done that at some point before he left – with cardboard, broken-down boxes, and paper bags, including the one from the department store – so fancy and elegant I hated to see it go – at the very top. She lit a match and a few flames flickered as she stirred up and then tamped down the papers and bags and boxes – airing then depressing the contents with a metal rake – as I vaguely registered – though in her flurry of efficiency she probably didn't – the slight swell of the Dayton's bag that caught fire and flattened out only after she got the blaze going. For a good while we stood watching, just to make sure that all proceeded according to plan, as everything burned to fine ash at the bottom of the barrel.

* * *

Easter Sunday April 14th, 1963: it was cold outside, but calm and sunny with an unusually high predicted temperature of 76 degrees, the kind of spring day that's especially appreciated in Minnesota where everyone knows that winter's not taken leave until the last snowstorm of mid-April blows over. Awake and dressed before being told, the unruly hair on each of our heads brushed away from our faces and held in place with special sparkly barrettes, my sisters and I could hardly wait to show off, for Mom's inspection, our special Easter hats and our more-or-less matching holiday dresses. But despite a frantic last-minute search of every closet, corner and cranny, my hat was nowhere to be found. And after a few moments of mounting confusion and distress – that I would never have thought to openly express – all-at-once my mind focused on the image of the department store bag sitting atop the Saturday trash fire, and then

it dawned on me what had happened to that splendid, creamy-soft, lemony felt concoction. Standing and waiting as quiet as I could in the hallway outside her door – I wasn't going to cry – I watched as Mom walked quick-step into her bedroom and plucked a small square of embroidered white cotton from the uppermost drawer of her dresser. Calling me over to her side – and giving me a look that said in no uncertain terms, “no backtalk” – she shook out the four-square folds of the doily she wore to Mass every Sunday except holy days, plunked it down, patted it into place to cover my hair, and briskly, but firmly, bobby-pinned it to the top of my head.

KEITH TAYLOR

Learning to Live with Our Neighbor's New Fence

We hope our new neighbors didn't build
their fence because we did something wrong.

Maybe they just want to keep their dog in
or be comfortably naked in their hot tub.

It's possible they don't like the look of our wild backyard,
unraked for the sake of bugs and butterflies.

Maybe they get worried when I walk out there
in every season wearing binoculars, watching for migrants.

They haven't lived here long enough to see the ash
and mulberry trees come down under snow or ice.

They don't know that our black walnuts and cherries
could drop a limb in any reasonable wind.

The trees might turn their fence to kindling
and there's no way we're paying to fix it.

They won't smell our compost when we move it
closer to their wooden wall (we're good with odor).

They probably won't expect the vines
we'll plant or the elves and fairies

of rot we'll encourage, spreading
slowly into their back corner.

KEITH TAYLOR

When the Beast Passes Through

Woke to snow-light
in our last significant snow

on a quiet day
in a time of quiet days

and tracks in the snow
up from the avenue

fresh tracks
very fresh

canid tracks
but no dog

walks like this
in a straight line

one foot directly
before the last

up and out
toward our neighbors

JAMES ROBINSON

The Lot of Property

It is not a lot of property
but rather just one lot of property,
something no one else would want
but we procured from an acquaintance
who acquired it from a previous owner
when the acquaintance lived next door
in a clapboard mill village house
on a street now-paved and curbed
where half the houses
were vacant and abandoned
but maybe still held hope for better times
as the years since the mill closed
and before an investor convinced the council
there was still breath between its looming
brick walls, tall paned windows,
oiled wood floors and over-looming water tower.

There is still a mill village house
on either side of the lot
--one rented to a young couple maybe as poor
but probably not as desperate as mill families were;
the one on the other side undergoing renovation
by another optimistic small investor.

When we cut the grass on what I like to call
“Our Ponderosa,” we find the remnants
of the brick foundation that once upheld
a four-room house identical to the others
that lined these blocks of mill village streets.

Occasionally we dig up charred remains
of what must have been a stud or beam
from the small house of a family who came

in search of work and found a job not only
for the father but for the wife and children
who lived crammed together for a time
on this lot of property, now empty,
except for the surrounding fence,
a pecan tree, a fig tree, and a submerged
vault for what was once a septic tank
as useless now as an open grave.

PAUL HOSTOVSKY

Sign Language

Maybe I should tell the ending first.
In the beginning was the ending.
If it's a story worth telling, a song
worth singing, it should sing itself. KISS-FIST
is one sign for love. Two fists crossed
at the chest, like a hug, is another. Signing
was hands-down the most beautiful singing
I had ever seen in my life. That's the gist
of the story, the plot, the characters, each
and every visual rhyme, first line to last.
When you fall in love with a language, you fall
in love with the people who call that language
home. One day, I took a sign language class,
and I ended up marrying the teacher.

PAUL HOSTOVSKY

Nostalgia

It's pleasant to remember
the house you grew up in,
big as a childhood,
even if it was a small house,
even if it was an unpleasant
childhood, even if
it was an apartment or
just a room you had
to share--still, it is pleasant
to remember the windows,
those little pieces of sky
you could breathe through
just by looking out of them,
which you did as regularly
and unawares as breathing.
Even if there was unhappiness,
even if there was boredom
or pain on the inside, you can
remember those windows now
with pleasure. You can even
count them, go ahead: one
on that side of the bed, two
across from the door, that door
that opened inward from the inside,
the knob on the left, remember?

PAUL HOSTOVSKY

Homegoing

And what if dying is like
that time I got out of school early
because I had an appointment
and I pushed open the heavy doors
and walked out into the day
and it was a beautiful spring day
or a late winter day that smelled like spring
and if it was fall it was early fall
when it's all but technically summer
and there was a whole world going on out there
and it had been going on out there the whole time
that I was stuck inside with time
and teachers and rules and equations and parsed sentences
but now here I was among the tribe
of the free and I could go this way or I could go that way
or I could just sit down right here on this bench
and look around at all the freedom
that was mine and also the work crew's
breaking for lunch beneath their ladders and also the woman's
pushing her stroller along the sidewalk and also the man's
walking his small dog and smoking a cigarette
and it belonged to the cars whooshing by with a sound like
the wind in the trees and the wind in my hair
and the wind all around me and inside me
and also above me chasing the clouds running free
and suddenly there was my mother
looking somehow a little different
in all her freedom and all my freedom
until she rolled down her window and waved
to come--now--hurry
because I had an appointment
which felt like a real buzzkill
and I briefly considered turning around

and walking away from her
and going off on my own somewhere
to be alone and free for a little longer
or maybe for forever
but then I realized there was nowhere for me to go
except home

Going Home

In his last months, he couldn't bear to be alone. More and more, he became disoriented from the weird isolation of hospital rooms. Mostly I slept in those armchairs that pull out to make a bed. Every four nights I'd go home, so that I could actually get some sleep. He'd try to get out of the bed without disconnecting himself from the various compression and breathing assists, and he could easily have fallen. When I was there, I could soothe him out of trying to go to the bathroom by himself, but when I was at home, he'd get feisty with the staff, and they'd wrangle him back into bed, and then he'd call me. The staff set the pressure-activated alarm in the bed—Walter the flight risk. At best he slept lightly. When he was merely awake, and it was dark outside, he could see the early morning flights taking off from the nearby airport. He would call me and leave voice messages. Even when I was there in his room and had merely gone to the bathroom, he'd call my phone and leave aggrieved voice mail if I didn't respond immediately. I'm glad I had the intuition to keep those messages, so I can hear his voice again. Karen! This is Walter. I am your husband (as though I might have forgotten) and I am all alone! Why have you left me here all alone? Why have you left me here alone in this airport hotel parking garage? That one was funny, but also plaintive—few things more impersonal, desolate, than those gray concrete parking garages.

The Friday after Thanksgiving, he said, clearly, forcefully, I don't want to die in this hospital. I got him discharged under hospice care the next day. Once we were home, I basically gave up sleeping at night. I stayed up with him as long as he needed me to do so, and I slept later on. We watched movies, though who knew how much dialog or plot he could follow by then. I read to him from the journals we had kept when we traveled, and added in my reminiscences, my memories of how he had been. These made him happy, and happiness let him fall asleep. Sometimes I'd need to leave the room, to go to the bathroom. He couldn't tolerate that. Once I put on a Schubert piano sonata CD, told him I'd be right back. I was five minutes. He called my phone

twice, yelled for me. When I returned, he snarled Why did you leave me alone with that horrible music?! I'll never put it on for you again, I said, grateful I had the understanding not to be offended.

We'd turned the bed so that he faced the window, with its view of trees and birds. A week out from his death, he started asking to go home. The first time, I thought he was disoriented. I tried to explain where we were, but he became only more insistent. About the fourth time, I finally realized that he was speaking IN METAPHOR. Some Jungian psychologist I was, right? and some lousy excuse for a poet. I felt like a real cluck. But at last I could answer the question he was really asking: I will help you go home. I will help you find your way. We'll make sure that you can go home. You're on your way home right now. And this was the answer he needed. On his deathbed, in his coma, as he struggled for air and fought to stay alive, I gripped his hand and stroked his arm and told him It's all right, sweetheart. I'll miss you for the rest of my life, but you need to go home. You can go home now and he did.

CHRISTINE BENVENUTO

The Bridge of Her Nose

Leila wants to see my home. My childhood home. We've never gone. Now is the perfect time to go, she says. I say, Now is the perfect time to stay here.

She makes me dream.

It's always the same dream. A woman falling from the back of a horse-drawn wagon. Wearing a white gown like a girl in one of those silly romantic paintings, "Lady of Here-or-There," that made me laugh so hard when I saw one in another boy's room when I first came here for college. The wagon's in an English country lane, hemmed in by trees. Blue sky, sun shining, bee-buzz. So pleasant. Except for this one thing, the girl tipping sideways over the the wagon. She's falling, swooning over the romance of it all. The dream ends right there, mid-fall. She doesn't hit the ground.

Leila says she knows so little about my life before I came here, before we met. I don't talk about it. She says, Shouldn't the children know their father's home?

The actual scene was different from the dream. The scene in the road. There were no trees nearby. The nearest, frail and spindly, trailed each other down a wadi 300 yards from the road and the flatbed truck and the Jeep, the reinforcements we asked to follow us. I saw the woman at the checkpoint, the woman and the two men, the driver of the flatbed and his brother. I think it was his brother. I don't know why I think that. The road was dusty. The woman, as soon as she landed in the road, was dusty. As if she had lain there a long while.

I recognized her. Her eyes and the bridge of her nose. That doesn't seem possible, does it? From the bridge of a nose? I recognized people.

It was a holiday. We drove past a little Bedouin girl dancing with a paper flag just before we reached the flatbed. Surrounded by goats

in the brown field, waving a flag that wasn't hers from a country that wasn't hers. We all watched her. No one said a word.

I was good at my job. I had a sense about people. I glimpsed them darting between buildings or in crowds. Faces in surveillance footage. Blurred faces, seen for an instant. A limp, a gesture, some piece of body language. At the check point I recognized the woman from a group photograph. I didn't say anything. They drove on. Then it hit me. I said, Her eyes. The bridge of her nose. Was it possible? The commander wondered. But we followed the truck. You can't ignore a hunch even if that's all it is.

It was the intense, dry heat I've always been afraid of. I think I might make some terrible mistake. Step into traffic. Misfire a pistol. This woman wasn't a mistake.

She must've been amazed to make it through the border patrol. All three of them. It must've felt miraculous. They thought they were going to make it all the way. Laughing, maybe, nervous energy. She was 19. A time bomb in the shape of a 19 year old woman. I was 19 also.

Stop!

She stood up in the back of the truck before it stopped. She faced us with her arms raised. Was shot. Fell sideways into the road. That I didn't shoot her myself doesn't matter. One way or the other. Her hair tumbled out of her scarf. Dust collected in her eyelashes.

They were headed for the city. Who knows how many would've died. It would have set off panic.

Girls who blew themselves up - Girls who'd shamed their families. Girls with nothing to live for. Offered a chance to redeem themselves. Martyrdom. Maybe their families were threatened. Starving. The daughters or sisters of fanatics, maybe fanatics themselves. Desperate. The girl. The 19 year old woman -

Reports of an explosive device headed for the city in the shape of a 19 old woman would've set off panic. There was no media coverage. No

internal records. No witnesses. The men were also unavoidably shot, though I have no memory of it. In their village, their families never discovered what became of them.

Actually, their families recovered the bodies for burial that same night. There were internal records. There had to be, didn't there? But no media coverage. Not a word about what happened, what would've happened if I hadn't recognized a pair of eyes and the bridge of a nose. Those eyes, that bridge of her nose. She died for them. Of course she would have died anyway.

Leila doesn't resemble her. They're nothing alike.

Even among ourselves it wasn't spoken of. Aside from the people there it was impossible to say who knew. Among the people there, it was impossible to say who remembered.

That Friday night, at my parents' table, I looked at my family. Talking, being themselves. I told myself, As if it never happened.

Even her footprints were gone. Of course, there were no footprints. They were on the truck. Tire tracks. Traces. Long gone. That I didn't shoot them myself doesn't matter. One way or the other. I don't regret identifying her. How can I? I'm not sorry. I'm not proud. I feel nothing. It's only the dream. Awake, I remember the actual incident in actual detail. And yet my sleeping mind insists on replaying the episode in this absurd romantic revision. I never tell Leila. Mornings I wake from the dream and Leila's face is beside me. I see the bridge of her nose, I watch her eyes open. Recognition flowers. I tell myself, always, the same thing. As if it never happened.

She wants to see my home. Shouldn't she know my history? Shouldn't the children?

I wonder. Did the little girl playing with the flag nearby hear the gunshots? No. Maybe. She must have. The shots rang out - No. No one heard them.

As if it never happened.

ELIZABETH KERLIKOWSKE

Bachelor Father

Mermaids rode the wallpaper carousel, side-saddle on seahorses.
Mermen floated nearby with lascivious mustaches.
the children's bathroom: set for the last battle
of the underpants I automatically put on after a bath.
No. Take those off. Why?
You don't need underpants under your pajama pants.
I felt I did. My grandmother told me I did.
When you're married, you can't wear underpants to bed.
Why? Is that a law like stop signs, like not stealing?
Mermaids watched, on my side; they wore tails
made of glistening armor that never came off. I wouldn't argue.
Ok. He put me to bed without my underpants, smug
that my training had begun.
When the door shut, I went to my dresser drawer for underpants.
Gone. But my grandmother had zipped an extra pair
in my sleep-over bag.
He underestimated us. Such drama over a small piece of cloth,
like the mermaids' bras they weren't allowed to wear, he said,
when the lights went out.

LESLIE SIMON

A Language to Dwell In

I. Beginning

*You gave me a language to dwell in,
a gift so perfect it seems my own invention.
--Toni Morrison to James Baldwin at his death*

The original place we dwell in is the womb. Floating in liquid, we develop limbs, facial features, and a breathing system that accompanies us into our early exile. Wanderers ever after, we look for places we can call home or spaces in which we feel at home. Thrust from the womb, we scramble to survive, catching on quickly that we must find a way to make contact. Landing in language, we try to reconstruct a place for ourselves. Perfect, like the womb. We cry, then point and, eventually, speak. We tell story after story, trying to get our needs met, our people known, our ideas believed. We build our language like we build our homes. All the places we inhabit are so many words, so many wants: warmth, protection, comfort, desire. It doesn't always fit. Sometimes the edges remain jagged. But we still look and dream, settle down and talk.

II. Middle

*We passed before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground.
Emily Dickinson*

If you live long enough, you will know the feeling of your breath knocking down your chest and out your mouth. It's the building that does it. The soft wave of word and sound that beads into another story and keeps you moving. It's funny how the same stories turn up again no matter how hard some people try to dig holes for them. They just keep on rising like shelters, from the ground.

III. End

*the flowers have eyes
if they had mouths
their songs would slay us
--Kamau Daáood*

The value of a good blade. The private, hidden slaughter house. And the public ones. The war that blooms unflower-like in pots of fear and sorrow. When one mind loosens and another hands it the deluded twist of a dried up plot, no one can go peacefully into the last sleep. We eat the animals and then our young. One slaying exposes and expands another. Then it arrives. A reckoning of unexpected proportions, on watch for a different ending. Natural and full of the original intention. We hold out for song, a fluency that sends us, after all, home.

ROBERT FANNING

Body of Work

Because we want it brighter. Because we want our own beauty bared
before us. Because we've lived long enough with the room's
deep forest print, we take to the wall. Faces masked,

we begin the task of peeling off the torn, dog-eared green, opening
the story of our house. Years bleed up from beneath the heat
of steam: solids, stripes, prints and florals unfurling

as we score and scrape—decades of blues and deep reds, of pastels
and pale yellows, a spectrum of dust-wet flesh sloughed
off, pages falling in strips and flakes at our feet.

It's more than a century of layers with their pentimento stains of
breath
and voices before we reach bone, breaking through
plaster holes we patch later, before, at last,

the last wet swaths of our chosen painted shade dry; we finish
in the day's fading gold. This is the work of house
and body. Every decorous self a patchwork

of seams and glue, a mashup of lives to make one. Each accretion
of wound and scab a making and unmaking, the flesh
a roll of film, a wall of swatches in the shifting

fashions of light. How I've peeled back year into year, hoping to see
the face of the child I was, the one breathing just beyond
this last brittle layer of blue, whose shadow

blossomed into this life, this room.

Who blooms through his million lids of sleep, his chorus
of bruise and roses. Who sings and sings: stay true, stay true.

JON D. LEE

The Curse of Knowledge

surfaced from basin slough stagnant with blockage / high water content begets moss / slows vegetal decay / results in acidified void devoid of minerals and oxygen / idyllic condition for sphagnum to grow die rot / release carbohydrate polymer sphagnum / only this: likely not last // body dyed / brown stained as oversteeped tea but remarkably preserved: / trimmed nails close-cropped hair eyes closed as in sleep despite plaited leather thong tight around neck / line high on throat indicative of hanging / not choking / no visible puncture marks abrasions tattoos scars except / right amputated hallux // bones: rubber flexible / sphagnum binds nitrogen halts bacterial proliferation but leaches calcium / soft tissue preserved: intestines brain heart lungs / lifelike if desiccated // radiocarbon dated age of 2,300 years / possible sacrifice murder god-offering suicide / unclear whether preservation was intended or accidental but presence elsewhere of waxy foodstuffs made from dairy fat meat indicates rudimentary knowledge of preservation methods // calm compared to some: / one forced to his knees garroted throat slit neck broken skull smashed / thrown in and left to drown / though opinions differ // such pretty eyelashes / teeth // still the half-seen rictus of the anthropocene / so often it comes to this:

JON D. LEE

New Baby

Late August, and those of us who'd burned our necks helping our fathers move sprinkler pipes from one field to the next, or who'd held the pan to catch the milk, or cried at the newness of a slaughtered pig, or even the lucky ones who'd escaped for a time to somewhere larger and exchange cowshit for hot asphalt and rush hour congestion had to remember the shape of letters and the brittleness of pencil lead. We blinked at columns of fractured dust, eighteen pairs of legs dangling from desks still carved with our parents' initials, the ghosts of last year's knowledge on the chalkboard, the teacher's same brown loafers tapping yellowed linoleum.

Then: *Pay attention*
everyone. A new student is joining you. New, would you like to introduce yourself? & we laughed, thinking the teacher had forgotten the name, said "New" by mistake and the student would have to correct it and so join us. Then we saw him, and knew it instantly, though we didn't know what we saw: knew it by the slope of his shoulder, how his hands hung from brown plaid cuffs like dead birds, the thickness of leg inside corduroy, the overfat neck and the Coke bottle glasses in their thick rims. And if not then, then when the words tumbled like cracked and greasy asphalt over a tongue too thick to deal with the lightness of an l or an r, or how an s came not from the tip, but shushed around the sides and through the cheeks. We knew all we needed, so at recess cornered him in part of the yard the teachers couldn't see to call him a word we did not understand, said it again and again, and watched the gravel kick up as he ran back.

That was before our fathers came back from the fields and pig pens, convenience stores and holding cells, and told over rewarmed dinners what they'd heard; and before our mothers whispered what they'd learned from long days at the school

and laundromat, secrets told as the day's last light tinged the brown fields a better color, and drove away the grayness that had settled on the dirt roads and the red brick church house: that the boy's family had moved here after the father was kicked out of somewhere else, had settled into the beat-down house near the dead animal pit, fixed up the roof with nailed-down sheets of tin. That the boy's middle name was Baby, because that's what the doctor wrote on the sheet when the mother hadn't thought up a name, and when she heard it and thought it a sign from God, thought her church had decreed it, took it as gospel, so made it official. More, how there was a younger brother born with a clubfoot and hips that moved opposite the way they should, and at four still mewled like a newborn calf; and younger, a sister who would probably spend what was left of life strapped in a chair and spoonfed, never able to hold a sippy cup or be trusted with a fork. And how, even then, the mother looked like she was carrying. How everyone blamed it on the father, who had driven them down from elsewhere in his rusted honey pot, had spent years emptying port-a-johns and septic tanks, joked about all the undigested pills he'd seen in everyone's waste, said he could tell by smell the last time you were sick. How all the fumes he'd breathed must have done something to his insides, rotted them until not even his babies turned out right. How the ambulance arrived for the mother late one night, and she returned with a box she planted in the back yard.

At some point, something always breaks. So one father, after the second year of drought and the bank calling to repossess his combine harvester, sells what's left and becomes a cop. Or one mother takes out a second mortgage and goes to nursing school. Or some children learn there's always someone lower, and it's only luck it's not you. But there's always some who need it pointed out a little more, and so keep calling names, throwing rocks, finding ways to sneak spitballs. Until one day, maybe a year or two later, when we're at recess and the sun glares off the December snow, we hear a holler, and turn to see one boy face down in a bank and another on top, clump

of hair tight in a fist and a face shoved over and over in the snow, and the one on top screams in a thick and tumbling voice, *stop it stop it stop it stop it stop it stop it stop it*. And though the words blur with screams from the boy whose mouth fills with cold, even the teachers pause just long enough for us to notice before they step in and break them up, send one to the nurse and the other to the principal, but only hold one hand.

But eventually we remembered we were playing games, so someone grabbed the ball, another the bat, and the first swing chipped it foul over the fence into a field where the cows were just turning home, except for one that got down in the snow and birthed an out-of-season calf we all knew wouldn't see spring.

JON D. LEE

December

I

The old woman next door died.
Obituary says she lived alone,
lived to ninety-two, outlived
her husband by twenty years. Doesn't say
she took care of the neighborhood strays, left
food and water on the step, freshened
them every morning. From my window
she buried those cats, two in the last
year alone, her out there
sometimes in the cold with a shovel,
chucking chunks of winter
ground behind her. So much care
for a chunk of matted mangy shit
that hissed and ran away
every time she called it over.

II

A friend requests my address. Woke
to a delivery van dropping packages
of meat on his doorstep, a gift
from his dad. Except he'd died in May,
must have set this up before he left,
box after box of Christmas Omaha steaks for his sons
and his friends and his sons' friends. My friend
says at the end his father thought he'd tailgated
at football games with all of us in Nebraska,
thought we all lived in the same town, thought
we were all bad-ass South Omahan, wanted to see us off.
Except I've never lived there, never met his dad,
who calls me *Jonathan*, not *Jon*,

never been to Nebraska, except to drive
to somewhere else. My friend knows all this. *I'm
a little drunk*, he says. *I talked about you guys...
he paid attention when I talked about you guys...*

III

We string the lights and ribbons and ornaments
on the tree that evening, my wife and son
and I, with the littlest one in her playpen,
staring wide-eyed at the rainbow mobile.
My son clumps all the ornaments together
as high as he can reach, a solid line
of blue and silver four feet off the floor.
Look, he says, *I'm helping*,
and we nod, then rearrange the line
into a more pleasing pattern
when he wanders back to his room. Outside
the window an unseasonably warm rain beats
the driveway, the road, the shingles.
On the tree and in the window
the white lights wink out, wink in, wink out.

CLAIRE WILSON

The Promise

‘I did it, William,’ I whispered to the sea.

It was hard for me, knowing how much he would’ve loved it here. It had been prominent on his list for the best part of 30 years. To visit the place his grandparents were born.

I hadn’t thought much of William the first time I saw him. No burning looks of passion. No secret glances.

The hot sun beat down on my skin as I closed my eyes and remembered.

I could almost feel the Scottish rain on my skin. Opening one eye, I realized it was a little boy playing with a water gun with his father. I smiled to let them know I hadn’t taken offense.

‘No shade,’ as my granddaughter Olivia was keen on saying. I could be doing with some shade against the sun, I thought, as I closed my eye again and settled back into my memories.

1984.

It’d been cold and raining as I’d made my way to the bus stop. He immediately removed his cap and smiled at me. Politeness made me smile back. The date was etched in my memory. The day that we first met. He approached me, coughing to clear his throat before he spoke.

‘Hi there. Nice morning.’

‘Lovely,’ I replied.

‘I’m William Peter Thomson and I’ve just moved to the area.’

Before I could introduce myself, he’d asked me out. Going against everything I was feeling, and wanting to annoy my strict parents, I found myself agreeing. I blamed his eyes, the way they sparkled like

the exotic oceans I'd seen in films. It was his eyes I fell in love with first.

We married just six months later. Things had gone too far one night, and we found ourselves with a nine-month deadline.

'This isn't what you deserve,' he repeated as we made our plans as man and wife.

'We should've had the time to travel the world. Had time for ourselves at least.'

'Don't worry, William. We can have all that once the baby is born.'

Our girl, Janet, was born two days after her due date. Andrew quickly followed a year later before James surprised us a few years after that.

William worked every day while I kept our home a happy one. We could barely afford a holiday in the UK far less one overseas. Instead, we bought a cheap car and a three-bedroom house. Small, but it was ours.

When William got laid off from the mines, things were difficult. He retrained as a bus driver, and I considered employment. But with no experience except how to raise children on a budget, I was unemployable.

Somehow, we got by. When the kids were older, I got a part-time job in a supermarket.

Before we knew it, the kids were teenagers, and we could afford a week in Portugal. It wasn't as far overseas as William would've liked, but it was away from the front door, and we got to feel a bit of sun.

It became a regular thing, saving up for our annual trip to Portugal. Even the kids could agree on that. They wanted less at Christmas – just so me and their dad could afford two weeks instead of one. They were good kids. Still are. The oldest are married off with kids of their own. And James, well, James has always been different. There's a young man in his life, I'm sure of it. Not that I care. As long as they're happy – that's all I care about.

William had always promised to take us to Australia. His grandparents had been born in Perth. Then we would travel to South Africa. Canada. New Zealand. All the places we'd watched documentaries on. He had them all written down on his list. But it was never meant to be. The cancer had gotten to him first. Had spread everywhere before the Doctors had the chance to catch it. He never even let on he was sick. Not until it became impossible for him to hide.

He went quickly. I took solace from that. It had been three months since he passed. The numbing grief. The unfairness of it all. Waking up in the same bed, expecting him to have nipped to the bathroom, waiting on him coming back before remembering he never will.

That's why I'd made the leap.

The mortgage was paid off and I had a comfortable pension. When William's life insurance came through, there was only one way I wanted to spend the money. I brought the whole family here. Down under. Perth. Technically, we brought William too. There was only one place we wanted to scatter his ashes.

'Granny,' said a little voice at the same time as a cold hand touched my shoulder, 'mummy asked if you wanted a drink?'

'That would be lovely, Olivia. I'll have a cup of tea please.'

My hips creaked as I got up off the sun lounger, giving myself ample time to allow my joints to work.

It was almost time. Spreading the ashes later in a private ceremony, arranged with the hotel on the private beach.

'Do you need a hand, Granny?'

'No sweetie. Just give me a minute.'

'What's that you're reading?' I asked, using my walking stick to point to the book in her hand.

'I'm re-reading all the Hunger Games books. They're my favorite.'

I'd been unable to read since I lost my William. I missed the feel of a book in my hand like I missed the feel of William in my bed. 'You'll never be lonely if you have a book in your hand,' was a favorite saying of his.

We walked into the hotel and passed the gift shop. Rows of books lined the shelves next to the window. I slipped into the shop to see what they had.

RUTH GOOLEY

Mal du Pays

Children scrabble in the dirt,
covered with dirt themselves,
shorts tattered, no shirts,
barefoot, although you've been warned
worms can creep in through the soles of your feet.

Wearing only cloth tied around their waists,
bare chests and backs slick with sweat,
two young girls pound millet into mush,
their mortar a hollowed-out calabash,
their pestles pieces of wood taller than they.

Squatted before a brazier,
a mother, baby tied to her back,
lights a charcoal fire,
pours water and rice into a rusted pot,
stirs her stew with a stick.

Three men lazing on stools
wait for their tea to boil,
hold the sweet mint drink high,
pour it from the metal teakettle,
watch the woman work.

A cockroach as big as a mouse
runs past your foot.
You recoil, relax.
Other thoughts
creep into your mind.

Your sisters' jokes, their pokes and humors,

your brothers' replies, their thoughtful frowns,
your friends from grad school,
discussions and even final papers,
professors who became friends.

Your apartment in Playa del Rey,
blessed by an offshore breeze, salt-crisp air,
shrill cries of seagulls and terns,
cool, cloud-dropped sky,
the distant moan of the foghorn from the Marina.

Reliable electricity and potable water,
good mail service and phones,
no mosquito nets,
no bats, no rats,
no packs of undernourished dogs.

No Malians who laugh when you say in Bambara
that you can't speak Bambara.
No passing woman who will see you struggling
to carry out your trash
and place your load on her head.

No travelers on the bachée
who will share a mango with a stranger.
No one to warn of a pickpocket in the market,
laugh at a fly in your coffee,
offer you a refill for free.

No gardien who weaves cloth as he guards,
offers you a homemade blanket,
invites you to his dirt floor case,
where you rinse your hands in a communal cup,
eat tō and rice from a communal bowl with your fingers.

No friendly haggling with merchants,

who ask about your ancestors
before you open with an offer,
laugh as they lower the price, take your coins,
slip in an extra banana or egg.

The call to prayer, the warble of the holy man,
your bamboo chair creaks.
Your face now dry, you stand,
wave at your neighbors,
go inside to soak your lettuce and tomatoes in iodine.

LINDA NEMEC FOSTER

House of Strong Light—El Escorial

Philip II builds a monastery near Madrid with over 2000 windows. It's designed like an upside down grille because the place is dedicated to St. Lawrence who (legend has it) was burned to death on a grid-iron. His famous last words: "Turn me over, I'm done on this side." When the sun sets on a clear day, the monastery's windows fill with fire.

LINDA NEMEC FOSTER

Abandoned House in the Tatra Mountains

Only the foundation is left. Roof, floors, ceilings, walls—all gone. Only the sky remains and the chaotic chorus of wildflowers: dark chicory, red poppies, the slash of willow gentian, chamomiles, blue cornflowers, dog roses, wild angelica in clusters of near white, yarrow crowded into bursts of light purple. They all shout, all at once, from the exposed cellar—as if to sing for no one but each other. Can you hear them? Understand their singular language that will haunt your next dream?

JOHN GREY

This Life And No Other

In this life together, we have chosen to live no other lives.
It's easier than I imagined. We stay in one place
and yet we roll around like the seasons. Spring buds.
Summer puts out new leaves. Fall colors them plenty.
Then winter strips down bare. And all without us
straying from the picture window. Yes, we've grown slack.
But I like to think we've gotten wiser. And your beauty,
once as sharp as wind has grown more melancholy.
And my energy has lost a little rhythm. It treats
the cold as something much colder, the heat as if it
has never been this hot. And furrows show up in the brow.
But, unlike with farmland, those grooves are never seeded.
At least, death's not getting impatient for us. It doesn't
know what to make of our modest lives, our steady attention
to what needs doing around the house. For now, it's more
concerned with guys on motorcycles, skydivers, or poor
souls in nursing homes. And pleasure is much more simple
since those days of hot sex. A good meal gets its attention.
Or even the two of us standing at the window, watching
rain fall. It assumes the guise of a rabbit nibbling in our
garden. Or a conversation with a neighbor over a fence.
And there's pain but it stays clear of the heart. Bills
are a symptom. So are leaking roofs. And tradesmen.
We dream of course and, from time to time, we find our
subconscious has traveled far from where we live, doing
what we'd never dare do with people who we hardly know
or even complete strangers. But, when we awaken, those
fantasies fade. Reality reinstates itself. We're back in this
life together. We've come through "what if?" unscathed.

JANE SCHAPIRO

Open House

In this suburban prefab home,
the ordinary catches one's eye:
a dog, a child. Snout
pressed against her back,
he nudges her.
She yelps with delight.

There must be a name
for moments like these,
when gestures cross,
needs interweave.
A term to call that pause
when the goldfish and I peer

through the bowl. Perhaps these behaviors
date back to Zeus. To Venus
on her scallop shell, her hair
still tangled with the sea, or Leda
inside the Swan, that fiery
blur of leg and wing.

Here there are no
wild joy rides,
no kinky midnight
brouhahas. Nevertheless, desires
converge—a houseplant, a cat,
share a corner of light.

These mutual acts are our only proof.
Scattered like empty beer cans,
they're souvenirs from that Fabulous Age
when the universe hosted
an open house, forms
mingled like drunken guests.

KATHLEEN MCGOOKEY

The Color of George's Fur

It's not the color of the center of the flame. Or the tip, as it flickers and then dissolves. A candle's flame, not a roaring bonfire. Almost like the sheen of brass. Close, but not quite. Warmer. Not that nearly artificial hue the trees blaze, briefly, in October. More like bronze fabric, with a little shimmer woven through. To throw off some light. (If he naps in the sun, imagine all this several shades warmer.) Not a color you can bring home in a box. Why bother getting it right? He's darker than our first, beloved golden. And younger, of course. And competing with our best memories: sprinting like a young deer after the herd; napping, chin in bowl, waiting for dinner; leaping out of the rowboat to join the swimmers; zooming in figure eights in the yard, delighted to see us. Like a young fox, this new dog is burnished as Buddha's belly. Right now, he curls on his bed in a tight ball, nose to tail, eyes shut. Resting up to break my heart.

RODNEY TORRESON

Buddy

Between the stuffed chair
and couch our nine-year-old
granddaughter bumps along a cart.
It contains the cage
that holds her budgie, Buddy—
his bobbing, salubrious blue
and white head, pretty prattle,
white-edged wings
with an appetite for flight.

Our hands will flutter fingers
that mime its wing's small primeval bones,
as the cart twists through a tight space
to her bedroom while we say goodnight;
Leah insists her bird stay close,
as if, covered by cloth,
it yet can sentinel any shadow.

But he'll pass into her room
in daylight too, and we'll cry,
"Buddy, are you going to fly?
Does Buddy get to fly?"—

Sometimes I'll turn my hand
to see its flapping as Buddy sees it,
as if we're part of that flock he watches
from this house
wrapped in windows,
where, in Leah's room, he must dream
of following the trees'
freedom trail up.

We hope, for Buddy's sake,

that flitting above the sill he'll feel
one-uppance—sensing
that the birds of our hands
are tethered to our arms,
that with his wings for a while
riding high, that it's us
who are ruffled, fussing
because we can't come too.

WALLY SWIST

Repetition

After our morning meditation,
I am clear enough
to think to share with you

that I hold my hands upwards,
palms up, close together,
in my lap, so that I can be

open to receive grace,
and then explain from my Zen
practice, years ago, I was

trained to hold my hands
differently, in a kind of mudra,
thumbs barely touching,

as if to produce the space where
the spark of enlightenment might
enter through into the ardor

and discipline of practice;
noting also that I focus
my breath by repeating

an inner prayer that I recite
for you. You nod your head
and thank me, and I cherish

that moment, its clarity,
the satisfaction of knowing
it occurred, before it passes

as all moments pass,
by elapsing into the nebulous
opacity of our forgetting,

reminding us both of what is
reiterated in the inherent gift
repeating itself every morning.

WALLY SWIST

Grace

You call out
from another room
that you see the vixen
and before I can locate

where she is
she is halfway down
the tree break, alternately
practicing stillness

and speed before
she slips into
the bracken, which is how
grace catches us,

which is how she defines
the moment itself,
by leaving us with
her streak of red

etched in our memory,
a swath the color of fire,
an opening into
a chamber of the heart,

in her disappearing
as quickly as we
originally see her,
even before she appeared.

CHRISTINE JONES

Mom Asks Me to Write Her a Poem About the Sky

She wants to brag to her new assisted-living friend. She, who loves me big like the sky, who tells me look up when I'm in need of a prayer. She can't know I'm lost & starless in Delhi where there's a cow at every turn. Where a girl knocks on my car window. Can I learn to carry bricks on my head? A bushel of hay? I count each day in sugar crystals & fennel seeds. Underwater in a pool, the only place I can breathe—the world is smaller than it is. She can't hear this city chanting its six million hymns far, too far, from the blue of home.

RUSSELL THORBURN

Richard Manuel Crashes His Cadillac

His world speaks to him through the windshield:
one crack dividing his before and after
of alcohol consumption and love for a woman.
The deer caught in his headlights turns to say
you can kill me if you want, but I am not going to move.
Its head turned up for the crash
and Richard Manuel sees not a deer now
but a wife who got away through the woods
troubled by his drinking and nights across the line.
Jane, he cries out as if he could warn her
before his chrome dented from accidents
collides with her thoughtful body.
Her name can't save him from the crash
on this mountainside and he sees it almost
in slow motion now, into the deer, then veering
off the road and a splintering thud.
He listens to the radiator hissing. Touching his mouth
that hit the rearview mirror, he sees his fingers
are the color of blackberries in the dim interior light.
He closes his eyes for a minute to feel
the earth spinning through the snowy whispers,
speaks the names Paula and Joshua,
his children, as if to slow that last revolution.
Tearing off his coat, he slides from his seat
to walk the cold mist and as above
a moon drives careful of the many stars.

BRIAN GILMORE

Post Rush Hour Riff – I-495, Washington D.C.

in between ringing piano notes
the silent fading blue blue hum
the pause of an impatient painter not
sure of what to reveal, on a canvas of cream
a puzzle perhaps, an unknown
number of pieces scattered like rice
on the kitchen floor. where do i start
again? what is this new moment i have
snatched out the sky like a baseball in
flight? what will/can i make of this out
here in the boondocks without alleys &
all the other trappings of that life lived
without care? second time
around like shalamar back in
the day. jazz players call it—the alternate
take. & this is not at all a do-over. there
are never regrets in and around this
blessed beltway. i know these blank pages.
the stories always come. today i stare at
boxes & ask—which one will
i slice open first?

BRIAN GILMORE

Flint, Michigan ‘skinny’*

dirty water is cash.

trading

life

for

death.

trading

truth

for

lies.

trading

water is dirty cash.

A Skinny is a short poem (a fixed form) that consists of eleven lines. The first and eleventh lines can be any length (although shorter lines are favored). The eleventh and last line must be repeated using the same words from the first and opening line (however they can be rearranged). The second, sixth, and tenth lines must be identical. (Note: Words in the last line of Skinnys do not have to match exactly words in the first line. They can have variations of root words, like Sestinas.) The Skinny was created by Truth Thomas in the literary crucible of the Tony Medina Poetry Workshop at Howard University.

MARC SHEEHAN

Starter House

I don't remember ordering a house. I'm pretty sure I didn't order one. That's not the kind of thing a person forgets.

My first thought was the post office must not be happy, since it took two of their semis to deliver all the wood, roofing, siding, nails, etc. Also, a whole cancellation of mail carriers driving their vans followed the semis to help unload. Maybe the postal service had to delay delivery of junk mail in the rural route because of this. Maybe people had to wait to receive the usual appeals to conquer obscure diseases, and circulars advertising the absolutely, positively final chance for *one week only at this remarkable price!* to arrive.

But the house. As I said, I'm pretty sure I didn't order it, which I told the mail carrier slash semi-driver who held out a clipboard with a receipt for me to sign. His fellow mail carriers, looking sweaty and cramped in their uniforms, began unloading the wood, roofing, siding, nails, etc.

"You're...wait a minute, I have your name here somewhere," he said. While he was fumbling with the paperwork, I noticed the tin mailbox nailed to a wooden post at the end of the crushed stone driveway. My name, which the mail carrier/semi-driver was still looking for, was there on the box in lettering so crude it appeared I had painted it myself – so how could I argue?

That was all there was – a driveway with a cement foundation slab sprouting electrical and water connections. It seemed as though I should have had a house already, or at least an apartment, but I was beginning to doubt my memory what with the whole forgetting I'd ordered all this wood, roofing, siding, nails, etc., so I sat on a stack of shingles as postal workers unloaded everything then got back into their vehicles and drove off.

That first night I made a crude tent using plastic sheeting. I ate a dinner of beans and rice that came in a vacuum-sealed pouch. There

was a whole crate of these ready-to-eat dinners and boxes of powdered milk, as though the house was intended for construction in the wilderness.

The next day I considered sending everything back, but I didn't have a return address.

It took a long time just to complete the framing-in. Once I did, I wandered like a ghost through rooms delineated from each other only by 2x4s and considered how much closer to completion I had come, and how much further I had to go.

My favorite memory of that time was the first night I slept in the house.

I had managed to complete the sub-flooring for the attic, then tied large sheets of Mylar over the rafters. After a dinner of macaroni and cheese and instant pudding, I climbed up to the crawlspace and pulled the ladder in after me. The setting sunlight hit the blue Mylar, turning my embryonic enclosure azure. A light breeze luffed the sheeting, and I was lulled to sleep as if by the sound of sails on some improbable inland schooner.

I finished the roughing-in. I now had actual doors and windows rather than sheets of plywood, although Tyvek still wrapped the house and the yard was either dirt or mud, depending on the weather.

That's when the recalls began. First it was the drywall, which could emit noxious fumes under the right conditions. Then the wood flooring was recalled for having high levels of Formaldehyde. Next the shingles, which were, apparently, little more than pressed cardboard. So, I tore out walls, ripped up floors, and pried off the shingles, putting the detritus in a large dumpster the company provided along with their apologies. Because I hadn't yet received a bill for anything, I didn't see how I could complain.

Delivery trucks arrived carrying pallets of supposedly non-defective materials. I was certain that one day along with the new drywall, flooring, and shingles, there would be a wife and children. I felt conflicted about this. While I built, un-built, and re-built, other houses

cropped up with professional efficiency on adjacent fields. Children, who I saw as they pedaled past on their bikes, blossomed faster than time-elapse flowers.

Didn't I, too, want a family, to make this a home rather than just a house? But then, what if a nuclear unit arrived only to be recalled? So, each time a truck left without delivering anything other than what I'd been notified to expect, I felt relieved. Sort of.

Because I'd put in so much extra work, I didn't build the guest bedroom and a half-bath, chopped the garage from a two-car down to one, and downsized the dining room to a breakfast nook. I didn't have a choice. The company scrimped on the replacement material and what did arrive wasn't cut correctly – they might have switched to the metric system, I'm not sure. Besides, the blueprints were translated poorly from some other language. Imagine *pedaled* as *petaled*; imagine *solitude* as *loneliness*.

Weeds, although not actual grass, grow in the yard.

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Christine Benvenuto is the author of two works of nonfiction, *Shiksa*, and *Sex Changes*, published by St. Martin's Press, and her short stories, essays, articles and reviews have appeared in many newspapers and magazines. A short play is forthcoming in an international anthology to be published in London, and others have been produced for the Boston Theater Marathon and online platforms. A full length play will be performed in spring of 2022 in Western Massachusetts.

Mark Brazaitis is the author of eight books, including *The River of Lost Voices: Stories from Guatemala*, winner of the 1998 Iowa Short Fiction Award, and *The Incurables: Stories*, winner of the 2012 Richard Sullivan Prize and the 2013 Devil's Kitchen Reading Award in Prose. His essays, stories, and poems have appeared in *The Sun*, *Witness*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Ploughshares*, and elsewhere. A former Peace Corps Volunteer and technical trainer, he is a professor of English, the director of the Creative Writing Program, and the director of the West Virginia Writers' Workshop at West Virginia University.

Nan Byrne is a poet and writer and the author of two books. Her work has appeared in a variety of literary magazines including *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Fiction Southeast*, *New Orleans Review*, *The Mighty Line*, and others. A former television writer she holds an MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University and is the owner of a vintage clothing shop called Utopia.

Eileen Cleary is the author of *Child ward of the Commonwealth* (Main Street Rag Press, 2019), which received an honorable mention for the Sheila Margaret Motton Book Prize, and *2 a.m. with Keats* (Nixes Mate, 2021) She co-edited the anthology *Voices Amidst the Virus* which was the featured text at the 2021 Michigan State University Filmtry Festival. Her poems have been published in *Sugar House Review*, *West Texas Literary Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Solstice: A Magazine of Diverse Voices*, and other

journals. Cleary founded and edits the *Lily Poetry Review* and Lily Poetry Review Books, and curates the Lily Poetry Salon.

Jim Daniels' latest book of poems is *Gun/Shy*, Wayne State University Press, 2021. Other recent books include his fiction collection, *The Perp Walk*, and his anthology, *RESPECT: The Poetry of Detroit Music*, co-edited with M. L. Liebler, both published by Michigan State University Press). A native of Detroit, he lives in Pittsburgh and teaches in the Alma College low-residency MFA program.

Robert Fanning is the author of four full-length collections of poetry: *Severance*, *Our Sudden Museum*, *American Prophet* and *The Seed Thieves*, as well as two chapbooks: *Sheet Music* and *Old Bright Wheel*. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Waxwing*, *THRUSH*, *The Cortland Review*, *The Common*, and many other journals. He is a Professor of English at Central Michigan University, as well as the Founder/Facilitator of the Wellspring Literary Series in Mt. Pleasant, MI., and the Founder/Director of PEN/INSULA POETRY, a resource for Michigan poets. For more information, visit: www.robertfanning.wordpress.com

Linda Nemec Foster has published 12 collections of poetry including *Amber Necklace from Gdansk*, *Talking Diamonds*, and *The Lake Michigan Mermaid* (2019 Michigan Notable Book) co-authored with Anne-Marie Oomen. Her work appears in magazine and journals such as *The Georgia Review*, *Nimrod*, *New American Writing*, *North American Review*, and *Verse Daily*. She has received nominations for the Pushcart Prize and awards from Arts Foundation of Michigan, National Writer's Voice, the Dyer-Ives Foundation, The Poetry Center (NJ), and the Academy of American Poets. Her new book, *The Blue Divide*, was published by New Issues Press in 2021. The first Poet Laureate of Grand Rapids, Michigan (2003-2005), Foster is the founder of the Contemporary Writers Series at Aquinas College.

Brian Gilmore is a poet, writer, and columnist with the Progressive Media Project. He is the author of three collections of poetry, *elvis presley is alive and well and living in harlem*, *Jungle Nights* and *Soda Fountain Rags: Poem for Duke Ellington*, and *We Didn't Know Any*

Gangsters. His poems and writings are widely published and have appeared in the *Progressive*, *The Washington Post*, the *Baltimore Sun*, *The Sugar House Review*, and *Jubilat*.

Ruth Gooley, returned Peace Corps Volunteer. Country of Service: Mali.

Karen Greenbaum-Maya is a retired clinical psychologist, former German major and restaurant reviewer, and two-time Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee. Her collections include three chapbooks, *Burrowing Song*, *Eggs Satori and Kafka's Cat*, and *The Book of Knots and their Untying*. She co-curates *Fourth Sundays*, a long-running poetry series in Claremont, California.

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Christine Jones is from Cape Cod, MA and is author of the full-length poetry book, *Girl Without a Shirt* (Finishing Line Press, 2020) and co-editor of the anthology, *Voices Amidst the Virus: Poets Respond to the Pandemic* (Lily Poetry Review Books, 2020). She is also founder/editor-in-chief of *Poems2go* and an associate editor of *Lily Poetry Review*.

Zilka Joseph's work has appeared in *Poetry*, *Poetry Daily*, *Kenyon Review Online*, *MQR*, *Asia Literary Review*, and in *RESPECT: An Anthology of Detroit Music Poetry*, *101 Jewish Poems for the Third Millennium*, and *The Kali Project*. Her work has been nominated several times for the Pushcart, the PEN America award, and Best of the Net. *Sharp Blue Search of Flame*, her book of poems, was a Foreword Indies Book Award finalist. Her third chapbook *Sparrows and Dust* won a Notable Best Indie Award. *In Our Beautiful Bones*, her new

book, has been nominated for a PEN America award. Her work has been influenced by Eastern and Western cultures and her Bene Israel roots. She teaches creative writing in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and is an editor, manuscript coach, and a mentor to writers in her community. www.zilkajoseph.com

Elizabeth Kerlikowske is the author of 8 chapbooks and a larger book, *Art Speaks*, with painter Mary Hatch. She is the past president of Kalamazoo's Friends of Poetry and currently the president of The Poetry Society of Michigan. She was awarded the Community Medal for the Arts in 2017.

Victoria Korth is the recipient of the 2020 Montreal International Poetry Prize and the Streetlight Magazine Poetry Prize (2021). Poems have appeared in *Stickman Review*, *Broad River Review*, *Ocean State Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *LEON Literary Review*, as well as *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Barrow Street* and elsewhere. *Cord Color* was released from Finishing Line Press in 2015. *Tacking Stitch* is forthcoming, 2022. She is an MFA graduate of the Warren Wilson College Program for Writers and lives in Western New York State where she is a practicing psychiatrist caring for the chronically mentally ill.

Jon D. Lee is the author of four books, including *IN/DESIDERATO* and *An Epidemic of Rumors: How Stories Shape Our Perceptions of Disease*. His poems and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Atlantic*, *Sugar House Review*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, *One*, *The Laurel Review*, and *The Inflectionist Review*. He has an MFA in Poetry from Lesley University, and a PhD in Folklore. Lee teaches at Suffolk University.

Kathleen McGookey has published four books of prose poems and three chapbooks, most recently *Instructions for My Imposter* (Press 53) and *Nineteen Letters* (BatCat Press). She has also published *We'll See*, a book of translations of French poet Georges Godeau's prose poems. Her work has appeared in journals including *Copper Nickel*, *Crazyhorse*, *December*, *Field*, *Glassworks*, *Miramar*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Quiddity*, and *The Southern Review*. She has

received grants from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Sustainable Arts Foundation.

Sonnet Mondal is an Indian poet, editor, and author of *An Afternoon in my Mind* (Copper Coin, 2021), *Karmic Chanting* (Copper Coin, 2018), and *Ink & Line* (Dhault Books, 2018). Founder director of Chair Poetry Evenings—Kolkata's International Poetry Festival, Mondal serves as managing editor of *Verseville*. His recent works have appeared in the *Harper's Bazaar*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Words Without Borders*, *Singing in the Dark* anthology (Penguin Random House), *Luvina* magazine (University of Guadalajara, Mexico), *Indian Literature* (Sahitya Akademi), *Kyoto Journal*, *Potomac Review*, and *Honest Ulsterman* among others. His works have been translated into Hindi, Bengali, Italian, Chinese, Turkish, Slovak, Macedonian, French, Russian, Slovenian, Hungarian, and Arabic.

Cindy Hunter Morgan's new book, *Far Company*, will be published by Wayne State University Press in spring of 2022. Her first book, *Harborless* (Wayne State University Press), is a 2018 Michigan Notable Book and the winner of the 2017 Moveen Prize in Poetry. She heads up communications for Michigan State University Libraries, where she also is part of the MSUL Short Edition team.

James Miller Robinson is a legal/court interpreter of Spanish registered with the Alabama Administrative Office of Courts and serves as an assistant editor of POEM. He has three chapbooks in print: *The Caterpillars at Saint Bernard*, *Boca del Río in the Afternoon*, and *The Empty Chair*. Recent work appears in *Maple Leaf Rag* 40th Anniversary issue, *Coffee Poems: reflections on life with coffee*, *Best Poets of 2019*, and *Pensive: a Global Journal of Spirituality and Art*.

Jane Schapiro is the author of three volumes of poetry, the 2020 Nautilus Book Award Silver Winner *Warbler* (Kelsay Books, 2020), *Let The Wind Push Us Across* (Antrim House 2017), *Tapping This Stone* (winner of the Washington Writers' Publishing House Award, 1995) and the nonfiction book *Inside a Class Action: The Holocaust and the Swiss Banks* (University of Wisconsin, 2003). *Mrs. Cave's*

House won the 2012 Sow's Ear Poetry Chapbook competition. www.janeschapiro.com

Mara Adamitz Scrupe is the author of six poetry collections, *BEAST* (2014 Stevens Prize), *Sky Pilot* (Finishing Line Press, 2012), *Magnalia* (2018 Eyewear Chapbook Prize), *a daughter's aubade/ sailing out from Sognefjord* (Fledge Prize, Middle Creek Press, 2018), *Eat the Marrow* (Brighthorse Press Poetry Book Prize, 2019) and *in the bare bones house of was* (Erbacce Prize, 2020). She has won or been shortlisted for the Fish Prize (Ireland), BigCi Environmental Writing Fellowship (Australia), Aesthetica Creative Writing Award (UK), Erbacce Prize (UK), The Plough Prize (UK), University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's Award (Australia), and the National Poetry Society Competition (UK), among many others.

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Leslie Simon lives in San Francisco. Her poetry publications include *Collisions and Transformations: Selected Poetry* (Coffee House Press). Her novel *The Divine Comic* (Spuyten Duyvil Publishing) appeared in 2020. She also publishes essays on literature, film, and politics.

Anita Skeen is Professor Emerita in the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities (RCAH) at Michigan State University, and the founding director of the RCAH Center for Poetry. She has been the coordinator of the Creative Arts Program at Ghost Ranch for more than 40 years and coordinator of the Fall Writing Festival for 23 years. She is the author of six volumes of poetry: *Each Hand A Map* (1986); *Portraits* (1990); *Outside the Fold, Outside the Frame* (1999); *The Resurrection of the Animals* (2002); *Never the Whole Story* (2011); *When We Say Shelter* (2007), with Oklahoma poet Jane Taylor; and *The Unauthorized Audubon* (2014), a collection of poems about imaginary birds accompanied by the linocuts of anthropologist/visual artist Laura B. DeLind. With Taylor, she co-edited the literary anthology *Once Upon A Place: Writings from Ghost Ranch* (2008). Her poetry, short fiction, and essays have appeared in numerous

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Wally Swist has published over forty books and chapbooks of poetry and prose, including *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), *Daodejing: An Introduction* (Lamar University Press, 2015), *Awakening & Visitation, and Evanescence: Selected Poems* (2020), with Shanti Arts Books. His translations have been and/or will be published in *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Ezra: An Online Journal of Translation*, *The RavensPerch: Adding Breadth to Words*, *Solace: A Magazine of Diverse Voices*, *Transference: A Literary Journal Featuring the Art & Process of Translation*, (Western Michigan Department of Languages), and Woven Tale Press. His latest book of essays and newest collection of poetry, *Taking Residence*, was published in 2021 by Shanti Arts. *A Writer's Statements on Beauty: New & Selected Essays & Reviews* is forthcoming by Shanti Arts.

Keith Taylor has authored or edited 18 books and chapbooks, most recently *Let Them Be Left: Isle Royale Poems*. His last full-length collection, *The Bird-while* won the Bronze medal for the Foreword/Indies Poetry Book of the Year. He has received Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs, among others. He worked for most of 20 years as a bookseller, before teaching for a few years in the writing programs at the University of Michigan.

Russell Thorburn is a recipient of a National Endowment Fellowship and the first poet laureate of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He lives in Marquette, where he sometimes performs with his sextet Radio On. His one-act play of a retro-alternate reality, *Gimme Shelter*, was set for a premiere at the Black Box Theatre but was cancelled by the pandemic.

Rodney Torreson, the former poet laureate of Grand Rapids, Michigan, won the Seattle Review's Bentley Prize, and Storyline Press named him runner-up for the national Roerich Prize for first

books. In 2015, the Dyer-Ives Foundation honored him “for his long-standing commitment as a poet, teacher, patron, and advocate for poetry in West Michigan.” His third full-length collection of poetry, *The Jukebox Was the Jury of Their Love*, was issued by Finishing Line Press in 2019. His other full-length books of poems are *A Breathable Light* (New Issues Press, 2002) and *The Ripening of Pinstripes: Called Shots on the New York Yankees* (Story Line Press, 1998).

James Vescovi’s work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *The Georgetown Review*, and *The Hudson Review*. His story is an excerpt from his novel in progress, *My Father’s Coat*.

Cheryl Walsh is the author of the novel *Unequal Temperament* (Buffalo Books/University Press of Kansas, 2023). She earned a master’s in history at Cornell University before giving in to the tug of fabrication and pursuing a degree in fiction writing at Virginia Commonwealth University. A native of Flint, Michigan, and a proud alumna of Michigan State University, she now lives and writes in a 110-year-old house in Iowa City, Iowa, U.S.A. Follow her on Twitter @IrishRoad.

Claire Wilson is an aspiring crime writer from Falkirk, Scotland. She likes to write short stories of hope and joy to alleviate the darkness. Claire is currently seeking representation for her crime novels. You can follow her progress on twitter.com/byclairewilson

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Exploring the theme of Home



*Teresa Dunn, #COVIDelicious, 2020.
Courtesy of the artist.*

Michigan State University Libraries Short Édition, an innovative publishing platform affiliated with the international publisher Short Édition, seeks short work (8,000 character max, about 1,000 words) exploring the theme of Home. Submissions accepted through November 15, 2021. Selected work will appear online and in MSU Short Édition machines, and will be considered for publication internationally. The theme is in conjunction with the Broad Art Museum's 2021 Faculty Triennial, in which artists meditate on what it means to dwell and consider where and how we create environments that feel like home.

Accepted submissions will be included in a print issue distributed to all authors and added to MSU Libraries collections. Work will also

be compiled in a themed issue available on the MSUL Short Édition site.

Please limit submissions to one story, one short essay, or up to five poems. Poems must be submitted separately. For example, if you are submitting five poems, each poem must be uploaded individually. Each submission should include a short biography directly beneath the work.

Please do not submit previously published work for themed issues.

MSU Libraries Short Édition, a platform that provides free on-demand printing of flash prose and poetry, is now accepting submissions. Submissions are open to new, emerging, and established writers. Accepted work will be included in all four MSU Libraries Short Édition machines and considered for national and international publication through Short Édition machines located throughout the world. All work should be less than 8,000 characters (about 1,500 words). Full guidelines are posted at: lib.msu.edu/shortedition/submit/.

The machines are currently located at the MSU Library (Main), the Broad Art Lab, the East Lansing Public Library, and the Capital Region International Airport. Writers do not need to be affiliated with MSU to submit work.

A collection of short works exploring the theme of Home.

CHRISTINE BENVENUTO

KATHLEEN MCGOOKEY

MARK BRAZAITIS

SONNET MONDAL

NAN BYRNE

CINDY HUNTER MORGAN

EILEEN CLEARY

JAMES MILLER ROBINSON

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