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POETRY  NORTHWEST

VOLUME TWENTY-THREE

NUMBER FOUR

WINTER 1982-83

RODNEY JONES Four Poems	3
WILLIAM STAFFORD Two Poems	8
CAROLYN REYNOLDS MILLER Four Poems	10
JULIA MISHKIN Two Poems	14
BRIAN SWANN So She Can See	16
PHILIP RAISOR Two Poems	17
SUSAN STEWART Three Poems	19
JOYCE QUICK Poet's Holdup	23
WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN The Wife	24
LANCE LEE What She Takes from Me	25
ALEX STEVENS Two Poems	26
ROBERT FARNSWORTH Seven Stanzas in Praise of Patience	29
EDWARD KLEINSCHMIDT Four Poems	30
DANIEL HOFFMAN Two Poems	33
SUSAN DONNELLY In Her Dream	36
BOB SMITH Primer	38

SUZANNE MATSON	
Two Poems	39
RICHARD RONAN	
Pine/Eucalyptus/Fennel	41
ANITA ENDREZZE-DANIELSON	
Two Poems	42
CHRISTINE GEBHARD	
Three Poems	44
KATHERINE SONIAT	
Just to Be Seen Is Enough	46
ELAINE GOTTLIEB	
Elegy	47

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POETRY NORTHWEST

WINTER 1982-83

Rodney Jones

Four Poems

REMEMBERING FIRE

Almost as though the eggs run and leap back into their shells
 And the shells seal behind them, and the willows call back their
 driftwood
 And the oceans move predictably into deltas, into the hidden
 oubliettes in the sides of mountains

And all the emptied bottles are filled, and, flake by flake, the snow
 rises out of the coal piles
 And the mothers cry out terribly as the children enter their bodies
 And the freeway to Birmingham is pulled from the scar-tissue of fields

The way it occurs to me, the last thing first, never as in life
 The unexpected rush, but deliberately, I stand on the cold hill and
 watch
 Fire up from the seedbed of ashes, from the maze of tortured glass

Molten nails and hinges, the flames lift each plank into place
 And the walls resume their high standing, the many walls, and the
 rafters
 Float upward, the ceiling and roof, smoke ribbons into the wet
 cushions

And my father hurries back through the front door with the box
 Of important papers, carrying as much as he can save
 All of his deeds and policies, the clock, the few pieces of silver

He places me in the shape of my own body in the feather mattress
 And I go down into the soft wings, the mute and impalpable country
 Of sleep, holding all of this back, drifting toward the unborn.

A HILL OF CHESTNUTS

All over the woods seedlings still sprout
from the useless crotches of chestnuts
shoot green and straight, toss
and are blighted, and die into stiffness:

dead wood all over, blackening, here
and there, a beech blasted by lightning,
the ache one feels like music
where fire scored the trunk,

but not tragic like the extinct chestnut,
the worm-mitered and cottony fallen.
And it is not like the shaky marriage
of memory and hope, which we see

and do not see, in the root-fist
gripping the boulder, where the oak,
that overcomer, rises improbably
from the mineral absurdity of stone

and the heart is astonished, the air
singed by so many green torches.
Finally, to burn like that! Once
all I had left to love was color:

I relished poverty like a mouth, cheap
salads in the kitchen of a friend
who every evening got less friendly.
One time—I was a kid—a poor man,

a friend of my father's, had died.
We dug the grave. I was down there
in the hole, beating at the clay
with a pick, laughing when the bottom

gave—and what I sank through—
feathery manacles that felt like chestnut
humus, hands of the dead, all

that sticky wing beating at my ankle.

I came up quick. "Go back down,"
my father said, and I went softly
tapping at the door of the earth.
Over my head he found the simple stone

coiled in privet, the name and date.
I chucked out clods, ancient
scraps of gingham, coffin-screws,
half a century, what's left of an infant.

The next day we laid the father
in the ruin of his son. I went home
and began to keep this to myself,
the fear, and the names of the living,

which were the names of the dead.
Sometimes I'll feel a hand
come up through the pavement.
Then doom recedes from me, like a hairline,

but when I see chestnuts going
down into their hills forever,
some standing fierce as missiles,
holding a pitiful green out from the rot,

I want to walk out into the streets
with all the foolish self-righteous
carrying the signs of redemption,
maybe not to shout, only to move

cautiously, as though in silence
which guards terrible secrets.
And I think of pie-safes and cupboards,
the yellow and black-grained wood of chestnuts.

LOVE SONGS

It is the way the evening approaches
my house, drifts in unannounced
and places its hand under my shirt.
Most of them come too easy
to be sung by children between the bells
that slice all school days
into seven neat portions of boredom.
That heart is academic,
travels in lunch satchels, broken,
until time reassembles it, locates
it precisely in its rightful
pain. Most grandmothers here
are listening to gospel
from Big Stone Gap, and instrumentals
go out to salesmen
who know all words are cheap.
The housewife fears she has been
tuning in the wrong station
for months, the one where poultry
is down in early trading.
As I drive home, I, too, am twisting
my dial toward some lost
romance of truckstops. The best
songs are for the ugly
who have been betrayed by the beautiful;
it is the intricate nomenclature
of distrust we follow always
to heartbreak or gunplay. My dial
tears the bad ones apart
like paper to find these few. Eventually
I know all the ones I love
will have gone off the air
and I'll just be riding along alone
toward some job I've held for years,
singing for no one.

A HISTORY OF SPEECH

That night my sophomore date wanted kisses
I talked instead of the torn ligaments
in my ankle, crutches and Ace Bandages,
parading like any arthritic
the exotic paraphernalia of my suffering:
and, that failing, went farther, bobbing
in the thesaurus of pain: the iron lung,
the burn, torture with water and bamboo.
She twisted a frosted curl around one finger.
It was then she touched the skin along my neck.
It was then I noticed for the first time
the strange wing beating in my mouth
and kissed her in a kind of flight
that plummeted and clutched for branches.

Oh but Tahiti of a thousand Tahitis!
Among the suckling cars of the drive-in,
trays of pomegranates, lingerie of surf.
Days I hurled papers onto the porches of invalids.
June nights I only had to open my mouth,
out came a flock of multi-colored birds,
birds of all denominations and nationalities,
birds of nostalgia, the golden birds of Yeats,
birds trained in the reconnaissance of exclusive buttons.
Before I knew it, I was twenty-two.
I was whispering into the ear of Mary,
the mother of Jesus. I was dreaming
in two languages I did not understand.
I was sitting in the bar of the Cotton Lounge

railing against George Wallace when the fist
rang in my stomach, and I looked up
to a truckdriver shouting down at me
"Talk too much!" Talk too much into greasy
footprint, linoleum stinking of beer,
the thigh of that woman rising to leave.
Talk too much and understand I'm not to blame
for this insignificance, this inflation

in the currency of language. Listen:
Whenever I hurt, the words turned their heads.
Whenever I loved too much, they croaked and hopped away.
At my luckiest, I'm only saying the grace
the hungry endure because they're polite.
Teaching speech, Cicero put pebbles in his students' mouths,
but my voice is haunted by softer things.

William Stafford

Two Poems

LONG DISTANCE

We didn't know at the time. It was
for us, a telephone call through the world
and nobody answered.

We thought it was a train far off
giving its horn, roving its headlight
side to side in its tunnel of darkness
and shaking the bridge and our house
till dishes rattled, and going away.

We thought it a breath climbing the well where Kim
almost fell in; it was a breath saying his name,
and, "Almost got you," but we piled boards
and bricks on top and held off that voice.

Or maybe it was the song in the stove—
walnut and elm giving forth stored sunlight
through that narrow glass eye on the front
in the black door that held in the fire.

Or a sigh from under the mound of snow where Bret's
little car with its toy wheels nestled all winter
ready to roll, come spring, and varoom
when his feet toddled it along.

Or—listen—in the cardboard house
we built by the kitchen wall, a doorknob
drawn with crayon, Kit's little window peeking
out by the table—is it a message from there?

And from Aunt Helen's room where she sews
all day on a comforter made out of pieces of Grandma's
dresses, and the suits for church—maybe those
patches rustle their message in her fingers:
"Dorothy, for you, and for all the family I sew
that we may be warm in the house by the tracks."

I don't know, but there was a voice,
those times, a call through the world that almost
rang everywhere, and we looked up—Dorothy, Helen,
Bret, Kim, Kit—and only the snow
shifted its foot outside in the wind,
and nobody heard.

YEARS AGO, OFF JUNEAU

It looked all right on the map, where the channel jagged
south, where the captain dropped anchor offshore that night
in a freshening gale. It looked all right. That year it failed:
in the crazed dawnlight one little whimpering puppy
crawled onto the rocks and looked back, once, and howled.

It was dark that night. Though they watched from shore
no one could tell how that freak wind took all—
women, children, pets—on the annual ship
that sailed outside from Dawson, taking summer life home.

For years after that, when summer life went home,
an old dog, a Labrador, limped whimpering toward
The Sound, and one long howl at dawn saluted
those gray, heavy waves where The City of Gold went down.

MA BÊTE

It must be a spell, so much ugliness
a castle grew up around it, twenty-foot walls.
A curse to rule over: brutes live alone
with terrible faces, and only fresh young hearts
can improve their appearance.

At first he stood in her doorway only in shadow,
or through the garden, let her glimpse his separate path
until she could look without flinching.
So weeks later, when dusk sprang at them,
they stood still as two harts in different sorrows.
In different sorrows, they watched the clouds go cold.
Dark at his side, she followed him back like a woman blind.
Of course he asked, but she wouldn't.
She bawled for her father.

Why should he care for her puny skin?
Hasn't he given her jewels and a magic mirror to play in?
Instead she spends her day digging among roots in the garden,
a rodent not fit to be his food.

Every evening, through his roses, she will not marry him.
Vapor from his nostrils envelops her head,
she curves her palm over his gloomy paw and they walk
along the parapet. When she leans into his fur,
when she looks up with quizzical eyes, he wants to be human
with ten harmless fingers. He's not allowed to tell the charm,
so he cheats, makes her dream *The Frog and the Prince*.

What if she will have him and it isn't true
about the spell, what if she will, and they go on forever
waiting for that transformation?
How could he touch her skin and not draw blood?
And what does it matter: She is all bony elbows,
a hollow at the base of his throat.
Could he spend a lifetime watching her eat things

already dead? He won't shed his russet pelt,
handsome as foxskins he rips in his private wood.
And she has taken to calling him *ma Bête*. Is it a joke
to have his face so ugly, to have fur in his mouth?
And he is weary from balancing two legs against his tail.

Every night he sleeps in different directions
so she, stumbling lonely, will not catch him by surprise.
He might take her for a snowrabbit and tear her belly.
Tonight the very room he chooses without reason
she hides in, weeping. He must stop and listen.
It is like the moon's rain falling into his heart.
When he takes hold of the door, he is shocked by grief
in the silver knob. Through his hide
he sees her lying frail as a broken bird
and naked. She will not know when he enters,
her face a velvet mask
on which she has painted
the face of a beast.

HOME REPAIRS

Settled: how wide
to cut the counter-well, hard ash he'll use to mend
the gap in back, what day, his price. Everything planned.
Carelessly against the sink he holds his ground,
just talking, invoking family, his proud voice prodding
last corners of an empty house. Isn't this the absurd
dream they stick us with? Husbands afraid of beds they've made
imagine us voluptuous under plumbers, leading
furnacemen down dark basement stairs, gas men, any trade.

He talks:
his wife back to school, a daughter he may persuade
(if he has one) to take up strings or slide trombone.
How young he is under his disciplined beard.
Gold light drifting from west windows
settles over us like pollen. A nod is good manners.
He draws his minimum hour along my nerves, my head

only a listening box, an answering service
taking it down when nobody's home to pretend
or respond. 5 p.m.: all across town, men lapse
into overtime or fraud, because so much is broken,
about to pull loose, or be ignored.

Going home late, they believe
other men can fix anything.

AT NIGHT, NEW SUBURBS, THEIR STREETLAMPS SALTY

Left behind in glowing sodium vapor
an old tree tries to shake off
poison apples. Belled cows
that coaxed and reassured it
fell one November in a heap of straw,
and the house, its porch cut loose,
was led away in mute distraction
and a hail of purple plums.

Now the countryside is overrun with lights.
Trees no wider than a finger
float in the ground, the garden's slow
ball and socket. The moon tugs,
houses rise like fairy rings
or crocus. On streets named Wildwind Drive
or Saratoga, you want to try out their attics
for walls that won't huff down,
for endless feathers aloft in a ticking.

Lots fit neat as a puzzle
under sky washed out with city glare.
Under triple driveways, gophers
keep butting their heads,
so each house owns its patch of bone and shadow,
its cut of feeble-minded stars.

They tell me somewhere people are alive

in meadows. I know what people are
in meadows. I know the wolf at the door
won't always go without a friend,
that someone has to haunt the private rooms
of sticks and glass. In a haunting,
nothing stays in place.
Brooms overwhelm the dreamer
changing umbrellas.

I still think they're beautiful:
streetlamps rare with pink and yellow gases,
carnival lights the way you could dream them,
soft apricot pulp on every corner,
ripe rain.

SURFACE TENSION AROUND THE HEART, LIKE HEAVEN

Stretched new and thin, young men and women lean
against the surface. They don't know what's coming:
a break in tension, the long slide to where we are,
in current going toward the bottom. Silt waits,
lit white with familiar bones.

We trembled so hard the cup fell from our hands
and, swamped in thirst, we dragged each other under.
Spangled chest and thigh, flashing chamber to chamber,
we chose one heart to lie in.

We are in deep,
dropping through each other's dark, past something
that matters enough to save us, our breath
a shadow of gill slits cast from the womb.
You pull strong, you let me swim in your arms.

If we could get out
I'd show you a pattern like moiré silk, beauty
that pain bends around a stone, all of us sunk here
working the river, broken links in a chain of silver

and our faces shining because of the strain.

Weapons we take up against the world
work on each other. Have we evolved from water
only to sink back like red rock?

Over our heads,
water skippers moor to the surface. Quiet days
we watch them walk in their halos, moons cast in sixes,
or six-armed constellations our fins want to reach for.
Heaven's boatmen. At night, they tap their oars
on our heart, try to tell us how it's done.

Julia Mishkin

Two Poems

SLEEPER AND LUCK

I'm afraid I might slip
off the edge if I don't . . .
count to ten twice. Slowly,

slowly the charged molecules
relax. I'm off to the side
watching the eager ones begin

their daily exercise, the short
song in praise of gravity's
blue hair, clear eyes. What happens

when this miser dies? What holds
down this room at the inn,
and what about the beloved

paraphernalia, the pencils,
brooms, enamelled pin,
orange peel, aspirin? Count

the chairs, the balls of dust,
how long it takes to tunnel
deep, the melting moth-wings

on the glass. There's no shortcut
through this story.
The more we count, the more we amass.

SLEEPER ASLEEP

To start down this road again:
the narrow line of dirt falling
between the rows of trees—

there are no markers, no boundaries,
no signs to the nearest exit.
Sleeper, this terrain's invisible.

The weather, unlike weather, does not
fall. It does not precipitate
or show itself at all.

Instead the blind leaves rage against
the trees. Their green fists sound
like rain and you are fooled into thinking

it's fine, this soothing elemental pain,
and rise to shut the windows,
open the doors, and breathe in

the last light of evening.
It's not light, but the rise and fall
of five thousand wings. They rise

and fall like your breath: white, irresistible,
string of unconsciousness unwound over
the hard, imperceptible ground . . .

Brian Swann

SO SHE CAN SEE

Sweeps draped the furniture as if
 somebody's died; dropped the ball.
 But weeks later the stove
backed up again. I dismantled pipes,
 stripped everything, thrust my arm
 along the dark flue into
the main chimney until, against my hand—
 solid coke the ball missed. Fingers
 found a hole & entered, worked
blind in the dark. It took a chisel to
 smash the seal—a rush of cold air
 shot up my arm like a needle,
numbing my fingers. So now the fire roars
 like the madness that has already left
 a father dead & sister wounded
and this mother padding around the house in short
 Japanese steps, filling in words a moment
 after you've said them,
cooking dishes sweet to sickening, held together
 by memories you're not sure are hers,
 or yours. She is ready to go out.
Tugs her corsets over the belly that shaped you, ties
 herself into a parcel. Pulls the last flap
 shut between her legs.
Light closes in the snow-clogged window. Starlight
 beset, mother takes my elbow walking
 crusted drifts, ruts where

water melted, stood, and froze. Up the cleared
 narrow path, I hold the flashlight behind me
 so she can see.

Philip Raisor

Two Poems

NEIGHBORHOOD GOSSIPS

Past listening
they chatter at each other
like raccoons in fresh garbage.

What do they see
when they scan sealed letters or x-ray
the bowels of the half-idiot gardener watering lawns?
Do they see buses colliding head-on?
Do they smell burning bodies?

I have seen them on street corners,
for hours, alert to sirens, deaf to children
on-the-wing. Their hands flutter momentarily.
A secret broken open, tasted, tossed
into the gutter. Whose error or pain
did they fork down the sewer this time?

I wish they would eat me whole:
my sinusitis, ulcer, jock-itch.
My short temper; career scars.
My wife's deep memory of a fatherless home.
Let the scavengers gorge on my great-grandfather's
scalping by Delawares, my uncle's Nazi souvenir
with blood on it. Let them taste the spoiled sauce
that flows through the growth on my father's rib.

If their fat bellies need more, let them devour

my future. "They will surely fire him
if he keeps dressing like that. And his car.
My heavens! You would think in this neighborhood.
If only he would put up a cedar fence
around that pile. They say he is going to build
a fountain there. My God! What next? What next?"

What next?

My daughter cartwheeling in her own backyard.

I turn back to my plans.

She spins on
noisier than gnashing teeth.

TOADS BREEDING, THUMB SWELLING

1

They start again,
the toads, bilious whistle
worse than cicadas, nighttime screech
toneless as faucet water. Turn it off,
I mutter, harried from hammering studs all day.
I deserve quiet air cool as justice.
Thick-lidded judges, they nail my eyes
and brain together. All night I hear
the drop on drop of seamless screaming.

2

The tadpoles gather
at the mouths of fishes, kiss,
then scurry toward my bruised thumb.
The shed is up. My sweat plunks their water
like oil. I am full of song, backroad ballads
Hank Snow traveled. They squiggle away,
blackened stones thumped from air. A cairn
rises; I wail on. Oh, all day I drift
through cotton fields light as whey.

3

Now, rumps in mud,
we hunker at pond's edge
eyeing cracks and dry algae. Toads,
I mutter, we survived. Let's rest.
In my dream of swamps, fog, stars disappearing,
toads squat on tree stumps, peat moss smokes.
There, I say, imagine next season.
Nailheads stare back. My thumb plops
into sealant. No one hears it, I know,

in Texas in Sarasota in Muncie, Indiana.

Susan Stewart

Three Poems

THE LONGEST DAY OF THE YEAR

When night comes on the dogs go crazy,
leaping up and straining against their chains,
their eyes sticking out and a rattle in their throats
before they lie back down again, pretending
to sleep. Because the night comes along like a stray
and noses around for scraps, and lifts its leg
on the yellow pansies: but all the daylight has put out
is three shadows in the bowl.

The boys and the old men hang around the taverns,
the Wagon Wheel, the Bzzu, and the Sneakin'
Peepin' Lounge. It's the same if you're inside or out
on the street: the cigarettes flicker like the stars
punched in the jukebox; someone puts in a quarter,
someone else rolls his hips. A waitress steps up into
the southbound trolley, then sits down with her knees together
very tight. The Bible Church starts to sing, someone turns down

The radio. The barber holds up the mirror for the man

in the baby blue suit, shakes the hair off the towel with
a flourish and twirls the chair back down to earth. Upstairs
at Ernie's Strength Club, the boxer's perfect body starts to shine
like a trophy, a human trophy bleeding a little below the mouth
and fallen face down on the padded white table. A trickle,
but the dogs go crazy as the northbound trolley passes, as the night
keeps coming on and the shadows lengthen and lengthen in the bowl.

THE MAP OF THE WORLD

In a drawer I found a map of the world,
folded into eighths and then once again
and each country bore the wrong name because
the map of the world is an orphanage.

The edges of the earth had a margin
as frayed as the hem of the falling night
and a crease moved down toward the center of
the earth, halving the identical stars.

Every river ran with its thin blue
brother out from the heart of a country;
there cedars twisted toward the southern sky,
the reeds were the pens of an augurer.

No dates in the wrinkles of that broad face,
no slow grinding of mountains and sand, but
like a knife crying out on a whetstone,
the map of the world spoke in snakes and tongues.

The hard-topped roads of the western suburbs
and the far-off lights of the capitol
all push away from the yellowed beaches
and step into the lost sea of daybreak.

The map of the world is a canvas turning
away from the painter's ink-stained hands
while the pigments cake in their little glass
jars and the brushes grow stiff with forgetting.

There is no model, shy and half-undressed,
no open window and flickering lamp,
yet someone has left this sealed blue letter,
this gypsy's bandana on the darkening

Table, each corner held down by a conch
shell. What does the body remember at
dusk? That the palms of the hands are a map
of the world, erased and drawn again and

Again, then covered with rivers and earth.

LETTER FROM TURIN

Tonight the moon is falling like a piece of silver
into the black apron pocket of the sky

again and again as if some secret hand
kept putting it back and taking it out.

What I have learned is the darkness
in the daylight and the furnace of a new

machine. You cannot imagine how the piston's
hoofbeats can pound through my chest until dawn

or how the oil slicks carry the illusions
of rainbows.

You cannot imagine my face.

As I write the black grease swirls
across my palms and I am leaving you

the fingerprints of someone else's life.
The trolleys hover like a hundred

angry bees and are the only animals for miles.
Once at dusk I saw the light fall

on the haystacks and the vineyards,
but it was only a flower pot in an office window;

the mountains in the doorway of the postcard shop
turned into a death mask of Verdi.

I have been to the cinema several times
to see the bareback riders of the West,

and a black man from America plays the saxophone
each night on the corner for free or cigarettes.

His songs run through my clothes, heaped
on the splintered chair, the way the wind

can ruffle the edges of the river. You ask about
the hours I have to spend to myself and I answer

they are only the pauses of sleep. I open
the courier of evening for news, but its world

is not my world. The little girl who takes it
from cafe to cafe does not at all resemble

our daughter: I've seen her cross the streets
like a small black leaf borne up and around

by the air. I move your photograph each morning
and evening from the wall to my shirt

and my shirt to the wall, and hope that this letter
is like money or luck, first in one hand

and then in another, until all that remains
is a soft shred of paper

at the bottom of your apron pocket one washday.

Joyce Quick

POET'S HOLDUP

Stop where you are—I want
your memory and all its untold wealth,
every last picture you carry;

I want your ear, the rumble of shadow,
the distant music you hear
and weave into song. Listen to my heart
and make something of it.
Listen to the stubborn
repetition of your name.

I want your snakeskin boots kicked off
in the caesura, and your watch
that tells you nothing so reliably.

I want your hands held just that way—
palms up, receptive.
I want your mouth
but postpone the pleasure
while I hear your crafty speech
the cadence of it,
the great reluctance to lie
in any way but loveliness.

I want your stories, games, and songs
so I can recognize you in the dark
and your mirror so you'll have no place to hide,
but most of all I want
your eyes

stopping me where I stand,
catching me hard in the throat,
taking everything I have.

William Chamberlain

THE WIFE

I say the funniest things
are all complete like apples.
They make me laugh and the laugh
goes out the window into orbit.
My wife is the best joke,
and if she is here I
am lord of rain in a drab town.
But if she is gone I am fallen flat
and dead wood claps in the apple tree.
What a wife! Never here
when I get home from work somehow
still at work and flaring mad:
parting a curtain of salmon brush,
stumbling into the clearing
of the stall to shower,
swearing loud in breaking rain,
screaming at blackberry vines
in the chainsaw's blue smoke,
my heart angry for loss of her.

In the thick hours
after work is suspended I
carve pure lines of red cedar:
not a woman figure but a cage for a ball,
a box of duties. I go without my dinner!
I pray to be myself before
this day goes to bed, or for mornings,
fog like a veil and each
huckleberry leaf filled to the brim.
I listen for the lightest step,
the footfall of the wife
who comes down from orbit
to water the wooden man inside.
Let fog lift as a wife

with hair of seedlings would from a lake!
I hear her laugh and see
scattered apples upon the planet.
I open the door to my lush green wife,
and mutely we mate until the laugh goes out.

Lance Lee

WHAT SHE TAKES FROM ME

We argue in the house like a change of seasons—
when I am Schumann going mad she says
“Here’s lithium, be composed and silent”
or Van Gogh removing my ear
“Here’s white paint and grey dawn”
or Duchamp with my chess
“Here’s the local bus map and help-wanted ads”

so I come outside in this steady downpour and stake
myself in freshly turned earth beside
tomatoes and strawberries,
 pummeled peas
wild on the black ground with profuse, snap-dragonish
 blooms.
My feet become thick roots, my hands a foliage cradling
 berries,
 my eyes
green fruit dawning through horizons of dark, bitter
 loquat leaves.
Soon waxwings with ember-tipped wings will forage
 through these,
children pluck the peas from their pods,
and herself, with a laugh, lift her dress and belly
 with ripened fruit.

LUNAR VELOCITIES

Much written about the moon deals with a fickle courtesan troubled by her profile. She's said to be a great repeater, to take the path of a younger age and shrink from sight. Those who love her pale trysts rue that she eagerly meets the beetle-browed stevedore, the timid antiquarian. What shifty moods, centerless passion—nothing to do but go wait for her in an empty museum or down by the wharf. And now fragments begin to bother the devotees: the mug temper cracked or Megarian shards pose too doubtful a jigsaw ever to reconstruct.

Although much has been written about the moon, few grasp the real one isn't ours. Along a sister orbit we find a moon undressing for bed, mirror and powder in an adjoining room. Neatly ordered as her reclining thoughts, the slim surfaces of her toilette glint like the ocean far beneath. There one captain, intimately acquainted with her true haunt, plots a course as confident as the North Star grants. From a fitful sleep she recalls, dependable dame, the shoes he brought, how they proved too tight, how the couple chatted amicably on a foreign shore, then bid good night.

Many legends surrounding our moon—that her gleam turns the edge of razor or Spanish sword, that concrete should not be poured at the full, that she drowns Chinese poets dextrously as a farmer pups, that she drives the werewolf mad with longing for her hidden roses, that vegetables thrust to her undine urge—are mensual superstitions against which we chart her actual, radiant curves. Really the water widow acts in tandem with the sun to promote tides; as to her famed affinity with madmen and poets, let us not forget that even lucky faces discover their lineaments in regrettable mirrors.

Many kingdoms the moon touched thought she made a progression of changes that shed little light

on the scope of her course. Tunisia, Morocco, St. Helena, Barbados;

Babylon, Sumeria, Athens; marbled Venice and its doge, Ecbatana and the promenade, Is gone under the waves with its wonderful doors:

each imagined that the moon appeared in a new guise to an old locale. But bees chirring by sweet walls, badgers cradled in remote dirt, Egyptian house cats lapping milk from ewers knew that *that* moon there and then, spread like a fan, was all they'd be allowed.

For centuries the moon was chaste and continent, attending nocturnal chores.

Then she fell in love, one of those dark affairs the Middle Ages spawned. Still fit and young, she took to her bosom an old man. One Prometheus, by accounts that survive: not a few commentators hint pure pity bedded him. He'd loll about in musty furs, uncouth barbarian to the core, though of a mind so nobly tuned, she acceded to his sturdy lust. Dropping to her divan, they counted far off city lights, lonely candles, watch fires, inquisitors on torchlit errands.

Few, O moon, address you as I shall. The planets and their paths were never round, the winking canopy of stars exploded from an untold center. Flung in a whirling drum, gems and heavier metal sank to cold worlds, left our own by the sun poor, and enriched those barren of air, indeed of any life at all. Reflect on a Uranus mulched in diamonds, a Pluto whose onions are gold, some priceless ore a carrot garden, planets flanked, like a Turk's bridle, by silver moons. What rich man loves a timid atmosphere?

Now I must tell of you as men do who crave a thing almost forgotten, like the unusual sandwich eaten on a lonely railroad years ago—I met you once when you bathed. Withdrawing from the window in alarm, I glimpsed a hip, an arm, a thigh not connected, a pose of unalloyed surprise, a blade brightness forged

and water tempered. Maybe because I'm shy, because the retiring
do not hastily take the fruit chance or design offers,
I've never reckoned with what I saw. What scattered you,
my shock when we collided, your glance superbly bold?

A ROYAL PROGRESS

The sky is blue. Tonight the stars will be like
flecks of acid, first a purple background
then a black, as a king might put off gay robes
for a sombre century. And the women he knew?
The erogenous zones, are they more or less populous

and delightful? Cars flash by, he is intrigued
with metal speed, heliographs in motion, but of messages
all he carries are a few friendly letters, nothing
political or to do with lovers' codes. If a poem, one
only he has read and easily forgets the import of

when he scans the latest news. 'But of course
I am that poem,' thinks a former minister or lady
in waiting; 'I am what the king carries like an apple
in his pocket, eaten at leisure.' In an occasional park
he will be drawn far away, to country manors

and matters, or bonfires in the evening capital where dew
ran quicksilver over porphyry. Sire, count backward;
you are in a new land; you are walking
by the shrubs of exile—suddenly in a ragged bazaar
you recall how another engraver used acid on copper

coated with wax, except where the profile deepened
through the soft shield. *Roi de la nuit*, a fault in the line
of your expression then bothered you; now, in gutters of cities
you fled, light breaks on the pictures torn from the wall,
lanterns of the watch go by, and they too will fade at dawn.

Robert Farnsworth

SEVEN STANZAS IN PRAISE OF PATIENCE

Winter stippled and glazed the green water
tilted in a pail on the porch.
It would be months until whatever was growing
on the rusty trowel resumed

*

I still pause to see that the pail
has not been flung out
on the shrubs by one in favor of order, one
sensibly averse to mosquitoes.

*

In the thin sand of an hour's snow, two
brown sunflowers persisted
on their stalks like rusty showerheads
near a buried boardwalk.

*

The water now looks like strong neglected
coffee. Sunlight seems to swell
on the fresh stump across the street. A chunk
of maple branch still clings to the wires.

*

At six each winter afternoon, the sun
had been gone an hour.
The barber would gently sweep together
soft archipelagoes of hair.

*

I do not disturb the scum kindled on the water.
Nothing swims up
from the bottom. I cannot say
what I hope to preserve.

*

Already I am thinking back to the next snow
squalling up the long black lake
to my window. The pail remains undisturbed.
I am making myself a promise.

Edward Kleinschmidt Four Poems

BACKING UP ON THE FREEWAY

We do this outrage of the tv,
this gee whiz to the streetwise,
tsk tsk to the pop tops, and hold
no high noses, no, no high noses.

We've done the boohoo on the swaying bridge,
the soft shoe in the barnyard, shouted out
it's feeding time, looked at who came running,
who came stumbling with heavy arms and dying skin.

Hill, hell, halloo on the cartop. Eat our
carburetor sandwich with beer. Ride the rest
of the way on the layaway, we're a shoe-in
for all medals: we're going, going, going, still going.

TWO WOMEN WHO DIE EACH JANUARY TWO WOMEN WHO DIE EVERY FEBRUARY

for my grandmothers

You lift the gray cat down off the shelf
Take the telephone off the hook
Bring the water up to date
Divide the dresser into drawers
Believe the carpenters will forget the nails
Assume the table will fall down
Grieve over the dusty radio

Wiggle the loose tooth
Appear in a blue dress
Forget the shape of the wine bottle
Agree to new measurements
Talk to the neighbors about leaves
Protest over a length of curbing
Decide to forget the worst
Refuse to talk to priests
Tease the dogs on garbage days
Put aside relishes for blood soup
Refrain from hypnotizing yourselves with fish bones
Wear green stockings on Wednesday
Close doors when not in use
Throw a work shirt over the parakeet cage
Light both ends of the candle
Start in the middle
End like you never heard the word
Advertise yourself widely
Avoid hanging your coat just anywhere
Walk wherever possible
Ride when the riding is good
Keep everything while giving it away
Remember what you have always said

WHAT'S YELLOW

Is it the eyes of old men coughing,
ring fingers, the messages on the
mirrors, old orphans, trees undressing
in winter, or ordinary flowers not blooming:

is it the Buttercup or Goat's Head,
the Sticky Cinquefoil and Whispering
Bells, the Sneezeweed, Devil's Claw,
Old Man of the Mountains, Eardrops,
Parentucellia or Lousewort, the Tufted
Loosestrife, the Hawk's Beard, the Golden Smoke?

Is it the flakes of dried fish,

the flesh of daffodils in a beaker,
the bills of ducks, the receipt
in the murdered man's watch pocket?

Or the last tooth, the butterfly the cat
ate, the diamond held up to the sunlight?

AT DREAMLAND IN ALABAMA

Forget the crab, the cow,
the chicken, but remember the pig.

Forget deep sea, coop,
featherland, and roost.

Forget everything else,
and you will remember this pig.

We scream
like first borns
in their red
hot juice world.
In this blackovened,
blackowned barbecue,
we don't see no
pigeon bones, no parrot,
no white cockatoo.

Over our shoulders
the huge blades
of a barrel fan
shell heat
like sacks of peanuts.

Our car, pulled up,
stays for the pig,
stands like a bottle
with nothing inside
to explode. Inside

Dreamland, all the bottles
are happy and cold.

We draw love notes
to each other at the bar,
write epitaphs
on hot slabs,
line up indiscriminately
a grand piano of ribs.

And a small pink child,
silent on a deep bed
of wonder bread,
sleeps, unamazed.

Daniel Hoffman

Two Poems

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS

Schoolboys in blazers infiltrate the aisles
Of the British Museum. It's hard to read
Maps of the Battle of Hastings
While their master futilely harangues them

About the Battle of Hastings. They are intent
On tactics of their own making.
A lot they care for the plight of Harold
(His forces bloodied and wearied from besting the Norsemen

Hundreds of miles to the north ten days before),
The Fourth Form will maintain its hegemony
Over the Third this day, come what may. At last
Their skirmish deploys through doorways, advancing

Into the Hall of Clocks. Another
Band in blazers—maroon, not green—troops through the Map Room

Scuffling, and out, save for one laggard, a toddler
But three feet tall. He can't even see into the cases.

His head is large, his legs and arms are stubby and bent,
His steps necessarily small. And now two boys
In green, for some reason retrace their steps,
Sniffing. Down the center aisle, they catch a glimpse

Of maroon, the enemy color, and rush
To opposite sides of the hall. They have him
Cornered—then see he's not a mere babe in Infants, but their age,
A midget-sized monster providently provided

For their satisfaction. He watches the boy at one end
Of the aisle, sees the eyes gleam, the curled lip
Of one waiting for him to come nearer. He turns
And at the other end of the aisle, sees

The other, lip curled and eyes eager to torment him.
He suddenly ducks under the cases, bobs up in the next aisle
But they move over an aisle and are waiting as before.
He is trapped between them, there is no escaping

Being born to endure the revenge of unknown adversaries
For an offense of which he must be innocent
Except for being born. I saw the terror
In that boy's face, and the desperate resolve

To run, or if he couldn't, then to do
His poor best for honor's sake
And not go down snivelling beneath the blows
Of the always larger, stronger. This was one

Battle in a series already long that might
Be averted. 'Young man,' I said, 'I'm lost—
Perhaps you can show me the way out?'
And so let him lead me to safety

Through his enemy, as though there is
A way out. In the entrance hall, surprised

By what they see beside me, others turn
With heedless stare and curious intent;

He pretends he doesn't notice them.
I thank him. I must go. The lines
Are being drawn. Among the columns
He appraises his next defensive position.

AT FONTAINE-LES-DIJON

How could we sleep in that pension
At the foot of the hill
Below the chapel
At Fontaine-les-Dijon?

There the carillon
Shattered the stained-
Glass silence
Of our sleep.

On this high hill
Where St. Bénigne was born
A monk in the Middle Ages still
Clanged a clapper all night long

Remembering how his mother
When her term had come
Hauled her big belly
To the hill's rocky dome

So her son could be birthed
Nearer heaven, so a church
In his name be erected,
His Sainthood perfected

—Speared by the Romans—
And now that this spot
Is holy, we dare not
Give it over to demons

Who possess the underworld
And pinch us with their spells
Unless driven back under the world
By the clang of God's bells

Which is why, at 4:30 this morning,
A monk in a cassock, to mark
Each quarter-hour in the dark,
Tolls anthems fourteen minutes long

And we arise to meagre rations
Under a holy hill,
Irritable as demons
Whose sleepless bed is in hell.

Susan Donnelly

IN HER DREAM

A baby cries in my mother's midnight,
cries for food from the lost chamber,

summons her, a towhead girl, from dreams
of her childhood on Laurel Street. Upstairs

in the room she has always suspected,
the baby wrings itself out with wailing.

The cry pulls great ribbony swathes
from my mother's chest: bunting,

grosgrain, pink satin blanket edging,
toddler harness strings, birthday ribbon,

the brittle cinnamon folds
of Christmas candy. Slowly her hair

turns grey, the blue-green eyes rheum
with uncertainty. At last, a vein part crimson,

part silver unwinds from her. This
is the skein we were not to touch,

the look-away skein none of us
dragged from her—none but that howler.

And how could a child be forgotten
so long in the last nursery?

She walks up the stairs. Below her,
school chums catch rubber balls

to their chests. Their jump-rope confidence
falters. "Mary! Mary!" The steps

are so difficult. Sea grass like cats' tongues.
Above, the mew-cry circling.

At the top of the stairs she pauses.
Her father, his baldness hidden

by Irish linen, studies cormorants
through field glasses. Her brothers pose

in a bony pyramid, then capsize
on the sand. The beach makes its grand gestures.

And the cunning mosquito nags
into her mind's tunnels,

hungry for brain. The cry,
the cry. She comes to a door marked "PERMISSION"

in curled blue letters. The door
is a blackened mirror, a silver rot

of fish scales, mica, kelp and

smashed baby-pink crabshells. "I'm coming."

The crib cave beckons. Veins scrawl
inside the transparent skull. But the baby

holds up two fingers, in a china Christ's
pretty blessing. Its smock covers air.

The cheeks are moonpits of hunger.
My mother becomes a well

the moon may dip into forever,
always drawing up salt.

The baby shrinks to a wish-coin in her hand.

Bob Smith

PRIMER

First page almost blank
for the years
you can't remember.
A spot in one corner:
ink, dust, a fly?

Next, names of flowers:
silver bell
trout lily
bachelor's button.
This page is meadow green.
A breeze lips your name.

Women's names now.
Audrey, dark eyes.
Rain in Erica's hair.
Rachel gathers wild mint.

Ruth feeds sparrows.

The lists get harder.
Words like
derelict, exile.
Words it may take
lifetimes to learn.

Lastly, the words
an old man says in his sleep
on long nights
when winter thickens
at his window
and there is none to hear.

Suzanne Matson

Two Poems

FOSSILS

For instance, the way trilobites
work around their past:
they fill and fall in on themselves,
vacancies blooming
into perfect extinct lives.

The shopgirl hugs her arms and stares out,
the tinted day hardly believable.
Customers come, clatters
of square light. She covers
the same steps, backward,
forward. She might leave
before the end of this
to be weather, everywhere, and not
the same twice.

Were we to come after,

sweeping out the empty spaces
she often becomes, we would find her
curled and listening to time,
keeping all that happened,
her getting younger face
swollen like a blank new moon.

LEAVING GARIBALDI

The train stands ready to leave Garibaldi
and the Lumbermen Memorial Park forever.
Any moment it will shrug off the children
who sit astride the black-baked locomotive

and leave the Lumbermen Memorial Park forever.
Oh, the town will be surprised at first—
three generations blackened their knees climbing the locomotive
and it was Clem McKinley's steady job to play the train sounds.

But the train will go ahead and leave
the first chance it gets, though it will be missed.
It's where Ada Beare sat every afternoon talking to strangers
over the wail of train sounds,

pointing out her son's three-bedroom on the hill.
She only missed for gout and once gallstones
when she convalesced in style on the hill,
and Clem, at the donation box, explaining her absence.

But any moment the train will stretch
like a spine after sleep,
leave Clem and his record to explain the absence,
and lurch bayward, parallel to sea.

There will be passengers sipping drinks,
conductors stepping over hatboxes and travel-dusty trunks,
and families in white linen, looking to sea.
The train chafes on its blocks; soon it will go.

Clem, not imagining handboxes, dusts the waxed timetables
and puts the needle back in its groove.
But the train, slipping from its blocks, must go;
its hollow eye has been fixed too long south.

It will fall into the familiar groove of track
and the children, their eyes also south
as they sit astride, will not be shrugged off,
and no one can look back until Garibaldi is left behind.

Richard Ronan

PINE / EUCALYPTUS / FENNEL

Odors of the pine needle floor:
the thin, dry smell of the upper pine inch,
the scent of the deeper plane of acrid mulch
—both hung low, mixed, close to the ground
on which we lie, breathing.

Eucalyptus leaves fallen onto this,
leather-like, flat, fragrant,
the twisted wooden rags of bark,
camphored, crossing with spiders' webs
through tree shadow.

Beyond an herb grove of fennel
at the head of the hill,
dry in the green heat of this summer light.

Sea-moist salt scent, bay water
blowing up the sand-ridge,
cool tide, lap over lap,
out of rhythm, clean as rain
on the sweat of our bodies.

HELIX ASPERSA

The typical garden snail breathes
and excretes through the same orifice,
reducing the loss
of moisture which has sifted through
the nets of conifer needles, diminished
to mist by the time it clings to the green collar
of trillium leaves. The snail is without
false expectations: whatever's left over
is life.

I am not dissatisfied with things as they are
but I wonder if it thinks the moon is a spindle-shaped shell,
smearing a glistening trail of stars?
And does it consciously fear thorns, droughts,
the windless volcanic ash? Or does it believe
the whole world is underneath, where the porous air
is full of fluid circles,
and weathering is a natural mercy?
No, it has no insight; it's as common as clover.
Observe its two front tentacles
which scent leaf-mold and lance leaf.
Its two longer tentacles are feeble eyes,
sensing only the light
which fogs its lusterless shell,
and the shadows that are boneless and flourishing.

I'm not without compassion
but I can't accept this inability to dream
beyond one's self. Yet the snail
has a special knowledge:
creeping 23 inches an hour
it shifts its perceptions slowly.
Does it bore even itself?
Or is it enough that its evolutionary patience
has awarded it with practical intelligence:

it seeks decay on its own level.
And, finally, here is a curious fact:
although it travels great distances,
over liverwort, slime streams, and stone,
it tends to return to its point of origin,
where it contours its body-foot
to the fertile soil and observes life
revolving around it in concentric seasons
of earthly abandonment
and need.

SANCTUARY

When I was a little girl I believed
I could move clouds by breathing
my straw-thin breath upwards,
and whispering "sanctuary."
When I was older, I was Given Responsibilities,
but the sheets would mold in the dryer, forgotten
as the lunch dishes I put in the oven.
Sister gloated: You'd even burn corn flakes.
Mother complained: you're always off
in your own little world.
I made my eyes as blank as butter
while she furiously scoured the pots.

In my world, their voices were distant
as Saturn's rings. Mistakes were written
in sand during a fierce wind.
My world was small as a ship in a bottle,
a terrarium Eden, or the Lord's prayer
etched on the inside of a needle's eye.
My world was as big as the seasound
in a shell, as the pollen that drifts
across the seas, as the single-cell algae
conquering ditches with a phalanx
of green shields. This is my secret:
my world regretted nothing, not

burnt toast (which was Night Squared)
nor the lies of boys with eager hands.
Nothing mattered but the mantra
of a cricket, or the chanting
of the maple's leaves in their high mass.

Christine Gebhard Three Poems

LAST NIGHT

when the rain justified the steep pitch
of the cabin roof, and the wind came in
through the long slits between the logs
that have pulled away from each other,
we quarreled among the network of streaks and the bitterness
that permeate a small kitchen in late summer.

And when a vein swelled at your temple like a worm,
and you said you had no reason, even to hate,
I reached for the red kettle that waits
on the cold stove like a symbol for fire—
bright and round like a mouth or a siren
or the scream I could not make—grabbed it and hurled it
to the floor. It was the first red thing I saw.

And when the kettle crashed at your feet, denting
the linoleum you laid to look like marble,
I saw how it, too, had betrayed me,
when it opened and bled only water.

TO A SUITABLE STRANGER

I'm light on my feet, and I need new shoes.
I can glide over tongues of ice and dance
down the spines of the stoniest roads. I carry
through the cold like the smell of bread baking

when hunger possesses you at the end of the trail.

I could be one thing as easily as another—
the clock you race against or the grove
of palms you retire to. I could wear you on my arm
or in my hair like a jewel. I need jasmine and cloves.
I need courtyards and doorways to walk through.

You could address the long unguarded
letter I have written and left unsealed
at the foot of the stairs. Come now. You need something
to happen. I could read my fortune in the hand
you rest so tentatively on the arm of your chair.

TO MY READER

There is little I can keep from you. Now as always,
I am plain as black ink on a white page.
The words are twice the size they need to be,
but that is more the fault of the one who wrote them
than of one who specified the type. Even backwards, in lead,
I could never appear distant from the language or from you.

Part of it is nearsightedness: I must rush up
to everything to see what was intended.
Once I tried standing back, but accustomed
to my proximity, the world leaned out to me,
and I feared the slender column of space that remained
between us might lose its balance and collapse.

Then there is the business of my blood, which runs fast for the narrow
roads I travel, and warm for northern latitudes.
Once I tried chilling the room where my words
draw their first breath by painting the walls
an icy blue called *avalanche*, but each time I entered,
the windows fogged and the ink seeped from my pen.

Perhaps I have it inside out again. Perhaps
you have come to relish the hunt as hounds do,

and would prefer I play the fox. But be forewarned:
my scent clings to every bent leaf
and blade of grass, never growing cold.
You'll go to ground pushing forward on the line.

Katherine Soniat

JUST TO BE SEEN IS ENOUGH

I

This is a country no longer needing
black dress or white dress.
The bodies lie sunning, uncounted
and unaccounted for.
They don't flinch for flies
or the long lengths of Pacific sun.
Neither do they breathe.

Only the ocean moves in gently
and washes out another body.
The one no one knows,
the one no one claims to have ever known.
It's as if the dead arrived dead,
raining down like a plague along the coastline,
laid out on the lava field.
Perhaps just to be seen is enough.

II

The city lies in the silence of locked hotels.
Like a ghost, torn curtains blow
onto verandas of hibiscus and shattered French doors.
There are no anthems,
and the dead don't begin to resemble soldiers.
This is war at random.
As in a dream there's no real reason
to choose sides. All the promises, words,

barely make it to the next day.

But someone is doing this,
something arranges these dead as displays.
It's not just for buzzards
and simple washings out to sea.
It's meant to be taken in slowly,
enormously, from every imaginable angle.

Elaine Gottlieb

ELEGY

It is a violin playing my mother
It is the gut note sweet with suffering
It is never having
It is knowing
It is my mother dying in May
the white neck the dark drowning eyes
It is an old room in a new house
with drabbed carpeting It is torn wallpaper
spangled with poppies It is a satin spread
on a bed with plastic springs It is
a china closet with a wracked glass door
The waltz whines like an adolescent girl
in a mature woman dreaming of the One
who never came It is the Messiah
deceitfully absent It is my mother
running at night because she does not know
whose shadow is on the walk behind her
It is ripped stockings and the death
of her granddaughter It is a high feline scream
out of a violin somewhere in Vienna

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A PLEA FOR HELP

Poetry Northwest is in its twenty-third year of uninterrupted publication. Unlike a distressingly large number of other American literary magazines, it has not disappeared, altered its format, or curtailed its quarterly appearances under the stress of increased printing costs, higher postal rates, and a weakened economy, especially in Washington State. It continues to publish the best poetry it can find. The University of Washington is supporting it to the limit of present resources, but in spite of our increased circulation, there remains a substantial gap between our income and our expenses. Our readers have helped generously in the past. Won't you please join them by making a contribution in any amount? Gifts to *Poetry Northwest* are tax deductible.

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David Wagoner
Editor

