Always the dolphins leaping before

my daughter, studying this year in spain,
tells me she's staying with a certain
doña sanz. the home
is two or three hundred years old. a
marble staircase rises from the first
to the second floor. up this she goes
to her room. the room, at the back,
has ceilings fifteen feet high! french
doors twelve feet high open out onto
a balcony from which she has a view
of red-tiled roofs. below, a courtyard.
birds sing. i think of her. i
enter the front door, smile
at doña sanz. my shoes click up
the marble steps. her room is simply furnished.
spartan, like yours, daddy! her letters
come excited. she has
good teachers at the instituto. one
is eighty-three. if you saw him
on the street you might
call an ambulance. he teaches a class
in don quixote. in class his age
drops away. he becomes a tiger,
leaping about to illustrate a point—a
tiger for cervantes and quixote.
brilliant, she says. i believe it.
every word! daughter, there.
in fabulous spain. my tall blonde daughter.
is it true that spanish men
go for blondes? i've heard so. it was true
in mexico. i've written to her,
cautioning, fearful of machismo. ha!
absurd progenitor! assuming
timidly your auctorial rights in her!
ghost of polonius, dealing caveats!
deaf upon the wind, o windy man. wanting
for her, whole argosies
of this world. wanting for her
the suns and moons, who wanted for her
always the dolphins leaping before her.
who writes this private poem to tell her so.
in whose dear ship she moves, her spine
a mast on which her spirit blows. who is
my flesh, but all men's. eve's. all.
more mine for having loved her
and been shaped by her, and been a part
of her shaping. o so lovely shaped,
daughter. your sails of spirit which draw
you, tall and slender. for me
you glide madrid! your tale of the bankers
moved me to laughter! how they came out
to greet you—sorry your father's check
had not arrived. cheering you, five of them!
banco español. who came from their partitions
to pay their regrets. ordering
pastry and coffee and chatting with you.
how could i be annoyed, you wrote to me,
with such charming gentlemen! how
could you, indeed! i am a pleased father.
you stand on spain. i stand here, they are
colors on a map, just as well that it
is spain—as greece or austria or italy.
if you love it. and you do. deep
into hispanic history, culture, art.
walking among their romans and their moors.
live with a fiery gentleness, my dear! live
with ardor! polonius,
you old fool! be at it now: telling her
how to do it! live this way! live

that way! nothing matters but that the ship
of you glide the dear life. you are here.
i brought you, in my way, with help of other.
i cannot save you from hurt. you've
known it—can take it. and will. but think
that those who brought you here, creative vicars,
brought you this long journey, long as all,
out of the essence of whatever is,
nurtured you with ancient tenderness,
wanted for you always the dolphins
leaping before you in the marvelous seas,
wanted for you
all the argosies of this world. daughter,
sailing there—your spine a mast
on which your spirit blows.

PAULINE

i was but a child, and you—
squat, thick, your tight-wound hair
shot with gray—
were a distant aunt, with a cow or two,
hogs, horses, your chickens
pecking
with petulant beaks. some went
cockadoodledoo!
and when you took the slop out,
crying Sooey! how the hogs came,
snuffling with their snouts, rooting
in the rolled stuff,
slurping, grunting! magnificent!
i loved to go beside your skirts,
your bucket slopping, to feed the hogs.
i watched you by the hour. it
was heaven! you worked as if
gods waited in the next room. as if
there were such purpose, as if
the energy in your fingers would weave forever.
as if the butter foaming in the churn

NORTHWEST
were sun and moon—
slabbing it out with a wooden spoon.
your round face with a half smile on it.
the barn, the smell of hay.
the cows that chewed forever, the blue
and gleaming horse. the green dew.
o but how that iron stove
sang for you!
plying the flames with wood, the iron
ringing, the homemade rolls you laid
in their birth dough in the tingling pan
to slide them quickly in
with a thrust of your fist in a black glove.
sweat sprang in tiny beads
to your forehead and your lip, your face
flushed, seraphic.
and the gorgeous jellies in their jars!
butter yellow in the rolls' bellies!
and uncle miles in his presidency,
his cheeks shining, as the food flew.
miles: the proprietor
of a country store with nails and shovels,
buckets. bins of stuff.
what a fragrance hung there! and those nails!
did anything ever shine so! and their sharp
points. how they glistened, all mixed,
in their barrels! the magic of it!
and the kind cow in the meadow. and the horse
glistening. i could see it
from my window, and ran out.
grasshoppers leaping in green terror.
how the breast of the horse shone! how it
gleamed in the morning sun!
at the well, pauline
slinging the bucket down.
the ringing of the chain—its tingling hum.
a moment—and the bucket splashes.
sucks in water. her hand on the handle
cranking the bucket up, slopping a little.
she smiles at me. i

squat to watch some ants. they go
in single file, feelers out, legs
frantic. red, and a
chipmunk. and a purple jay.
it is a misty place. another country.
i visit it occasionally. a strange cockaigne,
an island somewhere west of spain.
no one lives there in the usual way.
nor the horse, nor cow, nor that particular hay
whose fragrance filled the rafters where sifting light
boiled with a beautiful dust.
but it is vivid, and it had its day.
i have such tenderness for her
and miles. and the rolls
with their buttered bellies. and the ringing stove.
pauline, with her black glove,
thrusting in a pan of dough. her voice
murmurs. her spoon dips the floating butter.
the chain rings in the well. the bucket splashes.
it is a land in quaint suspension,
a curious atlantis—sunken, muffled.
but living—alive—with a life of its own.
and hers. and his. and mine.

SETTING DOWN A FRIDAY FOOT

that photograph of mars! i
slipped into a trance. in color. to see
it. the pink. the landscape. rubble on it.
sweeps of it. to think: there it is! no
one's there. no little thing moves. no
porcupine. not even a skunk.
nothing's there. what is it
that attracts? it's like:
there it is! a whole planet! un-
stepped. no crusoe. no
foot friday. a
whole planet! dear god of mars! no
foot upon it. vikings.
shield, sail, nitrogen. how
the mind gropes, how the ear strains
to listen. the mind
lopsided, swaying
from leg to leg, a kind
of stupefaction, a red
companion piece to earth, harmonic, a world
of a place! surreal, magritte.
viking digs its hand
into red oxides. shadows
are there, the
sun. rubble. i
don't want to be so arrogant as to think
if i pay taxes i own a piece of earth. i
want to be prepared—
god of mars—to move on.
ready—reincarnate, protean—
to set my friday foot on strange stone.

BLUE-GREEN LIDS

hands tense, knuckles white.
veins, a mobile
stirring from the ceiling, made
of thin metallic fishes. air
fizzes in a tube, sucking,
hooked in the mouth. a paper cup
shot with water. a
hiss. a
drill whining. a
storm shakes the atlantic, sinks
a ship. i'd
started the article in the waitingroom.
one survivor. his raft peaking
fifty feet in air. the dentist
moves his many elbows. his wife,
petite, with blue-green lids,
stands in the door. her lips

THE DIVER

At the tip of the high board,
looking down, i am not yet concerned for the green water,
not yet ready for plummeting hands first in fathoms of air,
and if someone notices me as
she squints against the light
rippling the flags of towels,
I am too remote to take her into account. i stand, loose,
nothing if not at total rest,
musing the length of my body
so any looker-on might think
from this posture i am a man praying. appearances fool us.
i am involved in myself, see
behind me on its steel hinge
the thin board rocks me awake.
Plank-walker, pirate-of-air,
I throw my two fists forward,
thrust out from the tall tower
just as it topples over. Un­
clenching the hot sky, I hurl
it over my head. One moment
I am a man swimming the void;
the next I am diver, graceful
in his precipitous element.
I wear the agile wind, I see
faces and bare white throats
craned toward me, I dazzle
across the eyes of the girls.
My hands flash ahead of me
to carve on this green Eden
only my perfect turbulence.

THE BLACK CAT

For the time it takes me
to smoke a cigarette
I have prowled this house.
My wife in the big bed
lies cradling my pillow
in the bow of her arms,
and she has no dream
that excludes me. My younger
son has withdrawn himself
to a far corner of the dark
breathing untroubled music.
My older son, the distant me
I remember over and over,
rises himself to kiss me
while I settle his covers
between repose and the wind.
Even the family cat dozes
in the rocker, his claws
unsheathed into the cushion.

What hurried me home
to them all was the absurd
fear they were murdered.
Some blind animal lunged
into my loneliness
and showed itself; Death,
I whispered, calling the beast
by the most exciting name
I could think of. Now
feeling foolish and tired
I have ended my round
to learn nothing but love.
I read too much, perhaps,
or wish the wrong liberties,
but I will sit for hours
at the window where light
enters first, hurt by guilt
and relief to watch the cat
go killing in his sleep.

Gar Bethel

RISING

You don’t realize what you’re doing.
You’re up against it; it being yourself,
not the mattress or the alarm,
not the gray glow or the sulfur smell,
but closer, your cage expanding,
your river bulging out of the hills
with dregs from the winter night.
Somehow it was going on all along,
and now you have to make polite
conversation, respects to the family.

You push back your insulation;
the forgotten air invades your vacuum.
You swing one foot over the edge
followed by its naked partner,
then by the legs; the clothespin body
sits at fulcrum. As if it were an army
exercise, you clamp a hand on each knee
and push upward like a seedling
emerging from the frozen ground.
The mouth opens as if to scream.
Already you are taking the first step,
but nobody is taking your picture.

DRESSING

Lifting them off the hanger,
they rest upon your arm
as if you were a waiter
presenting a bottle of wine.
You prepare a stance
for the daily balancing act:
standing on one flamingo leg
you fill down through the folded stem
and quickly balance on the other
aware of cloth against your thighs,
feathers ruffling.
Then you start the printing of skin
by pushing the waist button
through its hole with finger and thumb,
the buckle’s tine through
its tight fit, and the belt
into its flapless loops.
This daily passage ends
with the roll of a snare drum,
metal teeth biting into one another;
you zip up and close to meet the day.
COMING

It is time for the parting
after the suds and shower.
But first you comb the tempest
into plowed fields of wheat;
the teeth, like forks on tablecloths,
move down toward your eyes
that crossing from the mirror
coordinate the hand in memory.
You don't need to look or rather
almost don't want to, noticing
how far back the delta line recedes
before you can part-in the river
and bank its tributaries
to either side in smooth wet wings.

But you know this ordered beginning,
when another day walks out the door,
will have taken the corners of wind
and your scratches for an answer
and will have become random curves,
leaps, and rope ends, every follicle
standing in a half-pitch of space
where even your simple part
seems to have disappeared.

DRINKING

You test the dark water:
with index and thumb knot
you raise the cylinder to a plane
between the window and your eyes
to scan mist rising from the lip;
you cool it down by adding milk
to the litmus taste of your eye
and blowing the surface tension.

Bringing this contained warmth
up for the first sip,
you prepare your tongue

for wading in a mountain stream,
a patch of sun in a chilly room,
until the convergence of rim
and mouth are joined
in a slight burning that trails
down through your core
sending streamers out to the skin
making all pretense of beginning
lost once more in immersion.

John S. Flagg

PLOT TO RESTORE REASON TO THE CHAIR

Death? No problem.
Next item: Evanescence.
Wait, no, sorry.
Next item not evanescence,
sorry. Visitations.
Point of order!
Hasn't opacity been
ruled out of order?
The minutes please.
Etc., etc., etc., etc.,
etc., don't see where.
Your memory doesn't serve.
Next item: Visitations.
Got to come out of salary.
Point of order! Point
of order! The government
is disinclined to pay
the taxpayer's money
for your indulgences
so is the Corporation.
Got to come out of salary.
(Psst, this guy is a real
you know. How did he get to be
you know?) (He got to be
because he is. Don't ask rhetorical questions.)
I demand to be recognized!
Why shouldn't this institution financially encourage prostitution in whatever shape?
Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman!
(Psst, I see what you mean though. And am inclined to think gunpowder may be the answer.)

Stephen Dunn  Three Poems

CONFESSION

There was nothing to do
but keep driving,
maybe stop in the woods
to count the bulge
in my pocket,
but keep driving
the ghosts away, those
battered shadows
of people who died in car wrecks,
people who were always
my parents. The ghosts liked my back, kept angels from my shoulders,
rode me
into these small crimes.
They were caught
in the stopped air before the windshield became their last meal;
only fear, they said,
could nourish them.
So I knocked off a few
gas stations on the way to nowhere, picked up a hitchhiker and stole his Timex,
left him in a cornfield.
I wanted to sleep
but the ghosts slept with me.
I wanted to love them
so they would fall back
into their graves,
Oh I wanted to escape
the sound of badminton
being played by mutes
in a backyard, that noise
in my head.
I put the pistol back
in the glove compartment
next to the torn map
and the sleeping Cyclops
of a flashlight,
made resolutions to seek help
at the next Help Station,
but it hadn't been invented yet
and I drove right past it
into America and these headlines.

THE OBSESSION

I decided to call the dark
by its right color
so when it came down on us
or when it was in the house
I could say navy blue
is upon us or obsidian has come
with its black ice,
I could know the quality
of what touched us.

It started as an experiment,
almost a joke,
but soon I was wondering about dusk,
trying to remember how often
I'd driven home in it,
driven by it, shadow's breath,
a weight that wasn't
quite there.
I dimmed the lights in the living room,
it couldn't be simulated;
I walked out into it,
a simultaneous goodbye
on a street corner.

The dark was less elusive.
After all, the synonym for brain
is grey-matter, and who isn't
the brain's amateur, dusk's
confused traveler?
I tried to adjust my eyes.
It was midnight, the midnight
that has tried to myth us
into love or crime, deceive us
into not seeing it.
I wanted to decide what part of the dark
is chilling, the correct color
for desolate.
You were with me.
I was holding your hand;
at another time of my life
we could have walked into the sunset.

THE TRUTH
for Jeanne-Andree

My autobiography gets away from me,
the details mix
with other lives I could have led
or have led, how am I
to be sure in this amusement park
what's an accident and what's

a simple ride going nowhere?
I am the South American revolutionary
biting his fingernails in a bordello.
I am the French woman
who disappears in the lost embassies
of love, dreaming of repugnance.
And this is my story, the one
that would rather make itself up
than be anybody's delivered newspaper.
I am telling it now,
this is not me speaking.

John Allman

Two Poems

NANA'S VISIT

She hid her bottle of port
in the kitchen washtub
and we'd catch her lifting
the porcelain lid, reaching in:
we heard a swishing, and remembered
the smell of wet newspapers
in her icebox; the hall toilet
that gargled as you froze
on the seat and strange footsteps
went past. And suddenly father
was shouting. O his mother was drunk again,
singing her old vaudeville songs,
unloosening her stiff legs.
You could almost see the music hall
lit up, the Indian clubs whirling
like a halo around her head,
up went the left leg, up the right.
We saw her steamer trunk,
the pleated panties like pink
carnations, the sharp edges
of yellow contracts, a photo

18

POETRY

NORTHWEST

19
of her father, his white mustache
hung like the cliffs of Dover.
We heard the men of Tipperary
whistling would she do it again,
and she did, against the painted scenery,
the flat trees of Eden shimmering
in gaslight. Up went her skirt,
out went her bum. We heard applause,
watched her kick off her shoes
in grand finale. She snuffed out
a row of candles with her naked feet.

YOU OWE THEM EVERYTHING

Their fingers numb in thimbles,
eyes dim with hems, their front teeth gone,
they mean well. You give them old lamps.
You give them the room over the garage.
They wash your kitchen windows, looking in.
They smile like maiden aunts with lace
collars and hearing-aids. They nod like doctors.
You thank them for the years on their
knees in office vestibules, the wrung-out hands,
the checks for your law books, the debts
they paid with Irish brogues in old movies.
Even your Porsche coughs in their presence.
Some of your children ask who they are
and you speak of Slavic ladies in cabbage
fields, the Haitian grandmothers dumping ashtrays.
You name the widows with varicose veins
and prominent sons who visit twice a year;
chug-a-lug maids in Hotel Edison, connoisseurs
of abandoned wine; sisters of vaudeville stars.
You hear their jangled nerves ring up in dry-
goods stores. You hear them praise children
moved to Wisconsin. They are the lost nannies
in Victorian novels, the housekeepers with rings
of keys, who put the cool cloth to hysteric

brows, who soothe like cellos in the great hall.
They know they accept everything. They know
you wake in your middle-age sweating, thinking
of them. They smoke Lucky Strikes. They buy Wonder Bread.

Sean Bentley

AMERICAN DREAM

white line white line white line
white sheets line your city of sleep /
your eyes tour / your tires caress
pavement like miles of sweet
pea beneath your foot the accelerator /
white line white line a language
of flat colors and lines arrows
and curves ahead of your vision /
you focus on each red pebble in the street /
on each shred of glass each white line
white line / your car peers over hills /
your wheels belly the road / lights light
bushes at the verge / your hands grip
the wheel the sheet you roll over with /
and you hang a rachel / negotiate the curves /

teeth in front gnaw bugs from the air /
once they caught a warbler / held it
hanging / the white lines flashing
in its dark eyes white line white line
white line white line you
have dreamed this / the whitewalls
and hubcaps burn in to your eyes a corona /
the mirror explodes with sun as you tip
over a hill and no one behind you
nor ahead the road clear as the fire
in the mirror that white line of sleep
pulling you on its thread
through to daybreak you drive home the dark /

NORTHWEST
ON THE THIRD HAND

On the one hand
I am afraid. I wear a school ring.
I prick my tender fingers, remember typewriters,
carry hammers.

On the other hand
I believe there's nothing to fear.
I wear a wedding ring. I have pink fingernails.
My skin is soft as vanilla cream.

On the third hand
I wear the rings of crystal and pollen
and the rings the Etruscans fashioned
from feathers, auguries, seeds, and
salts of strange origin:
these rings murmur in the dark,
murmur and click in foreign tongues,
keeping my cold third hand awake all night,
promising pleasures unique as fingerprints,
pains closer to bone than skin.

The fingers of my third hand are green,
they are yellow and green.
Someone gave them to me in a dream
when I was twenty-nine.

With the third hand
I write letters to the world of glass,
letters instantly read and memorized
by priestesses of light, letters swallowed
by emptiness, letters conveyed by silent messengers
to polar silences. (Somewhere
in other words, they are well known.)

On the third hand
I play the piano of grass, and looped around cold fingers
I carry the green keys that unlock the door in the oak
behind which my great aunts live smiling
in a parlor lined with glittering samovars:

with the third hand
I turn all the handles, and once again
the ancient tea steams out like rain.

SPINSTER

It's raining. She doesn't want to go home.
We promise to watch from the window
to see that she's safe. It rains,
and we watch from behind our house:
her windshield wipers begin to beat—
crack clack, like lunatics.
No one comes near. Rain, trees, sidewalks.
Nothing moves. Nothing talks.

But she idles her car
as if she wishes the engine would die
and a tall stranger with a face
of Plato, a face of newsprint,
a face of the Marquis de Sade—
and a trenchcoat and all that—
would rescue her with cigarettes and cocoa.
She twists her fingers, rolls down the window, cries

"I'm a shark, I'd like to eat everyone up!"
And we have to listen.
We have to watch
as her hands turn to string, all knots;
watch as her arms fall off,
devoured by shadows,
and her car explodes in the street; watch as the strange face of Plato
approaches her lips like the glistening snout of some night animal, and the teeth of the Marquis de Sade close around her cold ankles.
She screams, "It isn't fair!"
O Plato, the blood is everywhere.

DAPHNE

1
Her father often said to her, "Daughter, you owe me a son-in-law; you owe me grandchildren." She, hating the thought of marriage as a crime, with her beautiful face tinged all over with blushes, threw her arms around her father's neck, and said "Dearest father, grant me this favour, that I may always remain unmarried, like Diana." He consented, but at the same time said, "Your own face will forbid it." — Bulfinch's Mythology

2
I see it now: this is how it happened, this is how the heavy bars of the sun fell on her: like thick hands seizing her breasts, her shoulders, rocking her backwards, prying her thighs apart, announcing the searing tongue of the intruder— and she ran

or tried to run on feet suddenly melting and vague, while the great heat knitted her
the truth of the dark eating
that goes on forever,
under the ground.

3
Apollo stood amazed. He touched the stem, and felt the flesh tremble under the new bark. He embraced the branches, and lavished kisses on the wood. The branches shrank from his lips. "Since you cannot be my wife," said he, "you shall assuredly be my tree. I will wear you for my crown; I will decorate with you my harp and my quiver; and when the great Roman conquerors lead up the triumphal pomp to the Capitol, you shall be woven into wreaths for their brows."

— Bulfinch's Mythology

Brendan Galvin

RUNNING

Experts say for me to do it well
I should be forty pounds lighter
or twenty-one inches taller,
so if I do it I'm a fool,
fat fool if I don't.
Dying of experts, I shuck off

home by the back door,
taking myself to yappers at heels
and the nameless worst who may

break anywhere from bushes,
my mind holding its hand,
telling itself the teeth of the unknown

dissolve when confronted even in fear.
If you see me and toot, I may have
only my middle finger for you:

I'm not sponsored by the National Park Service for your viewing pleasure, have had shin splints, and suffer

permanently from Morton's Foot.
Experts say any moment my spine may collapse from cervix to coccyx.

But look, there is heavy traffic of bees
in the burst willow catkins, that kingfisher
dips and rises over the marsh
like a lesson in scansion.
A month from here, swallows will loop and dive,
slicing the air close to my doubling heartbeat,

two months and a woodcock
will sail through a steep
parabola ending in bushes.

I let a fly live completely a moment
in the dampening bush of my hair.
Rhythms are breaking, the last shred of

human song just flew out of my head.
Once I awaited adrenalin's uppercut under
my limping heart, and paused like

a man in mid-celebration
recalled to final things. Red fish
school up in the blood. Whatever I need,

there's no name for it, but we are
a naturally healthy people,
being of the Elect, so this must be

somehow un-American. Any minute now,
Flab will dust me off with his Pontiac,
but here on the edge of energy
I believe even the stumps will fly again.
What expert ever saw a hawk go before him
toward a quarter moon pale in the western sky,
or a random butterfly exploring the air
over bayberries? All things are pilgrims,
except maybe the blacksnake soaking up
asphalt's watery heat, who is only inertia
to be overcome. Shifts change in the blood,
but I'm breaking no records. By mile four
I'm only the framework a breeze passes through.
Bellies of gulls on the flats
are lit like quarts of milk. This wobbling
under my ribs dessicates bad habits.
I slow to a trot, to the least piper's
whistling, and my pulse begins its
shorebird glossolalia. It says
dowitcher coot yellowlegs
brant bufflehead knot

Gary Gildner

TOADS IN THE GREENHOUSE

When the scale were sucking
the life from my orchids,
I imported hundreds
of lady bugs into my life,—
blessing their tickle
among the sobered,
applauding the sparkle
they rendered to wrinkle
and droop. But soon these
ladies were snapped

away by the quick
sticky tongues of my toads,
whom I also had
affection for.

Stuck,
I had to keep the leaves
breathing myself, washing
them off with soap and water.—
telling the toads when they
lumbered over to squat and watch
that what they saw was
what they saw. As always their faces
said: We are simply here—two beauties
in a world gone buggy.
And so they continued to lumber over,
keeping their mugs at the ready.

Summer began to steady itself
against autumn, my strongest spider
moved slower and slower
up in her corner, the ants
seemed to have scrammed for good.
Only the sluggish and slimy slugs,
I thought, kept the toads going.
I started leaving angle worms out
on a piece of musty pine
they liked, making sure
the worms were lively.
These little squiggles, they replied,
are adequate.

Every night they'd
either be perched on the pine,
waiting, or hopping toward it.
I saw they were losing
their skins, scratching at the tough
places it wouldn't come off.
Then one night in a dream
they revealed themselves as uncles,
a wee bit hung over:
honey bees, they gargled,
bring us honey bees.
I ran toward them, my hands
brimming with mud, my feet freezing.
No, they said; the sweetness,
the sweetness . . .

In the morning frost had come—
and in the greenhouse, each to a pot,
the toads had burrowed down
among the roots;
I saw their noses briefly—
and then like deliberate
wonderful fish,
like prairie dogs,
or like uncles who can't quit
chasing the ladies,
they were gone.

Stephen Dunning

DREAMS OF DUCKS

1
This dream recurs, ducks caught
by an instant freeze
webbed feet firm in the ice
bodies twisting side to side
heads jerking. The marsh grasses
rice, cattails; cracks and echoes
of shotguns far away
hunters invisible in blinds
drunks before sunrise, voices
staggering across the still silver
of Lake Mille Lacs. The dream
tries to divert me
from ducks twisting
side to side, father and me
stiff in our boats, decoys

bobbing and nodding, alive
in the quiet surface of Mille Lacs
splinters of daylight
coming through the blind
our feet firm in the ice

2
I awake to water so clear
stones, twigs, grains of sand
the grasses and the water ferns
are focused by early light.
Smells at the ends
of deep breaths, snow
coming our way, and soon
melted, bubbling paraffin
for dipping the birds.

Father posed me in front
birds on a stringer, him behind
holding the gun, smiling down
hand on my shoulder:
Step back so you get the birds
and Mother did, moving the Brownie
up and down; side to side
finding the heap of blue-wing teal
the canvasback shot by mistake
the mallards: a weight of ducks
hung on the stringer
bead-eyed birds, side to side
hanging from my belt.

3
We fly patterns like birdshot
spatters of us
v's and vague arrowheads
through the silver sky
patterns skewed to the sun
to the warmth in the East
handfuls of us
loose in the grey-silver dawn

NORTHWEST
beating our wings toward sloughs
lush with grass and seed
early birds flying south
running at life
to grass and to seed

the surprise weight
brushing through feathers
biting through skin
letting my warmth
leak into dawn
the weight eating
into my heart
breaking my beat

me caving in
legs pulled tight, wings
stretching out for air to hold
me folding, my whole self
tight for falling
for arcing down
away from friends
me pulled by the force
deepner than flight
my memory braces
to hit the water
ready now
the weight in my heart

Mary Oliver
Two Poems

WINTER SLEEP

If I could I would
Go down to winter with the drowsy she-bear,
Crawl with her under the hillside
And lie with her, cradled. Like two souls
In a patchwork bed—
Two old sisters familiar to each other
As cups in a cupboard—
We would burrow into the yellow leaves
To shut out the sounds of the winter wind.

Deep in that place, among the roots
Of sumac, oak, and wintergreen,
We would remember the freedoms of summer,
And we would begin to breathe together—

Philip Fine

BIRDS OF WINTER

for Sophia B. Fine

Storm night; and the pines spill shadows,
the birdfeeder swings by its thong like a censer;
rain streaming down steamed up windows here,
but in the city, you lie under snow.

Behind me, your philodendron strews
threadbare tendrils down the bookshelf,
balks at renewal. With each shed leaf
you die again, and again I have failed you.

Kindled in a corner, the Christmas tree
prickles with electric lights, syringes
sharp as the sting of the dialysis machine
that wrung tides through your brackish sea.

Beyond all that now, it no longer matters
but these effigy birds, more delicate
in the wreathed boughs than kinglets,
would have pleased you; as there is pleasure
tonight, waiting up alone,
to conjure, storm past, chickadees and finches
weaving songs through the branches
above your stone.
Hesitant as singers in the wings—
A shy music,
Oh! a very soft song.

While pines cracked in the snow above,
And seeds froze in the ground, and rivers carried
A dark roof in their many blue arms,
We would sleep and dream.
We would wake and tell
How we longed for the spring.
Smiles on our faces, limbs around each other,
We would turn and turn
Until we heard our lips in unison sighing

The family name.

SMALL ANIMAL PATHS

To be a small animal
You must wake early in the morning—
Before the moon has climbed out of the pond

You must drink there, and leave
A plain track in the mud
As you turn and vanish

In any one of a hundred
Directions through the forest.
And not even the owl,

Flapping to his daylight bed,
Will frighten you, so well
Acquainted with leaves, the deep

Apple-core smell of earth—
Everywhere, under the looped entrance of roots,
The darkness offering shelter.

Joseph Duemer

FALLING

for Billy Felix Ayac, 1953-1975

Something told him, a voice
falling out of the sky like a shot bird,
that the moon was not
a hole in the sky
that he would never rise
climbing hand over hand
on a spider’s web, a strand
of the moon-girl’s hair
into a new world. Inside
the Blue Moon Tavern Felix Ayac
ordered a beer.
“The moon is a lump of rock.
Raven stole it once, when it was bread,
the first bread baked by woman.
The moon is a lump of bread
turned into stone
in Raven’s beak.
I can hear
his wings cutting the air.”

On the street things speak to him.
Beams of headlights strike him: Fall down.
The sidewalk speaks sweetly: Over here,
you can sleep over here.
But faint stars tell him
the moon is gone.

The freeway calls itself a black river
with snakes of light.
On the empty bridge
Raven Bone Picker danced,
Raven Moon Thief, near the edge.
The eater of stones, dark of the moon
danced with Billy Ayac who jumped
or fell and broke his body,
shattered a windshield
and sat beside the driver
but kept falling, fell
out of himself
hugging a stone through the black water
toward the stolen moon.

Laura Grover

CALLS FROM A BOOTH IN TIME’S SQUARE

i
It's after dark—you should be home
The phone rings to the attic and back
The wallpaper in the dining room is green
The lawn is mowed and someone strange
Answers in a black-hat voice—tells me your
Walls are peach-colored satin
You cannot talk right now
Because you are praying
And your mouth has been sewn shut
Since February. While you were gone
Someone came and stole your room
I looked and there was only the shell.
I made the walls for you six years ago
When you had your little toe amputated
And stayed three months with gangrene.
Your husband made the ceiling before
But the floor got away—it had no signature
And I suppose no insurance—though you seldom
 Needed it. Now it's all there is to hold
The walls from leaning
Toward one another. Their white panels
Gossip about the condition of your closet
Where the awful sound of your heart
Still gurgles at night. The rug left
Its ashes and that's all. I guess

Someone is making love in your bed
To your husband, but I can't find it.
They say the chest of drawers died of broken ribs
And your dressing table fell into its mirror
But there is no clue here along the baseboards
Why the phone keeps ringing and this strange
Voice repeats that you are out for the time being.

ii
It costs so much to call and this phone booth
Is shrinking—there is hardly room
To move my lips. Last week a friend said
I was getting hard to see now.
You were two years disappearing
Just a white blur on the last photographs,
And I keep watching my hands to make sure
They are still visible because one foot
Has already dissolved into a begonia
And I have to wear more clothes to keep the sun
From shining right through my arms.
I know when you start to go like that
There's no stopping and I'll wake up
Some morning and not be able to reach the floor.

You melted into the grass. I think I'll just
Hang on to a cedar tree at the last and
Live there for a while until the right
Bird comes along, then I'll be its breath—
Or perhaps I'll become the salt in ocean water.
My head could be the silica in stones,
My eyes the ultraviolet in light and my hands
Might be the unexcitability of orchids
But if I get to stay together I'd like to be
The indelible in trees—but I suppose you don't know
Exactly where you're needed.
I can see the blue quilt through my hand now, mother.
And I just passed the mirror in the hall—
It was empty. Next week they will have to look
At the forest to see me at this rate.
DEPRIVATION

The man who reads
puts a beer nearby,
and feels, for just a second,

his hands burn
under the reading lamp.
The burning hands lift
one leaf from the next,
as the thunder deepens,
making light end-stops

in the evening air.
Lightning like a typist's key
appears

with the briefest shiver
on the power line,
a clean cut

that dims the filament.
The print flickers in an after-image as it says good-bye.

The man who reads is sighing
in the common dark,
astonished at how easily

the light abandons him,
at how the one requirement
of what he wants is light,

broken now by cracks
that have no wire, no carrier.
The book slips down,
a saint in a pewter field
attracting beggars
like the skeleton in soup?

Boughs croak
while windmills whip light
to lard;
millstones grind,
thunderheads ignite dry sticks.
Men flail their burning harvest.
Jays fade.

A wind of locusts,
a wind of dust
shaking cellars
inside out like pockets
in a dead tramp's trousers.

Straw leaks from craniums,
cornsilk from hearts,
horizon upside down—
a whipping line of trees,
roots for limbs.

Trees like yellow chicken claws.
The prairie scrabbles.
A traveling salesman
feels his way back through the henhouse.
A long-lost son,
his gazed at driftwood arms
on tropic beaches.

He opens his suitcase:
a sewing machine disguised
as an elder,
vacuum cleaner an elm.

gun, silver birch,
movie camera
a cherry tree.

When the moon makes
snow silver
this tree mistakes
its shadow
for the reflection
of a willow
arched over a pond
where two lovers
from warring houses
have agreed to meet,
on foot, without horses
or henchmen,
you are one.

Marky Daniel

Two Poems

NAKED LADIES

Amaryllis, the belladonna lily,
sometimes called the naked lady.
— The Garden Encyclopedia

I saw them circling the porches
of forgotten houses, pink and common
in their habit. Mother hurried past,
mouth prim, pulling me, saying she hated
their bare-legged look, telling me the only name
she knew for them. There were none
in Mother's garden; no brazen trumpets,
no lolling tigers. In my starched pinafore,
sandals, long white stockings,
I scrambled by her side, clutching
for her hand to keep in step.
Rose-pink, fragrant trumpets
summer; dormant spring.
The church is banked in pale madonnas.
We consider the wild lilies, which grow
in idleness, yet still are loved.
Afterwards I walk, my silk dress heavy
in the August sun. In their overgrown garden,
they nod to me. Their heavy perfume hurts
my mouth. In Mother’s garden, the boxwood rules,
green flanks against the bricks in formal pattern.
Flowers there are clipped and staked;
trained up in the way that they shall grow.
I swelter in my ornate church brocade.

I keep her garden ordered. Hoops of wire
surround the baby’s breath since spring.
Their foaming summer bloom hides
steel stays, keeps stems from sprawling
under every rain. But these untended lilies,
tumbling among the twining honeysuckle, wilt
and sweeten without care. Kneeling here,
in my long skirts and emerald sleeves,
which Mother would admire, I am breathless
before pink mouths gaping in the heat.
Frosts were far too subtle this year.
Much seems unseasonably green.

BESTIARY FOR THE RANCHER’S DAUGHTER

I expect the unicorn in May,
crossing my father’s pasture, through the green,
shin-deep alfalfa, past the wind-break poplars
mossy with leaf, to sit cross-legged
in the sage, combing my hair in the sun,
watching myself in the mirror
I borrowed from my mother’s dresser.

I wait impatiently through July,
riding my blooded Quarterhorse
so hard his sweat makes curds
along the bridle reins. Ranch hands come
to mow and turn the sweet alfalfa;
the baler binds it all for sale.
Seven of the best bales I save aside
in the hayloft. From a catalogue, I buy
a red plastic halter. Wild sunflowers bloom,
the poplars stand up neon green
against a purple wall of thunder.

I forget, hurrying through October,
breaking open bales to feed the work horses,
after their long teeth cut
the pasture down to stubble. West wind
rattles seeds in the dry sunflowers,
tumbleweeds bounce and sail,
sewing their spines in the fragrant sage.
Like oriental spires against a wall of lead,
the poplars turn, and one afternoon
I drop my mother’s mirror:
It takes forever sweeping up.

During an ice storm in December,
the unicorn arrives, striking the fence
with one split hoof. He is rangy, thin,
with mangy coat and cockleburs snarling his mane.
My halter misplaced, I run out with a rope
to tether him. Among the poplar skeletons,
we look each other over. Sleet melts
and runs on our faces. Wind whips us.
Escaping the weather for awhile, we skid
across the frozen ground together to the shed,
to see if there is still space
among the milling, steaming herd.
A USED CAR LOT AT NIGHT

Love has come
to the used cars.
The moon shines down
and changes their lives.
Under the sun
they were hard, flawed,
a nervous tremor
ran through the metal.
Each was separate
from each. But now
community. They flow
like water. They flow
away from their past
like a car veering
to avoid the body
suddenly before it.
Above them, the flags.
All the long day,
the bright triangles
flapped in time
to the anthems of countries
men escape from by night,
crossing a border.
Now the flags, their many
colors become a single
color dreaming desire,
hang perfectly still.
The hearts of the cars
have grown large and spiritual.
A pure blue
moment wears the mask
of eternity. Love
has come down from the sky
and cooled the fever
of the cars. The miles

in the tiny windows
roll back to zero,
a spinning declaration
of possibility. The cars
shudder and die
like one body
a sexual spasm
releases.

SLEEPING PARENTS, WAKEFUL CHILDREN

When our parents were sleeping
We brought them gifts
It was a whispering time
The great bodies lain down
Upon the long bed
The deep sighs adrift
Through the upper rooms
It was a whispering time
When the gods slept
And we made gifts for them
With paper, paints and tiny
Scissors safe for us
Masks and rings
Obscure, magical things
In the halted hour
In the still afternoon
The anger asleep
And the jokes we didn’t understand
The violent love
That carried our weather
All subsided to these
Two vulnerable ones
Their hands and mouths
Open like babes’
Their heads high
In the pillowy clouds
For all we knew dreaming us
Sneaking in
Lest they wake and discover  
Our love our fear  
How we thrill to propitiate,  
My sister and I  
Approaching the border  
The edge of the platform  
Where the gods murmured  
So precise in our placement  
Of these our constructions  
Frivolous, fair  
The gifts on the skirts  
Of their lives for surprise  
Then turning away  
Lips and fingers a cross  
When they woke  
They would never know how  
When or why  
They would never know  
Who we were

Mark Ercegovic

Two Poems

KEYS

When the keys hang limp  
at the end of your chain like fingers  
you have lost in another life,  
asleep so long in the night  
of your pocket their rattling  
withered to bone against bone,  
then you will be coming home  
with your collar up  
and your key pointing the way  
to that house grown cold over too many years  
where this key fits its lock  
like a knife in a wound  
and the night begins at your door  
to creak on a hinge.

RUNNING WAR MOVIES BACKWARDS

As we always suspected  
those happy endings  
ever last.

The anti-personnel bombs  
we thought had blown to pieces  
(we thought so often of  
being people ourselves)  
pull themselves together  
and plug their own open holes  
sucking trees and cows back to place  
their shrapnel coming to a soft roundness  
and rising the idyllic path of lost balloons.

Tanks and jeeps  
troop carriers and amphibious ducks  
retrace their treads  
and stall at the start of a slow rust  
their engines going as cold as the memories  
children visit in war memorials  
Saturdays after the matinee.

Changing expressions  
as easily as changing shirts  
the enemy set down their weapons  
or remove fingers from buttons  
and return home to argue (like us)  
among themselves at dinner tables.

Those hard-boiled, military tacticians  
lapse into a soft-shelled, second childhood  
unlighting the barrel ends of cigars  
and inhaling smoke screens from reclining chairs  
while our raw-recruit hero  
backs out of occupied territory  
and into the driveway of his small-town home  
(sleek profile unmarred)
to resume that same job selling shoes
for the rest of his flat-footed life.

And now the faces of peasants
we need no longer care about.
The tears of their children
withdrawn and unwept
as they move over whole countrysides
the wheels of their oxcarts
spinning like movie reels
to the flopping up end
of an old beginning.

Dennis Marden Clark

KNIFING A PIGGY BANK

You hold it upside down and stab it in the back.
It’s something you kept coins in once, your savings,
determined not to lose (once you forgot) a stack

of price-fixed metal staggered like piled shavings
of Baal’s heart on a formica table top,
plunder at first of pop bottles, yield of slavings

in neighbor’s garbage, on roadsides where bottles stop,
and lots spared by developers in your town;
later, odd change scavenged about the house and shop.

Knifing the only pet that never bit—you found
it easier to feed—pays off: fat coins come
two at a time, caught between blade and spine, sound

once on the table, spin clattering to the floor, fall numb.
Some of your past adds up as you watch heads roll
and snatch at heads of state you had forgot, so dumb

they are in their infinite trust in God and their own finite soul,
no catch in the voices reciting IN HOC SIGNO VINCES.
At large, E PLURIBUS UNUM chunks on your cents, paying toll.

You hatch DEI GRATIA REGINA and rex, who winks
at LIBERTÉ ÉGALITÉ FRATERNITÉ—
and mortmain walks hand in hand with mortgage and thinks
you back to when you stole those; from an uncle, say
a soldier or sailor, served in Europe, brought
souvenirs back to Grampa’s in a trunk you used to play

was yours; you wonder if his children miss the lot,
and it’s as close to Europe as you ever got.
Your hand moves heads and tails into a babbling stack.
The pig, speared with a butter-knife, jinks and charges back.

Gary Miranda

LINES FOR AN IMAGINARY SON

Today you occurred, perhaps for the first time,
were born announcing how I’ve neglected you
all these years, steeped in mythologies of daughters.

What did you do, you say, not to deserve even
gratuitous love? And I grope (let’s say you are five)
for answers, as though you had just asked me
about sex (which you have) and wonder what the hell
your mother (which you haven’t) would say. I say:
Let’s go for a walk.

Outside, the October trees are raised fists, remnants
of old losses dangling between their fingers. I think
to you: Listen to trees! I say: Are you warm enough?
I know: soon my answers will have to turn stark as these trees. I try to remember what it was like being a boy and wish, in a weak moment, you might have grown up like me, afraid or perhaps too proud to ask anything, a briar root spiraling into itself.

I tell you a story:

I had a cousin once, older than me, who had a dog, a collie, that could find us playing hide-and-seek no matter where we hid, that dog smarter than any kid in the neighborhood. The cousin got killed in the war (except I know that isn’t right because he wouldn’t be old enough, but still . . . ) they shot him down in the cold Atlantic and no one ever found the body (this is true) and I kept thinking: the dog, send the dog! (Or was it my father?)

I shout then: Look, I don’t want a son, how would I know how to make you love me! You are hurt. I want to make myself not to have said that, or explain, or say Now that I’ve said it everything will be all right.

But you have already let go of my hand and are walking away toward the grey mouth at the end of this clutch of trees. I watch you go, wondering will you be warm enough, and why in hell did you buy that cap if you never put the flaps down?

_Dan Minock_

**DRIVING THE INTERSTATE**

What to do?
You can listen of course to the radio but the music is not live and the news either moves so quickly you just can’t get out of its way, or so slowly you’ll catch up in an hour on Sunday.

Aware of the risks of giving or taking advice I say read poems.
Actually this may be safer than sitting open-legged at sixty miles per hour taking everything for granted. Anyway as any speedreader will tell you you needn’t stare at words—just a flash down to find a phrase then back to the world from which poems like accidents come, breathing the line into your lungs, doing no damage.

As for what to read, it is best to choose poems written after Henry Ford though there are exceptions like the work of housebound Emily Dickinson—some poem anyway which turns in tight circles, which you’ve never read carefully enough, it keeps shaking you off.

At fifty or sixty or seventy miles per hour you may be ready to move through it nearly as slowly as the poet did or as others before you moved over this route—who walked horses, led mules through mud stopped for days numb beside a fire half out of the rain, who had to take wagons apart and lift them up a ridge.

When you get to where you are going you may pick up a novel going five hundred words per minute, or have slow talk and think without the bitterness of roadside nettle dissolved in a blur. But for now keep the poem beside you, one hand on the wheel, the other marking the place. Save it for the open country, the cars ahead moving away, the cars in your mirror still miles back, no trucker beside you looking for skirts.

Off the road, lamps keep lives going at night. But you must remember your poem in the time without light, everyone else home, the rain in slant lines, and you on the Interstate, trying to hold on.
Gary Myers

LOSS OF A SATYR

One would have to walk very deep into a cave to feel the sorrow, and have light passed in by smooth stone to understand the truth: his body, half bent into itself, half in depression; his head brotherly, as if listening to the age that stiffens in one shoulder.

All his songs would have to be remembered by heart, and the vision of the nymphs, following—a belief that music was a youth of kinds. And one would have to listen closely to the trailing of his breath down the slender reed, that echo of the air at each hole, which is next to silence, next to stone.

Arriving, like a premonition, his wind comes from as deep as one can imagine and seems another form of dark, and even then, a memory of the woods as small as the cave’s distant entrance, that single star that offers nothing but the space it is.

Peter Davison Two Poems

SKIING BY MOONLIGHT

Orion reclines on his hip. Polaris glares high at my left. I glide my way homeward, a quarter-moon chasing me.

I pursue the lurching shadow of my sweaty body back along the newly crumbled tracks I slogged only an hour ago through the mirror-image pasture. (Polaris twinkled at my right, Orion teetered at my left; the moon, narrow as a candle, sparkled on smooth, blameless snow, a beach of diamonds. Cedars were heaped with treasure among frozen cherry trees.)

Our sheep have all taken shelter beneath the black barn. In the windless moonlight only an owl hoots against the cold while deer, silent among pines, wait to hear my skis stop hissing and the back door click shut before they wade toward the barn to steal some hay.

THANKSGIVING

By the authority vested in me, a gift (in German, poison; in Swedish, a marriage), I write of journeys, landscapes, interceptions; expressions visible, alive, or dead. A milkweed pod atop its autumn stalk bulges from cold and flips itself wide open to sprinkle flurries of snow among the grass. They bloom, mulberry-like, for next midsummer, nourished by milk no bitterer, no whiter than any I have tasted as a gift.
CYCLE

Stretching his ankles into high gear,
the man commanding ten speeds pumps up
his heart and lowers his head against
the north rain. He's riding into November,
miles from where he intended, years
from where he has been. Downhill now,
he steadies himself on curves by how
the thin wheels gyroscope; he leans
to feel speed, losing weight as
he settles his butt to pedal across
the flats and outside the old suburbs.
Once he has left the suck of traffic
the gravity of the hills gets to him:
he slows to how oaks cantilever,
how spruce true themselves at right angles
against the sky. Gut, heart, toe, knee:
over and over he keeps instructing his body not
to forget: this pumping is toward new country.

SHE

For M.K.H.

Attending the bed where he is near gone to ground,
consenting, in her high age, to every knowledge,
she pulls back the tides and recalls them.

She has kept the powers her whole life practiced:
an eye for cormorants rimming the outermost ledge,
waves she would read, and winds her whistle could call
to sail. She stories him what the cormorants told;
her voice spells a passage through days of fog,
her hand sounds a cove quick with stars. As his mind
closes to pain, he opens every eye to remember:
the white birds come to the island stillness; from space
beyond fog they have flown to her hand. He hears
against wind the distance she speaks from, yet all
that earth, between them, established: how she will wait,
consenting, until his own consent is accomplished.

NOT TO TELL LIES

He has come to a certain age.
To a tall house older than he is.
Older, by far, than he ever will be.
He has moved his things upstairs, to a room
which corners late sun. It warms a schooner model,
his daughter's portrait, the rock his doctor brought him
back from Amchitka. When he looks at the rock he thinks Melville;
when he touches its lichen he dreams Thoreau. Their testaments
shelve the inboard edge of the oak-legged table he writes on.
He has nailed an ancestor's photograph high over his head.
He has moored his bed perpendicular to the North wall;
whenever he rests his head is compassed barely west
of Polaris. He believes in powers: gravity, true
North, Magnetic North, love. In how his wife
loved the year of their firstborn. Whenever
he wakes he sees the clean page in
his portable. He has sorted life out;
he feels moved to say all of it,
most of it all. He tries
to come close, he keeps
coming close: he has
gathered himself
in order not
to tell
lies.
About Our Contributors

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