POETRY NORTHWEST

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THE HUMAN BRAIN

They say that memory is electrical,
along with the constant arrival of our sorrow,
that bells and meat, thunder and lightning
are mirrored by molecular learning inside the cell,
and every time we read a book or hear a lecture
little bumps on our dendrites swell and explode.
They say the gas station I reach with my friend
in a Ford Galaxy appears as a cellular alphabet
emitting a shower of neurotransmitters
across the spaces between axon and dendrite.
That even our wish for the gas station to be there
is like looking through a diamond of calcium ions.
The gas station unfolded a kind of black rose
of oily light wherein we sat feeling protected from the
theories of night,
though I thought I could hear the dirt
from his home town drop out of his laughter,
and so the past sieves through us endlessly.
Potassium expelled as sodium rushes in.
This is my only memory of this friend
and what it means has faded with why we stopped
or why better than his face I remember
some kind of bug flying into an insect zapper,
tiny executions which made us laugh
This was before my long-gone friend and I stared at the elf owl that got in the way of our car and turned out to be no tragedy. Its neck steamed little seahorse wisps of steam.

There's also no way back from seeing or believing. Yet it seems almost immoral to talk about this sequence of events as agonistic and antagonistic molecules without which there would be no black branch of a desert highway, no all-night gas station and no frying bugs. The moon looked like a prop watching over us. My friend's arm, tattooed with a hummingbird, slung indifferently over an inert steering wheel while insects fried out loud: so many laughable electrocutions constitute the past, which is a desert night.

Even remorse is a lightning storm of synaptosomes, without which no one is sitting in the movies, no one is slicing the brain of Sergei Eisenstein and no one's unfilmed wishes spend so many dark years afloat in refrigerator light. Then the knife sinks to the bottom of genius. It's practically snowing genius tonight, the roads outside are lined with scree of plowed snow, new snow oozing to old in this bottomless night.

And each fat drop the icicles turn out is practically a moral imperative to stop thinking of memory as punishment or guilt as anything but theory for processes too minuscule to mourn.
exhaling dead smoke, green dashlight smeared all
over his glasses,
as deep into Daylight Savings as he could wait,
embalmed like a mummy in the winding sheet
of his exhalations, unloved or worse,
unthought of, yet there—
The engine coughed on, headlights drilled through water-down.
And there I sat, the little executioner
watching the snowflakes strange and vagrant before
sidewalks destroyed them,
our footprints still trudging up the museum
steps without us or any ancient teacher.
Streetlights were haloed in snow's stupefaction—
angelic, it glistened
all the way down from heaven to Chicago.
And skyscrapers half-vanished in a white cloud
and one of them was where my father worked
all through my childhood.

RAPTORS
How strange it is these two eagles seem so small,
like someone's aging father and mother. It's because
they're caged behind chicken wire, a browned Christmas tree
to shit on, white down matted against the wire
and flocking the Christmas tree as if these raptors were
the harbingers of winter all spring.
And I would tell you this and how these two eagles
look bleaker than sometimes our parents do when they turn to us
the hunched, loquacious sadness of their backs,
but some mood plays havoc on your face, you seem to be
anything but the near thing you are. So when
you wave to me from the other side of the cage,
it's almost as if you wave to me from your very own planet Earth—
in these dark woods where even introspection seems evasive,
forever mooring us to our botched intentions,
whatever feeling comes over your face steps across
an Acheron of its own making.
Here where we push ourselves into each last frown or smile
and fall through this joy to which there seems no bottom,
the male grips a slung strand of rope
while the female swooshes in a curtain call toward the opposite end
with a rat's tail like a shoestring hanging from her beak,
then shrieks its cac cac cac out of almost nothing we could rue—but I am afraid the eagles have their own theories of joy,
that to these two black angels
not even Dante could engage in talk, joy has talons
along with two eyes which never see one another,
two wings that can appear from almost nowhere in the sky,
barely rousing the world below in a shuddering wind,
joy that would join the raven feeding on roadkill
washed in exhaust and memorized mouthful
by mouthful and burned away by rain—
joy shrugging into depths no ray can reach,
joy of the ghastly realm the captors love to hate,
joy caged and waiting and parental, broken-winged
joy we never feel at home in, joy at the ethereal blood
the slaughterhouse of a sunset had been hoarding.
joy at almost nothing
that could ever speak to us clearly,
joy at whatever eats away our hearts.

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Philip Dacey

Two Poems

THE NEIGHBORS

"Ask yourself who you would prefer as a
neighbor—Saddam Hussein or George Bush."
—Mary Jane Lauh, Christian Science Monitor
Feb. 25, 1991

I walk out my front door
to enjoy the summer evening,
the silk hand of a breeze.
Immediately eastward,
Saddam is watering his lawn.
He sees me and waves absentmindedly,
absorbed in the sound of the drops slapping grass.
On the west side, George reclines
in a lounge chair, a newspaper folded on his lap
as he looks at nothing in particular,
a car passing, a bird hopping at a distance.

They're good neighbors.
It's true I worried when they moved in,
one right after the other,
I had heard stories.
And there I was between them.
But I have seen them pass each other on the street
with an acknowledging nod
and even sometimes chat for a while
before they part with smiles and touches
on the arm, the back.
From time to time I borrow things, too,
a ladder from Saddam, a drill from George.
As I said, they're good neighbors.

Only occasionally
a small hand pushes up
from the ground their lots enclose,
breaking the level green,
the fingers uncurling

---

NORTHWEST
or a knife wound sustained when I rescued a beautiful woman from a street gang, but it's all the same in the end:

my poems will be fundamentally sound, and my stories get to the bottom of the human heart, how we go and go on, divided against ourselves but cheeky.

**Lowell Jaeger**

**ON FACING MIRO’S “TETE”**

It's the mind on all fours having climbed as once I scrambled in my sleep halfway up the cellar stairs and woke in my nightmare where the door to the floor above loomed like a green moon I could run to and close behind me.

I'd dreamed again that night the light of lights in the atomic darkness. Look away, Mother warned, her last words blaring like the yellow trumpet of civil defense from the power pole in the play yard close outside my school. That's what I heard as they marched us single file to the underground: Mother's alarm.

O, yes. I was such a nervous boy. Very imaginative, the teachers reported. So once a month they shut us from daylight,
cross-legged on the concrete, my spine
erect against the cinderblock
—as my mother-the-siren screamed—
and I sat smiling with eyes wide
and blinded in contemplation of doom.

I wasn’t old enough not to look
at what others more snug in themselves
couldn’t see. In the era of the bomb
shelter, on weekends fathers dug the family tomb
while neighbors sputtered over Geiger counters,
stores of drinking water, blankets, dried beans,
new-built basement shelves and how long
do tins of crackers last.

I’ve never lived with this danger passed.
In the dream, I’ve filed again downstairs
in the long wait for the walls to tremble
and echo at the last. A nerve explodes
in me and I’m leaping three, four rungs
up the ladder to the exit, so absolutely sick
of it all not even Mother on her tall pole
can hold me. Then I’m on all fours
climbing, bound toward that door, the moon,
when below me mushrooms a cold white blast.
Look away, I tell myself. But I turn. . .
Mother remembers only finding me naked
halfway up the cellar stairs, groping in the dark,
my face twisting, wincing, drawn. In my hand,
her double-bell Wesclock pounding out another dawn.

Mona Van Duyn

Three Poems

THE CHOICE
(minimalist sonnet)

MIRANDA GROWS UP
(minimalist sonnet)

A CERTAIN AGE
(minimalist sonnet)

Blind love,
awake,
will shove
by mistake
the word
I write
So I’ll keep
my heart
in the sleep
of art,
untrue
to you.
Propero
foreknew
what snow
could do:
the beguiled,
heart-chill
his child.
But she
forgave
what swirled
on every
brave
new world.
Say “May I?”
the child
is told by
her mild
exegete
is the way
to the sweet,
to the play.
But I’m
abused
since Time
refused
to say
I may.

POETRY 13

NORTHWEST
"Maybe she has gone off without breakfast,” he thinks, rubbing his eyes, and spends the better part of the day rummaging through the barn, missing his chores, and terrifying his two chickens.

5. The farmer, though intending to rise early, lies lost in sleep. His wife, having prepared breakfast as if nothing were amiss, begins her chores.

THE DESK-MAKER

The desk was designed by night, whittled out of white wood that was as new as the moon.

Its maker was no more than a child. He built the desk for play; he slept during the hours of daylight in a secret drawer.

He placed a picture of his mother on the top, to look into his eye and say, “Sleep well...”
Molly Tenenbaum

THE HUNDRED-YEAR FLOODS COULD COME EVERY YEAR

We expected forsythia first, then plum, lilac and rose.
We got a blur, as if color had blended to rain.
The days were waves, and we were cells
patterning with other cells—not that we could see
a particular spiral or strange attractor,
but occasionally a tail would flick around a corner,
we might hear a tongue, and those faint senses
may have licked lightly at what we'd been or become,
caboose and window-stained passengers in a tapering
view on the other arm of a curve.
It seemed, when the alarm rang, it was our alarm,
and we were up. It was our job
to pet the cat whether he appeared
as a rock, a small pool, or a vague section
of shade under a tree. Lines were as likely
as other swirls, and we found them in sash and sill,
wavering sieves of the scene. Outside, the rain
poured through our fingers, or our fingers
combed the rain. Our eyes were sky-colored, and the sky—
watered, white, darkening—seemed familiar,
though we couldn't see exactly:
when we rubbed the fabric with finger and thumb,
it fanned into dew. We stood next to the car, ready for work.
Likely, we would arrive there. Possibly, the steering
wheel would blister out leaf bud, flower spray,
tires root oak, tread crust
rivers of bark. It was our job to enter
the car and drive, whether or not
foliage took over, our blood and eyes
as bright as eyes, skin wet
with glistening new green folds;
our job to walk, if that day our legs were water,
if that day our feet were mist, our amble
a billow of particles, wild and white.

The Night Laundry

I rise at noon
and climb into
the big basket.

As soon as
night falls,
I will be tossed
into a heap
at the bottom
of the sky.

Overhead,
the stars work
hard to make
everything white.

I sleep and
sleep, dreaming
of finished shirts
and perfect
color rinsing.

Pale water
is wrung out
of the moon.
DIALOGUE WITH A CORPSE

"Where are the hands?" I asked.
The right hand is looking for what
the left hand smuggled through a mirror.
It is searching for its twin lost at birth.

"And what is the left hand?"
The left hand known of the right,
but he won't be tempted.

"Where are the legs?"
One leg has taken root and blossomed
into an apple tree. The other is walking
on the far side of death, looking for the way home.

"And what does it report?"
Nothing. Nothing at all.

"What are the lungs?"
Trees that have never seen moonlight.
Beneath them the blood carries an empty boat
which will never reach the sea.

"What are the ears?"
Shells deafened by a stone's shout.
Wells whose bottoms have fallen out.

"Where are the eyes?"
Only when the left eye is voyaging
does the right eye dream.

"And what does it dream?"
It is dreaming of the left eye, a black moon
in a winter night endless and blue.

"What is the mouth?"
Words like flowers in the green silence of grass.

"No. What is the mouth?"
A bird that has flown the nest, leaving
the tongue like an unborn syllable.

"One last time. What is the mouth?"
An echo drifting back to its source.
A leaf or the memory of a leaf falling

John Lindgren

June Frankland Baker

PLEASE SEND

It was Martin Van Buren who suggested value in a "charity of silence."
We, the unlisted directors, request whatever you can give.
All names, incidents you send will be kept confidential
in accordance with our principle of silence
(for any action or flaw of character that does not need exploration
for the public welfare). Thereby we relieve all donors of the burden of casting abroad such news, and allow them, when they seek status or power, to escape the temptation of promoting sensational tidings.

We accept any revelations sent to us and dispose of them promptly, without aid of computers, in a vault of silence set aside for that purpose.

We send no receipts. Please use your own stamp, or don't write us at all but bury the information permanently, away from groundwater, in a place of your own devising. Thus you would save the country.
further expense, and find yourself in our announcement honoring our most cherished supporters. This we guarantee will be widely withheld, at the end of this drive, from the media in order to bestow upon you all those rewards of silence you so richly deserve.

Rod Tullis

LAKE CARLOS AT SUNSET

We were sitting outside your uncle's bait shop in the cooling breeze of a screened-in porch, finally safe from the mosquitoes that invaded every evening like the night itself.

On the other side of the lake, the campfires from the state park had already become visible, the smoke rising into a cloud of stored light.

You stopped reading long enough to tell me about the loon's nest you'd photographed the day before, while canoeing the Long Prairie River,

how the egg was centered perfectly over fifteen feet of water, the coontail reaching up from the bottom like the arms of a drowned man who was only trying to rise.

Downshore, past the small beach where once again several toys had been abandoned for dreams, where the few colors left on the water had washed up into the reeds,

the neighbor's daughter was floating off on an air mattress, her laughter scattering out over the trail of light behind her like bread crumbs.

She was balanced so delicately that when she slipped into the water, there was nothing the guy with her could do but wait for her to climb his body out.

That night, as the fishing boats flipped on their lights and headed home, as you slipped a T-shirt down over your swimsuit and brushed back your wet hair,

the fires in the park were growing wild, the shadows and light spilling over the far side of the lake. But it was more than that, they appeared to be drifting,

as if each had been built hastily, on a raft, and pushed out from shore to free the souls of all those who'd ever fallen through the ice.

Your uncle was still inside skimming dead shiners from the tank
willed with the bad aerator.  
Every night, he'd fill his bucket with a death  
so miniaturized he could easily handle it.

then he'd carry it slowly down  
to the same spot on the dock,  
and empty it out  
into all that darkness  
where the northerns were always waiting.

It didn't strike me as that odd  
that your aunt and uncle hadn't slept  
together in years.  
Our smaller compromises were already beginning  
to feel as natural as desire,

and besides, there's no one voice  
inside of us.  
They're all ours, and like the loon  
we question every sound  
to see if it means anything.

AT THE WATER'S EDGE

to Sara

Tonight, after the heron  
has grabbed the last streak of color  
from the still water, a dark purple,  
and flown off with it  
dangling below like a snake,  
the shad will begin to jump  
and that sound, the rhythmic sound,  
of a thousand dogs lapping  
at the furthest edges of the darkness,  
will settle into this valley like a fog.  
After the temperature has dropped enough  
to drive me from this landscape,  
you'll sit down in the cold mud  
at the water's edge and listen

to the voices that will wash up,  
the gentle voices that will only speak  
in the hushed language of the drowned.  
Not far down the shore, at a point  
just beyond the reach of a good cast,  
where one branch of a large sycamore  
twists down like a bolt of lightning  
frozen in the thickening air,  
the youngest of the neighbor's boys,  
the sad one, will stand up in the leaves  
decomposing in the bottom of a john boat  
that I'd left, half in the water.  
His silhouette balanced there,  
darker against the dark,  
as star after star appears  
like grasshoppers kicking nervously  
on the icy surface of the night.  
At that moment, as a cluster of oak leaves  
rattles a warning to the approaching winter,  
and your fingers press into the mud,  
your face will become your mother's,  
or her mother's even, your smile theirs,  
those brief but honest smiles they'd worked  
their whole lives to pass down.

Somewhere, in the belly of these rocky hills,  
in the absence itself, where the light gathers  
into underground pools,  
the moon will be all but formed  
like a word on the tip of the tongue,  
any word, sorry, for instance,  
or like the sculpture in the mud beside you,  
the smooth, still wet, abstraction  
that you have yet to name.
AUGUST: A LUNAR ECLIPSE

Lately I have felt myself disappearing
the way the moon becomes a copper ghost
when the earth casts its shadow upon it.

This can happen when we leave someone.
What we were is effaced
in our dark meeting with grief

and we become no one.
Though, in truth, it must have begun before:
the steadiest, almost imperceptible

erosion that wears a boulder
down to nothing. Ice, wind, water
can do it, enough deception.

For years, without knowing it,
I was the magician's assistant.
The woman who vanishes on cue in a closet.

I may even have come to believe
I did not exist
without his tapping.

Then one night, as quickly as the moon
moves through all its phases
in a matter of hours, it was over.

That the moon returns alone
from behind the shadow, whole again,
seems a false ending, another sleight of hand,

but here it is, a round fact
visible this mid-August night
over my house.

THE MOONS OF URANUS

Often what is darkest, say, the moons
of Uranus, we shine names upon.
Against last night's argument or indifference
we wake, lift the shade and think
Monday or Tuesday or May.
At winter's solstice it's Christmas
or the lilting syllables of Hanukkah,
each one a candle.
Before they are born we name our children,
blinding ourselves to the perils,
blessing their passage to light.

And so the icy moons of Uranus
with their frozen valleys and cliffs,
their frigid zones that do not glow
are Ophelia, Desdemona and Rosalind.

Even from his grave the poet speaks.
And others with the storm of ashes
nearly upon them say Jesus.

A couple in the theater
wish disbelief away as the curtain rises,
while outside in the autumn night
the heartsick swallow the harvest moon
like a tablet.

We resemble the scientists
who have given the barren moons of Uranus
the beautiful names of lovers—
Miranda, Titania, dead Juliet.

In the dark of our house
you call me Sweetheart.
I still call you Love.
AMONG THE CHOSEN

When the schoolroom door opens
on a jumble of lunchboxes, jackets,
and untried faces, my one child bolts
toward me waving his first paper
like a signal flag.

Fifty years ago a boy in Paris
witnessed the day the men came
to choose his yellow-starred classmates
from among the many:

A gold star smaller than my fingernail
shines in the upper right corner of a page
filled with circles and sticks, his letter “a”;
but it is the boy’s own light
that draws me from all else.
His never-ceasing voice rising high
as a bird’s, fills the air.

“You!” with a finger pointing like a knife,
“You!” with a hand clamping the upper arm,
“You!” a thump between the shoulderblades,

Around us, the children run to mothers
who bend at half-mast, arms out.
We enclose our children; we’re safe
as houses. Each child
sports a five-pointed gold star;

until no stars remained
but only little boys who would dream the voices
because they knew—the way children know minutes
are days and years never end—that a life closes
when someone leaves the room.

Jody Gladding

HERE, A SHARK’S EYE

which looks like a moon shell
except it spirals out from a dark
center, just as grief

begins with a weight
you can’t fathom, dropping
as if into water.

What is my mother now?
What but the news of her death
before it descends, soaring

there, weightless and true
and not hurting anyone.
So that, looking up at a perfect

sky, my sister knew first,
the light accurate enough
she had to say, no, not that.

Leaving us this body
FOOTWORK

When Nijinsky died, they cut open his feet to find the secret of his dance. His bones, it turns out, were like anyone's. Each step grinds our heels that much deeper into earth. We have nowhere else to go. Once my mother crossed and recrossed an entire field to find my sandal. She's gone now;
she left her darning.

UNDERCURRENT

If he whispers the names of the birds to his daughter, who, in the course of things, will no doubt learn to speak them, it isn't because of Adam. Why should she hear the names over their songs which she is taking in now, all ears, though her eyes keep closing. No, it's because they've followed an old streambed to get here. So many currents pour into it, when she dreams, she will be carried by them, among them his, the human voice, full of wood thrush whitethroat waxwing.
Tom Wayman

BILLY ON INDUSTRIAL PROGRESS

He's down in the big garden
on a cold day
early November
before the snow,
having left the autumn rototilling
this late, and Joan's old machine
can't really handle
the frozen topsoil
or maybe the icy temperature
but in any case
the engine dies every few meters
and when it does start again
the machine spurts ahead as the tines
suddenly climb on top
of the hard ground
and race across the surface,
snappin Billy's head back
as he's yanked after
until he gets the device
settled in again
and turned to cover the part of the row
it missed

At the moment, though,
the rototiller is on its side in the dirt
having stalled out once more
and Billy is looking at it
like he'd kick it
except he knows he would kick it so hard
he'd break his foot
and that would hurt
too
so instead he stands in the field yelling
to inform the crows and jays
nothing has gone right for the human race

since the industrial revolution
and the Luddites were right
wanting to smash all machinery
and there are people in this Valley
he knows personally
who will tell you the wheel
was invented by a woman
and since the wheel is the basis
for every machine ever invented
it isn't hard to point the finger
at just who is responsible
for things being
the way they are

Steven Reese

Three Poems

ONE HALLOW'S EVEN,

after hours, and the stock procession
of brides, buccaneers, quarterbacks,
rodeo hands, I half expect
to answer one last knock
and find a boy with my own dark

hair, left long in back; and his eyes,
their kindness, their relish—yours.

No get-up, no bag; for masquerade,
the substance of a living child.

Seen from the street,
I'll seem a man who thought

his own front stoop preposterous
or the world beyond his door an enormous
prank: jack-o’-lantern grins gone
drunken, their roofs caved in;

neighbors’ old sheets haunting
oaks and maples; leaves blown chattering
against curbs, or still on their
limbs shivering like sheet after

sheet of not quite the right words crumpled.
And if I’m seen to reach for empty

air, to hold it close, they’ll say I’ve
been too long beneath that halved

apple of a moon, its lonely watch
passing nearly close enough to touch.

DREAM HOUSE

You’ll pass it by at first, then double
back and double-check. Once
you’re in, you’ll still think twice,

bank on routine disrepair
to make enough demands that you feel
handy, at least, if not at home,

tools clattering cheerfully
as ice in a cocktail glass. Until
one night when you’re kicked

back, content—the walls
will meet like lovers in the dark
corners and nestle there, doorways

making shameless overtures,
every joint in the place moaning,
coupled, tongue and groove.

In town next day you’ll pass
some lunatic howling at traffic,
hair like a truckload of old mufflers,

and later in the drive suspect
it was you alone he was raving at,
about work left to do.

You’ll dream the dream that night
of the life gone bust somehow,
of someone after you to fix it.

A TWENTY

Back at the grocer’s today
where we saw your mother last
alive—past the water wheel,
the lobster tank,
by the coffee urn where the pensioned mill
workers are milling, talking golf
in mid-December, fingers chalked
with doughnut dust.

She was wearing one of those
deli department lab coats,
someone else’s name tag
pinned above the pocket.
We were saying goodbyes. She fished
a twenty from the coat
pocket as she often would,
with her quick, embarrassed laugh,
her eyes narrowed
as though they looked into a sun
somewhere over our shoulders.
As always she was flushed, dabbing
at the nape of her neck
with a paper towel.

We saw her again at the viewing,
satin pillowed, packed away,
so at rest you'd hardly know her, who
was always up and down while the family
ate, caught naps on couches,
in chairs. Even dying
in the middle of the night,
she wound up curled not in
her bed but on the floor
at the foot of it. Her five
sons, who stocked freezers and
raised steel and rallied from comas,
her sons and I hefted
the awkward weight
of her absence between us.

Now the urn grows, the grounds are
steeping; I'll need, sometime,
to toss twenty bucks away,
on something I can do without. Or
just drop it from a pocket, leave
it curled up on the floor,
and whoever comes along
will think first of their good
fortune, and then for a moment
of loss.

IN MY FAVORITE RECENT DREAM

In my favorite recent dream I discover my talent:
I can do handsprings, forward and back,
perfectly, without strain.
I stand in the center of a white marble floor,
possibly the lobby of a library or bank,
and I am also perched above, watching from the rafters
like one of the angels carved into the choir of my childhood.
I—the I below—bend over as if I see a key near my foot
but I've seen nothing. I bend for no reason,
without thought or desire, place my left palm on the cold
floor, and
that second I am lifting from the hips, my legs scissoring
over my head.
There is no pressure on my arm. I am light.
I am turning a one-handed handspring as easily
as turning in bed, easier.
And then I am standing. "Hey!" I call out,
maybe to the rafters, maybe because I have no choice.
I handspring again. Then backwards.
Touching the marble, I see the face in my starfish reflection
is not even flushed. Further above, I forget myself
in watching,
my self that is heavy, that is full of imagining.
In the dream I start to love the dream,
a sign that I am waking. Now I am mostly in the rafters,
the twirling me growing smaller, fading.
I notice that I am holding on with white knuckles
and, truth be told, the height is beginning to make me dizzy,
I am afraid to look down. Am I still there?
Has a crowd of admirers gathered, one of them holding
my glasses,
one of them handing his expensive camera to a total stranger?
I sneeze from the dust and my whole body shakes,
my whole brave body shakes.
THE HORSE LATITUDES

Navigators identified the Horse Latitudes by stars and by noting how the waves were almost calm there, the nameless spot where the ship moved slowly and more slowly, and everyone knew the load would have to be lightened, the horses chosen.

The smallest ones, which would bring the least money, were led to the rail, moonlight on their flanks, their teeth, their watery eyes. The smallest ones carried the moonlight down to where they swam, following the ship for some distance.

When a man and a woman make love they can feel themselves pulled forward by something not of their making, call it what you will, as they move through the dark, star-riddled water but what of the man on deck? He has chosen one star, and stares. He pulls his coat closer. It is thin, one of its buttons broken in half. This is how he is dressed to start his new life which must be different from the old: serious, well-loved. What does he mean by these words? They are ways to remember things he once saw—two men stacking wood, a woman and her child asleep in the same room—in the way that the star will come to mean something more than itself, something he cannot anticipate now, standing at the rail, the ship moving more and more swiftly, hooves circling in its wake.

Mark Jarman

THE INSTANT

That the name flies out of her memory;
That her forefinger extends and points and pivots like an antenna;
That the signal to her body to move forward is lost among unravelling nerves;
That no hope of ever satisfying the child who studies her appears in her eyes—a downcast veil, a dog’s sorrow;
That she knows with one more step she’ll pitch forward and the falling may not stop;
That all the past is present in her as it is in God, but without the present and the future, so that she understands the freakishness of saints;
That she knows she’s not a saint and knows her great joy will be the first drink of the day;
That she recognizes her son’s impatience, her daughter’s, and yet—
What was that name?
The instant that she tries a name to name a grandchild and finds that she’s correct;
The fading of that instant and that name, the onset of the slippery murk where she will have to pick it out again.

CALIFORNIA PASTORAL

T-shirted and wing-tipped, in banana slacks,
Translucently revealing paisley shorts,
To 6 o’clock evening Mass, freshly showered
And rinsed of sea salt that had laced their necks,
They came, having parked in our parking lot—
The Catholic surfers, like sea gods in mufti.
They pocketed their car keys, squinting, always scanning the horizon. We watched and volleyed
The dull ball up and over the limp net.
And they looked down toward us and turned away.
All day they genuflected before steep water.
Or was it that the breakers knelt to them?
All day they licked the spindrift from their lips
And felt the sea-surge rise to end it all.
They made the crack-up of the glassy swells
Look purely beautiful, and came to have
The host placed on their tongues and turn to flesh.
And what was it we loved? Our image of them?
Or the bodies where our images were born?
But we were merely curious, as they were.
They strode along the crest of our parking lot,
Along the warm white sidewalk, past our church,
And entered theirs where candles welcomed them.

Cecile Goding
Two Poems

CONVERSATION WITH LYLAL

"This work will break your gorgeous heart," I tell her.

Waste it, like the precious organ alone in dry ice
once discovered in a plane crash. There was a failure,
the contents shattered somewhere in our American
desert, and they had to start all over
searching for the right size heart. The donor card
I carry in my wallet will one day be forgotten, like the face
of my neighbor George. Whatever is salvaged—
the uncrushed kidney, one good eye, my delicate stirrup
bone—will vibrate to the surgeon's low request.
If I am still connected somehow, I might feel
fulfilled, the world all one piece, no horizon.

Lyla spends vacations chasing burros.
man, and her kids are starved. "Already I love and hate her.

Fathers fly in, migrate out. So who's at fault here—
her father? The System? Herself? My mother? Or me because I
showed up,
hunting someone else. Lyla asks, "Then what?"
"What do you think? We got
groceries."

Lyla says, "Take care," and I hang up,
thinking, sentence fragment. Where's your object, kid?
Maybe the problem will solve itself: more dumps,
less desert, fewer burros each winter.

WATCHING BACKWARDS

"Be careful, young ladies," says Sister Suzanne.
"Act up once more and you'll watch this one backwards."
But I am new to the school so, curious,
I jump up twice in my seat before I'm caught.

I thought Sister would be true to her word.
She would press reverse and send Anne Frank
with all her kin spinning back
to their own lovely black and white flat
in Amsterdam, Anne on a window seat bright
with winter sun. She would trip backwards
into a featherbed, wait for soothing darkness.
Like us, she would pout, daydream,
and soon we'd be back to her happy beginning.

Older, working
in the projects, I pray for real
power: Please, there are things
I cannot accept.
I want to stop a nice woman
in the act of beating
her girl. I want to hang up
on the calm official voice

that says, "Let me make this easy"—what
have I
actually
seen?
Now I'm talking with the child
who will never
speak to me.
She urinates in her chair,
then waits to be hit.
I'm tired. Let me take it from the top:
each time she comes over,
she gets smaller and smaller until—
one day—she gets her wish.
She reverses course, up the bloody
birth canal, to be reabsorbed
by the passionate body.
End of story. Easy.

Here's what really happens, more than once:
Sister marches me and my chair to the front,
then turns me to face an audience of children
who wisely ignore my fate. She throws the switch
on Anne Frank and suddenly I'm miserable,
staring right at the round white sun of the projector,
its tunnel of blinding dust. Shading my eyes,
there is nothing I can do but sit.

There is nothing I can do but try
to piece together a story that might make sense.
There are snippets of words and music above
the clack-clack-clack of the machine. And—damn them—
row after row of good, quiet children, expressions too easy
to read. Light barely licks each frame.
The story of a girl plays, inevitably, on.
Martha McFerren

KNEES AND NECKS/NEW ORLEANS

I was getting my shoulder
jerked back in place when
DeLancie brought Dr. Jess
that nice new book on Medjugorge.
He isn't going again,
not while they're making Yugoslavia
back into Bosnia
and Serbia and Montenegro
and Croatia and Slovenia.
If you look up now,
you don't see the Virgin,
you see a helicopter.

He's going to Guadalupe.
And Dr. Jess said,
"DeLancie, I'm begging you,
don't go down to Guadalupe
and mortify your knees.
Look at Miss Mae Marie's cousin—
six months of agony
with a nephew on either side
hauling her up and down until
I got those two knees fixed,
and, first thing, what does she do?
Takes herself to Guadalupe
and sees those brown old Indians
crawling around the pavement,
and down she crashes into this
fit of Mexican religion.
I told her, 'I certainly hope
you got what you prayed for,'
and she said, 'Dr. Jess,
I hurt so bad I
forgot about praying.'
DeLancie, I saw those kneecaps,
and they were blue and purple
like one of those dab painters
had gotten cute on them."

Despite this flawless expostulation,
I could tell, just standing there,
two fat little candles
had lit themselves
behind DeLancie's eyeballs,
and he had every intention
of packing himself some khaki shorts
and heading on down to Mexico
to fling out both his kneecaps
for a little ecstasy.

Even if you don't go thump
in front of revelation,
embarrassing your friends and
frightening the chiropractors,
the older you get,
it looks like you're going to have
a lot of those little
calcium epiphanies
in the third and fifth lumbars
or maybe the seventh cervical.
The Big O, roller coasters,
or some idiotic football team
scoring a touchdown—
what's the point
if you can't fling back your
head and howl?

That happened to you yet?
Three Poems

**Lynne Knight**

AND AFTERWARDS, THE LONGING

The odor of raspberry mingling with honeysuckle,
beating through the long heat of a June afternoon
on the veranda, where we lay flushed from playing tag
in the orchard, too lazy to lift the cushions
to the glider or untangle the hammock, chips of gray
paint sticking to our arms and legs, the whole summer
with nothing to do shimmering there before us—

And I'd go back, I'd be that fat flushed girl again
if it weren't that it's taken all these years
to smell raspberries or honeysuckle sweet with sun
and not tremble with longing, not feel my heart
sicken with longing until I have to reach out
to steady myself on whatever wire or rail
the bush spills over, the way I've trembled
and sickened for love, a woman otherwise capable

trembling and sickening for love, for his hands,
for his tongue, the blood-rush, the murmuring—
and the good chair or bed no comfort, the life,
the books, the music, all nothing against this
longing for the beloved to still love, as if love
were all of it, the odors mingling, the blood beating
with what's to come, with knowing there's no stopping it—

And afterwards, the longing—

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**Jan Wallace**

THE PASSION OF DOCTOR DIXIE

Consider the sad Lepidopterist leaping after butterflies
with his net and his nose for a whiff
of passing Swallowtail, the sweetbriar siren
of Clouded Yellow. Not for him the great field
of rolling and holding, the dull weight of flesh, huge
hot breath of human crooning loud and ungraceful.
He hears the whip of wings against breeze
and sets his net to the chase.
Oh, the fragrance!

The scent sets itself apart from any flower—
seduction tool, little male love gun;
in *Fritillaries*, aphrodite and atlantis,
it's delicate chocolate, vanilla wafer airs.

Secret odors the doctor must discover
rubbing a finger down the tufted abdomen
or barely brushing a lower wing and pressing his finger
to his nose as he goes away, then, just for an instant.

Oh, some smell of kitchen sink and cabbage water,
and some betray a taste for rot and excrement,
exhaling softly in his face, pressed close
against his pinned-down paramour.

And once he caught a whiff like pig sties,
he could not believe anything so small could smell so much.
But a man can forgive a butterfly its secret passions,
it's trembling energies stinking only for love.
ORNITHOLOGY LESSON

It's an act of desperation,
the rare mating ritual
of the bald eagle pairs.

They come together mid-air between
mountains, you can barely make
them out, you with your Audubon
binoculars, you in your birding
hat. The two of them bound beak
and feather, claw and wing,

having taken leave of every other
instinct, like survival, like hunger,
when they caught that scent floating
in the thin air. Mostly what they
have forgotten is how to breathe, how
to fly. They drop their wings,

admit to the full weight of themselves
washed clean of the serendipitous
magic of every day bald eagle flight
by the thick true wash of lust—
which brings every creature right down
out of the wild kingdom into his own

common, humble denominator. Aren't you glad,
bird watchers, you're not a part
of that? Those eagles risk it all

for the free fall down the long swallow
of sex, speeding down the chimney of air,
plummeting blindly toward earth, unaware,

entranced, careening toward your keen
eyes riveted on the speeding bundle,

and just when you know this must
be a suicide pact, no birdheart promise,
but the real thing among the noble breed,
just before they hit the earth and scatter

like burst pillows—they disengage slow
motion in a stunning, artful gesture.
And there you are, binoculars around

your ankles, as the eagles pick up
the next breeze, feathering, feathering, and soar.

THE LADIES OF THE CLUB

If it's no good, your friends are dying all
over the place. If it's no good, you can't lift
your bones to sweep the floor, if grief grips
your gut so hard you can't mash down one more spoon
full of what might sustain you, better go on down
to the club. Pull up a chair, lay it out for the ladies
where they play cards and smoke until dawn.
Lay it out for Ollie hovering near the ceiling,
dentures clicking, face twitching, and Edith perpetually
doing the dishes, how else, she says, will things
get done? And Anna with her headset tuned
into Gospel—wafted in a cloud of violet perfume,
Myrtle's serving the sherry and Alice
dries her mortician fingers to get a better grip.

The motto here is "Hedge your bets."
The motto here is "It All Comes Out
in the Wash." Nobody waters the creeping
Jesus vine with gratuitous tears,
nobody blames you for breaking down
as long as you can play out your hand.
Nobody tells you it will be better
in the morning, they just
cut you in on the deal and keep on playing.
About Our Contributors

JUNE FRANKLAND BAKER lives in Richland, Washington.
SUSANNE CLEARY lives in Nyack, New York.
PHILIP DACEY teaches at Southwest State University in Marshall, Minnesota. He and his two sons have formed the performance trio Strong Measures.
ALLISON FUNK teaches at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. Her Forms of Conversion was published by Alice James Books in 1990.
JOZY GLADWIN lives in East Calais, Vermont.
CECILE GORDING is a literacy teacher in Florence, South Carolina. Her chapbook, The Women Who Drink at the Sea, has just been published by State Street Press.
LOWELL JAEGER’S most recent book is Hope Against Hope (University of Utah Press, 1990). He lives in Bigfork, Montana.
MARK JARMAN is currently a Guggenheim Fellow and last year was co-winner of The Poets’ Prize. He lives in Nashville.
ALLISON FINK teaches at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. Her Forum of Conversion was published by Alice James Books in 1986.
JILL GLASS lives in East Calais, Vermont.
CAESE PRUS lives in Florence, South Carolina. Her chapbook, The Iranian Who Drinks at the See, has just been published by State Street Press.
LIYNNE KNIGHT lives in Berkeley, California.
JOHN LINDEMEN lives in Santa Cruz, California.
MARSHA McFARREN has published three books of poems, most recently Contours for Ritual (Louisiana State University Press). She lives in New Orleans.
STEVEN RECKE teaches at Youngstown State University in Ohio.
MOLLY TENENBAUM lives in Seattle.
ROD TULLIS lives between Marv’s Bar and Bertha’s Cafe in Edinburgh, Indiana.
MONA VAN DUYN won the 1991 Pulitzer Prize for her book Near Changes (Knopf). Firefall will be published by Knopf next year. She lives in St. Louis.
JAN WALLACE is a graduate student in the University of Washington MFA Program.
TOM WAYMAN lives in Winlaw, B.C. His most recent book is Paperwork, an anthology of U.S. and Canadian poems about daily employment. He teaches at the Kootenay School of the Arts.

Poetry Northwest Prize Awards, 1992

HELEN BULLIS PRIZE: $100
John Woods for Five Poems (Spring 1991) and John Engman for Three Poems (Autumn 1991)

THEODORE ROTHKE PRIZE: $50
Gloria Boyer for Three Poems (Summer 1991)

RICHARD HUGO PRIZE: $50
Mark Kraushaar for Two Poems (Summer 1991)

CAROLYN KIZER PRIZE: $50
Jan Wallace for Two Poems (Autumn 1991)

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