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Molly Tenenbaum

ODE TO THE UGLY COLORS

Hairball beige, rust that spots
every single snapdragon,
mustard of 70s telephones, she swore
she never would wear these, and why
grownups did, who could guess, when they could put on
all the pink they wanted.
At ten, she claimed brown
her favorite color, but only
("brown’s not a color") to shock little yellows and reds —
or maybe she’d seen maroon velvet,
even then, felt the blush of cocoa powder.

Iris, iridescent, you were lovely, color the crescent moon
might flash if she fluttered a wing,
glimpse of her aunt Eva’s silk sheath, shadow
the black-haired girls
caked on in the junior high bathroom
and came out looking, the principal said,
like sluts, but she loved.
their necklines of peacock acrylic, their idea of brushing blue anywhere.

Sings to you now, blotchy green, underside of a sunflower leaf that will be completely dead tomorrow.
Sings to you, burnt buttermilk, tabletop clotted with cup-rings.
Sings to you, gray porous linoleum tracked with wet weather.
And to you, white glare, all a cataract sees.

She wears green of cow-dung, tan of an old dry gourd.

Color of mildew, of grated potatoes.
Color of grunt, harrumph, and husk.
The old lips of yogurt, the lost cottage cheese.
Scrape and cav, a dinged aluminum pot.
The granite color of collar bands.
The chicken-fat color of sleep-scum.

Mud of her eyes.

Ugly colors, she sings, you have
the most beautiful names.
Dove-gray, olive, dusky rose.
Murrey, claret, bloodstain, myrtle.
Mauve, russet, mahogany, buff.
Sallow, ginger, peckmarked naure.

Birchbark, mica, sandstone, moss.

You are soft as the cotton sheet in the mending basket.

You are the damp cloth
fever heats through every five minutes.

When you wrap around a person, when she pulls you tighter, heavy weight of wool in winter,
she feels a tug

in her heart —
cuticle detaching, claw caught in a sweater.
Unsealing of a leaf before it falls.

AT MANNY'S FROSTED MUG

amidst the clamor of dual televisions, so many locals moving among each other, splashing expletives and gossip, the sudden clack of pool

sticks, somewhere between popcorn and chicken wings, the first swig, the last burp, one of us will turn to our spouse, our cousin, perhaps

the waitress serving bottles of Bud or the salesman who peddles homeopathic assurances, turn on a stool cut from the heartwood of an ash

that shaded the gazebo in the park where they held the Old Fiddlers Picnic, fat wedges of Muenster on rye, three-legged races, some marbles

spun over dirt, the stench from Drake’s rubber plant pushing through the lilacs’ bouquet, persistent as the boys who pinch the elbows of girls passing secrets, their breath all molasses and mint, a thousand fiddle notes scratched, then pinned to the skirts of women Virginia-reeled,
grand-squared by men
who clap and stomp, handkerchief
their moist faces... O, Pascal
you were right. How often
we wander in times not ours,
that zone between the past
and the present, trying
to recover in a joke
or a story what we accept
was, what we presume is,

while across the street
at Vera's Knick-Knack Shop
the shelves are heavy
with porcelain figures, discarded
magazines and books, pieces
of tired puzzles waiting
in their boxes, like the bolts
and washers next door
at Earl's, claw hammers, wrenches,
every type of nut, every nail,
even the walls, it seems,
are on consignment... O,
how we love the lies
that are this town, the brick
scrubbed and pointed, the road
resurfaced, dark water filling
the canal. We say the schools
have grown small, the bank
will change owners, offer
new versions of old bargains,

that there's too much oil
on lane seven, not enough on six.
What would we do without

such beautiful fabrications,
now that each of us,
refusing to stay, can never leave.
Who knows? Meanwhile we gather,
lose ourselves to The Firemen's
Breakfast, the county fair, Methodist
rummage sales, or to a stool

against the bar where we drift
call for another drink
over the ruckus, the prattle,
the delicious midnight din
of Manny's Frosted Mug.

385 QUAKER MILLS ROAD

After scotch at Manny's, craps
with Harrelson and Brooks,
Chet Gilson fish flopped
on his bed, still drunk,
made love to his wife, cooked
Canadian sausage, then built
a new silo west of the barn,
had four children, rotated
alfalfa and wheat, led the Kingpins
to consecutive titles, studied French,
basic thermodynamics, cut
a swath through the corn
for his Cessna, served as deacon,
village ambulance driver, whacked
rodents with a shovel, attended
soccer games and music concerts,
dreamt one night of a hawk
that sang it ain't necessarily so
and woke realizing
he lives next door.
SHOES

One shoe, two shoes, a dozen shoes, yes. But how
can you describe several thousand shoes?
— Edward R. Murrow

At the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.,
between the video histories and photo tableaux,
this slag heap, this lava flow, of shoes:
Old shoes, tired shoes, lost shoes, abandoned shoes,
an industrial rubble of shoes. Saddle shoes, buckle shoes,
tie shoes, high-button shoes, wing tips, cap-toes, loafers, flats.
Open toe and closed toe shoes, baby shoes, grannie shoes,
high-heeled shoes, low-heeled shoes, well-heeled shoes,
broken shoes, oxfords, sandals, brogues, taps.
Shoes without their mates. Overshoes, winter shoes,
summer shoes, all-season shoes, shoes that have seen
better days, shoes with their eyes on the future,
hopeful shoes. Left shoes, right shoes, formal shoes,
leisure shoes, shoes for all occasions, work shoes, party
shoes, a pollution, an ash heap, an hallucination of shoes.
Fashionable and unfashionable shoes. Practical shoes,
hiking shoes, dress shoes, casual shoes, snee shoes,
cordovans, shit-kickers, monk-straps, pumps.
Shoes with their tongues cut out, mute shoes, deaf
shoes, shoes with their eyelets ripped, soleless shoes,
shoes that will never again take up their laces and walk.
Leather shoes, cloth shoes, cheap shoes, expensive shoes,
a mass grave, a wasteland, a moonscape of shoes.

Shoe (shoo) n. 1. A durable covering for the human foot.
2. A part or device that functions as a protective covering.
3. A device that retards or stops the motion of an object.
4. A chute, as for conveying grain from a hopper.
5. Shoes. Informal. a. Position; status: You
would understand my decision if you put yourself in my shoes.
Plight: I wouldn’t want to be in her shoes.
b. If the shoe fits shoes. Waiting for the other shoe to drop shoes.
Nobody’s shoes. Somebody’s shoes. Anybody’s shoes.
    Everybody’s shoes

LUCKY

He was a lucky bastard.
He had the luck of the Irish,
was lucky at love.
It was just his luck.
He had kissed the Blarney stone,
stroked the rabbit’s foot,
found the four-leaf clover,
touched the hunchback’s hump.
He thanked his lucky stars
he always lucked into things,
lucked out. No matter how
he tried or pushed his,
his luck never changed
or ran in streaks; it held.
He was always in luck.
When other people were
down on theirs, calling his
dumb or blind, he knew his
luck was pure. He wished
them it, for all the good it
did them; it was just his.
And if his days were numbered,
when his number came up, well,
it was his lucky day:
luck was a lady that night;
he got lucky.
He was a lucky stiff,
as luck would have it.
THE GOSPEL OF RED-HOT SHOES

Each time I heard about the mother witch
dancing to her death in the red-hot shoes,
I clapped my hands: Read it again! The bitch
within had already awakened, and I wanted
her dead, stick-and-stone dead, knowing
she was mean and self-obsessed. Whose fault
was this? Not my mother, who read and sang
to me while I stayed in bed pretending to be
sick. Not my father, who held my hand while
my mother did her mother things, or held her
in his arms and danced sometimes. Not God,
who could hang upside-down like the moon.
Not even my sister, who lay in our dark room
whispering of monsters whose slime-haired
tails and legs would wrap around my ankles
if I climbed down to hide or drink or pee.
No, it was no one's fault that I could name.
I was too young to say it was my wickedness
I wanted dead. I just kept drawing the red-hot
shoes, little fires that licked the mother witch's
toes, next her insteps, then her heels, until
her ankle bones melted and she had to dance
on stumps. If I'd shown these to anyone,
maybe something could have been done,
something prevented. I could have been
told the mother witch was nothing but my own
darkness, projected. I could have learned to live
with it. Or I could have been given red-hot shoes.
Dance, they could have said. I would have tired
so easily then. I would have been forgiven.

NIGHT FOOD

At the sweet spice house, we ate and ate,
my lost brother and I opened our mouths
and took in cornices and sills, latticework,
while at the back of our knees, shadows
from the forest rubbed like beasts, fur
of our terror pouring itself into the night
where the moon climbed, shrinking.
The house was the body of our mother.
The breasts were the spaces we fell into
when we had eaten so much the frame
began to sink into itself like a woman
who'd eaten the vowels from her keening.

My brother knew none of this.
Whenever he came to me, we set off
for the pathlessness, saying nothing
so our senses would not intervene.
Once at the house, we started on the side
still warm with sun. The sweetness then!

When we couldn't eat a bite more,
we would start back through the forest.
I can't tell all that happened then,

night fell so deep. But sometimes I held
still while we bled into each other
like shadows sinking as they spread.
SUPPER

How does a mother do it, give you her terrors like food. *Here, take and eat,*

so you eat, you grow strong though you lie awake nights weak in your bones,

you know how fast the door would break down if someone tried to get in,

so you study locks, evasions, you map out escape routes in dreams, and all this time

your mother is saying *Don't tell your name if they can hurt you* not in words but in milk, meat,

she lays everything on a plate and you eat, eat, you are bone of her bone, will be dust of her dust,

you go on with the meal she has set you while you dream of escape routes, of saying your name

to a man who takes your heart in his hands like food he can't live without, until you say *Did you know*

*you were eating my mother* then wait to see what he does, if he swallows, if you can breathe on your own.

THE YEAR BEFORE THE BREAKUP

I never wanted to go.
I wanted to stay in bed with my blankets and quilt, my books and lamp.
I twisted my feet in the top sheet. I pulled my quilt to my chin.

When my mother came in I lay unblinking. *I know you're awake.*
Why couldn't she leave me alone? I could read all day, using up nothing but my bit of oxygen, light.

Why did I have to sort the darknesses out the way I would one day sort out my lover's socks? Matching dark to dark, thinking of his ankle bones so near, whispering *Don't ever leave me.*

Not a plea. A threat I could barely follow. If I'd gone earlier to the forest, would it have been different?
Would I know why I'm so awake each time I hear the word?

*Forest. Forest* I know it's in me. I'm just not sure how long I can carry it, what I'll say the next time my lover takes me by the shoulders: *What's wrong? You seem* so distant.
How I'll tell him I feel shadows unpack from the back of my neck like the trackless cries I can't stop making.
Gregory Djanikian

ALMOST ENOUGH

He wants something extraordinary,  
a heron feather floating to his hand,  
or the Pleiades, all seven sisters, 
flaring above his house.

He wants the nearby pasture cleared  
of old box springs, all the tractor parts,  
he wants his bad neighbor  
to fall to his knees, confessing  
his love for the Yukon, say,  
or the tip of the Australian desert.

He wants people to have  
as many suitcases as they need.

But a hundred oboes for his room.  
Starfire lilies scenting his every morning.  
And what about someone saying syrup in just  
the syrupy way he could get used to?

Maybe the wind in his dream  
will die down long enough  
so he can hear what the leaves  
have been whispering  
all these years.

And what if he could touch everything  
just beyond the edge of his life,  
the fox deep in the woods,  
and the woods deeper within the fox?

If he could move the river now  
five degrees to the left so the sun  
could glint perfectly into his parlor,
**Jim Barnes**

**CORNICHE DE L’ESTEREL**

Even now the road is narrow and curved, the reddish rocks so close to the pavement that they had to paint them white. No crosses laid, but many the dead along this road between Cannes and San Rafael.

When Scott and Zelda took the villa and drove into the moon and mood that linger still on the pages of Alabama’s book, the bridges were of native stone and curves red gravel. You had to swerve dangerously to miss the goats and potholes. To know the road you must drive it, leaning into its slopes and turns, hugging a few of the rocks so close that you feel the full forces of the Esterel on your back. Something here wants to push you into the sea. It’s haunted by spirits of all those who came this way in search of selves no fame could satisfy. Drive south, along the coast at night, but not alone.

Let the moon hang full over the sea, its mountains almost within reach, and, if you are lucky, you may know the Esterel, feel its shadow move you toward a destiny never dreamed a possibility.

**Bob Brooks**

**POINTS OF INTEREST**

Look to your left or eastward from the straight-edge Interstate south of Pueblo, traveling at the posted maximum seventy-five-mile-an-hour speed limit, and see sparse sagebrush tumbling by that fast up close and slower and denser farther, out to the thick dark gray-green fixed horizon line at the far margin, and imagine rising, floating, above this sepia-toned earthscape, flat as an engraving plate, the color of an old air-dried, time-cured newspaper floating and looking down at the sagebrush benday dots on the halftone surface and trying to make out what it’s a picture of, thinking perhaps you’re too close for the shape to come clear and should rise higher, but higher the dots merge and blur and the picture stays just as mysterious, mysterious in the same way as the signs you’ve been seeing that say Point of Interest 5 Miles and nothing else, and then Point of Interest 2 Miles, and now Point of Interest with an arrow to an exit to the desert and nothing else, to the same scene you’ve been seeing, as if you’ve overheard a question in a language you don’t recognize and then its answer in that same language.
Jeanne Lobmann

FLYING HORSES

1.
In my early fantasies I thought if the day comes
I dare to climb on the Flying A red horse
on the gas station pole at the corner
of Fifth and Main, if the day ever comes
I take the golden bridle in hand and pass
through clouds and stars, the great wings
opening and closing as we flap through the universe
toward the Chimera that waits in the night
to vomit the lead from its jaws, would I
be bold to risk such transformation,
seize the bright mane though it burn my fingers,
though heaven's air is thin and hard to breathe,
though planets spin and die around us?

2.
In my late life and hoping the muse would bless me,
in Firenze's Boboli Gardens I asked my love
to take a picture where I stood next to the statue
Pegasus tamed by white marble. Born of the Gorgon's
blood, there was no sign of the wound that bore him,
no light in the unmoving eyes. The merciless wings
did not close, no feather fell to the ground,
silence heavy in the body, the muscled flanks and back,
one perfect foreleg lifted and ready to rise. My head
hardly reached to the pedestal base, my hand
on stone struck no spark from a single hoof.

3.
Centaur, bareback rider, feet and legs bare
to the rough wet hide of horse, thighs and knees
fitting his ribcage, our two hearts pumping,
his long muscles expand, contract under skin
that rolls against me smooth as water.
Night rushes past, another dark rider
flying ahead of the sea-wind,
its bitter smell of dunegrass and kelp.
At Half Moon Bay the beach goes on forever.
Bent low to the hot and straining neck
my body staccato hoofbeats on hard sand,
the roar of invisible ocean
in our four ears, we are saltspray and foam
and the moon will never catch us.

Robert Hershon

THE MANSARD ROOF AS A SIGN OF THE
MATURITY OF ROADSIDE ARCHITECTURE

Let's drive five hundred miles
take our ease at the Holiday Inn
braid sardines into lanyards
count every word in the Plain Dealer
spend our night at the Day's Inn
sneak Ramadan snacks at the Ramada Inn
open a vein at the Red Roof Inn

Now everyone is eating the secret
purple grains of the Incas
If that doesn't work, what will?
It comes with a grudging breakfast
and Jeopardy reruns
at the Count Me Out Inn

Let's drive five hundred miles into
a sunset that pauses, considers
and reasserts itself in the sky
How did I offend the night that
it only shows its back to me?
I draw the shades at the
Well Are You Going To Stand There All Day
Or Are You Going To Come Inn

Let's drive five hundred miles to the funeral

POETRY
If the homilies are brief and all the verses
don't get sung we can be back in our room
at the I Had A Hat When I Came Inn
by the fifth inning Martinez beats out Thomas
and McGwire to start at first base, life
is full of unexpected all-stars illegal ashtrays
unlisted 800 numbers hidden ball tricks
silhouettes in plucked chenille
a profile of the loved one left
in the mirror by a previous occupant

We're atheists of course!
But we wanted the children to make up
their own minds so we locked them
in a convent for twenty years
We're gentle as lambs! But we encourage
our friends to commit axe murders
just to establish base readings at
their home base, the And Now This —
Just Inn

Let's drive five hundred umbrella steps
until the radio foams over
I hand you a dollar and a minute later
I ask you to give it back Why do you now
feel ripped off, angry and poor?
You moan and slide down
the end of the road From here on it's all
used tacos and cars drenched in red sauce
while you try to think up an explanation
for the manager of the Are You Almost Finished
I Need To Get Inn

Alexandra van de Kamp

APRIL EVENING
Plaza de Espana, Madrid

Not five minutes ago, a fountain
with two nymphs — each kneeling on one knee,
a pitcher of water tilting out from their hands —
switched on its lights automatically
at 9 pm. One nymph has a hand lifted
to the back of her head as if to feel
for a haircomb fallen out of place.
A gesture of matter-of-fact love

for the things we find most often
next to us: strands of hair, the light
falling on us over and over again
each day. Buses glide by — telling those of us
who are in the park that we are too still.
We who are waiting for the April night
to soften us, blend us into what is next to us
as nearby lovers sculpt out their bodies
against the grass, press into this world
as best they can. So how does a fountain
sense the night coming, know that the sky
is deepening past itself towards a blue
so darkly lit, so just about to go
yet not going, that it pours itself
into the moment, tucks the buildings
and streetlights within its blue-rinsed
luminescence? Perhaps the fountain's water perceives the light leaving as our bodies

know absence — the skin imprinted with what has been while the world
touches us into the present.At times, birds fly so close

we are slapped with the air they have left behind. Or perhaps

the bronze nymphs falter in their pouring when they know the day has left them

just one degree too alone. And with this hesitation,

the fountain lights blink on — stunning us into near-darkness. The water braiding

its golden rope up and down the sky, the city now settling into versions of night.

And we are all here, gathered into a waiting, believing in the ability

of a light so gentle, it could hold us like a hammock, swing us delicately

between motion and stillness, bracket us within the thin parentheses of evening:

the murky sheen of the grass already fading, the pavement bruising to a milky gray.

And you could say this fountain lights up in a Spanish city because at the end

of the 20th century such things are feasible. But I prefer to think what we are
John Lane
Two Poems

MY DEAD FATHER SETTLES IN

I tell him about video, and he checks out
a dozen cowboy movies. He eats pigs feet and drinks
cheap beer from my refrigerator. I could talk his ear off,
but he asks for his supper. I say it's on the stove.
He says he never eats that way, likes it on the kitchen table
in bowls. "I'm not your mother," I say.
He smiles, and puts on a tape, explains how he used
to work seven to ten, seven days a week, and deserves
a little relief — John Wayne or Jimmy Stewart.

He sits there in his dark work clothes, one tape after another.
He asks if I can run out now and get some more beer,
since he's just sucked down the last cold one.
"I'm not your wife," I say. "Go get the damn beer yourself.
We got pause on the VCR, and you can take my car."
He reaches in his pocket, pulls out a folded hundred,
flips it my way. I tell him how Mama said he was careless
with his money, how once a hundred dollar bill flew out
the car window. Pick up some more tapes too,
says. And hurry back son, we're getting to the good part.

MY DEAD FATHER REBUILDS MY ENGINE

"Ambition is a dream with a V-8 engine."
— Elvis

He says he can't believe I'm driving a Toyota,
so my dead father goes to the local auction,
buys me a Rambler. He gives them my truck,
and pays the balance in cash, just like my mother
says he used to, thumbing big bills, looking
crisp and fresh from the bank. He says on credit
you're always looking over your shoulder,
something men like us should never do.

It's a car as old as he is dead: a Nash with fins,
push button transmission, and lots of chrome.
He drives it out of the lot, and down the street
to my house, the tail pipe blowing blue smoke.
I tell him my Toyota was good for 300,000
rugged miles, and this piece of crap needs
new valves or worse. He just smiles,
knowing something I don't know about cars.

The Nash wheezes in the drive and shudders
to a stop, then won't turn over. "I told you,"
I say, but he hops out. Don't worry, my father says,
and we push the old trap into my back yard,
right under the big white oak just off the deck.
"You got a chain?" he says, opening the hood.

I get a tow chain from the garage, and my father
throws it over a stout low limb, and goes at
that engine with tools I didn't know he had.
Somehow he's got ratchets, wrenches, a hammer.
Before I know it, that block is swinging
from the oak like a hanged man, and the old man
is ready to crank the pulley down and start work.

Half a day later he's replacing old parts,
looking at the wear on the oily lifters.
"This looks to be as good as new," he says,
replacing a valve cover, wiping the grease
clean with one of my kitchen towels.
Eight hours after he started, my dead father
swings the engine back under the hood, bolts
it down, and checks the oil. "Let's take a spin,"
he says, and jumps in behind the wheel.
We find a flat stretch of road, and he opens
it up. "Smooth as a baby's ass," he smiles.

Then quickly as he came, the ghost foot
eases up on the gas, brakes, his dead hand poking
the button into park, and he hands me the keys.
AFTER SHILOH

In the evening on the second day quail covered the ground in the field beyond our tents, the killing was over, and somebody brought out a mouth harp. The Chaplain said the quail were a sign, like in the bible when the Hebrews in the desert didn't trust God so he sent them quail and manna. I'm tired of the killing. We all are, all of us that's not crazy. Deaver, our Corporal, lost his mind two weeks ago and only lives to kill more graybacks. That fire in his eye is enough to light your soul to hell.

Last night I dreamed we were walking along a road and the dirt hillside was wet and crumbled open. The rebs had buried our soldiers there, and all were peaceful except one. His head came loose and it rolled and chattered down the hill toward me, yelling in a high voice that the dirt was happy, and the dirt was his lover, and if we knew what he knew we'd all be kissing the dirt. His head rolled across my feet and on down the hill into a stream where it floated away.

I'm not scared of dying so much as being dead and still alive like that head rolling down the hill loving its dirt. Maybe it's right. Maybe we all love the dirt and should be kissing it.

In the battle our mouths turn black from tearing open cartridges. The powder tastes like sharp burned earth. The smoke in the air is full of it. Nobody goes home after such a thing.

Down the road is a split rail fence, a little garden plot and a church the size of a right good house. People live here, though the fighting tries hard to make us forget. If Moses and the Hebrews lived in the desert forty years, then who's to say? These trees shattered down to stumps might turn green again. The bloody pond might turn clear. But that's all hope. Faith's got nothing to do with hope. Faith is knowing it's all dark and it ain't going to get any better, but you don't care. A body don't need any quail in the evening, nor bread in the morning. All a body expects from God is dirt. That's enough. To love it. Kiss it.
Wesley McNair

WAVING GOODBYE

Why, when we say goodbye at the end of an evening, do we deny we are saying it at all, as if We'll be seeing you or I'll call or Stop in, somebody's always at home? Meanwhile, our friends, telling us the same things, go on disappearing beyond the porch light into the space which except for a moment here or there is always between us, no matter what we do. Waving goodbye, of course, is what happens when the space gets too large for words — a gesture so innocent and lonely, it could make a person weep for days. Think of the hundreds of unknown voyagers in the old, fluttering newsreel patting and stroking the growing distance between their nameless ship and the port they are leaving, as if to promise I'll always remember, and just as urgently, Always remember me. Is it loneliness too that makes the neighbor down the road lift two fingers up from his steering wheel as he passes day after day on his way to work in the hello that turns into goodbye? What can our own raised fingers do for him, locked in his masculine purposes and speeding away inside the glass? How can our waving wipe away the reflex so deep in the woman next door to smile and wave on her way into her house with the mail, we'll never know if she is happy or sad or lost? It can't. Yet in that moment before she and all the others and we ourselves turn back to our separate lives, how extraordinary it is that we make this small flag

Christopher Spinelli

GRAD SCHOOL ADMISSIONS REJECTION

Maybe it was the essay. Maybe you seemed too certain, Too sure of yourself in fields That celebrate the multiple piracies And confusion behind words. Maybe It was your record, not without flash, But far from stellar. You can recall What a friend once said (I will write): Maybe we've got to fail Something colossal Before we have a sense of the world.

You have not failed anything colossal. Your blues are as temporal as candy. Now please yourself. Embrace distractions! Books, those wan moths, may escort you To lightness. That one there, on Sir Francis Drake, Contains copies of misleading maps And records of meals no longer exotic. Like everyone before you, you too will try Some strange new meat the natives eat, Some red and flashing berries.
Kris Caldwell

THIS IS NOT THE MEAL I ORDERED

This is not the meal I ordered.
This meal was served to the Queen of England the night before she died.
This is the meal I should have sent back.
This is the meal that melts on my lover’s tongue and all over her hands.

This meal is not rated.
This meal is into aromatherapy.
This meal has a graduate degree in the algebraic function of the pinhole camera.
This is the meal you've been waiting for.

This meal is working its way up the corporate ladder.
This is a meal that could be persuaded to run for president.
This meal is not rated.
This meal reads *Playboy* for the articles.

This is not the meal I ordered.
This is the meal I should have sent back.
This meal doesn’t know when to quit.
This meal could go on forever.

Padma Hejmadi

CALLIGRAPHY

For us, tropical, distances dissolve into mist; beyond each nearby tracery of twigs stenciled with a delicate load of snow.

Every summer we learn the shape of a tree, every winter its structure while this soft and soundless white erases old seasons.
Oliver Rice

SAINT AUGUSTINE, JULY

He slouches beside the statue of Ponce de Leon, where A1A turns across the bridge to the beaches, Miami, the Keys, old enough for a junior executive but leaning into a guitar, sandaled, ponytailed.

There is something larger on the air along the Avenida Menendez, around the fort, the municipal marina, the pavilion in the first marketplace of the new world.

In the night I think of scops, trouveres. Of him in a room out there, dissident, soliloquial.

Of cattails along this unmolested shore, sedges, caracara mounting an updraft.

Of persons on Granada Street, Orange Street, who have had the radio on all day, owe their mothers better, believe that by going on and on they will come out somewhere.

This afternoon on the pedestrian mall he squats by the entrance to the shell shop, waiting, it seems, picking restless fragments, waiting.

Yesterday at the city gate he sat, brown bag at his feet, mouth open for something he did not sing, muting the strings with an open hand, relics beneath us of Seminoles, Franciscans, victims of pirates and hurricanes, of Confederate profiteers and pellagra, and today he did not appear, father figures, intending sopranos, keepers of precious diaries coming and going at Betty’s Baubles and Books, Mi Casa, Potter’s Wax Museum.

He has departed, I think. To Provincetown, Taos, wherever the rides are headed, modest investors, estranged sisters hanging on at work they did not intend, despisers of bluejays and carrot cake who are compulsive about the daily crossword, wish to have a good talk with their sons. Still grieve for the death of the peke.
DEVIL'S HOLE PUFFISH

"...occupies the smallest habitat of any viable population of vertebrates in the world."
— Ichthyology

They're safe now, these inch-long fish that live by nature in one place alone, the devil's own hole, a rock-lined shaft sunk too deep to measure: should harm befall them, the back-up group in the lab will start their kin over again.

These orphans endured the rise and fall of the Pleistocene, evaporation of the Death Valley pluvial lake and banishment to this tepid lacuna at Ash Meadows, tributary for a river of brine that fails to flow to a sea.

They have faced extinction in our epoch and won for the moment, though cans and flashbulbs float like huge galaxies in their pool. During drought, the aquifer drains out, trapping them below the shelf where they prefer to breed.

Once, scuba divers cut the fence and climbed in, only to descend too fast, drowning out of reach. Yet even now the species clusters together every spring to select their best dancers, those most fit for sex, those that will survive for nothing outside the hole.

No need to hurry. An entire era of secrecy and second-hand sunlight refracted down into Devil's Hole has not made an eye obsolete.

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ARBORETUM

Maybe the great tragedy of my childhood is that I could never keep a fish alive for longer than a week.
On Monday, I'd slide a blade on the cheek of a bag and watch everything empty into a round glass bowl: water, fish and beige strands that rose when each suddenness rippled from its body.
By Thursday, the fish would stay still for longer than usual, and by Saturday...

It happened many times: Gold ones with flecks of maroon in the shape of Virginia (for that is all I knew) would disappear behind the film of their eyes.
And the silver and black ones, the same.
And the blue and even bluer ones, the same.

In college, I watched a performance of Romeo and Juliet in the clearing of an arboretum. I had brought someone with me. She knew nothing of the fish.
We were just starting to date, though as I listened to the play, I knew we would never die together.
Sometimes the lessons are this quiet — someone whispering as if feigning to be sincere. Afterwards, a few of the actors disappeared into the woods, and we followed them to the edge where there was a large, man-made pond and a bridge that spanned its width. We stood in the middle, tapping the blond planks, their edges slightly green, fresh, and watched as the koi rose, every color suddenly appearing to feed on our shadows.
**TREE LICHEN**

You. What I pick from my clothes.
The last shreds of disaster.
The soap-blue splat of kingdom come.

What I have left on the line, a frayed thread caught on the jagged nail,
the forgotten hose swollen with ice.

Spineless. You are stemmy and dry
as the teased hair of women.
Creekside, when your chartreuse tangles.

To survive on so little, the vertical soil of bark, and snow to suck
where it lands. You take no chances,

but lean out some to catch the light,
splayed like a cell, only this
is your body, simple, a sea-blue caulk
to fill the seams, a certain height which you have mustered.

How quickly it can all unravel, a cricket
caught by winter. Better to hunker flat against the host,
to be so slow, outside and still alive.

No one is looking for you, a growth on dead limbs, stiff
and wadded like a frozen, ruffled dress.

Rootless, stemless, flowerless. What holds you on is fear. You do
what you have always done. What is left.

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**JUNIPER**

Supplicant, low-lying, as if their arms
hugged the knees of some host,
their backs, the piss-green tatter of winds —

Who will recognize them? The wooden spears of their spines stiffen with sap,
atrophy. They are evergreen, slow-ripening,
yielding only a few berries at a time. Hard, dark, the nipples of some god we
dare not pluck. Not pure. Pure is undivided.

What part don't they show the sun? The blue blaze on their palms they hide
from the sky, some strange kind of reversal.

Astringent, adversarial. They persist in the evil of grappling. Rejection and praise.
The small retractions we have learned to call sin.

Daphne, the ancients say, turned into a bay tree
to escape the rape of Apollo.
And Leda? Old school. To be taken unaware.

But to fall back as if expecting someone there
to catch you, to be a raft in a great river?
It's not I who calls this blasphemous. Just that lust
in a woman is so very unexpected. Bitter-fresh, intoxicant, the berries blue with age.
They are trying to make an incense of themselves.
For several months in 1994 I seriously considered running off with the man who grew up next to the abandoned gold mine. He took me there and warned me of the winces, the shafts of water that hide beneath the rails, beneath the rotten ties.

Believing every altar should have a door of darkness, no one knowing where it leads, I found him to be a soulmate, but too dangerous.

So it is fitting that Rob, his fingerprints dark on my morning blueberries, his kiss smooth as the inside of a split lemon, and his laughter quiet but consistent, spent all his summers on the lake.

I have learned I am a brook person, forever trying to catch up with my heart.

Only after all this can I see how you, my tiny beloved, my unborn child, are a dewdrop on a lupine leaf, magnifying-glass bright.
FOR FRANCES, WHO CAN'T STOP DREAMING OF DANGER, 
EVEN WHEN THE CHILDREN ARE SAFE AT HOME

I know what you mean about being stuck holding
a particular moment like an uninsured porcelain —
how you can already envision the fragments
at your feet, the white dust
that can't possibly be fixed back into the seams.

There we are again, in traffic, your child and my child
in the car, whole as uncracked eggs,
the beauty of those foreheads.

And yet, right now my boy is somewhere pushing a truck
back and forth over his babysitter's carpet,
right now your girl is sitting in her classroom circle, watching
a teacher weave a story from
a child, a forest, a bag of enchanted stones.

And we have nothing to do with it.

You think that because the truck pushed into our lane
that you must add another ending to the story —
or maybe compulsion isn't the point, maybe helplessness
is, the way I feel when I lift my son out of his bath
and he briefly rests his large toddler's head
on my shoulder, trusting that
I will do what mothers do: take the naked
shining perfection, and learn to bear it.

WIDOW'S WEEDS

With my wooden paddle,
I stir and stir,
sliding her skirts,
blouses, her dress —
its roses vined across
a silky sheen —
into my tub of inky soup.
No need, I told this
newly widowed one,
to spend precious drachmas
on a dressmaker's goods.
What was can become
in the time of a breath
what has to be. She'll see.

Now each thread
sucks at the dye
like a withered tongue.
Each of her garments
becomes the shade
created to swallow light —
a night that will
in its wearing surround
the new moon
of her separate flesh.

TRAVELER

Cast ashore
like some fleck of wood
brought here from afar
by the sea,

you reel — stunned
to breathe this reek of

NORTHWEST
strange urine, strange perfume
thick in saffron heat.

Here you are, foreign one,
familiar with only
the moon and stars,
a cloud-scraped sky,

the lidless eye of sun.
Take heart: only what floats
could be carried
as far as you've come.

MOONRISE, ASTERIA

The sea is gray, gray, an even
undisturbed slate. The moon,
just a heartbeat away
from the water where it rose,

is the burnished red of some
huge unnatural jewel —
full, tumescently round,
heavy as it can bear to be.

What is the sky to such a moon?
What does a blood-gem care
for the airy dark spread out
beyond its rim? Nothing.

Not an earthly thing.
It snubs the sky to pour itself,
in one long wavering gash,
across the salt gray sea.

Richard Robbins

MY HOPING FOR YOU

I want to conference with you
I want to workshop your poem
I want to parent you through this difficult time
I would mentor, but I'm an INFJ and do not easily relate

I once modeled behavior and once, too, devolved
Then it floored me the way
the slimmest creek treed that sky while, all around,
water commotioned beside scorpions
side-winding C-threats in the dirt
That was the year of kokanee and Loch Leven
I trouted all through fall, hip-pocketed
my aging, my son's non-loving
I trouted mud and gravel beds, pathing myself toward health

Maybe you should journey
There's a dark place where another you angel-waits
He will dialogue in his own dark way
He will do the soul-work of spirit management
Maybe your wife's anger fluster at the you
rigor-mortised in routine
even the not-you in charge grudges
I, too, once tombed function in dysfunction
Maybe you should de-cocoon your future
Your poem won't need language
Maybe your life is just a verb a heartbeat from verbing

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undisturbed slate. The moon,
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Not an earthly thing.
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in one long wavering gash,
across the salt gray sea.
Jeff Worley

EARLY EVENING AT THE CHEAPSIDE BAR & GRILL, LEXINGTON, KY

I'm reading the Georgia Review: No, pretending to. I'm eavesdropping, really, on two women at the next table drinking cherry wine coolers. Between them they've skewered a dozen men. Josh has won the prize so far, they agree, for most detestable dweeb. He rotates his underwear according to Day of the Week, red on Monday, for example. He picks nickels out of the mud; his hands feel like jellyfish. Pervis, though, is surely in the running: he tried to impress the dark-haired beauty I'm trained on (I've named her Shannon) by making rubberband animals on their first date and launching them across Lone Star Steakhouse. The poodle, Shannon admits with a shrug, wasn't bad. Then they start on their current beaux. Lonnie's penis, Shannon says, is big and fat and pink as a whale's. Cassandra (the name on her key ring) nods and stares off at the faint quarter moon, a scythe harvesting the light. Her green eyes glint like cut glass. You know that old rock group Pink Floyd? Cassandra says. You know what a pink floyd is? Shannon doesn't. The teacher in me rises up, wants to join in and make it a sort of threesome. A whale's dick, that's what. Cassandra sighs and sticks her small thumb in the air: This is Fred. Then they fix their eyes on me, a man writing who knows what. I could tell them the truth: that Pink Floyd took its name from Pink Anderson and Floyd Council, two obscure Georgia bluesmen, but would this be worth giving myself away? I decide not. I lay aside the fine-point Bic, the normal equipment for a writer. The three of us watch it wobble back and forth on the warped tabletop until my pen is still. And still mightier than the sword, and more shameless.

Robert Wrigley

BODIES

Too soon, the foreshadowed, incipient curves come forth from my daughter's body. She is nine and wanted this night to bathe alone, thus breaking her little brother's heart. Privacy and changes, a sermonette of parental guidebook and buzzword blather: I held his small body to me as he cried himself to sleep. She curled up with a book in her bed, pink and flushed with identity, her mother having combed out her hair.

Let us mourn the advent of modesty, I say to the dog, who looks up expectant, inquisitive. She'd been licking herself with that rapt intensity her breed is famous for, and now, head aslant and tongue protruding, she looks as foolish as I must look, having sock-by-shirt-by-shorts stripped to stand naked in the center of the room, arms extended like a tenor awaiting his roses. Now everyone's asleep but the dog and me, and she's grown weary, what itch or animal impulse to groom that afflicted her earlier gone. Still, here I am, going door to door, checking locks and turning out lights,
all but the one beside the easy chair
where I intend to sit and read the daily paper.
But first, I step out onto the porch
and the dog comes along. Our distant neighbors’
houses are dark, one solitary car plies its way
along the river road, and I remember
a night almost thirty years ago,
a girl and I drove the downtown streets
buck naked in my father’s Mercury.
The car windows were nearly clear
of the fog our hours of parking brought on.

At first she giggled and I grinned,
but on the second or third pass down Main Street
we grew expansive and serious.
This was grown up business, we were sure
of it. She no longer slouched
or slunk down in her seat at the stop signs.
Under the radio’s blare, the tires thumped,
and the air filled with our musk.
We stayed like that all the way
to her house, where she dressed herself
by dashlight, kissed me once on the lips
and let her hand slide down my nearly hairless chest.
What magic there was might have lasted
all night, if she had not left then,
if the dome light had not gone on
and shown me there behind the wheel,
a boy not so much naked anymore as peculiarly nude,
bare, even, pale and grinning.
She loved me, she loved me not, but could not
help herself and laughed before the door slammed.

The dog nuzzles at my hand. The strangeness
of people is nothing new to her,
so under the light I sit, exposing myself
to the news. The paper’s bottom edge nests
against my ordinary, unwaponely cock, the world
is a mess, horror and treachery abound.
War too is grown up business, and money,
and the body as well, a concern and a currency,
powerful and weak, manipulative and manipulable.

In love with all he feels, my son sleeps.
In the weeks to come, despite his pleas
and wheedles, his elaborate bubble bath
and squirt gun seductions, he’ll bathe alone.
We will call it growing up, the long
solitary journey every body makes,
through the neighborhoods of modesty
to the homeland of shame, to the vast
uncharted wilderness of desire. We will not say so,
but already he is left behind, blind
to his sister’s sudden hips and new swellings,
the last human soul in the household
perfectly at ease without his clothes.
About Our Contributors

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*Poetry Northwest* is in its thirty-eighth year of uninterrupted publication. Unlike a distressingly large number of American literary magazines, it has not disappeared, altered its format, or curtailed its quarterly appearances under the stress of increased printing costs and higher postal rates. It continues to publish the best poetry it can find. The University of Washington is supporting it to the limit of present resources, but in spite of our increased circulation and a recent increase in our subscription price, there remains a substantial gap between our income and our expenses. Our readers have helped generously in the past. Their contributions have kept us going. Won’t you please join them? Gifts to *Poetry Northwest* are tax deductible.

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David Wagoner
Editor