

BPJ

BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL VOL. 68 N°1
WINTER 2018

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Subscriptions

Individual: One year (3 issues) \$25 Three years \$60

Institution: One year \$30 Three years \$75

Add for annual postage to Canada, \$10; elsewhere outside the USA, \$15.

Submissions

are welcome via Submittable. See our website for guidelines. Address correspondence, orders, exchanges, and review copies to *Beloit Poetry Journal*, P.O. Box 1450, Windham, ME 04062.

Beloit Poetry Journal is indexed in *Humanities International Complete*, *Index of American Periodical Verse*, MLA database, and *LitFinder*, and is available as full text on EBSCO Information Services' Academic Search Premier database.

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ISSN: 0005-8661

Printed by Franklin Printing, Farmington, ME, using 100% certified renewable energy

BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Vol. 68 N°1 Winter 2018

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BPJ

We are delighted to announce
that final judge Carolyn Forché has selected

Michael Wasson's "SELF-PORTRAIT AS ARTICLE 1[1].
[TREATY WITH THE NEZ PERCÉS, 1855]: CESSION
OF LANDS TO THE UNITED STATES"

as the 2017 winner of

THE ADRIENNE RICH AWARD FOR POETRY



Finalists (selected by Carolyn Forché)

francine j. harris, "Versal"

Gretchen Steele Pratt, "But For This Passage Touched By Nothing"

Jacob Sunderlin, "Circular Breathing"

Semifinalists (selected by the editors)

Emma Bolden, "In the Middle, the Night"

Julia Kolchinsky Dasbach, "Camp means field"

Alisha Dietzman, "Recommended for You Because You" and "For Fear That"

Philip Metres, "INSTRUCTIONS TO THE ARAB POPULATION (2) (for
Nahida Halaby Gordon)"

Gretchen Steele Pratt, "This Is How You Must Leave"

Sophia Stid, "But for I Am a Woman Should I Therefore / Live That I Should
Not Tell of the Goodness"

Meredith Stricker, "A Living Coal"

Michael Wasson, "EZEKIEL 37:3"



"... EVERY POEM BREAKS A SILENCE THAT HAD TO BE OVERCOME ..."

—ADRIENNE RICH

**SELF-PORTRAIT AS ARTICLE 1[1]. [TREATY WITH THE NEZ
PERCÉS, 1855]: CESSION OF LANDS TO THE UNITED STATES**

In the year of their lord, *this eleventh day of June*, I enter the boundaries of my body:

The said [centuries here dissolve & I re-ink *nimiipuu*] hereby cede, relinquish & convey—here,

I want to convey how my physical testament is written &, at a particular point, then erased into the land—

to the United States all their right, title, & interest in & to the country occupied or claimed by them,

bounded & described as follows, to wit:

in the year of their lord, in the boundaries of my body, *they* intend to clarify the divisions & say *to wit*:

& so I enter every name of the dead into each source of water, each river mouth, every flattened field:

& I cross out the cross of the divide & lie down on the crest of [every mountain has its name,

a place of, a place where the animals & humans met, a place where the story began,

a place where the blood was washed, a place at the heart named for our monster(s) & tim'néepe,

*a place where the gray coldness looms like *hiquixquxcentki*, where America names over the land [~~lapelipe~~*

~~néete~~], *a place where the blue haze of warmth looms like *bi'lap'ápxp'apxcanki*, where the bodies lie*

unburied]. I, a silhouette, a *hereunto*, am between the articles of the & *a(n)*: indefinite, definite:

& it is here in the *boundaries* I have no choice but: to set [my] hands, on *this eleventh day of June*,

on *behalf of the above-named, at the place, on the day & year hereinbefore written,*
to seal the body

shut:



[x] [an empty cross, fallen]

Sealed & signed in the presence of us—

EZEKIEL 37:3

When I close my eyes I see / him, my lord. *Do you not
remember me?* I ask the half-buried / bones in ochre dust

& shedding / their deadened histories—*yáx yáx*
yáx they answer. Like a house / creaking open its doors

to reveal all that was left / behind. That day
what did I even know of a plea / but his beloved

body beginning to stir / against itself? My lord, here
is one shadow—our rainless valley / opening the earth

as though the entrance to a gun-/ shot wound. Here
is where our graves echo / a nation & this nation

is yours / alone, my lord. It always was. / An oiled stroke
of forest smears the hills / days before the fire comes

to take us back. Here— / my lord, is the skull / joining
its spine—the body's standing / ladder—a column of rungs

like years of lives taken / & draped from the nape of the neck.
Lord, forgive me for I cannot / dance with you this way. As

these bones. As you leave / your imprint the air carves
away like ghosts / the width of stories found

in translation. Where my heart is / the very same humming-
bird lifting the end / of every sunlit petal left / to be

shredded by any trace / of summer. Here, thirsted—
na'yóot I pronounce. & the dot appears / in his skull. It forms

just enough to fit this mouth- / swabbed bullet through / once
again—the way the North Star reenters / the skin

of every night—to salvage itself. & I can't / help but
turn away. For I'm afraid of the loss / of even my own

eyes. For I cannot bring myself / to peer into
those eyelets shaped in the image / of rain

puddles found / around the bodies of our nation. How they won't
stop boring into me. Like / this. & I just can't— / forgive

me, *tóota'*. With the lord / at my side as half of my skeleton
awaits your flesh—the forgotten half of me / to bloom back

over you like the start / of another hour. Ticking the sound
of jawbones desperate to swallow / the evening. Here, once

a field seared off tomorrow's / atlases. Once an ocean
of *qém'es* blooming out / of season—under the dead

light / draining the sky. *'únim píst*, my lord, I see / his lips
as a kiss blown / apart—like the gift of first breath. / It's the blood-

rushing dark / rising from beneath his skin / beginning to flash
me back. *Soon this body / is yours to collect* you pledge

in their rattling tongue / of salvation. Here / is my father's
mouth / warmed—tightening / parted only by its weight—lord, look

into him. Like a well filled / with its unlit promise
towards water. & I promise to remember / this final opening

cocked back & waiting / to breathe. How this / singular fleshed jaw
is myself / now remade in its first shape. The body

before the body.

Versal

The wood is not a negro with tree in the farm-split sand
for almighty, not a road to bend over,
not a lakeside, or sideways log stump, not
a sidelong, not a strangler clutch

or fruiting body of fungus. The warn
of wood is not hiding in bark, deer suit,
or elk piss musk, not in camouflage. Not
a snowshoe a negro, not a cowhide stripped

or oversprawl. The tree is not a loner type, not
a sleeper cell, not a jumpy trigger.
The foliage low hangs a lake I like, an ice cave
shot, a hit tide, frozen in place.

And a black girl is standing on it, over a river, rocking.
Sidebank isn't thug among us, not
a rush gang, not a flower snatched from sidewalks,
which isn't breaking in root. Nothing

for jewels, isn't watching through windows. The black meadow
isn't sniper squatting, cheapening the field reek,
eyesore cattail driving down
the sound of stream driveby. The wood

is an eager, a Negus among us, a runner like eagle
a brown sighting, root system gathered in growl
of curl, of amassed vein feed. Say it with us.
The wood is a falcon, a clean stretch of might.

The dark bark is humming. Night stretched.
A reserve is craning in its path glow, pitch fall.
Matted grass atrament, blowing night
like long husk. And a black girl is standing in it.

But For This Passage Touched By Nothing

Enough to have heard there was once a Venetian glass chandelier
So large, so ornate, of the lightest soda glass, arabesques of leaves

Fired onto its many arms, so elaborate and delicate the only way
To get it to the New World was to hang it, floating, in the belly

Of a ship, submerged in water. It did not know what it was, chandelier,
Immersed in a sensory deprivation tank, unlit, never touching

The flanks of that vessel. It felt it was something there in the dark,
Could sense the swoons of many branches, some remnant of the torch,

The glass master's breath. Come to be a witness in the New World,
Suspended, raised in a penthouse high above the Park. It did not know

What it was—brain, or missile, or crown. Come to be a witness, on, off,
To the generations, an heirloom vesselled. But not yet. A pause,

A preparation. Unbelievably dark, not even a dripping. Tiers, stems, lush
Stems, the work of the furnace—sea shells, ashes, sand. But in the depths

Of the Atlantic, a not yet, it swung in water that wasn't the sea, quite,
Unaware of all it hung above, curved supple out of sand and ash, a creature

Of the deep. To be hung beneath the celestial murals, the gilded
Ceiling medallion, forever dusted with a long feather. But for this passage

Touched by nothing. A net looming through, without any catch.
To take shape as an impending occurrence, to sense the stilled blood

Of jewels, veins of internal amethyst loomed in. It did not know what
It was, halo, net, spiraled-out dying star. Not even a drip, just a groan

Of the muffled fathoms. Come to bear witness from a ceiling painted
With angels, come to hang high in the New City, in a tower sunk

Every morning in clouds. But for this voyage seen by nothing, a tomb
Or bride, the singular purpose of the ship, forever marked by this drag

Through the sea, bass note of the ocean held down long after.
Fire polished, it knew not what it was, heart, gown, or cage.

It could sense the chambers preparing. An heirloom, but not yet,
To hang above the feasts to come, the delicacies of the sea reappearing

Down the years, splayed open—oysters, caviar, crystal fountains
Of shrimp, octopus, the blue and black mussels on beds of ice,

The chandelier, so much older than us, scattering its underwater
Light. But not yet, it catches nothing, it does not dissolve, it is a hanging,

Unlit branches, a bouquet, swaying, carried, absent the cradle of arms,
But on its way, as bouquets always are. To be raised dripping, unlit, craned

Over the throngs in the new harbor, to be raised, dripping, a wreck,
A corpse, a mirror, to harden like ice to its ballroom purpose.

But not yet, go back, some remnant of the torch, it knew not what it was,
Sand and silt of the Old City, fired from the sludge of the shallow lagoons,

Raked to dry in sun, first sand and silt of the crumbling foundations,
Cathedrals sinking in the canals, shifting islets clasped only by bridges,

Torched ash of saints veined in gold threads, meal of the dragons' bones,
Masked face of the glass master, his secret, the burning saltworth marsh,

Spell of ash, poison, quartz—it did not know what it was, cave, fountain,
Or shroud, when in the ancient port of Venice it was lowered crank by

Crank into water, coffin or ghost, from the surface fading, ghost or lace,
It knew not what it was as they lowered it, hand over hand letting out

The ropes, into the sea—lung, piano, chandelier—but not yet. First this
Darkening, the glint of sinking, the letting out—anchor to a Floating City.

GRETCHEN STEELE PRATT

This Is How You Must Leave

—*Seaside Heights, NJ*

The rollercoaster rusts in the ocean—
at high tide only the peaks
visible, at low we see

every plunge.
Black scaffolding of the old century,
now the long wash

down the next.
At dawn the sun rises from
the coaster,

a burnt building.
Teenagers swim out
at sunset, drink

from their silver flasks,
legs swinging from
the peaks.

They cheer the moment
the sun drops inland and
the whirligig lights

of the boardwalk
whir on—
Pirate's Plunge, Surf Shack,

Moby Dick,
Shore Shot, Wave
Singer, SuperStorm.

The rollercoaster does not
lift with
the waves and the teenagers

stand the rails, wait
for a big one and leap
into the canyon

GRETCHEN STEELE PRATT

left as it passes through.

 This is how
 you must leave.

It could collapse

 at any moment—
 lifeguards staple the warnings

to pilings

 along the boardwalk.
 And yet

there is no talk

 of taking it down—
 it has lent some ancient tone

to this stretch of shore,

 like the shipwrecks
 in our dreams that

disintegrate as we wake.

 The children throw
 their white rocks

toward it, summer

 steepens, and
 in a tattoo parlor

on the boardwalk,

 a man leans
 forward, his t-shirt lifted

above his shoulders.

 Over his entire back—
 the coaster,

almost complete.

 The door to the parlor
 is flung open

so the tattoo artist can
 see the thing
 and get it right—

launch track,
 lift hill,
 each black brace—

it is needled in—
 the roiling sea.

Circular Breathing

All I see is snakes, all I am is curling
back on what's been said
as if I were the snake dealer
at Knight's Inn, out 26,
who piled them in glass,
who at the window would peel
back the blind, let you slip in
your cash, then he would meet
you with your serpent
at the meeting place. Caught
in the deadgreen the cop
camera made him all knife glint
& it was true he looked fit to
gut that fuck in the mirror of night
on the news. Before the dash cam
went black he sang out in single
pitch. No. If you had the cash
he would peel back the blind. The snakes
became what his wife would release
into the yard, a few months after,
to curl in our sewage grates, under
cars. No one knew
the names. They were what
was in the grass now like a
lesser thought, some small
violence. One day a red-haired cop
came around with a
black bag. Once I heard the snake
dealer sing Goodbye Booze. Dead
Flowers. I heard him sing
Cocaine & now we sing
Cocaine. Now a cop is on our porch
saying *I have the same demons from
those songs*. He's got an old snake
in his having bag. As if he
tilted back so much of the gold-
colored void the cicadas were
screaming for him, howling
that same loop, that boot-black
shine, that neighborhood
mind, New York St., Lafayette, IN,

→

where there was then & will be
forever I guess that night noise
none of us could ever learn to play—
none of us have a breath to hold
a note so long.

Notes for Sobriety

In the morning, eat nothing
& grits. Allow the wolf in the egg
called Wednesday the occasion to sit
angry at your table. You'll be nervous
to eat the berries he brings
with more complicated names,
so pick up saw, harp, homemade banjo
& never play for anyone
whose middle name you know. Do it
yourself. Devote to it the day
entire. Given the jukebox, play Creedence.
Given the option, stay out of it.
What is it?—Never make a punchline
of your family name. Even if you plumb
its gutter for crimes, then publish them
in serial, or trade paperback, even if
you trash the installments
under the most impenetrable of public
pseudonym. Given the interview,
play dumb. Find real work
in a magnet factory making birds.
Learn to airbrush & etch *Crossroads
of America* at the foot of the cardinal
in the crotch of the racetrack. Clutch
at this work like thick rope.
Start smoking, so you can learn
to sit. Be always baffled, always in boots.
You should get some good boots.

Orchardist: At Home
(Cassatt, SC)

*I say I dreamed the old Haile mine split open,
rained blank copper coins and rock salt,
and a whole host of brown cardinals flew north*

toward Pisgab. The too-hot butter pops in the pan
and she doesn't turn around. Back two months
from my state-sponsored bardo and she still won't speak

before noon, but the sun's coming up quick, like Mother
used to say as she sent us to bed. She said *Nothing*
in the world to be afraid of, and then, first thing: *Get to work, boy.*

Down the road, Paw joining the stripe of pickers
heading north to McBee. All those mule men,
those roughneck ambassadors of the season cycle,

day wage, summer crop. The collective mumble—there
but for the grace of god—each day. *Best not look away,*
sugar, she said and slit the gray-pink throat of a sow.

Now, I can tell the size of the pit if I hold the peach tight.
Boss says land always needs tending. Doesn't matter much
who does it. Kids come by the busload and do cartwheels

between the trees, heels sliding on dropped fruit, and I
think of Mother singing absentmindedly to the hens. I say
It's good to think the marvelous might still happen, even if

you know it won't, and my girl throws scraps to the dog,
sits cross-legged at the table with a plate, says
Crazy, ain't it? without looking up.

Beneath the Breaker's Yard

To disappear for 600 years, take your bow
below the disassembling mound where man
after man unmade and were unmade, where use-
less parts found use again. Hold tight the axes
and the cannons, every one of your tons to keep
you fixed firm in the mud. To disappear, Holigost,
humble yourself in the Hamble, let your ribs
lose the sky, lose the breeze. Forget Hundred. Forget
Henry. Forget the gads raining from your flanks.
Slowly forget the sound of the breaker, his hammer,
his whispered prayer to Weland. Give yourself
to the phantom tide, to the muck. Take apart
your history, your memory. Give back the battles
won, the Santa Clara within you. The dead are not
with you. Even they have left. Do not envy that
they will be gone longer. Do not quiver under
the weight of this later sun.

JOHN A. NIEVES

A Few Degrees

Cold slipped in through the corners
of the room, though we never found any

cracks. Something was giving way, something
only our flesh could tell. I made the same jokes
when you made the same openings

for them. I could tell you were slowly
going the same way the chill got in. I could taste

your breath less and less though you hadn't
moved. Your laughter kept tinning and sounding
further down the hall. Your words

became easy script, involuntary. Eventually,
I stopped saying anything, but you kept the daily

conversation up with a me I couldn't see. I think
he lived in the phone, or the tv, or just a few inches
behind me. Sometimes I'd look over my shoulder to make

sure I wasn't there. Sometimes I'd say your name
to make sure you were. We lived like that for six more

months before you wafted north with a few people
you met at a drum circle. I moved in with some friends
just south of the county line. There my window didn't fit

right in the frame. The wind hummed through it almost
constantly. Sometimes even gnats would

crawl in. I was never cold. These things the skin
knows first: temperature, texture, pressure.

For Fear That

Lest I forget those greasy summers, our drunk-weight flattening
lawns, I bind them to my fingers.

Lest those lawns die, we water them, growing nothing
but an outdoor carpet the startling green
of advertisements.

Lest we die—we cry, and it tastes like silver, or small
pieces of meat—it really tastes like small pieces of meat.
There is no way to avoid any of this.

Lest I lose, I hold, like some flowering
plants—everywhere a metaphor for wandering, and holiness,
an endless word.

Lest the chicken rot, we freeze it in pieces,
in plastic bags. What does this look like? Many soft colors. Steam.
A sentence describing June.

Lest I know the end, I know the end—there is no lest.

Lest I see a way out, I say I can't see a way out—I can, though,
and it looks like Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes*—
the shadow of the valley of her arm, the shadow implying
a sawing motion.

Lest the stories we tell each other lose their shine, I dig further.
When I was a child we bought groceries at one store, and I have kept
its less-than-dazzling array forever in my mind, meaning up until, and on
and on, I imagine, for no reason. I imagine for no reason. I always have.
And give me your dazzling arrays. There will be a mundane
exchange granted value by your name, which I call in the wilderness—
a dazzling array of truly boring animal bones and the absence,
of course, of faint techno and the presence, of course,
of things you never imagined so bold. Technicolor matter.
Not found in nature, found in nature. And the stones,
they cry out. I call your name in that wilderness.

Lest I lose you, I call your name in that wilderness.

Recommended for You Because You

*Yet the fortified city will be desolate,
The habitation forsaken and left like
a wilderness*

Watched: war in Ukraine documentary on Patsy Cline
the largest alligator in the world Amy Winehouse
at some point says *These are hard to sing.*
The sad lily of her body, small.
She lifts her leg, lightly. Lamb in heels. Body appearing
almost wasp stung. I was told our restlessness
is only. God. God, like apricots, a thick
sweet light like screens, like eyelids.

*There the calf will feed and there it
will lie down
And consume its branches*

eBay informs me only 13 hours left
to buy _____. I get drunk most Tuesdays.
Like my sister—drunk most Tuesdays and
dating a dead girl's brother, saying everything
he does he does because
it hurts. Every time he hurts me, he
doesn't. He hurts. He
loves. To which I say.
She told me in the missile-proof room: he, and—
I said no. Which was almost
funny. And then we talked in a missile-proof room
about the ducks on a pond in Arkansas.
The ducks on the pond in our almost
hometown, _____, which
continues to decline despite
those warm floods swelling
the sides of highways. Turning the ground
a sudden green. Cartoon-poison, that green.
The soybeans, a dollhouse jungle we walk through.
Fearing feral dogs, we carry sticks. We go back
mostly for funerals. We tread water to the car in our black skirts,
watch the TV lady say *Worry about the coffins*. Will they
float. Rain thickens. We're left swallowing the bugs on our tongues—
they taste like I imagine moon grit, and killing
spiders with juice glasses,
wine glasses, whatever will. Slowly,
the watermelons lose their seeds.
But still, we are heirs to this earth you gave us, this earth.

*When its boughs are withered, they
will be broken off;
The women come and set them on fire.*

She says take away
any identifying features. I linger over
certain events. I think I want to chew
the ground. My sister opens bottles
with her teeth. I have daydreams
where I choke on their caps.
Folded into the couch we eat apricots.
The juice finds the hollows in us.
On EURONEWS No Comment
a man in a tracksuit says *My son died here
and sometimes I look for him.* Background shot of shoe
and jaw edge, in dirt. Digging
for bottles we found a bayonet
in an orchard, wasted time
determining what war had made it like coral.

*For it is a people of no understanding;
Therefore, He who made them will not
have mercy on them*

I thought for sure it was white, the color
of those walls. I couldn't look. Like the last look
given that last time, always like.

We've scattered ourselves.

Six thousand miles. Settled with God, we are
the betting kind. Listless fans shake, silver,
or lead paint, cracking. Like the end
of a videotape, which we watched
before these videos now,
with no clear end.

Recently I realized my thoughts
are image clips, like I'm living all this
breathless, well lit.

*And He who formed them will show
them no favor.*

Browse now plenty of beautiful
Ukrainian brides; Russian
cupid.com; Alena-marriage-
agency. Related searches include.
So much sublime in wife-profiles.
I shop for deals like I'm serious.
Smart,gorgeous,landscapes,the girl
is looking. Keeping smiling. I like to know.
It is difficult to prompts myself.
Those with perfect English are less desirable.
I pass them over, biblically,
as if their doors were smeared with blood.
HOTSTYLE: I am clever, kind,
was a more stripped down. Has filed
a tender offer statement. _sweetlady_:
a woman must always remember
that she is a woman regardless of.
little_lily asks, did you see me
in your dreams? I am very tender. I can be
a good person. To talk to. Many-sided
people. I like to meet new. And—
we are unlikely to have problems in finding
common. Ky33 is I AM. Femininity is the word
which often describes me.
I am not very religious but.
I could teach you. Open your.
If, I believe we could.

*And it shall come to pass in that day
That the Lord will thresh*

I was told our restlessness is only God
And God is only. Seeking.
Desperate after. Us, running,
on cut feet and bread alone.
Through our dark, God. Through
our cold. Our closed
mouths, God. And what I want from God
is possibly a bad thing to ask. To ask
often is. He is sometimes quiet,
a choke. And hold. An early night,
stark as vinegar. And what I want to say is
give me your hands, if even
they are thistle. Give me your hands.

Note: The sections of this poem take their epigraphs from Isaiah 27: 10-12.

Cartoon God Following Us Like a Cloud

I pray now mostly out of fear, some hunger.

Thou holdest mine eyes waking.

The city is more beautiful than swans hiding the water.

The salt on the sidewalk, a low shatter. Our January hands

bright like meat in front rooms where we shake
off coats, white like fox-bellies. In us,

there are elaborate structures. I feel the thicket of you
close, warm. And the blue background of the nightly news

is a holy sonnet of bodies battered, badly, and maybe after
looking God in the eye. The nightly news spills over your neck,

tentacle of light. We are deep-sea creatures in our dark.

You are eerie beside me. I remember a man

at a party who said to me *Here you are, drunk*, like it was some
miracle—and then *I've lost God*. He said because God

is a God who asks, a God who wanted everything dead
a few times over, commands *ash* and *utter consuming*

and none allowed left. Even the animals burned.

For Prague/The Girl Who Cuts My Hair

*. . . and round her neck she'd tied a scarf
the color of pale smoke.*
—Jaroslav Seifert, "A Song at the End"

There are so many cemeteries. The Baroque buildings,
gaudy as carnations, like brains. As brains, like carnations.
Neither quite the same, nor quite different the founder of the French
fashion label claims about an unnamed thing: women's shoes,
a silk scarf the color of despair, which is not unlike
the color of smoke. And when I missed home I wanted
only pictures of places in the city with no water. No bridges,
no ornamental saints stilled in their agony. Their love of God, too, so
agonized. Uplifted hands catching snow over the river
in mid-winter, when night is a reverent black, and you'd cover your hair
in yellow scarves. A series of yellow scarves. Lemons in a bowl
or slices on the radiator. Scent of clean rooms, murder, early evening
in August. Memory has this bite. I heard we are losing it, our minds
now trained that all information is stored somewhere. Somewhere
is the way I described you for so long. Folk-pattern wildflowers
on your ankle bone. And leaving what. Some trace amount
of dead skin. The scent of smoke which is not unlike despair.
We've learned this a few times in history—which is a reliquary—
which you are, also: a holding room for history, in fragments.

What Will You Do, God, When I Die?

—after Rilke

What will you do, God, when I die—
when the last bell of Santa Catarina
leaves her winter carol and snow
begins its slow, fulfilling moment of erasure.

What will children say about the moon
who now has no reflection?

How will the raven greet your morning
without my steady shovel, the crack
of the long curved axe
splitting the frozen air? Who will clear the soot
from the crenellated chimney, the ash
from the fire's brick box, light
the crumpled lists and vanished symphonies
that spark each day's new kindling?

Will you shoulder the battered bucket,
the two blue metal barrels
parked under the gutters, carry again
each precious month of rain?

Will you stack and stoke the fire
with the same orchestration—
a pyramid of pine,
a stick of clean-split cedar, set
the coffee boiling in the white Sears pot,
the steel tureen of Anasazi beans
fat on the cast iron stove.
Bring each hour to simmer
in such burble and aroma?

Who will ride with my three-braid rope
to rein in the Lightys' mare when shots
go off from a lost hunter's gun
and she breaks down the wall of the barn,

and if another porcupine
 lashes their brainless Jackie—grab
these gloves and pliers, yank a thousand spines
from the corgi's wretched face?

God, what will you do
 when I can no longer find
this pen, this page, the soft dawn
of the silver fox tracking her song in the snow,

when hoof beats on the mesa
 become another animal, another cloud
forming its fleet of battleships, another
country rising from my resignation?

Will you take my father's saddle
 from the tack house? Put the Zuni blankets
back up on the wall? Take me back
to the trunk line trails, bells and summer sheep

crossing the Ortegas, Servilleta,
 Canjilón, the Vallecitos mill. Back
to Katie Harris. Katie. Katie Harris. Oh Lord—

Katie Harris. Will you take me back.

ELLEN STANFORD

Devil's Pool

—*Wissabickon Creek, Philadelphia*

In the middle of my life
a rift:

gap of still water. Schist cool
against my back and my body
burning.

In the middle of my life
a clearing:

mica-flecked ache. A ledge
to jump off.

Longing's metamorphic, too—
a deep fault,
geologic.

All I want is something
to plunge me into the cold
current.

Someone to pull me
out, lichen-slick, sputtering.

Romance Sonámbulo

On the Línea Verde north
of Salvador the rain comes
hard and swift. Then
disappears. For so long
you didn't
exist: I was
happy or sad, but
my tears had nothing to do
with you. I ate lobster
in Jacuipe with Mary Lúcia, licked
olbo albo from my fingers
and didn't think of you
in a cornfield
in Pennsylvania,
in Barcelona or
Jersey City or
L.A. It was my words
that brought you
to me, and my words
will one day
send you away. That's
how it is, Mary Lúcia
says, shaking
her head at my foolishness
and the rain
green over the water.

REBECCA HAZELTON

THE MIND REVISES. THE MIND TAKES AWAY.

When I think of you I erase most of what you say and replace
it with a courtly love poem in the style of one of the lesser knights
following King Arthur around; it's you, sans stutter or stammer,
precise like a piano's hammer—but gentle, gentle—
you'd be a soft-pedal kind of guy. Last time we talked wasn't anything
I wanted to hear because I was tired, you were tired, and there were
no bulbs in the fixtures that hadn't at least contemplated going out.
I have contemplated going out into the silken night in my best
silken kimono and doing nightly things with silken bodies,
but I have not, mostly. When I think of the last ten years, I revise
us into a story of Saul to Paul—meeting you was one bright fall
off a horse and I woke up converted. I get to be a glowing cloud
of good intentions, not the sullen backslider you know.
And sometimes your hat is black and your spurs prick my ass.
Sometimes you are a white hat who sunsets away and we never
consummate our unspoken hot for one another. Why, I cannot say.

RIP, Laura's Vagina

Your vagina is beginning to devitalize,
the doctor explained, when I asked him why
I had had so many urinary tract infections lately.
The first thing I thought was that I should say
No, your vagina is devitalizing, because I have
two teenage sons, and that is what passes for wit
in our house. But then I got lost in the fact
that he didn't, in fact, have a vagina,
and I thought I should point that out instead
because in some circles—say, mine—
that would be an insult. Then, in the little
room inside my mind where Dorothy Parker
was holding court at the Algonquin,
I thought maybe *devitalize* is just a medical term,
give the guy a break. But I didn't even know
this man. Couldn't he just give me a prescription
and say something vague about aging?
What about euphemism? I guess *devitalize*
was one because he went on to more vividly
explain that my tissues were, frankly, deteriorating.
At that point, I was thinking *But you haven't even
seen the area in question* and *How did you get
this far without knowing how to talk to women?*
Devitalize reminds me of *de-ice* which is what
I was doing just before this tricky moment
at the Urgent Care. My son was late to Algebra
because it's really cold and it took a while
to clean the car. And at 8:00 the door
where he usually goes in automatically closes,
so I had to take him around to the front,
and he dropped his phone in the snow
and it got run over, so now there's a crack
in the screen. He wants me to replace it,
but I said *No, it still works.*

Curiosity Sings Happy Birthday to Itself

My mind is all wheels.
 Four years ago this sol,

I became the only other
 I know. Take this selfie,

for example, how my one
 roving eye stares back

at itself with a look almost
 disquieting in its directness,

which is why I prefer
 to focus on the mission:

clouds of red silt and the ever-
 elusive presence of water,

alluvial fan like the lines
 of an open human palm.

Everywhere you go,
 there's nowhere to get to,

so I bumble on, a bee
 in a garden, sampling

each specimen, my
 aluminum members

all lit and engorged.
 Happy birthday to me,

I sing to the impact craters.
 Happy birthday to me,

I sing to Olympus Mons.

JOSEPH O. LEGASPI

Twilight

—*Mount Batukaru, Tabanan, Bali*

Tree against dusky sky is shadow.

Creatures wind-carried
by oncoming darkness.
Seed-light, bat-eyed.

Birds beehive towards branches.

I like the way I smell in the forest.
Different. Stink & sap & mulch.
I rouse myself.

Meanwhile my father has wormed
farther into his grave.

Do I belong in a field, too?
I've been beholden enough.

When I leave this earth,
let me disappear fully.
Quicker than vesper.
Lightning-sharp.

MARY PEELEN

Aphasia

It's what you listen for—

the repetition of a word
both noun and verb,

stroke, for example. Or love.
In therapy, my sister

recites her children's names
like a profession of faith.

Afterwards, they disappear
and it's just me again,

benign, vaguely familiar.
I push her chair around

the square glass corridor.
Courtyard snow

melting in the afternoon sun
goes gray around the edges.

Rubber wheels on linoleum
make no sound at all.

Order of Operations

I do not want to know the force required to break

 a human bone, but
my oncologist persists
in telling me how opening a skull

is not the same as setting a forearm straight
again—inside my head a pressure



to nod as if I care how my brain
will be scrubbed clean. It is the same

nod I use when my lover spins a yarn after a good fix,

his mouth pulsing like the abdomen
of a caterpillar mid-metamorphosis.

If I could see my skull opened, skin stretched like wings—



No, no, no, she says, we will use a saw and forceps to remove the tumor.

There will be no forced breakage.

My lover is in another
person's apartment

 looking for a screw-
driver to open the refrigerator's back

 and suck out whatever poisons he can.



When I find him, he twists himself
on the floor like a melting wax figure.

He says *We are all flesh* into his flexed torso. And soon we
bend in and out of each other.

My oncologist makes a quick gesture
to the back of her head and says *There*.

BRIAN CLIFTON

Feels Good

I have said the f-word
so often
under my breath

that it is now a kind of breathing exercise.

On the porch, my brain burnt
off its hinges, I watched the night

■

slither down the hill and into the city.
He said *We are having a party*. He said

I want you to feel
good. And for the rest of my life,
I will watch people squirm

in our foldable chairs. Our favorite drug poured out of us

■

and dragged its body down the road
until a car wrecked it.

The corpse appeared and appeared
in each passing headlight.
I traipsed from home

to oncologist to home again, practicing my breathing.

■

Inhale through the nose and
fuck, fuck, fuck through the mouth.

My lover twitched on our bed, part of him shooting out
of the covers—a foot, a leg.
Such is the restlessness of sleep
when a body is reeling

■

from what it lacks.
On the road, the torn maw,
the opossum splayed wide
for the sun to rot. We swerved around its opened mess.

I slithered
my fingers through his dark
hair. He said *I just want you*
to feel good. I said *I feel good. Does it feel good?*
It feels good. He said *It feels so good.*

In the Middle, the Night

the wilderness stumbled

in the beginning (I was a survivor) I was an answer
I remember the flash & my hands & his face

(was there ever a mystery) a man under scrutiny
(this is a city of matches & heavens) he was tall &

trapped by his good nature we took a lot of photographs
we bought a house & a shotgun & then a stranger

(a blur of very fast & bright) I can imagine running
when I found him & his wound I wouldn't say hope

or finally (a game of weddings & widows) a life
of Junes transformed (I was possible it's very natural)

every dampened life is a crime scene a dump a diversion of
gloves & careers (the facts were a background) that story

was a life of figurines & their beneficiaries (a man & woman)
(clothed & confiscated) my story again & again I turned

around he was standing & then on the ground (his neck blown
open past possible) I tried to look (a question of focus) it was

more exact as a mystery (he was a working murder) a house
that began in the middle of the night (the most exciting part

is breaking) with his words he had broken (his story) a gun
a duffle bag (I returned a widow) a camera of taken things

GAIL GOEPFERT

Kahlo Shape Shifter

| | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| <i>I paint</i> | what is real— | recording | my body |
| <i>myself</i> | a deer | leaping | pierced with arrows |
| <i>because I am</i> | pigment | on canvas | shameless |
| <i>so often</i> | a fist of organs | a way to exist | my eyes |
| <i>alone</i> | my reflection | still and always | a refuge |
| <i>because</i> | swelling | luminous | my eyes divine all |
| <i>I am</i> | a revolution | embryo | open to |
| <i>the subject</i> | in portraits— | paint and pain | the vortex |
| <i>I know best</i> | mirrors | and blood-love | of indigo nights |

I Make Another Body For Myself When

my grandfather tells me about important men.
He says the names and I forget.

In the next room: the uncles, the priest,
the cousins. The portraits. I am so tired of family.
Who knows why

we do
the things we do. Why we are these animals
in this room, holding our teeth in our mouths

to talk, to eat. We are gathered together
and I'm wild eyed, tossing my head
to see who it is

whenever somebody else walks into the room.
My body needs to get me out.
What harm will you do to me.

If someone were to photograph
the years of my life I spent young
and listening—

I would not be in the photograph at all.

**But for I Am a Woman Should I Therefore
Live That I Should Not Tell of the Goodness**

Julian of Norwich, 1342–1416

THERE is an anchoress. There is a horn
whose song is ink (rainwater, crushed
oak apples, old iron nail for age). An anchoress.
A writing desk. A woman declared dead
for her life's last half—

a woman who had herself
declared dead so she could write.

Ceremony: the Bishop
walked her to her grave and pointed. The grave, soft mouth

of ground, beneath the window of the room
where she would live. *Enclosure.* Anchored to a space without a door—

only windows—
they built her in. The sound. Of each limestone moment
stacking up upon the last. Inside, she watched the hands of men

wrestle in each brick, wrists
rotating stone to find the slot, the right-well fit. Dust ground up
between the teeth of each Caen stone filled knuckled cracks in skin.

What was the sound of the last stone as it was chiseled in?

Cloud-roar cross high skies. A mare's huffed maternal breath.
Field of grain heads, moving for once in one direction—

What was the sound after?

Qu'il Aile

There is not one bird that uses its feather to write in the sky.
It's only by falling it creates, for us to see, its marks.
When it dies, that is a note for us to interpret.

The crisis of conscious thought occurs
When we let elements address the little body we found instead.
When we don't kneel and scratch in the earth to fold its wings across its chest.

The crisis recurs in later moments and foolishness,
When we revise the scene, and when our fingers are clean.
The mind has a smell of its own now. It is an unpleasant smell.

I remember one little bird I found. It was yellow, it had not been born.
Its egg was blue as blue can blue and I carried it in my hand.
I forgot which color I couldn't see.

Its wholeness, its black eye and inability to sob,
was inside my closed hand.

J.T. LEDBETTER

after oats they lie down

when last light falls out of the sycamores
into the horse tank work horses plunge their soft noses
into the cold water their backs steaming in the snow

after oats they lie down in straw kicking their legs in their dreams
their eyes white at shadows running beside them

the man waits for the tea kettle pluming on the stove
upstairs his wife combs out her long grey hair and lies down

he cups the hot tea inside his coat and goes to the barn to help the mother
birth the colt then lies down in the bloody stall
watching her nibble at the sack her lips pulled away from her teeth

later he sits in the kitchen with some cold meat and dips a piece of bread in his tea
he sits very still because the blood on his clothes is hard
he does not know his wife has died nor will he know what to do
he will sit beside her until morning then call a neighbor
and wonder if he should turn off something

he will go to the barn to throw down some hay and listen to the pigeons
thrumming against the tin roof
and when shadows move from Turley's Woods toward the farm
he knows they wait to press their farm bodies against him
wanting to hear how it is with him now
he thinks he could go in if he walks through the wild plum orchard
if he crosses the old bridge into the high corn

You Tell Them Anything

You tell them anything and they listen say a word and their ears cock hear you yes they
hear you talk talk talk a battering rain on the cerebellum early medieval or late the *six*
persimmons or the tender part of the Song when calligraphy elongated to *orchid leaf* and from
sea to mountain horsemen were dispatched with scrolls one braids your hair into newborn
morning all while world-class listening goes on they talk and you listen your mother is
dead this is the first night of it and one is not alone on the chapel couch one is not with her
among cascading monitors but here in her house these two with you two you can tell
anything and their capacious billion-cell brains make room though a sentence circles you
our mother is dead you talk frescoes the devoted monk painting each severally for his
brothers' meditations a battering rain early or late the one who braids your hair misses his
girls he's not usually away from them for this he is anything you tell them its calligraphy
elongated we alone in her house how can we not look for her here

Memory of a Year with Allusions to the Greeks

When I had company, it might have been
the classicist who sat with me—
he would have called that year *cloud-cuckoo-land*.

We worked in a place of claw and pinion. Beak.
Outside, a shadow bird was cawing
on the branch, all signs gesturing at catastrophe.

Some ancient playwright said
Grief's an avalanche whose weight we cannot stop,
of course, I'm paraphrasing here.

We rolled boulders to a hilltop.
We commiserated in the maze of our small suffering,
The Greeks would have named the classicist *kind natured*.

He told me once he hated
how that year had smashed the clay of him,
breathed anger in his lungs.

Beyond my window, the great green lawn remained
indifferent, and in the warmer months,
students drowsed on towels, golden figures in the light.

And then, sudden as a crane that lowers gods onto the stage,
the classicist and I were both leaving, a strange departure
from the mythology. We were leaving

even the monster of that year—the many-headed one
so hungry it would feed upon its own serrated self.
I don't remember our goodbye.

I hope somewhere he's still explaining
what the Greeks believed about pain, how the body keeps on
bleeding and we spit the poison out.

That snake-bitten year—I'll strike it
in revenge for how it wounded us. I'll string the bow.
I'll send the arrow through a dozen iron rings.

Claqueurs

Am I just one of Nero's
soldiers, chanting an encomium—
what choice did they have?
An emperor is like that. Or
maybe I'm the *chef de claque*—
I should hire myself out
as *rieur* and laugh
at jokes on cue or clap
my hands or there, I see
me with a handkerchief:
Pleureur! On the news they say
the new emperor brought
his own to fill the room.
Maybe I'll do that, too,
have them sit around me at all
times and cheer on what I do.
Or I can be the *bisseur* and call
for it all again, giving us a chance
to stop what happens next.

PHILIP METRES

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE ARAB POPULATION (2)

(for Nahiba Halaby Gordon)

“Outside those enclosures, normal life”

*In Yafa I attended Tabeetha School for Girls
named after the girl brought back from death*

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha
full of good works and almsdeeds

A pink pen mark along the left margin highlighting the passage.

“All public Offices...must be kept intact
and all documents and registers therein”

*we escaped in April 1948
shortly after Yafa fell
the Haganah destroyed all public documents*

And it came to pass in those days that she was sick, and died

“must be kept safely and in good condition”

Then Peter went with them and all the widows stood by weeping

“so that any claims of residents”

And prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise

*the registrar of the Tabeetha School
saved a few registers*

And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up

*2006 she showed me the register
I could see my name:*

And it was known throughout all Joppa

Nahida Halaby

Glass Key

The only key there is
is made of glass.
It slides in the lock.
But if you turn it too fast
the top will crack
leaving its thin grooved
filament inside.
In fact, that may happen
however you turn it.
And then? Will you
take the door
from its hinges,
flip it horizontal, tap
the back of the knob
to jostle shards loose?
But you can't unhinge
a locked door, and
the only key there is
is made of glass.
So you try a slight
upward pressure,
thumb against one
side of the key head
and feel tension
build in the material;
then you push
harder, and a little
harder, the glass taut
as a *pizzicato* string—
and stop, letting
the key
exhale, cool
in your fingers.
Better to slide it out.
Better to put it back
on the chain around
your neck, translucent,
all but unseeable
against your skin.

Haircut

I took a photograph of a handsome young man
with an interesting haircut to my stylist.
She looked at the picture, nodded,
agreed it would flatter me—a casual,
sort of accidental cool. She asked me
about the guy in the picture. I didn't want to tell her
it was young Josef Stalin—
it made me uneasy that my hair inspiration
was responsible for 49 million deaths.
So I went through my mental database
of 20th century history and estimated
my hairstylist's knowledge—*It's Jonas Salk,*
the guy who cured polio, I lied.
I have no idea what Salk looked like,
but neither did she and, most importantly,
Salk saved people. But Stalin, by God,
what a head of hair on that deplorable man.
As I walk through town with my Stalin hair,
nobody asks about my inspiration,
nobody says anything except *nice haircut.*

The Bat

A machete is an extension of your arm,
not your grip. In this,

cutting resembles tennis—
forehand with a topspin slice—

into the messy tops of ragweed that clutter the locust posts.

I'm good at it, the way some are natural at surfing,
or smiling in the face of incomprehension.

Fifteen—love; thirty—love.

I behead my way around the field we hayed last month.
The cows notice me but do not react.

Swinging and chopping,
there isn't any measure to consider how anyone can be hurt.

On the west slope I bury dead horses:
Tommy Starfish, Charred Angel, Nothing Easy—
my cemetery of punk bandmates.

Like John Lucas and Ashe, I learned to play on clay,
rolling out the dew each morning.

I was known for a devastating second serve after the shock
of an unpredictable first one.

A few friendly bounces, a toss in the air,
and it might sail to the river or smack an opponent between his eyes.

Once, finding me with a machete, my love asked
Who's winning?

And I didn't have any answer except a quiet assent
at the semi-horrifying nature of mixed doubles.

She'd lately been tending a juvenile bat rescued
from the bank barn. Its ear was bent. It wasn't moving around much.

You worried? I asked. *I'm worried,* she said.

Self-Portrait as Ishmael's Arm

—after the painting by Scott Kelley

I am not what you are thinking.
I am the hitchhiker attached
to my own story. The long-
shoreman of history. I am
corpus and metaphysic.
I am whale bone and tendon.
I am *palmaris longus*
and *flexor carpis*. I am speckle
and I am tooth. Hunger.
I am Inuit and infinity. I am
the hand of God reaching out
to touch Adam, His billowing
Majesty, the brain-shaped cloud
He rides blustered with cherubim.
I am spine and I am snake.
I am the ship disappearing below
the horizon. I am the thin trail
of the railroad riding itself
across the country and vanishing
at the wrist of the river
where black firs crowd
the bank and water spumes.
I am riding the whale of my own
story into the future.

Wire Artist

He bends them into the poses like wire,
then bends them out of wire.
The models are women for hire.

I read this in the paper
made of light. Then again in the paper
made of paper.

She claims he pulled her by the hair
and stuck his fingers into her.
Already there are twelve versions of her.

This man is not the artist.
He is an alleged rapist
who shares the front page with an artist.

The point is the women are the middle men.
The point is he sells to rich men
who want wire sculptures of their hired women

bent into abstractions so their wives won't know.
I think their wives know.
Exaggerated sex parts show

through this hokey notion of abstraction.
Like money, it's not really an abstraction.
The rapist will face incarceration

after multiple convictions.
What are convictions
if not the skeletons of actions?

The hired women get a cut.
The artist gets a cut.
The john gets a piece of wire art and a cunt

and if the college women testify in court
no photos will be allowed so the court
artist will make them into art.

SCOTT CHALUPA

from “Seven Acts of Mercy”

I was a stranger, and . . .

make for me a home —in your place
a shift: for the changeling weather
the minute you’ve left. lonesome grown
once was: a month. a mouth. a marker
or more: the thing it was— I begged
some memory of you. that long stole
who in the movie— how moving
whose: momentous morphology

makes of me: a home from your place
the weathered changeling’s lonesome. groan
time’s tiresome lie: a month’s. mouthed mark
less loved —or more. a beggar’s eye
remembers. other you: stolen two
how moving. moments’ how. And who

Naked, and ye clothed me . . .

You think it musta been God
turned that girl out. Girl like that
gotta get forgot by somebody big—
gotta be that rent-boy cum
Player Upstairs—to be left like
rough trade, like roadside trash.

But you see there she be, dress
tore wide, rent from the inside,
as if by magic, tragi-comedy
like Lady Chablis forgot to tuck
her candy, wore out like knockoff
champagne chinchilla, castoff
couture, empire-waisted Gladbag.

Honey, hasta be you—surprised by
her maybe-boy's beaten body—
who decides you ain't gonna go
one more mile, gonna light up
blinkers, pull a freshly cleaned
pink chiffon caftan from the front
seat, lay it over her limbs,
stumbling every second step,
911 on the line, knowing
what's at stake: *Yes'm. Third block
down. Ain't going nowhere.*

. . . sick, and ye visited me

dear nameless
shadow you
will not be
the last
over whom
I sentinel
each time
surprised
how living
noise ebbs
the company
I've kept
all that's left
my dials
flick I
cardiograph
the human
vector
its easy
egress
had I more
heart than
the binary
switch that opens
switch closes
still I dream
my digital
ventricles
dissemble
beneath
my machined
immovable
face my
perpetual
report my
bedside penance
this how I
love each
stranger

→

specter
gone
before
the body
can be
collected
replaced

... in prison, and ye visited me not.

for weeks the reverend || was pinned beneath the a/c unit || in a second
floor window || of the Upstairs Lounge || investigators trying
their level best || to keep from laughing || half-heartedly worked
the incinerated room || to identify the other 31 || bodies
passersby peering in || never knew he was a holy man || all markers
burned away || collar coat shirt slacks skin || what was left
visible || was his thin gossamer char || his mother's shame retreating
so far back || from his scorched corpse back || from the gaze
of her church friends || from Romans and from Leviticus so far ||
that she could not even || claim what remained

In the Pines

Before the country died. Before
The deer
Bleeding out in snow.

You drove us down the road
To Montana—the specificity of it.
Early leaves on the floorboard,

Lead Belly on my mind.
A song that chills me
Driving in the pines.
Tell me where did you sleep

A man I loved once
Sleeps on the streets in Seattle.

Night
Can be deadly in tents.
A man I loved once

Asks strangers for things. He's
Holding his sign.

I'm losing my speech—
Diction
Belabored and slow.

Name it
Pause before distorted sound.
Words break

And become larger rooms. More space
For me to set the terror down.

You listen to me
Carefully. You drive me
In the pines. We

Sleep in a tent.
I've never seen
A place so wide.

I think my voice
Is being ripped from me.
How I've conflated

Voice and identity.
I do not mean it hurts—I mean
I hear the rending.

I ask you. You
Drive me in the pines.

Somehow, traveling
Lets me put
Some terror down. Lets me

Strew it through a wider space.
Here's the land—
It will receive us.

I knew a woman once
Whose friend was killed
And his head was never found.

I've lost track of her now.
I remember her voice
But not her name.

I remember
How a body being strewn
Affected everyone around.

More surface
For the terror
to spread.

Snow in the mountains
While the sun
Burns the valley grass brown.

The deer
Not yet bleeding in the snow.

You drove me
To a place I'd never been.
Even the name—

Going to the Sun Road.
Even with fog
obscuring the view,

It's glory going down.
When we slept in the pines,
I was afraid. But more so

Of degenerating slowly—
Being hacked and strewn
Didn't carry its usual
Theoretical terror.

Before the summer turned
And the country died and I
Became more people than I know.

Before the deer
Bleeding in the snow. Before
The killing cold.

The growing mass of me,
If I keep looking and I'm
A part of all I see. Oh,
Our aching surface area.

I ask you if ghosts
Congregate
In a beautiful place.

If ghosts
Can stand as tall as pines.
I'm also
Moving closer to the cold.

And the dead
Are continually arriving.
A man I loved once

Sleeps in the cold.
Once, he drove me in the dark
By a mountain's root.

He stopped at a sign
In the night
In the nowhere dark

And a stranger
Stood strange by my window.
Man or a ghost or

A ghoul from the pines.
He asked for nothing.

MEREDITH STRICKER

A Living Coal

“Maybe at that time God had abandoned us, only hunger was left”

he wanted to speak of the bread made of nothing but no words came
only grey grey grey and grey and blank and blank and no no no no one
bone bone blank grey and no one grey and gone you build a fire
and no one comes this fire gnaws meager sticks cold as killing this fire
enters your body a hunger you cannot answer the mouth cannot
say it nor eat it nor any living thing reach its edge or end when
near death Rilke writes *Ich brenne / I burn* he enters the hunger
willingly or not it doesn't matter he is speaking without metaphor
when life has been stripped away there is nothing it is like—
man's fast-moving cloud or living coal

Note: The poem's opening quotation is taken from the testimony of the poet's great-uncle Peter Stricker in *Jetzt sind wir hier: Gespräche mit Zuwanderern aus der ehemaligen Sowjetunion* (*Now We Are Here: Conversations with Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union*), published in Germany in 2008.

Camp means field

means open summer means temporary means go there someday
I tell my son means naming the sun and wildflower by color burnt blue means
doesn't exist in nature means tasteless but blue means camp and war in the body means
adhering to doctrine or cause camp fever epidemic fever life fever never burnt down
fever means endless means as far as the eye can see but what if the eyes
are gone and in their place are flowers means in their sockets are stones my son
a stone in my belly then my ancestors stones around us means field of stones
is not camp even if camp means field means I have to stop writing stones
carrying throwing burying stones weighing the body down with what it's lost
flowers I say camp means field I say it again means this isn't my meaning
my *lager*' lagging stone means what can be remembered or named means lagged behind
means legend without water is still a field growing largess to *lagrima* to grime
amalgam of languages I don't know what they mean or where they come from
but *лагерь* means field because field means everything
crammed below the earth means things growing out that were once pushed down
camp means when I pushed my son out of me I felt I'd birthed a stone
flowers loose in my moleskin brought back from stone fields means the fields
we were pushed out from means the fields we were pushed into means there is
no camp to return to but there is still a field *polye*
margin square bent brim bound domain range province provide expanse
expanding flat means flat means flattened earth of stones means stoned bodies or
bodied stones means when you hear Holocaust wholly burnt or burned whole
sacrifice by fire burnt offering caustic whole you don't hear stones or fields or flowers
mean you don't hear blue because gone and gray and counted weigh far more
and you don't hear a name because there are too many or a body because the same
means you hear in plurals in bodies you imagine them means magnitude
and you weigh how wrong it is to figure them this way their lack or lessening
means them as stones again or still but when my son hears holy and challah and cost
years and years from now hears it over breakfast with his family perhaps he will hear
a field means the ghost who lingers there means imagine growing wild
chicory dog violets snowdrops baby blues as far as the eye can see

JASMINE DREAME WAGNER

Snow Has a Silent Strategy

I walk to the park and toss blanched peanuts to pigeons who scatter in terror from my gift.
I, too, have flinched.

What comes attached? Human endeavor has always been an attempt to lure and to hold.
The gaze is my tether.

I gaze until there are no details, only an arctic blue.

I gaze like a child counting to her largest number.

I gaze like a gull wrecked on land. The blur in my eye, a current, hard and cold.

I gaze and the tree is devoured by an avalanche.

I gaze into the usefulness of a white wall of washing machines.

My gaze, heavy, is full of sweetness. How the Greeks might say, *with eyes like figs*.

I eat my shadow.

I empty like a lamp shorts out.

I stream a recorded snow squall. Watching it, I am part of it.

I gaze until the screen is no longer distinguishable.

A January Collect

O Lord, this evening glows
like the underside of foil
and snow comes down
as if light flakes
off the hidden moon.
Ice-tatted trees on the hill
disappear in fog.

Everything is fragile.
And almost.

I thought I had forgotten how
to pray, all my regrets
lining up like dusty jars
on cellar shelves. The one
I opened yesterday,
so full of disappointment.

Lord, loosen the lid of
my grief-spranged heart,
my red-knuckled heart
knocking from inside.

Against the darkening pane,
paper whites,
those sweet, stinking stars, flare up.
Over rooftops, a swatch of crows
rip off the last light.
Bird tracks in the snow
come to my door and end.



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