HAYDEN SAUNIER
Room Tone 6

JENNIFER ATKINSON
Spiral Leap 7
If Orion Is 8

CHRISTOPHER PHELPS
Sound Belies 9
Demagogue 11

MONIQUE-ADELLE CALLAHAN D.
A-Tisket, A-Tasket 12
Hetty’s Tale 13

KOMAL MATHEW
In the Garden: A Tomb 14

C.T. SALAZAR
Poem with Three Names of God + a Promise to Myself 19

DEDE WILSON
Insomnia 21

GRAHAM BARNHART
What Being in the Army Did 22

NAZIFA ISLAM
Her Instinct 25

PERRY JANES
Kink 26

DANNYE ROMINE POWELL
Motel 27
I Woke Today Thinking of Chloe Robinson 28

BRETT ELIZABETH JENKINS
SVÅR UPPLÖSNING 29
A Man in an Illinois Toll Booth Called Me a “Beautiful Woman” as I Was Driving Away 30
CONTENTS

VERONICA KORNBERG
An Appreciation 31
DMV 32

GREG GLAZNER
Sorry As We Are 33

PAUL GIBBONS
How You Should Have Passed, Brother 38

CAMERON MCGILL
44.6336° N, 86.2345° W 42

ABRA BERTMAN
One Significant Landscape #2 43
Tournament Hopeful 44

LESLEY WHEELER
Dear Anne Spencer 45

PETER LEIGHT
Resistance 46

LIZZY PETERSEN
“Mr. Hipp, ca. 1940”: The Rain Does the Plow 47

CATIE ROSE MURGTY
Diorama (the uses of the girl and the location of the 45 buildings) 48
Diorama (woman given all the children) 49
Diorama (woman who watches the forest fill with twinkling lights) 50
Diorama (back to the factory) 51

SARAH BURKE
Dear Desert 52

ROWAN SHARP
March 53
Time is a Country 54

HELENA MESA
The Lesson 55
CONTENTS

MICHAEL HURLEY
Hemingway 56
His father 57

BRANDON THURMAN
Anointed 58
Mud 59

DEREK BERRY
Still Life with Escaped [Lamb] 60

NOME EMEKA PATRICK
My Mother’s Aubade Says My Father Is a Clown 61
House of Gold 62

GINA FRANCO
A Foundation Laid on Which the Wall Had Not Yet Been Built 63
Temptation to Say Words that Cause Pain 64

CLARE ROSSINI
We Splurge on a Glass of Wine at the Top of the World Trade Center 65

COVER
Seth Pennington, design
Richard Ahnert, “What Once Was Not,” oil on canvas, 2018
www.instagram.com/richardahnert

→

An arrow at the bottom of a page indicates the stanza does not break.
Hayden Saunier

Room Tone

Each body’s presence alters the room tone
so no one may leave. For twenty seconds
the soundman wants nothing of us.
Only that we not be the action, the breath, the story,
not stir the particular air of this particular room.
Painful, such necessary stillness.
How our restless histories rise up, batter
the throat’s confessional.
The whole business takes forever.
Someone always coughs or cracks a knuckle,
shifts weight heel to toe, a sleeve inside a jacket
rustles and we must begin again
until our smallest human gestures,
tilt of head, finger held to lips, fall away.
We try to be only body, only mass,
unplayed piano, unstruck bow; rectangle
of amber rosin gleaming in a bamboo box.
What frauds we are, how ridiculous our lies,
how deep and wide our neediness,
bellows the din inside our heads.
Our ears fill with hum. Headphones on,
eyes closed, the soundman looks skyward.
We become armchair, bowtie, floorboard, cello, shoe.
Become only what the air plays through.
Spiral Leap

A NASA simulation
    in fuchsia: the orbit
without the orbiter. Or

the spiral you draw on the air
as you whirl,
    encircled, your sparkler a wand

in your hand. Its fizzy light a line
    that leaps
when you think to leap,
that spells your name—

a line that stops,
    tucked back into darkness,

gone, as quick as fun. Used up, bobbed,
burnt out like the mineral ice

that trails a comet
    across a passage of night.
If Orion Is

nothing else it is
refusal
refusal
to surrender to
concede
refusal
to pretend
her one voice one
story could tell history
as if one
vision were as
like another as one
stroke to the next
or next
refusal
to let
color be dimmed
or muted
by narrative
premise.

She refused
to let Orion's line
of stars
apparent form
among the random
distances be “belt”
be anything less
than rest
in the scatter.

She refused
to let her fiery
paint re-tell
the hunter's storied
swagger and sword
mere illustration mere
example of
“what men are like.”
Sound Belies

The stuttering toward,  
the frittering away.

The man beside me sleeping,  
breathing gently, by all appearances
resting in peace, a phrase
I wish could be returned to the living.

There's time to worry about the rest,  
or else there isn't.

The carrying on, the cutting away.  
One way or another,

the soughing wind around a tent,  
and miles astray, the sound of lint
not yet formed and husk
not yet hardened.

The dross from truth to beauty,  
one way as a letter.

The sun somewhere,  
in and out, after and before,

an overthought,  
an underthought,

a body with its own
problems and pressures,

own fissures of rest
and restless motion.

One way as a letter at a time,  
that is, the car doors

closing somewhere else,  
the echo here unheard, except

in this winsome wind
somehow to form
the bearings of a storm,
say reports, rumors,
narrators about as reliable
as the several pack of boar
we startled across,
just past sunset.
And sure we shouted,
and sure they clod
their heavy hoofs away,
and sure the gibbous moon
was hours from rising,
and sure the air was
too still to be a comfort,
and sure the stars
looked, as ever,
in such a dark, implausible.
CHRISTOPHER PHELPS

Demagogue

A thrash held in the mouth,
his threshold

hellmouth

fishing for the sweet spot,
testing for the rot.

Taste testing us,

vindictiveness and vindication
came from the same Latin word.

Twice, the same bitter root
cleft to us. In the same absurd,
susceptible tongue—with its

same fork to choose from.
A-Tisket, A-Tasket
Lancaster County, Virginia, 1855

A-tisket A-tasket a brown and yellow basket
Ol’ Pharoah Douglass perched Rosetta in his buggy
making haste, for she was, they say, in the full act
and article of parturition; “great with child” was she.

On the way
Rosetta bulged and bit she breached until her body preached.
Eight miles that buggy panted through Virginia woods,
eight miles Rosetta coiled and spat ‘til like a stone

I dropped it I dropped it
her baby boy landed in the cool belly of Ol Pharoah’s caravan.
Born alive he wriggled and swooned
slick with caul and vernix glazed. He wailed, Rosetta cried

and Pharoah whipped that aged mule. “Giddeyup old boy,
the going’s got to get!” But soon, the cord not yet cut
that tied Rosetta to her son strangled him good and he died.

A-tisket A-tasket I lost my yellow basket
Rosetta, faint and almost grey around her lips, she moaned
and brayed and pushed the afterbirth; she held the warm blue
body of the boy. Ol’ Pharoah pulled his mule to halt.

Rosetta was a hired slave on loan to earn a master’s wage,
belonged to Towles and great with child;
he’d sent her off to work that day so as not a day to waste.

And if the good lord don’t return it
Don’t know what I’ll do.
Hetty’s Tale

An enslaved woman in British Jamaica went into premature labor after being stripped naked, tied to a tree, and flogged incessantly by her master with both whip and cow skin. She died a few days later.

To own it—
the cattle prod
the cow skin
her back, neck, calves
the child in her belly

To own it—
the fatigue
of the beating
she kept on
taking taking taking

To own it—
the rage
the loss
of the cow the loss
of the stillborn child

To own it—
the fear
of the loss
of the cow
of the woman who latched it

so loosely
it took flight.
In the Garden: A Tomb

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. —John 19:23

1. It hasn’t happened to me personally, but I’ve heard, I’ve read about the ripping of shirts and shorts, the narrow alley at the mall, the dark rooms in every house-boat, city condo, white house. I don’t know personally, but it seems like there is no soul in the well anymore, no little girl that can play alone on a private street.

Though I don’t know that room personally, I am careful opening the front door at noon when my kids are home—whatever you are selling, others are trying too—

(Did you know that—to sell girls like her?) I don’t know personally, but I know it’s not wise to go to the park alone with my three young kids; there are not enough hands to keep them all safe or the others that swing in low secret waves, squinting up to the sun. I don’t personally know anyone who doesn’t think about the ripping and the dark room. If you don’t see me, if you get lost, remember to press the button with the star, find a crowd. Look first for a momma, then a masi, a papa, but never just a man alone. I tell them, knowing this is personal,

knowing that God will at last remain silent for any man who’s decided to do publicly what he has been thinking privately. I don’t want you to be in that dark bruised-purple room.

2. Your first words are leaf pirouettes, a ring on a glass counter, my best and worst—an echo of my ways.

Your words are a silent lonely work, Isaac down the road, pulled faster than he can walk. And you sway, singing no, no, no.
3.
He is your only Son. She is my only daughter.

Am I to believe that this is the trouble
you meant—this disrobing, stripping
of before and after? That you would
be the Father of this kind of pruning
where there is a field of stones
to aim for every part of you?
That you would open and lay bare
your knees and shoulders and high thigh,
that you would be willing to allow dirtier nails
to dig up this earth that you created, this earth
you created by tearing a hole and speaking into it?

4.
Eve to her son:

I am not worried about my sin
but yours, your sin that sleeps
for three years after a faithful
fifteen—the full snail of you
that no one knows. Do you know
what I was doing fifteen years ago?
I was cradling a city as if it had tiny
fingers and toes. I was in love
with the work of my brown hands.
I loved the law and not the person
it was supposed to love. Now you,
without memory of being born, see
only the full fruit trees. Open your eyes,
boy: the apple is ripe and ready
for the shaken eye. You have a memory now,
so I pray you will know: everything wasn’t ours
to have, to hold, and pursue.
5.
Cain to Abel:

I know I was young, but I was with God walking, talking with him in the cool of the day, watching him draw lines, an august gesture, in the damp sand—a design for tic-tac-toe or perhaps hangman?—I didn’t know how to play then, with words, with a winner and a loser, with the knowledge of good and evil, but I saw a line drawn just for me, pointing me toward the flavor of speech, protesting, what she took from the garden and what I took for your grave.

6.
When they come, they take the front door first, then your whole home—the broken chairs, the wide table, your linens. They take the firewood, the wedding jewelry, your hand lotion and water glasses. But your clothes. Your clothes are the last thing they take; your clothes are your last earthly possession.

7.
Rebekah: Why is this happening to me?
Moses: Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me?
Naomi: Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.
Saul: Why have you not answered your servant today?
Job: Why have you made me your target?
Habakkuk: Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?
Jeremiah: Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?
Jesus: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

8.
The Living Water is thirsty? After all the sin, He was thirsty?
9.
Let me be clear: He was naked before He died. All but one man He called friends left, but the women—four of them—stayed at the cross, hoping to wrap Him in burial clothes. Did you honor them as they honored you? Let me be clear: you were naked but not alone—the women, did they know that they would die too? Should I trust the linen you have made for me to wear?

10.
Someone somewhere is teaching me how to be vulnerable, to be a julienned carrot turned stew, a meatloaf kneaded in a blue kitchen. There are buffets, you know, where you can find everything on display. You can find pineapple and Italian dressing and everyone loves it because everything is available in every aisle—please say something. Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? Say something about my furrowed brow, about my turning to the side to sleep now, not on my stomach, not again. The stomach, the curl, the turning inside, the disappearing belly, the turning into pride the way a man says I’m tired or That’s right.

11.
All day, she has been wailing over what’s gone—a ball, a broccoli floret, her yellow duck lost on a sidewalk. She’s been drinking new cups of trembling. Somehow we are getting up and walking and finding new clothes—like He did—to wear. Sweet girl, celebrate: the old garment is gone, but the tomb is empty. Sweet girl, celebrate: the linen is on the floor. Celebrate. The curtain is torn. Celebrate. Somewhere
He went and found new clothes, new clothes
to show us that He is alive, to show how His faithfulness looks
like summer in Finland
where darkness doesn’t know how long to stay—

12.
Should I trust this linen,
this new veil—

There is no other covering—
you say—Father,
for me for the places
I have sat and known:
there is no place for you
to lay your head.
Father forgive me.

I didn’t notice
the splendid place,
the shelter under
your straw hat.
Poem with Three Names of God + a Promise to Myself

And in the beginning, I thought my father’s hands
looked like old countries. I thought the dried rivers
running through his palms were all that remained
of the land he carried with him. I have been making
a list of the promises my favorite things can and can
not keep. A bridge over the river promises you’re not
too heavy. A father promises to eventually be a knot
of electric seconds between synapses called a memory.

Our spines promise to remember their shape, but some
promises break. In the beginning God promised light
but this might have meant fire. God promised his name
but some names break. *Abba* means father, *Elohim*

means something has just been made. A wolf maybe.
A series of rivers to trap it. A group of fathers leaving

because God told them to. My friends are always reminding
me how patient God is. Whether in the form of a sixteenth
century church at the bottom of a river in Mexico
slowly reappearing in the drought season

or as the diamond my grandmother lost at the edge
of the woods while chopping firewood. How

my mother over and over returned to the tree line
to search on her knees, as if she were trying to unearth

one of *YHWH*’s misplaced names. Maybe a handful of wet soil
despite a month of no rain. Maybe red fungal spore that somehow

smears gold under the fingernails. Maybe God lost his name
and whispered sounds until it flew back to him in the dark.
One day, strangers will drink water from each other’s cupped hands. We won’t call this a miracle. One day, we’ll build a library that lets you borrow birds instead of books. Don’t call this place heaven, because you’ll want everyone to feel welcome. You can be lost. Like the diamond from a wedding ring lost to the woods, we’ll tell stories about you knowing you’re somewhere shining. We just haven’t found you yet. One day you’ll look at your open hands and realize how much country your father gave you. Your rivers. Your dried deltas. Are you listening? Every bridge you’ve ever crossed will eventually collapse, heavy with rust. The miracle here is that you weren’t standing on any of them.
DEDE WILSON

Insomnia

I tell you
       starlings
ripped my sleep

little wicks
       above the eaves
as if a twist

of twigs
       and bent wind
poured

over the asphalt night
       and I
was the only room

every window open
       every door
unlocked.
What Being in the Army Did

Things you'd expect. Taught me a trigger's weight—
its pull—depends on the gun and doesn't matter much if you practice proper follow through.

Follow through here means holding the squeeze through the kick like you won't have to do it again, like you'll never have to do it again.

The army taught me torsos and tailgates are useful for gauging distance. That swaying grass or flags or scarves can estimate windspeed, and traveling from an artifact to a fundamental constant requires loss. It takes me sixty steps to walk one hundred meters. Assuming my body weight and leg lengths remain roughly constant and I'm using a compass, which means I'm moving in very straight lines, then sixty ten times is a kilometer, and sixty one hundred times is ten.
In France, they have a lump
of platinum and iridium made in 1879.

They named it Le Grand K,
and that’s how much a kilogram is.

They keep it under glass.
Won’t even touch it wearing gloves

because of however much
a fingerprint weighs.

They used to have a metal rod,
but now a meter is how fast light travels

in 1/299,792,458ths
of a second.

Five liters is still the same
as a little over a gallon

but any amount of blood looks
like more blood than it is.

When I say things like that
my girlfriend asks if I’m proud

of being dangerous.
I can safely say

I used to be and now at least
I know the dull machine chunk

of a rifle’s sear reset between rounds,
a sound my father asked about once.

He asked if I knew any words
that sound like a prison door locking.

Abduction? Deconstruction?
He shook his head.
So I said maybe there is no word.
Maybe if there are bars,
describe the feeling
of the air between them.

If there are keys, the distance
between the sound of them
touching and the sound
of them touching the door.

The weight of your days
approaching that closure—

No, he said,
there is definitely a word.
NAZIFA ISLAM

Her Instinct

*a found poem: Virginia Woolf’s The Waves*

She stands among the stealthy and assured
in a corner of the barnyard.
There is no light. Dressed as a beast—
a bird’s beak nailed to her,
speared by the sharp moment—
her face assumes a dazed futility.
She is a wild creature now.
And yet—the alarming wish to be loved.

Note: to write the poems in this series, the poet selects a paragraph of text from a Woolf novel and uses only the words from that paragraph, without repeating or adding words or editing the language for tense or any other consideration.
Kink

as in the bent link between words
how sex leads to sects to sectioned to

the lobster boiled with lemongrass and bay leaf
split on my dinner plate

the way umami sounds like a pleasure cry
cut loose in the kitchen

praise or don’t but allow yourself to open
for the fork in the sea urchin’s shell

pulsing even after it’s split
offal fried with capers their pretty names

sweetbreads concealing glands that fold beneath the fork
we hold our breath before the first bite

mean to or not how lovely the percussive fucks
grunts that mark consumption

heat anything long enough it loses its form
flame that coaxes layers of flavor

from collagen and cartilage marrow sloughing
from bones halved and broiled

the cooking twine that fastens Sunday’s roast
shrinking tighter below

the bubbled skin Love how good to feel
this craving stretch the rope of me

and you tie it
How dared my parents
make love across the room
in that motel where the child I was
slept on a cot—or where
they thought that child slept—
a starless night somewhere
out West, a thin curtain
of dark between us,
then my father’s cigarette,
its roving red tip,
and the match struck just before
that exposed their dear, wicked faces.
I Woke Today Thinking of Chloe Robinson

You once told me that Chloe Robinson
got it into her head
that you wanted to marry her
and before you knew it, her mother
had selected Chloe’s wedding dress
and all the bridesmaid dresses
and was about to order the flowers
when you had to quick disabuse her
of that crazy notion. Soon after,
you married me. So why is it
that some days I mistake myself
for Chloe Robinson, though I have never
even seen her photo. There I’ll be,
walking past a store window
on a balmy afternoon, and I’ll turn
and say Hello, Chloe to my image
in the glass. And always
we are wearing a long white gown,
the most beautiful, translucent veil billows
out behind, and the look
on our face, well, it’s sad.
SVÅR UPPLÖSNING

My boyfriend broke up with me and he changed his profile picture of us to a picture of soup.

He keeps texting me though. I'm in IKEA and everything here makes me think of you.

He wants to have his breakup and eat it too. Is he in the section with all the beds?

The food court? The parking lot? Where? I have so many questions.

It feels like an accomplishment to be so linked to IKEA in likeness.

He misses me, he says. I say that's a very thin emotion.
A Man in an Illinois Toll Booth Called Me a “Beautiful Woman” as I Was Driving Away

and I turned my car around, jumped into his small sanctuary, and started a family there in that dirty box. We subsist on nickels and rubber gloves, snips of song lyrics pouring out of sedan windows. Now, love, love don’t come easy. But I keep on waiting, anticipating for that soft voice...

You’re a beautiful woman he told me, and now we live in this toll booth collecting coins. Our seven children tap dance on the median. We sleep in a pile like puppies. They don't go to school but we don't get in trouble because the police are scared of our strange family. Windows open and shut. I'm beautiful. We have all this.
This time, I took the window seat.  
Awake alone in the darkened cabin,  
I slid open the shade to look for what you had often marveled at—the aurora borealis glamorizing the polar route.  
But filling the entire frame instead, the dim connect-the-dots of the Big Dipper.  
Big deal. There had to be more!  
I stared a while at the curved handle, the squared-off bowl forever ladling darkness. So this, I thought, is mine.  
Soup on a cold night: familiar tune written on the staff of an empty ocean: sleeping question mark of ordinary light.
To a mixed-up Roman, it might mean
five hundred five which is about the same
number as my place in the queue
among my fellow citizens, whom
I have come to admire as we wait
to be questioned and fingerprinted,
to cover our eyes, first one then the other,
to read from a diminishing list
of letters on the wall chart, to sit
with a cane sliding unnoticed into an aisle,
to cup the elbow of an elderly parent
as the line snakes on, and to sigh and shake
our heads as the photo guy takes
a coffee break, to state our political parties
or assert that we have none, to agree
to donate our organs, or not, to look into
each other’s faces and see that what
we have agreed to is not always to our liking,
before our number flashes on the screen.
Sorry As We Are

1.
Brother out of our mind into the full-on
world we climb that shocking heat upon us
one hand up against the sun
an iron earthquake
slamming shut behind us on our doings.
Nothing left in the grass but glare
shaped like a door.

Had a cellar ever even been there?
Out of the hold and into the pull we
squint and make our way the oak stick in hand
and a bellyful of roving a pocket buzzing
as messages rush back in the phone.

Locusts
are loud at it in the burr oaks and the slab has been
dozered clean of a house save the cracks
and pipe holes—
walking it you feel
in your heel bones the hard featureless heat
where the rooms and dreams had been.

The sheen
is blinding if you face it and if you close your eyes
not even a whiff of dog or the ghost of wind it
once made wagging.

What good anyway
is a calling?

Just stepping down to the root-heaved street
starts up the knee that had gone easy all morning
on the throbbing.

But for well or ill kinsman I’ve imped
my limp on yours and now we sweat and feel our way
and shine like slugs in the full-out sun.

2.
What say we slip off into the shade of this bait shop?
The door’s long gone but the Coke machine’s still on.
Finally get that heat off our head the miles off our feet.
It’s dark in here but put your hand down in that concrete tank.
Even in the dry you can feel the shadows of minnows and shad that used to shiver in the aerated water.

And don’t a Coke taste as fine right now as tin cup water back at Trevor’s well?

It’s dark enough in here you could about be there in his no-window pump shack now.

Or be six on a dead-dark road about to light the sparkler in a Nehi bottle.

Or twenty with your eyes closed. Feeling her hair case in all around your breathing.

Except for that sick that’s in your face that shock or crazy or whatnot.

What say we break out the phone about now?

Light up some guitar in here some conspiracy politics. A little sexy stuff a little Wrigley Field.

You can forget about that sick sometimes if you just keep scrolling.

You can look up roads you used to drive or friends you used to have.

You can post a photo of a big bright doorhole in a wall of dark.

You can touch here for help if you need to. You can phone home if you have one.

3.

Shuffling through the bar ditch weeds
soaked and rank already my head blazing
needing a ride and afraid to flag one down—

I can see over the fields a haze that’s
come a thousand miles to show us
half the forest world’s on fire.

The shed and silo waver in a blur I once
believed was only heat. Clouds to the south
swirl in on clouds circulating

hail and lightning working up their fury.
A zero’s twisting in my belly and I can sense
what’s troubling the minds of two whirlwinds
harrowing the furrows churning inward
suffering their smoke of sand inhaling
shredded ropes and sacks but what could ever
satisfy the hole at the eye of what you are?
The huge one blows on through the fence
a low roaring stays behind a tractor’s
stopped where the air clears. The glassed-in
driver has the fierce gasping look
of a drowned and I almost call out Brother!

But he cuts the engine opening
the high door and I can hear hate radio
up loud in there as he steps down
all that sound behind him driving him
my way like a wind. I can’t make out words
though I understand completely Stranger

I will shoot you if I need to. He yells out
Can I help you? and I don’t speak or move
but I have my thumb out toward the road.

Then a flash is rushing over the weeds
a truck is idling and I understand—the rumbling’s come for me. I turn

and see the dark-haired driver two huge
mongrels in the seat beside him. He shouts Abajo
pointing to the empty flatbed. Back there.

The one approaching yells Can I help you?
The driver shouts ¿A dónde vas? I close my eyes
feeling the way the oak stick pulls blurt out North!

jump up on the truck bed and crouch my back
to the generator strapped there the watcher
standing at the fence a long time as we roll.
4.
Wheat rows shudder by side roads blur and rattle. Anyone
with teeth and bones would understand the ground
has had enough of us all the way down
to the shale.

Sorghum now. A shack with a cow
half in it. Boot prints leading out survivors
staying one day’s work ahead of famished.

All this brutal
wind that’s worse than useless. How hot can sun get?

Maybe just hum a little and shield our eyes.
Maybe hold that feed sack on our head unless
we like it blistered.

Just rattle like that a while.
In the sack shade. The oat smell. Until it’s nigh well
third grade again.

Nigh well high up on the rumbling
trailer next to you Ofelia and your brothers.
Sliding off at your shack’s dirt yard. Straightway
to the roped tire to swing you

a gold girl over the cotton rows.
Your five brothers grinning skinny and angry
a shade of gold called brown. We all knew it was wrong
for a kid to be there white but not why.

Caramel eyes
quick at math you only stayed in school one season.
If you’re alive I glimpsed you then I see you now
jarred and blistered with my eyes closed on this rig—

smaller than I was and brighter offering what you had
hot wind leaves rushing by your quick smile
and flying hair—

5.
What say we collect ourself here on the underpass’s shady side a while?

Lean the oak stick on the concrete and mop our eyes and try to come to terms.

Lost now on the way to where?

Sky with all that high white smoke. Mosquitoes all over us. The ground rumbling.
Far off a couple of dogs. Not half a chance of rubbing their backs or handling their ears.

Maybe just duck our head a minute and give it up. Sorry as we are.

Who didn’t have the sense to stay in out of a tornado. Who couldn’t maintain enough wherewithal to feed our own animals.

And climbed up into all this again. The ladder wiped out behind in a crash of glare.

Lost here brother an overpass for a roof and thunderheads swelling in the southerly haze.

Dry lightning then the dim roar. In a while we’ll flag another ride and maybe have a bed.

Don’t believe it’s traffic. Knowing all these houses are riding on a shuddering in the ground.

So shaky or not we get up from the shade. The low sun brutal in the haze.

And let our mind give in so the pull and zag have ahold of us. And the tremors.

And from here on find our way by glare and smoke.
How You Should Have Passed, Brother

As the car dives from the bridge you will sit of your shirt pocket hair back and meeeting at a coin napkin note about you a missed taco catch the slipping by, park pass and a

will green a

river be vein, crooked

below a maybe smile.

A few will have the lighting mud

swallows banked canyon in nests.
You'll be impressed by the girlfriend's smell of Marlboros by your left fabric.

by the pinch of shoes are bucks, the she worth and pinch slip-on says forty then

you'll sense the green up a not river here star quite below like you're looking

at, and your tongue its the be will roof ridge dry, find and will hard,

and dusty forest where driver his road every has brakes like washboards goddam jammed to

make waves that rattle and citrus your you'll and pelvis taste iron.
Your
tie
will
crawl
over
your
shoulder,
and
you'll
think
to
kill

the
motor.

As
grows
and
the
river
sky
narrow,
you'll
skip
the
stages
of
grief

find
slow
as
the
car's
corrective
rotation,
if
it
had
tail
feathers,
calming.

You'll
lines
in
the
palm
until
your
meet
they
the

guardrail

you
punctured

over
gorge
with
a
river
as
talks
your

desert
a
long
with
dead.

You
sun
like
the
itch
takes
care

and

though
dead,
you are trying still to find the perfect rhythm to your lure have been made into this sharp moment of music forms.

the sentence you’ve given at
This is not a nightmare this is how the world looks
in a forest at night phantasmagoric
in the canopy There is the sound of sleet ticking on bark
Bark that quakes like tuning forks
in the crowns of pine Crowns like the heads of waves
seen by no one

but my father and me
in the four o’clock dark He starts in with noises
of his life A fluency of branches swimming at the window
means I wake in blue The room a vanity mirror with rain on it

Downstairs he rises with his cough
His small lamp hung in the dark Who smokes must be
talking to himself There is a freighter skulking full of ore
pounding sleep-knots to Charlevoix

This distant country called me home
Why have I only brought it adjectives

I try to sleep
She is not next to me I cannot put my hand on her back
I have only a stormful of trees in the dark
One Significant Landscape #2

In this, Cézanne as always
pulls the eye to the heart
of verdant hills and orange slate
slopes of houses, square shades
tongued by brush.

Something red draws here, in the blue
formal middle of our lives.
We know the midpoint
of the eye, the oracular optic disk, is a locus

of insight without sight. For the hill,
those figures, that story,
this love, are
only sometimes as substantial
as the image. Appleyness

supplants apples, and slips
from the frame. The slope
slides to wrinkle, the mind to weight.
Tournament Hopeful

My interest in the sport is only theoretical.  
Like a Roman augur counting crows that turn  
in a vermillion sunrise stripped of the colors of astonishment,  
who never looks past number and direction to the art of chance  
or to the way bright wings lift when they beat out the sound  
of passing, who never wonders, awestruck,  
where they’re going, or why, or sees more than the future  
in the flash and flutter of the straight-flying dawn, every year

I fill out my bracket using the A.P. stats as guide  
and watch your team win or lose. What do I know  
about this court with its tall kings, its royal advisors?  
See how they surge together at the time-out, huddling  
and praying and flaring out like a ten-armed hallelujah  
exploding into motion? And in the air, like fate,  
a three-point shot swishes true to the basket and the world  
erupts in applause. I duly notch my bracket but thrill  
when your crow’s feet lift with surprise. Love,  
you have me good arc and all net.
Dear Anne Spencer

From cherry blossom season, I write to inform you the parties are still stupid here. Last night I succumbed to cocktails at the book-strewn home of a fund-raising politician, trim as a tulip, who set out platters of shrimp: pink fingers, crooked. High-ceilinged rooms were jammed with old men gone septic under buttons, under powdery cheeks.

Over tea in your garden, I'd say more, but for now let's admit I was rude, escaping through a racket of invisible birds, finding a friendlier table, nibbling syllables of cheese with women in mourning, whose joints are painfully inflamed.

I'm tired, Mrs. Spencer, of meanness and NDAs. I wish I could bring by some birdsong, or the rose-scented argument of what I've been reading, this rainy heap of magazines.

One hopes for a breeze, impolite, rowdy, to rip the gorgeous petals down. One hopes to be it. I'd pen you a note from that town in pretty tatters. Until then I am admiringly yours, a flock of cedar waxwings, a bristle of spears that would rather, some unsecretive day, be lush and ant-starred peonies. Sincerely.
Resistance

If you tell me what you’re selling I’ll tell you what I’m not buying, or sticking in, or in between meals, or pushing inside—this is the way I feel about Formica, is it even a surface? If you don’t try it you’re not going to like it, I’m tired of trying. My skin’s sagging a little, as if it’s snagged on something—I don’t think my appetite is a problem, I mean everybody has one, by the time you figure out what you need you don’t even need it anymore. Smoothing my ribs, making sure the cage is closed, covering my face and looking through the cracks in my fingers, don’t you dare. I’m thinking that’s enough for now; and enough is enough, as far as the dependent variables are concerned I’m going to act as if I’ve never even heard of them—it’s kind of like medical resistance where you don’t even get something in the first place. Of course it’s easier to fix what isn’t broken. Breathing deeply, pulling the air into my body, as if resistance is a kind of resuscitation—difficult at first, then it’s difficult not to. Sometimes I don’t even feel like it; indifference is also a form of resistance. When something is broken you fix it, if it keeps breaking you don’t even bother.
LIZZY PETERSEN

“Mr. Hipp, ca. 1940”: The Rain Does the Plow

That’s what they used to say—water
will follow the work. This might’ve made some measure of sense

at the time. If you plant, the crop starts to make its own kind of moisture.
Dew on the leaves gathers

the clouds while you sit in a pasture
sucking on sugar cubes with the sun not on the rise but giving you a break, trusting

in the lay of the land and phony scripture made up by farm salesmen. One way
or another, we got to the plains

by following a lie. Like lie down
in that ditch, a tornado of thorny sand is on the way. Lie down on any cot,

that’s your bed. Get settled. Lie down too long and you might be dead.
A lie follows any flat surface.

Flat like clapboard with only its little notches. Flat like Kansas.

Flat my credit at the Union Bank and flat my pocketbook in winter.

Note: This poem is part of a larger work on the photographs and life of Arkansas
portrait photographer Mike Disfarmer, 1884-1959.
Diorama (the uses of the girl and the location of the 45 buildings)

First: the poorest. Put them downwind. In the smoke. By the water.

Then the finest. Put them up on the bluff, great grey houses that know like sleeping owls.

In the center, spiraling: the furnace, the factory, the queen they're feeding, the tooth they're taking out of the earth's head. Picture a building in which you tie down the darkness and work on it with enormous tools.

Next: the opera house, the red and gold. The sashes and the beautiful, disembodied voice. Announcements on a wall tell people what's going to happen: singing, singing, and singing.

Then the boarding house, the school, the church, the store.

Then back to the houses. Establish the various ways people can see one another.

A town is one pronunciation of an old word. You say it by opening your door.

At the third house from the end of the road: a girl running to the front door and telling the charred man inside to get out as fast as he can.

The charred man inside the house saying no. He makes a good life for himself out of smoke, and he gets to start from scratch every day.

In the man's yard, a stump. When it stops smoldering, a girl sitting down on the stump.

A girl drawing the town in the dirt and tapping her stick. What she needs to remember: a few feelings to stuff in their hearts and where the buildings were.
Diorama (woman given all the children)

Perhaps they’re pretending to be weak minded?
Perhaps they’ve been pounded into an allegory like spikes?

Seven children walk into a snow-dead forest, and six crows fly out.

Maybe the children are horses or stools for mounting horses?
I’ve stood on them.
I’ve brushed the quivering dumbness of their coats.

They look like they’ve committed crimes in other states—
vegetable, liquid.

Perhaps they’re the bars of a jail or the main points in a treaty? If you see them,
tell them to come home.
It’s time for supper.

They’re so crudely emblematic:
this one is fire, this one water, here earth, here semen.
Don’t forget stupidity, stomach acid, and steel. I suppose, though,
these are the materials one needs to build a strong ship.

Where do you think they’re planning to go?

Perhaps I become topographical and elaborate
when they require an odyssey to endure?
Perhaps I become an arrow for them to spin
when there’s only one way out?

I’m living in someone’s house, folding linens,
a long row of children damp and pupal beside me in bed each night.
Before I can close my eyes, I’m supposed to mend three dresses
and attend a long series of negotiations. Instead I consent immediately
to your destruction, roll over, and blow out the light.
Diorama (woman who watches the forest fill with twinkling lights)

Slowly, the town recovered, and we all became women. The only things left were white pines and our long streaks of sweat.

We gladly joined the slash marks and counting of the forest.

Oh, the repetitive, vertical things that we did at night. The unreportable events. Oh, the choral activity characteristic of young women.

We worked hard and surrounded the object. We picked it up and sang to it, no matter what it was: laundry tub, baby, husband, secret, map, bone.
CATIE ROSEMURGY

Diorama (back to the factory)

A quick tour: this is the blowing house.

Now as you prepare to exit:
Now as you calculate the best way to the surface:

be grateful.
Be grateful and remember the buildings:
the buildings aren’t resting.

Not resting:
is a factory.

Not resting, the buildings:
have assumed responsibility for reproduction.
We were necessary

to create a great race of houses.
We were necessary:

you cannot roll up the map
of all the forthcoming houses.
You cannot:

you can go out or up. Yes, that’s why
we started to stack them.

In each of our rooms:
we undo one thing done by the people who lived here before us.
Thus the machine eats our hearts.

Thus we feed it our hearts.
Thus it becomes our large, indestructible heart.

Now as you triangulate the exit:
Now as you prepare to scuttle on the wet surface:
Now as you remember the buildings:

remember also how few bodies are left.
If you must inflict the blow:

you must also pivot to absorb it.
Dear Desert

I expected a wasteland of dead rock whittled to dust. Instead I found you alive, brimming with purple wisps of lupine, cactus tips flaming like candles and thought *Fuck you.*
All you needed to offer up a flower was a white sheet of sand, a seed, a thimble of rain. *Fuck every failure, every trail of blood I thought might lead to a daughter,*
a son. Under your sky I poured whiskey into my cider, devoured raw fish,
smoked meat, soft cheese, all the fruits I wanted so badly to be forbidden.
March

As we forget to buy cat food
As the bed must be soaked from the open window
As we’re blowing our noses
into our bare hands
As the mythic farm father crossing some icebound lake
hears it crack under his horse
We hurry in the door, pour cubes of dry bread stuffing
in the cat’s bowl like an apology and see
how the wind has stilled
And do not close the window
And step over the hungry cat
As the father, scarf floating in a slow S, arms
upraised, looks above him at the ice
re-forming, thinking Oh, it’s spring
Time is a Country

Which busted house with its back to the road is your house, in which acre of logged-out woods with which exact, particular lost Ford pickups gone to moss?
Or
When you get up naked to bring me water in bed, in which sleepy voice do you say *Time is a country* or which dead European philosopher do you quote for me to forget, or Tell me
Which forests of the earth will you stride over as a long-legg’d giant, so foxes small as caterpillars can see you and run?
HELENA MESA

The Lesson

She said *He is everywhere, even inside you.* I felt my bones bow, my organs crowd with words whispered from within. The thin black dog leaning against a white fence, the seamstress pricking her finger, my father sleeping at the end of the pew—inside us all, He listened, a black phone with a stiff dial connecting one mind to the next. I listened to the circuits of my body jam with sounds, then a stillness I feared. *Eve left the garden,* she said. *Eve disobeyed, and He marched her through gates leading nowhere, and nowhere stretches.* He knew before she covered herself in leaves, before the core swarmed with bees. He lived inside her and felt the thought form.
Devil, here we have lunatics.
    Devil, here we get ill.
Here we get Christmas cards
from cigarette companies and famous chefs
    leave skillets in their wills.
We’ve got a lot to look at, Devil,
    and ropes to pull them closed.
Devil, there is watercolor,
there is soot and dice and once, Devil,
I swear we made the clothes ourselves.
Devil, they were intricate.
    Devil, it looms.
Devil, and spearmint, and trestles, and Devil,
    we were all pretty once the docks slid
        like ghosts through walls into the rising tide
    and then higher still to the porches.
Once we fastened our lips together with buttons.
    Devil, we’ll break a truce.
Devil, there are pacifiers and thermometers.
    Devil, we bruise.
    There are bruises everywhere.
Devil, what about the wires?
What about the pile of burnt clothes and the patch
of bent grass where someone walked out of the woods?
Devil, we burrow deep into the core.
    Devil, we shine.
When the glass breaks, we sweep.
    Devil, when it cuts us, we bleed.
Devil, sometimes we stain and stand, like you,
one boot pressed to the head of something slain.
Like you, a thirsty one, mouth to the hose.
    Like you, Devil, sipping from the dark glass, thirsty.
    And then, like you, sipping from the barrel.
His father

broke the legs off an antique telephone table
to make a Ouija board in the basement.

He carved each letter
   carefully.
Told me
To pluralize Jesus,
   one must know
   what he is getting into.

Curled rinds
   sprang from the cold beak
   of his claw hammer.

Even to sin he said
   is a matter of faith.
Anointed

My father tilts the vial of holy oil over his finger & smears it across the forehead of my best friend’s mother.

I imagine the cells inside her breasts as dark archangels rioting in the streets of heaven. On Monday, she cancels her chemo. Belief ripens in her chest. She dies.

I never did tell my friend about the time I walked in on my father refilling the vial with our Dollar General vegetable oil. I want to be cynical, but the light glowed through the oil’s gold as it glugged into the vial & over his hand.

Remember after the revival?
We found your mom in the kitchen.
Your dad was kissing her, dancing her around the silence.

The thick yellow light oiled her tightly stitched skin.

When they caught us staring, they pulled apart into two separate blushes, his hand falling back from her breast.
When I muttered the word I’d learned at school, my mom said, “Your name’s mud, mister” & washed my mouth out with soap. On my tongue the cuss did taste like mud:

Shit. Shit. Shit. Sunday, the boy who taught me was hauled to church by his mother. The old ladies whispered how his dad had dragged the family name through the mud.

My mom says a name means something, says the Christian meaning of my name is _Strong in Victory_, but the baby names book says _hill covered in broomweed_. Only mud seeped up no matter how deep I dug in our backyard—never the unnamed bones of another time, never those rumored diamonds. Deep under my fingernails: mud.

Pastor once said if we conquer our bodies God will give us a new name carved into a clean white stone. The boy wrestled me in my Sunday clothes into the mud but never thought to lay a hand in the hollow of my hip. I’d have thrown the fight, climbed the ladder to heaven or hell, taken my true name. Come summer, dried mud caked my legs after my baptism in the lake. “You know,” my mom said, “we almost called you…” She held the name like an unborn child, picking absently at the mud.
Still Life with Escaped [Lamb]

In the beginning, a small [  ]
split open upon an altar, blood
spilled from a body still
warm. This is how some men worship,
a father’s blade against the neck of a boy,
his son a vessel of obedient sin.

How else to cleanse sin
except to slaughter the [  ]?
Gush-warm as the thigh of a boy.
A body bathed in another’s blood
learns how to properly worship,
shudders, gasps, then goes still.

What remains still
is the question of where sin
seeps when the body ceases worship,
how even what is ruined becomes [  ]
when cleansed in blood,
a field of limb-wrecked boys.

The splatter of a boy
becomes bloodborne warship.
He grasps your head like a sacrificial [  ].
You clean your face & still
taste the sour tart of sin,
metallic, almost like blood.

A new song enters the blood,
cleanses the body in antithesis to worship.
How miraculous the factory of sin,
what slips in through the boy’s
mouth, corrupts every organ until stilled.
   An altar without a [  ].
My Mother’s Aubade Says My Father is a Clown

Little as I am, I too, know the devil. He goes into my mother’s room with the same rough hands as my father’s, the same boots tracking soiled dirt into her room, the same voice that tilts around like a typhoon overlooking a city from a hill. Little as I am, I know the devil’s voice. Every night, I imagine the devil straddled over an angel like an emperor leading a war against the dead. Every night my prayer is a mollusk. Every morning, a hull of monologue left on my mother’s tongue. Little as I am, I too know the angel. She goes into my father’s room with hands that have tended gardens like my mother’s, her feet silent as the fall of a feather on snow, her lips parched with a hymn that opens like a bird’s wings. Every night, I wait for the devil’s boots to knock the tiles of the house as if summoning ghosts, then kneel as my mother’s cries run off the walls to my room without her legs. Every night, I sob into the body of an imagined god, hoping my mouth will burst into sunlight, hoping my mother will sing a new aubade while she tends the garden in the morning, when my father is away counting birds with his teeth: clown!
When my father lost his job, we thanked God it wasn't his heart. My mother became the greatest philosopher
don't worry when there is life there's hope she'd say
in the shady stillness of air between teeth & tongue.
We survived on his gleanings for three years
before the story took the shape of a tragedy:
garri is gold, if you have it thank God
your mates are under the bridge, on the highways you hear?
My mother's voice has lost the bird in it & often
I think this is the first war I get conscripted into.
Years have rolled past our faces. My father is a rusty silence.
I can barely recognize him.
In the morning, we have garri & cubes of Louis sugar.
At noon, my mother gets fried fish on credit & breaks them amongst us like Jesus
though there never were any baskets of remains, no bread, we eat it with garri.
We just gather on the balcony & swallow all the silence until we're filled with fireflies & sleep.
In school, I tell the bullies I have a house of gold.
When they look puzzled, my heart pirouettes & when they ask how, I say garri is gold & they laugh
until the urge to run leaves my heart & sticks to my feet.
My cheeks burn & I remember the last time they burned
I was holding a spade full of sand over father's lifeless body, the priest's voice at the edge of the grave drying away in the sun.
GINA FRANCO

A Foundation Laid on Which the Wall Had Not Yet Been Built

—we were held up/we held on
    apprehended little enough—
the parenthetical children,
the set aside children suspended in the bridgeless border,
    remember:
kept long and far: preserved
    for later
use: the father’s seed-grown garden beyond the chain-link fence, his pride of white roses weighing
down the white trellis in his doorway
    arch *(point of eternal return)*: I remember, I
can’t remember ever
    being at home: late last
night I lay awake and listened in bed to the recorded unheard
    -of
children, wailing, playing
    on an endless loop, a taste
of perfect hell:
    world stalled
    between event and news of event: watched
world taking your tender place behind glass:
    far-fetched
world, we were told:
    there are many rooms in the father’s house:
Temptation to Say Words that Cause Pain

told world:
  “there are many rooms in my father’s house”: words
  meant for many, not for all, the novice master said
to his school of young monks:
    wind
  turned the pages of the priest’s left-open books
    (his hands
cupping the air to make
    rooms): I was among those other
  kids
told to write: I will not lie to my teacher; I would
not lie:
  in the master’s story the room is a word
    to be
  filled, fulfilled:
    truthfully
    … in the locked cathedral, God
died: image of hands flailing in total darkness in a red
    sea,
    and the sea was the father,
    and the red was the dead
son,
  and the hands were gesticulations of the void
  in a void: one
day the children showed up at the gate, having left behind
  all belongings: the flailing, so many:
    words lost on me:
We Splurge on a Glass of Wine at the Top of the World Trade Center

The glasses we hold, tall, with thin stems. The Chardonnay, crisp.
And the towers

that yearn up beneath us, ours.
Ours, the curve of Long Island fading

into the Atlantic’s cocktail-blues.
Steak tartare, coconut shrimp: half our grocery budget before us, plated.

Giddy, I grow
into our luxury. As the tower sways slightly in wind, weights sunk deep

in the rocks of Manhattan
make delicate adjustments as you turn

and say Another glass?
Now lights flicker on, votives in the haze of the Bronx.

Bridges light up, airy necklaces strung across the East River. I want another glass. Want

to bring the planet to my mouth,
tip it, and drink. It’s ours, the height of the tower, the lengthening shadow

it flings. Somewhere, someone
is adding up the bill.
The 2019 Adrienne Rich Award for Poetry

$1,500 prize for a single poem

Judge, Patricia Smith

Submissions open March 1-April 30

More details at www.bpj.org