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Calliope

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Calliope

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Calliope is published twice a year, in December and May.
Single issues are \$2.00; a year's subscription, \$3.50.

Submissions of poetry and short fiction are welcomed from
August 15 - October 15 for the December issue and from
January 15 - March 15 for the May issue. Manuscripts
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Manuscripts are discussed with the writer's name masked so that beginning and established writers are read without prejudice.

Address all correspondence, submissions and subscriptions to Martha Christina, *Calliope*, Creative Writing Program, Roger Williams College, Bristol, RI 02809.

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WHY CAN I KNOW THE FUTURE AS SHE GETS

Winged out head, so she can fly

—Katherine Mansfield, *The Garden Party*

Truth is, she's just the richest
my daughter standing silent in her soul.

her smiling eyes were like the green
and over her head she tilted her sparkling

a mother's wing. She murmured, surprised
"Take your shoes off, take them all off"

Oh, she is so spoiled away to life

howls what a joyful pattern—

the leaves and leaves on the branches
the squirrels have dropped from their nests,

the ground onto the ground I swept
from the water, and the related,

graying eyes she wishes her death
were just the reflection of images.

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William Aarnes

WHO CAN SHOW THE CHILD AS SHE IS?

Wer zeigt ein Kind, so wie es steht?

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Fourth Elegy*

Truth is, she's just too ridiculous,
my daughter standing naked in her pool,

her swimming suit tossed into the grass,
and over her head the tilted hose spouting

a putto's wing. She commands, imperious:
"Take *your* shorts off; take them off *now!*"

Oh, she is so carried away by life

despite what evidence gathers—

the brown oak leaves on the branches
the squirrels have dropped from their nests,

the drowned ants she'll demand I scoop
from the water, and the inhibited,

greying man who wishes her death
were just too ridiculous to imagine.

James C. Anderson

THOMAS AND HIS HARP

Harp strings are steel bars
until Thomas touches them. Then
the woman's face that was in prison
breaks out in a full smile.
Even the smoke settles down to listen.
I have been here a while
and when I ask, Sean pours me
another Guinness in a pint glass.
I drink and drift off.
French cherry wood and pale spruce
frame the strings Thomas plays.
His wrists are wrapped in bandages
and look too weak for a musician.
He closes his eyes and always finds
the red string in the center.

James C. Anderson

POSTCARD FROM LONDON

The rain has never read Shakespeare.
Never, never, never, never, never.
It never will. It's quite content falling
as it does this morning, a fine mist
glazing the pavement, keeping gutters alive.
The cigarette ends allude to lips;
the shattered pint glass, to a Limehouse punk
brainless when pub crowds hit the street
at closing time. The city writes itself
here, in slang, at night. Each morning
down below carries a stone headline
indecipherable to those with their heads
buried in newspaper novels. Look there! Look there!
A rat in the rubbish on Charing Cross Road.

Mark Cox

TELL US EVERYTHING YOU KNOW

In that life, mornings were questions I refused
to answer. The clock threw water in my face. My job
chain-smoked behind intense light. Low voices, stiff shoes,
lined up behind the one way glass
at the bottom of the glass
and still, I kept my mouth shut.
Not one thin dream between me and the scuffed linoleum
of sleep, not one note smuggled in from anywhere.
Are you a human being, they asked. Where were you
the night the world disappeared. Will anyone remember seeing you.
Can you supply us with a list
or at least, a lover who will lie for you?

Often as not, I'd wake up too fast, swearing
I'd been knifed. Anyway, I'd hold myself like that,
like some unforgettable sunset
leaking through the fingers of my hands.
We're not going anywhere, they said.
We've got nothing but time, they said.

If I were an American Indian my name would be Registers Slowly,
but I uncrossed my arms one morning and admitted
that people can't bury themselves.
And when I saw my hands around that tumbler I drank from,
they could have been anybody's hands. And when
I saw each tick and tock in the moulding, the shining black
where someone else's shoes had rubbed
against the door leading out, when I smelled
the loneliness of the last few drops of tonic
in the bottle in the corner,

Mark Cox

I held myself like *that*.
And wept like that.
And confessed
how I'd so often been ready to talk,
that it was never necessary to defend myself,
that the weight of the world can't be carried by six people
but has to be
and is.

Mark Cox

INTRO TO HUMANITY 101

Please open your eyes to page 5 am

Soon there'll be several million people
turning in small circles under the showerhead
clicking their heels together
wanting to go home
which is back to sleep
which is in their beds

This is the one time of day when everyone understands
everyone else
There is still a wet screen of stars
in our heads
There are still small fires
licking the backs of our eyelids

There's not enough strength in our hands
to open a jar of jelly let alone harpoon you
for swimming around on the same slide with us

All over the world people are saying things like,
'I don't want to argue' and 'whatever pleases you'
and 'just drink your coffee'
We handle pots and pans like bombs
We have a no first use policy about the horn in the buick

We are paper bags full of nails
Hefty bags full of pizza boxes
lava lamps in the cheap foyer of economics
and know it

William Virgil Davis

THE DREAMER

Asleep, he dreams he is dreaming
of sleep, like a man after a long
work week comes home at night
and falls asleep in his chair,
dreaming beside the fire,
hearing his children at play
in some game or other, playing
near his feet as if he were not dead,
but only sleeping, as if the room
were warm, with the light
against the windows, without rain,
as if the dark were distant,
or like an eye, slowly closing.

Mark Doty

ANNA KARENINA

This morning a hurrying white boat
was framed between the plum tree
and the harbor's rippling sateen;
by afternoon whitecaps break

far out from shore, and the gulls reel
by this off-season rental, angels on wires
in a lavish pageant of storm.
Wild grapes scour the roof,

a stunted trunk scrapes
the wet black siding; the wind
investigates anything, like someone
picking through a rummage table

in a terrible hurry. For days
I've grown accustomed to silence;
yesterday I didn't see anybody—
no, in the morning a woman trundled

along the beach toward the canal
as if her constitutional were a bitter duty,
her kerchief flapping blue wings.
Now the whole house seems to lean

into the wind as she did,
only the rattling windows between
the sea and my smoldering fire,
the water jug of sea lavender

—futile gestures to make
this place mine, this summer house
anchored to a dune
held only by grass and a ribbon

Mark Doty

of wooden wall. All day
I've been reading *Anna Karenina*,
returning to the chapter in which Tolstoy
brings Anna back to the house in Petersburg,

after the bitter separation, the dawning
awareness that her new lover
will not perfect her after all,
when she stands by the bedside

of her son. The little boy curls
and blinks out of the deep water
of a child's sleep, lifts himself
and then falls, not back to the pillow,

but into her arms. They had told him
she was dead, but he never believed them,
and when he has pulled himself up
to words again he says,

"Today is my birthday, I knew
you'd come," though he is falling
back into dream even as he speaks.
Because she has never stopped

longing for him, she has not imagined
that he has grown. And because
the boy can't say what he knows,
that she is perfect and unhappy,

he tells her how he fell on a hill
in the park, and somersaulted three times,
and she holds him and forgets to open
the bag of toys she chose the day before.

It's dusk and the storm's hardly let up,
but the little triangle of sail

Mark Doty

skitters over the water again,
gray and vulnerable as the moths

that fold against the windows,
now that the lights are on.
How do they hold on? The fire
is trying its best, as it will

all night, to push its aura
further into the room.
I can't imagine how cold
the sailor must be, though I can guess

something of his exhilaration,
how the sail must fill and push
against him almost like the body
of a child glad to see him.

There is always something more fragile
than ourselves. I almost expect
to see, in the near-dark,
the blue woman making her way

down the shore again, leaning
forward to feel the rush
of wind pouring against her,
the pressure that reminds her

she's here. And the mother
who's lost everything
sits on the edge of the coverlets
with such tenderness, although

she must leave her son again so quickly
that she is barely able to be with him at all,
her thoughts are on the future so.

Kate Dougherty

ARTEMIS

Hunter if you wondered
why it was
I never spoke of the moon
it is because
I fell for it
once before.
See, even the pathway
on the ocean looks real, reflections
of a reflection's
reflection.

And you in the dark,
left of me—
I feel your body
as the moon must know
the night
along the curve of her.

All I need have done
was lean back into you
and release,
breathe deeply
opening, opening . . .
with what ease
I drink you up
you eat me down
and how relentless
the argument of sacrifice
night after night
month after month.

Kate Dougherty

TIDE POOL

A crab in tide-line debris,
broken shells, seaweed, her leg segments
drift within the wave,
in without will, out as something else
shifts, claws cast to dance
the dance of surrender
gathers her, sinks back
each tidal breath
more shallow
than the last,
fails to reach her body
once an immeasurable ocean
now a bleached desert
but for one moist cell
holding its prisoner for life.

Two barefoot children hurry past
pointing to maroon rocks
left bare in the cove, and pools
that pocket between them,
excitedly repeating the possibilities,
hermit . . . crabs, star . . . fish, sea
anemones.

Gary Fincke

COAL REGION

A boy wakes before
his father and takes
a long, dark shower.

He carries cereal
to the newspaper,
listens for stirring

while he memorizes
a column of scores.
His father refuses

to set an alarm,
and this boy lingers
in the damp center

of the house, waiting
along his nerves for
the floor's weak pulse.

Outside, a friend
loiters with two girls
so quiet the cold

lunges at them, huge,
transparent cave-in.

Gary Fincke

FACING BACKWARDS

This time the relatives are Hennie,
Harry, and Willy—the Hemke brothers—
The Langs and Krolls and Schwartzes
And each German cousin who cheered
Or regretted Hitler's end. I wanted
To write on their walls, carve myself
Into their furniture while sausage
And vinegar and dough squeezed out
Their doors, the porridge would flood
Unless I said "Little pot, stop!"

They are shaking off the cobwebs;
They are blinking back the sun;
They are approving the pulse
Of themselves like lucky victims
Who marvel and brush themselves
At the crash site, each of them
Lifting his head like my grandfather,
Who refused to ride in cars, who gets
Up in this dream of highways, and walks
Away, stalking through the curves
Of his neighborhood, lugging
A chip basket like a briefcase
Though he puts nothing in it.

To see if that basket is ever anything
But empty, I am following him
And the symmetry of his hikes,
Estranged miles of foraging
For something to fill that ready space,
A lost migrant worker picking
A dim, unrecognizable field.

John Flynn

RIPE

Ground fog whitens the window
into a threat of early winter.
One hawk submerges,
its cree a spear
swapping majesty for vigilance.

Silver the slow haunt
of its rising echo
stray barren sun
ghosting the corn.

Brendan Galvin

INVENTING BALLYGALVIN

Because my cousin the priest
knows but won't tell me
where the family's from, I've invented
this West Cork townland. I admire
its sheepdogs' individual styles
as one has at my car head-on
and another snipes from wayside fuschia.

Both have a leg outstanding—
that "fender-duster" that heals
a different wrong way
on every dog. Still, as we say
in Ballygalvin, "He couldn't drive it
if he caught it, could he?"

All that walking topiary ahead
is only the backs of sheep.
For centuries now the castle's
been dropping in on their pasture,
a way of measuring time
stone by stone. When they get there
they'll gaze out bowmen's slots;
they like to pretend
they're the Norman invaders.
It's a kind of revenge,
though they're more like tumbleweeds
when wind leans them
against the stone bridge.

There's no pink hotel here
for golfing monsignors
in green hats, only this bog
of moor grass and black rush,

Brendan Galvin

which lubbers onto the road
full of years of rain.
But not today, so I'll hold my hour
and admire how a soft morning
dissolves that blue mountain
seamed with walls, and the
switchback road that brought me.

Bless me, St. Finlan,
from your niche in the wall.
We're local boys without stone
or well to our names, and nobody
recalls your miracle.
Mine's that a cousin just gave me
a nod and almost sent me into
the left hand ditch full of axles.

He's filling pot holes
for the county board,
one of those foxy pipe-sippers
whose pace migrated
to the Massachusetts
Department of Public Works.
Turns out in the States
he used to be a priest.

Turns out that faces in Ireland
are faces in Boston,
somebody's rotating
the living and dead. Or that's
his theory, not orthodox.
He says I'll have to watch
I don't meet myself rounding a corner,
or some red-haired woman, glorified
in maroon, who I promised once
I'd murder Cromwell for her.

Brendan Galvin

ASKING DIRECTIONS OF AN OLD KERRYMAN

Get in close, past
that nose that looks
like it's been places
besides these fields,
past the bone outcrop
pressuring his windburn,
to the eyes, stripped
of cloud like
the Blaskets on a rare,
clean day, and deeper,
where the sun's splintered
on whitewashed stone.
Only three days later,
when the turf spade
of his wit connects with
the back of your head
will you realize
he just might have
the word to raise a ruin
up from pasture stones
after dark, a roofless
abbey he's given
the first saint's name
the wind off the Atlantic's
given him, and for
the likes of you
planted his own face
under the bishop's mitre
on the wall, and again
flat on the chieftain's tomb.

Pamela Harrison

COMMUNIQUÉ

Last night I dreamed we took a room somewhere near a border while guerillas with charcoalblack below their eyes and banana leaves waving like hankies above their hats took off on gliider kites. I stroked your back and said in the shelter of that thin room, what I meant at last. How easy it was to let down the hair I never had. You thought it was fine on the pillow. While a bedside lamp pooled its light into the ashtray and your empty boots, I knew you in my bones and woke to find the President-Elect of Lebanon blown apart at a party caucus, a princess dead at a stroke in downtown traffic, and a favorite writer brought on his Harley to an untimely conclusion. This happened yesterday. We may all die tomorrow. But if I ever see you again, though trains pull out in all directions and ground fire tattoos the backside of the building till posters sail from the walls like kites into the dark, let's take that room at the motel with a view to doing what I dreamed we would.

Pamela Harrison

TERMS FOR LIVING

I held out for perfection all my life,
setting the steely template of its unforgiving
form against the loose, aberrant sprawl
of all that was. But see, how beautifully
into the golden flesh of ripened fruit
a centipede in ebony armor bores,
how gaily flies and crabs carouse about
the eyes and mouth of still-born lambs
abandoned beside this ancient tree. Not
a summit fit for living, perfection's a place
of the mind we're always after or fallen from.
It's the measure that leaves our cups half empty,
turns lively choices into ghosts of possibility,
and gladdest memory to a grave and elegiac ache.
Everywhere it rules by cruel omission,
our present moments shed like rattling scree
beneath the granite of its steep, supernal peak.

Pamela Harrison

WHO FROM THE PLUM TREE FELL

It isn't merely that the earth bears repeating,
that sundown draws all the colors of the day
to a shimmering light tinged with coral
and gold, sea and sky clothed alike
in wrinkled silk. Or that, at dawn, black
and ruddy cattle loom, horned and still,
among the hummocks of a greening hill.
From a plum tree yesterday, a child plummeted
like its ripened fruit. With perishing grace
his father bent to gather the broken body home.
What draws us high in the tree is not
some abstract form of plum perfection,
but branching arms that bear us toward the light,
the promise of sweetness remembered: the actual,
flinting through the dense and deep-veined leaves.

Bill Kemmett

MATTER OF COURSE

There's a theory, or a fact
that nothing's by accident . . .
the electric storm over the golf course, . . .
this evening's truck, . . . a heart attack
at the wheel plowed into a sidewalk
of busy shoppers, appointing their times.

I'm in the hammock out back
near the quiet brook, reading . . .
barbeque's cooking . . . the cubes slowly,
methodically clink in my styrofoam cooler,
overhead, a tiny jet marks its way . . .
across an impassible sky—
across a matter of course.

*

The wingdust from a circling hawk-
moth makes me sneeze. I once heard of someone
who actually died sneezing—I could myself
(It feels that good!)

*

"Honey! (someone calls from the family room)
Your father's on the horn."

My name's not "Honey" and my father . . .
dead for twenty years.

Still, I walk to the downstairs phone
anxious, hoping to hear his voice.

Geraldine North

A SONG

"Lovey," he crooned. "Lovey, lovey," twisting the fragment of faded blanket around his fist, rubbing it down his cheek and under his chin, down and under: his waking time. His knees were soft against his chest and the crib was close about his body, so close, when he uncurled to turn his feet hit the end slats and his legs buckled. He rolled over onto his belly and pushed himself up by his wrists before sliding over the crib where the side-rail was lowered. He touched his toes to the cold linoleum. Every morning he tried to hit the square with the yellow flower, his lucky square, although he knew flowers were uncertain things.

He held the wall as he moved to the kitchen, his stomach uneasy, his mind absorbed in placing one foot in front of the other. He passed her bedroom door. The mound of bedclothes stirred; the long arm trailing the sheets to the floor moved back under the comforter. There was only one person in the bed, and that puzzled him. He heard them together last night, and past nights, his mother and this new man with the high voice and large hands who wore the T-shirt with an eagle on its back.

There was movement from the large cardboard box by the stove. He made for the bowl near the box, the plastic bowl filled with dog food and the small white dog slipped from the box so they reached the bowl together. The dog growled in its throat, but the child was larger, he pushed the animal away with a short jabbing movement and lowered himself carefully against the door of the stove, his eyes on the dog. His fat shiny legs lay straight out in front of his body, red weals on his thighs where the diaper chafed.

He scooped the lumps of chow into his mouth, moving his tongue in a slewing sideways motion, his eyes half closed with pleasure. The dog sat with its forepaws high-stepping on the linoleum waiting to retrieve the pieces of food that fell from the child's mouth, snuffling between his outstretched legs, gobbling the fragments and leaving small patches of saliva on the floor. Finally, the plate was empty. They sat a moment while the dog licked around and nudged the bowl for more.

He heard the bang of a closet door and his mother's footsteps coming along the hall. She stood in the hallway, tall above him, her hand brushing the hair off her face, the sleeping shirt creased to the folds of her body. Her face was creased, too, as she reached down and cuffed away the dog, then dragged the child by his arm to the table, hustling him toward the paper napkins, the utensils, and china plates. "Not again. How many times do I have to tell you?" She breathed heavily, her lower lip slack, as she pushed him onto the chair.

She swung the cupboard doors open and shut with a ferocity felt in the trembling of the table against his knees, banged down the blue speckled bowl and shook in flakes of cereal. She pressed a spoon into his limp fingers. "Hold it!" she commanded in a thin voice. A command like all the other commands that rushed past his ears: "Sit up. Close your mouth. Don't rub yourself there. Eat!"

Her voice was rising. "Look at you!" She leaned across the table, her face flushed near his. "You're nine and you can't do anything. Anything! You can't button yourself, wash yourself. I've nearly had it!" She stopped and sat down with a thump in the chair as though she'd fallen from a great height, as though the bones had collapsed in the skin of her body.

"What's the use?" Her fingers played in her cotton lap, pulling the material into little pleats, pressing them out with her thumbs, reassembling them. She glanced at his scattered toys under the window, his red tin ambulance beside the carefully balanced tower of blocks. "You're not stupid, God knows. You're not here, is all."

The child kept his eyes on the blue dish and watched the small shiny white flecks in the blueness dissolve. He sat very still, and when he lifted his eyes fleetingly to her face he saw she was staring at the wall across from his right shoulder. There was no window there, only the wall with its pinkish paint and the wooden slats cutting it into pieces from ceiling to floor. He wondered if she saw pictures in the tiny broken tracks, saw the spidery creatures that moved when he squinted his eyes, the watery stains that darkened each time it rained.

But he couldn't see through the pinky flatness like she could. One night they'd heard noises, bumps beyond the wall and the shrill of voices. She turned from the sink and said, "There you go, Frog, Harry's home again. There'll be some high-playing for Edie tonight."

She could even see through the white skin of his skull to the pieces of sounds in his head, saw the words they formed, their shapes. Like now, as he gazed at the grey softness of the smoke that rose from her cigarette. "You want me to catch it for you, Frog? Look!" And she stretched her fingers through the air, making the smoke wheel and eddy, breaking the plumes, brushing it up toward the ceiling. "You see, Frog, it's gone. Just like everything else. You think you've caught something, and presto! it's gone."

The dog had followed them to the table, lain down near her chair. She rubbed its ears with her shoe, making its tail slap the table leg. She leaned down and picked up the dog, sat it in her lap, stroking the short hairs on the back of its neck, scratching the fur underneath its jaw where the little depression lay between the sinews.

He watched the dog creddled on her breasts and wanted to be there, held and stroked. There had been a time when he climbed there; he remembered her smell and softness, before she pushed him away. "Everytime you climb on me, you want to suckle!" she'd said with a pull of her mouth, legs opening so he slipped to the floor. There was a time when she pushed him away, and

he'd learned.

She straightened in the chair and plopped the dog on the floor. She crushed the cigarette out in the saucer among the other butts, pulled herself up, and walked to the bedroom. "I'm going to Marge's for a while." It was no more than a whisper heard through the slam of a drawer. "He's got a room there, but Marge wants him to move out. If I don't bring him here, his belongings, he'll be gone." The words flowed out to him, under the bumps and rustles, a layer of sounds he knew well. He felt their meanings, allowed them to settle in his mind, rearranging themselves until he pulled the sense from them. "That's the way it is, Frog. Have to make things happen for yourself, sometimes."

The room was stuffy. The light dropped from the side window onto the kitchen table, the pile of food dishes, his glass of milk. He sat and watched the cereal sink in the blue bowl, the spoon slowly fill with liquid.

When she came and stood in the doorway the little dog strutted round her legs, its tongue fluttering for attention, but she pushed it aside absent-mindedly. He knew the dress she wore, covered in large blowy flowers, with buttons and a belt that swelled her hips. The flowers were yellow, like those that covered the floor of his room. She put it on each time she left him.

"I'll be back soon. Can't be with you all the time, Frog, you know that. I get to wanting company. Someone to talk to me, just someone, anyone." Her mouth stayed open after the words as though there was more explaining to do and her eyes flickered round the room, not looking, but seeing it all. "He's going to come back tonight." She paused. "And maybe he'll stay. Depends on you, Frog." She turned to the bedroom for a beat of time and came back with a suitcase in her hand. He had never seen her take a suitcase to Marge's before, all the times she had gone. She gestured at the case. "It's all right. It's for his clothes."

She touched his head as she walked behind him to the door, flicking the stiff brush of his hair. Again she paused, and putting down the case, called the dog. She opened the broom closet and took out a leash and the plaid doggy-coat she'd bought last winter. Catching the dog to her, she snapped on the coat, fastened the leash to its collar, while the dog whimpered in her arms. The child's eyes and her eyes met over the white fur. She opened the door and he saw the light was very clear beyond the porch frame, a strobe of brightness, before the door closed. He heard the soft click of the lock as the key turned in its place.

They were gone, she and the dog. He had things to do in the quiet of the rooms and he shovelled the cereal into his mouth quickly and carelessly. He knew he had until the sun came low though the further window, until then, the house was his.

He eased himself off the chair and padded down to the bathroom to clean himself. Then he stood in her bedroom and sniffed the sweet air. She'd forgotten to put away the bottles and jars with the purple flowers on them.

He lifted a squat jar and unscrewed the lid, prying with his fingers into the milky-white cream and rubbing it over his cheek until it disappeared. She'd warned him about touching anything on her dressing table. "You only waste it, Frog. And it's all I have for the world out there." Then she locked everything up in the side cupboard. Except today. Today, she was only thinking of the eagle-man.

He turned to the bed with a sigh. Her shirt, the one she slept in, lay there, and he cautiously pulled it over his head and down his hips, holding his breath as he felt its softness. He raised his arms and turned, gently, so he didn't step on the hem at his feet. He dragged the covers down and settled in the bed where the indentation of her body was set in the mattress. He stretched himself, long between the sheets, his toes feeling that delicious freedom of space.

He smoothed the sheet at his side. That's where the eagle-man slept now. Once there had been a man he called dada, a greyish man who laughed a lot until he hadn't laughed anymore. He remembered lying in dada's arms and the smell of his sweater, like the oil he slicked on his hair. Dada played the game on his toes about pigs and roast beef, and if he concentrated he felt the tweaking of his smallest toe as it cried all the way home. Dada had laughed as he chanted the words, caught him against his woolly chest, saying, piggy-wig, piggy-wig, my funny little piggy-wig.

But one day dada was gone. The house became silent and she didn't speak for the longest time, didn't do anything. She played with the dog in a preoccupied way, but stayed in the house. Once she said, "You've done it, Frog. You've scared him away, too." She watched him with a strangely tender look he'd never seen before, and she moved his crib from the corner of her bedroom into the storage closet. The song was coming in his head. It always came when he thought of dada. Slow and easy. He didn't need his blanket when he was in her bed; the song arrived in a curling wisp, like the blue smoke drifting upward from her cigarette. He ran the silky end of the comforter over his mouth, over and under, holding the song on the inside of his lips.

Lucien Stryk

STAR

Easing out of the garage
toward the emptied garbage
cans field-basing barbered
lawns, ceramic doodads, shrubs,
petunias and geranium beds

half circling downhill, I pull
up sharply as the red haired
girl across the street turns
up the volume of her boom box
to full blast, limps out into

my pathway, flexing the braces
on her gammy knees, spits
in her mitt, eager to be
first woman in the baseball
Hall of Fame. Touched by

her gesture, as if she's asking
why the world won't stop to
play, I pull up to the curb,
shut off the motor and, despite
the fussbudget behind the louvered

blinds next door, I nab a fast
one, watch the bittersweet
surprise turn to anticipation,
taking on her pop-idol's
applause as she dreams, base

to base her first homerun.

Michael Trombley

SENSIBLE SHOES

Would the world be different if my mother had worn them the afternoon she stepped from the snow bound taxi on her way to lunch to surprise my father who was selling them on the 12th floor of J.L. Hudson's in Detroit in 1950? She was radiant and tipping with the weight of the world that contained me, in high heels and a smart dress, perhaps foolish to brave a storm the afternoon it snowed and continued to snow.

She walked three blocks to reach the lobby where the contractions began. It was certainly a surprise then, hoping to catch him unawares at lunch hour, this balding man who at 25 held promise in shoes, that she caught one heel at the top of the wooden escalator and stepped away without it, into a career that signalled my arrival. It was a slight twist of the ankle, and she walked to a chair and took it. I would not wait for the weather to change, for a taxi or an ambulance and, attended by my nervous father, shoe horn in his back pocket, and the store nurse, I was born 30 minutes later on a couch in the storeroom. Blankets were unwrapped from the baby department and later, in the hospital, my parents would decide to name me Spike. I guess my father would say, a good fit, a name as good as any, slipping into the comfort of a walk that has taken me this far in shoes of my own, in shoes that are sensible. My mother never did wear them.

Michael Trombley

HOLDING ON TO DARKNESS

If I hollered because he squeezed too tight
my father would say, button your lip.
The time he let go from the embrace
I never grew too old for

was the beginning of a distance
I found growing in my bones.
My mother's embrace carried the weight
of cameo on blue jersey, the cheek

rounded in ivory and pressed cold
to the side of my face.
I was twelve when he died, his mouth cracked
and eyes open as if his last breath

had been a hammer in his lungs' frail wall
of blood, striking flat the shape of words
he'd never speak. I placed a hand on the eyes
gone milky, put a finger to his lip,

pressed my cheek to his forehead
and heard myself repeating the words, button
your lip, button your lip.

Maggie Valentine

SNOW

All the long autumn days have stood in rows
as round and gentle as haystacks,
until tonight, the winter's northeast gale.
You can see through the eye of the storm
that my house, veiled in smoke and snow,
is almost swallowed by the sea. I hear
the cold roof creak as if
someone were moving around upstairs
getting ready for bed and I wonder
how the nails a man drove in can hold
against this wind.

In the photo of my girl at nine
the city of New York blurs like a blizzard
behind her dark braids. When she married
she wore the pearls her father gave her
when he left us twenty years ago. It's been that long
since it snowed two feet in New York City and blew
the scarves of drift across the empty streets
until what we saw was new, freshly fallen,
so still that we could smell the bakery.

Maggie Valentine

IN THE WORMWOOD PLANT

Digging last night, the toad
buried himself in the pot of herbs,
burrowed under the Artemesia seedling,
planted himself, and squats now
among the threads of root, young
leaves green over his head.

Masked in fragrant earth, he blinks
when I disturb the soil. It isn't food
he wants. He's snapped that up at night:
wings, thorax, the spikey feet, juice
of abdomen. He swallows.

He might, having escaped some danger,
have come to the wormwood to rest
in this plant called the flower of absence,
fill his warty skin with loam and dankness
and be invisible for a while.

I touch him and his cold heartbeat
quickens into connection
with some like thing in me that,
spotted and scared,
caught by calamity, once
dug in and hid and wondered
at the risky size
of ordinary life.

Joanna Warwick

STAR MAPS

for Richard and Carol

1.

Years ago I took a star map
and went outside
to connect dot by dot,
light by shimmering light,
all those animals
penned in the bright dark.
I wanted to hang my desires
up there with celestial pelts.
But I gave up.
It was like being a child,
with an upheld finger
trying to count the stars—
always losing one's place,
that first star.

Now I only walk
my cat at night.
She runs up into the crown
of a crooked pepper tree,
between the street lamp and the gray
continents of the moon
broken in the branches.
The earth revolves under the soft
white cloud of her belly.
The tail and the shadow of the tail
lash back and forth.

2.

Nikola Tesla, inventor, wizard,
creator of spasms of light
in his sinister lab,

Joanna Warwick

loved nothing so much
as a thunderstorm.
He'd pull the couch to the window
and sit as if in the front row,
bursting into applause—
genius applauding genius,
a minor homage.

3.
The most startling thing
I ever heard in church:
a young priest saying,
"We don't know
what God is.
Perhaps God is nuclear energy."
I was getting sadder and older,
almost twelve.
It was the only God I could accept.

4.
One time a six-year-old boy,
pale and frightened,
pulled me to the side and asked,
"Where do we go after we die?"
It was a leading question.
Not, "Do we go anywhere?"
but, "*Where* do we go?"

5.
The night ocean
shatters its black mirrors.
Waves like an endless snake,
hissing yess, yess.
What do astronomers know?
A handful of moons,
a dusty Milky Way of facts.
The star maps are within us,

Joanna Warwick

an eccentric personal arrangement,
constellations of *House, Tree, Cat*

an advanced alphabet
made of points of light,
saying *This is your face*
beyond your face
the roads that lead
through the lines of your palm

CONTRIBUTORS

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POETRY AND FICTION BY

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