

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME
31



#1

Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 31, #1

And I stare back,
one eye straight into clarity,
one transfixed on chaos.

Ida Fasel

COVERING THE DISTANCES

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WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 31

Number 1*

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Tree Down
photo
by
Barbara
Fisher

Archaeology of Vanity – William Corner-Clarke

This room
In the stillness of morning
Is like a museum
Of your vanity
The dressing table mirror
Still tilts to the level
Of your face
The cut glass casket
Has not been touched
No jewelry
Has been removed
A hairbrush poised

Like a dragonfly
On a pond of glass
Is gathering
A summer's dust
Another mirror
Lies without an image
Its reflection dull
As an empty spotlight
In the shadows
Of the ceiling
And the whole is silent
Embedded in a lava
Of hardening time

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Georgia O'Keeffe's "Lawrence Tree" – Alan Catlin

*D. H. Lawrence's
sulphurous glow on the horizon
approaches. Stan Rice*

Black shadow branches
are varicose veins on
Vincent's Starry Night,
are broken blood blisters,
supernova suns disappearing
as puffs of rheumy smoke
turning dark as exhumations
from miner's black lungs
on a blue canvas sky.

Now I Lay Me – Rex Sexton

Dreams float without soul, each night a new death.

Each day a postmortem on dreams abandoned.

“Do you think we’re going to make it through this?”

My wife asks.

“Sure, we can raise some cash.”

If we can sell all our trash – furniture, bungalow, used car, nick knacks, clothes. Factor in my unemployment checks for as long as they last. Add whatever handyman gigs I can put into that. Government food stamps?

“I’m afraid.”

“No need to be. We’ll be OK. Take care of our needs – housing, heat, food for the kids.:

I stare at the darkened ceiling of our bedroom.

*Fire sale! Fire sale! Flames leap. The night stands ignite.
The bed burns, dressers, tables, chairs, drapes, the whole
bungalow swirling in flames, boy scout, girl scout, little
League pictures erased as plumes sweep each the room.
“Try to get some sleep.”*

Rosy Cheeked Children – Donald Lev

Hundreds of rosy cheeked children
crowded in with their resumes.

Old Frank Morgan, with his sad, humorous
gaze, came himself from behind the screen
to collect them. He had just had to
let go his girl Friday. The world wide recession
had even reached Oz.

He knew he had only three openings
for the roulette tables he had installed
before the bad news hit—
and he didn't know how he would handle this.
Like all the rest of the wizards of finance,
he wished he could find a place to hide.

chaos takes your pockets – Jennifer Jayne Scobie

beneath the mountains, creeping slowly out
is anarchy that lives in depths unknown
its chaos wreaks such havoc through the night
in more ways than we see; some are surreal

the fire built by clarity burns strong
perhaps the two shall never cross their paths
stand high enough and you can see them both
the nameless ruined vistas to behold

be careful where you take your sleep tonight
and do not venture too far from the fire
or chaos takes your pockets for a ride
and you will lose your vision and your peace

melting and melding – Jennifer Jayne Scobie

one eye captures just the light

the sun rays peeking through the trees

the other, only darkness

shadows that creep through the unseen

one ear hears the birds

happily chirping in the trees

the other hears the thunder

the whirling of tornadoes

one nostril smells the freshly cut lawn

the blossoms on the lilac tree

the other smells the garbage

the sewers beneath the streets

on my tongue, all is joined together
the juicy and dry
the zesty and bland
the sweet and sour
the delicious and foul
melting and melding into just one form
and I call this form
“alive”

The Other Side – Bill Freedman

I just received
a packet of old photographs I'd never seen.
My brother and myself as children
more than sixty years ago.
Our father, mother, theirs.
long wool overcoats, print dresses
and silver pins that held the heart in, there.

Grandma, whom I remember
as a vivacious, jovial woman,
despite her always menaced heart,
in image after image does not smile.
Dour and leather-creased as old Cochise,
she stares expressionless,
as though across another ghost-pocked plain.
The look of nothing she has seen.
It's 1944, but the look is time's, lent freely.
I wear it now, hooked and reeled behind it,
dragged away.

I wished to say, my father,
who in memory almost never smiled,
can't stop.

Whoever he stands or sits beside,
in yards or alleyways, on porches,
sofas, or in parks I can't identify,
he touches, rests an easy arm upon
or pulls a little closer at the waist.

I feel that arm, that weight, for the first time now. Heavier,
as every distance runner knows,
than it appears.

Cook Until Done – Katie Vagnino

For my parents, who met in an adult class called “Cooking for Singles.”

On the first day, they made consommé.
The way his hands cracked the eggs,
Whipped their whites into a frenzy
Stirred something forgotten inside her.

The way his hands cracked the eggs
Made her wonder how he'd handle her—
Something forgotten stirred inside
When he finally asked her out on a date.

He wondered how she'd handle herself
When he ordered Chianti at dinner.
On the date, he asked all the usual things,
Noticed her eyes were hazel like his.

He ordered more Chianti at dinner when
She said their matching initials were a sign.
She noticed his eyes were hazel like hers;
He stroked her hand, offered to drive her home.

Matching initials must be a sign, she said,
Picturing pairs of monogrammed towels.
He stroked her hand, invited her to his home.
Eight months later she was still there,

Picturing pairs of monogrammed towels.
Watching him was like waiting for water to boil.
Eight months later she was still there
Without a ring, not getting any younger:

Was she waiting for water that never would boil?
At last she delivered an ultimatum:
“I need a ring. I’m not getting any younger.”
The following September, he caved in,

Delivered a proposal to her ultimatum
To legally consummate their love. One day
Eighteen Septembers later, it all caved in;
Both were whipped, but the frenzy was gone.

Preferred Rental – Joanne Seltzer

Not in the lease, a bat hides in the rafters
of this vacation home. It's terrified
of us. And we of any winged creature
who tolerates our pesticide-rich blood.
How can the bat see without being seen?
By interpreting invisible waves
on an archetypal radar screen
it carried from the closet to the eaves.
From where the bat sits we are Visigoths
transplanted from another continent—
and we at first thought it a giant moth.

Rabid perhaps, darkly uninnocent,
the bat pays homage to the vampire myth,
is an invasive guest we put up with.

Bay Ridge – Russell Jaffe

When we first came here, everything was many years behind, and we liked being thrown off. We left Chicago in my car right after breakfast. After dinner, we wandered around as we got fuller, our eyes gleaned garbage bag street corners and our stomachs ached. I will say the drive back through New Jersey was like the glass of water before bedtime, which was dry and then ineffable, spiraling from the sink to my gullet and back to the toilet, and the process was like the way the city itself came pouring out like a multi-course meal and slammed to the table, only to be drawn back again. We were going to move to Bay Ridge. When I first saw it, I knew, my mouth and teeth hurt. I used every limbic portion of sense memory to lick what remained of the bowl;

you only remember the good, which is why the dessert portion comes at the end. I would have pulled off the highway if it hadn't been for the expansive density of the city, like a carrot cake behind a shop window. The moist air blew in sweet notes from the sea, Staten Island's best gathered around the docks near an ice cream truck to watch the barges pass the Statue of Liberty. Old Russians with their fishing poles in the water slept next to buckets of dead worms, their fingers beery and oily, their hats dangled off their heads as the surf dusted the planks beneath their thousand year old shoes. The guide book said the culture here is rich, little notes of languages quicker and jauntier, thicker and more mixed in. Little men with poppy seed mustaches, women with crinkled wrapper headscarves.

These are berries in the center, mixed, a fruit salad which adorns the table as much as it adds a validation to something that isn't good for you, but something — love, a dream of a career, being young, or bored, or just not thinking, or thinking way too much — tells you to keep eating and keep ingesting, and if you do, you will get a stomach ache before bedtime quiet time and you'll need a glass of water, the regulation of your own patterns, and out my kitchen window you can see the Statue of Liberty.

Beyond that, on a clearer day, the walls of Manhattan's exterior are syrupy on their reflective glass faces, and crunchy on the inside. Their tied and shirted workers are building their own miniature identities in frosted comb. On most other days, smog's like window panes.

A Sestina Dedicated to that Marvel, Ida Fasel – Patricia Brooks

And I stare
back
one eye straight
into clarity
one transfixed
on chaos.

Chaos
is perhaps only that which we don't know. We stare
at it, analyze it, transfixed
by oversimplifications, born back
when we confused clarity
with straight

laced religious truths, sure that straight
paths would never lead us back to chaos.
Or is it that clarity
is only simplicity carried by the stare
of one fool at another, back
when certainty was something that transfixed

us all — sages, fools — transfixed
us right down the line, straight
to the most evolved of us, and way back
to that Adam and Eve duo, chaos
just a snake away from the back
door to Eden, clarity

embodied in a simple apple. But clarity,
we now say, can be achieved if one is not transfixed
by other, lesser minds. Simply stare
straight
ahead, imagining chaos
as an equation learned back

when we were simple folk, back
when we were certain of that clarity
preached from every pulpit: eschew chaos
born of disbelief and we will be transfixed
by miracles of straight
perception. Do not stare

back again to that deity of our childhoods, only straight ahead, transfixed with the certainty that clarity topples chaos with a single stare.

Say, Uncle! – Mary Belardi Erickson

So Brother,
across our fields, his gall
grew into a crooked shadow
as from a malformed branch.
Today, if at the wood bridge
we threw a low-down twig
into the stream, we would
view it superficial like a hat's frill
or call it only a bit of bamboo.

We should cast off his silhouette
of rancorous lines, let it flow

away, a stick shadow
under the barb wires
at the neighbor's property line —
their vacant barn and house,
dusty windows,
closed eyes all these years.

Along our own banks,
we inhaled mint-leaf breeze
and sought waxy buttercups.
Count how many leaves and petals
still murmur when in spades,
we've had enough of bent reason
and feel certain of ourselves.

Anger Management – John Grey

You're angry, angry to the point of throwing things,
so pity whatever is in your hand, like glasses, once a wedding present,
or dishes, heirlooms every one.

And for every sorry missile, there's a target,
a favorite mirror, a photograph of lovers at a beach,
or even a wall, a wall whose unmarked surface must mean something
but not as much as the hole a hurled steam iron, of all things,
could smash into it.

You're so angry it's as if all the angers you've felt up to this moment
are piling on top of each other to be the anger that bursts out of you first.
There's anger at teething, anger at brothers, sisters, parents,
anger at school and teachers and the kids that called you names.

And what about the anger at the expectations you never met,
at college, on the job, in that rough and raw dating gauntlet
that those women made you run.

And now there's that ultimate anger, anger at the course
in life that brooks no other, no exit, no turning back.

Anger at the house, anger at the car, the street where
you live, the neighbors, what's on television, what's playing on the radio.
And your wife, the one who didn't so much tip your balance
as turn it upside down.

You're angry at the woman you love.

So once again, the glasses, dishes, mirror, photograph,
even the wall, are saved.

You throw yourself on the couch.
angry that you love her.

Happy Endings – David Gershator

Happy Endings
knocked on my door
and left a message
while I was out of town
sorry I missed Happy Endings
everything could have turned out
differently
I could have met the girl
hit the jackpot
made the cover of Time
now it's back to normal
it's the same old story

I'm back to not knowing
how anything ends
maybe it's better this way

At night the moon's
a shining witness
to the fact
that there might be
an advantage
to being kept in the dark

Let Me Know If You're Dead – Bill Roberts

The last of five messages on the phone
is a real beaut, a classic.
I play it a second, then a third time.

“Roberts, I heard you died.
I hope not but you never know at our age.
Call me if you're really dead, okay?”

I play it a fourth time,
Then decide to call my old friend
Who I haven't spoken to for months.

No answer, then his message
thingamajig kicks in:
“Make it brief – I’m getting too impatient.”

“Norris, hi,” I say. “You heard right
I died when I heard your voice.
Please send flowers but don’t call back.”

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