

Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream



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Volume 44

Number 4

With you I can speak
of purple Moroccan Hills

from "To an Old Salt" by Magdalena Gomez

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contents

Sylvia Manning	4
Pat Anthony	6
Jane Stuart	7
Gilbert Honigfeld	9
Charles Rammelkamp	11
John Grey	13
Robert Cooperman	15
William Corner Clarke	16
James Penha	17
B.R. Strahan	18
Deborah H. Doolittle	19

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Barbara Fisher

Sylvia Manning

**The House That Jack Built
for the Little People**

*But through all Faery lond his famous worth was blown
(The Faerie Queene, Canto VI)*

When noble Jack of Glover
heard the fair librarian's request
for the little ones (who love her)
to have a fairy house, made best
of smallish twigs and limbs,
he set his mind to her behest
as if a village Queen had asked him.
Soon it stood at edge of river
flowing swift but sweetly past the library lawn.

Village children gave it their art
they'd make on a nearby table,
sang it their songs learned by heart,
told it their fairy tales and fables.
Some few may have seen the fairies
just as they'd flutter to depart
(like their own grown-ups, in a hurry).
Years passed quickly beside the river
past the little people on the lawn.

Then one summer the river got high
with rain that fell too hard for too long.
It roared with sending it all by,
losing in this thunderous noise its old
soft song.

Whole trees and huge rocks were torn away
from where they had always belonged,
leaving the village in dreadful disarray ...
except for the fairy house beside the river
that Jack had built for the library lawn.

No one quite understands how this can be
that something of only branches and twigs,
a miniature folly (that Jack built for free)
could still be in place when other things -- big
stones, whole trees, footbridges and such
were swept along to end in mud we'd dig
away but only with machines, so much
silt and debris was left by the raging river...
that left Jack's fairy house in place
on the library lawn.

for Jack Sumberg
Glover, Vermont (summer, 2025)

Limón

in the purple dusk
cloaking the mountains
mist and music guitar and guitarrón
lifted voices anguished notes
wavering flames in the makeshift oven
roadside where a Mayan abuela
sells blue corn tortillas
redolent of cilantro, puerco, limón

and I can tell you only now
how in your eyes I could see
our wanting both of us
to call the throbbing love
yet it was only music and the night.

Game Deluxe

With you I can speak
of purple Moroccan hills,
the moon at midnight, fresh dew on the peak
of Lonely Crest and down the road
a house that holds
illuminations, parchment dreams
and scriptures edged in black —
What the world calls "priceless" —
a sultan's corner of the world,
a folded tent, three black horses
and summer bells that ring themselves.
This is lavender earth
in the light of silver stars
but it could be a painting, even song —
the hills and mountains, shadows, sand,
a long walk into the past
—there is no future—
and most of all the "there" that is
a desert dream and girl who sings of wine —
apocalypse, apology, an answer to the wind
and distant rain
 a turquoise ring,
 silver bracelet, coffee strong and sweet
 and feet that slowly turn
 beside the fire.
The purple hills
repeat your snapping fingers
and I remember our forgotten love songs.

Truth in Labeling

Months before he threw away
the key to his ranch house
with its two-car garage and
automatic irrigation system

the new woman warned him
what he'd be getting into,
how Destiny would author
this chapter in his life
in disappearing purple ink

but in return she'd offer
a kind of passion he'd
never ever known, the fire
of a fading woman with
a failing heart who'd one
day soon die in his arms.

Gilbert Honigfeld

November 12, 1927

Desperate to make it work again,
he orchestrated a fantasy feast
hoping she'd accept an invitation,
decorating his two-person table with
purple asters bought with a handful
of change from a pushcart peddler,
picturing her face among them while
he tempts her with favorite
delicacies, watercress and fat black
olives, French cheese and a long-
neck bottle of red, a final trans-
action after he'd pawned the Bulova
his mother'd gifted him on his
last day in high school, the perfect
flourish for his dream reunion.

But, Lilly never showed up, no
knock on the door, no ringing phone,
just her wineglass still full on
the table, the bottle emptied
while he waited until he could
wait no longer, stepping out into
the rubble pile of Manhattan,
a hint of winter in the air.

Red Is Never Boring

Professor Rose began
his Medieval Lit. lecture
the way he always did, a statement
he'd spend the rest of the class proving.

"It's such a dramatic color.
It's all about strength and desire,
physical needs.
In the Bible, it represents life, blood, sin, flesh.

"In China, red stands for luck, prosperity.
In Japan, happiness; hence, the red kimono
brides traditionally wear on their wedding day.

"Red is either Cupid or the Devil.
Which brings us to our topic of the day,
its uses in Medieval literature.

"In Greek mythology, the red rose
was said to have sprung up from
Adonis' blood,
as he died in Aphrodite's arms
after being gored by a bull.

"This obviously became associated
with Christ's blood at the Crucifixion.
Dante uses the red rose as a symbol for Mary.

“In *The Roman de la Rose*,
the famous French allegory,
red becomes a symbol of female sexuality.
Red, my friends, is never boring.”

Professor Rose paused then,
sipped like a hummingbird
from his bottle of water.

We all turned at the sudden snoring
in the back of the room,
watched the drool slide
down Jackie Boyd's chin.

Man and Dog

On a warm July afternoon,
you toss the ball toward your dog,
and he leaps up like a basketball player
guarding the net,
grasps it in his teeth.

And then, when you cook hotdogs
and burgers for assorted guests,
he does his best begging routine,
mouth open wide
and eyes as sorrowful as a basset hound's.

Is it any wonder you slip him treats
like some schoolboy surreptitiously
passing notes in class.

And when everyone's gone home,
you collapse on the couch,
and he sidles up beside you,
as you fondle his soft fur
and he licks your hand.

It gets you wondering
if a dog is better
than having a wife and family
like so many of your friends do.

And it gets the dog wondering
if this cushy suburban life
is as good as it gets for a canine
or would he rather be part
of some wild wolf pack.

But just look at the two of you.
curled up together,
so comfortable, so peaceful.
It doesn't look like
anybody's wondering.

Robert Cooperman

Busking by the Subway Entrance

During an NPR interview,
the great violinist, Joshua Bell,
told of playing his Strad
by a New York subway entrance.

No one, he chuckled, listened
or tossed a coin. Maybe, they knew
who he was — though not as recognizable
as Lennon or Hendrix — and figured
he didn't need a busker's handout;

or maybe they were hurrying to a bar,
a ballgame, a lover they'd dreamed
about, all that sweaty afternoon.

Or maybe they shouted,
as New Yorkers often will,
“You stink! Get a real job!”

In retrospect, maybe he thought
he'd been lucky no one mugged him,
or smashed his violin against a wall.

Lucky too, he wasn't challenged
for that prized spot by a madman
trying to snatch that sacred instrument,
to show the pathetic diletante
what a real musician could do.

Library

5 years old
And the first walk
With my big brother
To the local library
In the purple light
Of a late November
Afternoon

Approaching
The massive brass
And frosted glass lanterns
Flanking the doorway steps
A ground mist gathering
On the frozen lawn

Inside
A silence
Warm and yellow
Welcomed me
And drew me to
The Reading Room
Where rows of books
Looked down
On heads engaged
In some great mystery
Unknown to me

And then I knew
Right then and there
That this was where
I had to be

James Penha

Haiku
Bedugul, Bali

hills mantled in fog
lakes and roads beclouded—
monsoon calling

Blame

It always had to be
Someone's fault:
The missing dish,
A bone left in the fish.

If you were sick
It was not just the weather,
The real reason was
You didn't wear that sweater.

So now you always look
For lines of fault:
The lost dog you didn't watch
The falling glass you didn't catch.

Like misplaced words
In a failed poem's lines,
No matter what you do
That whiplash voice defines;

Your fault, your fault,
And never ever mine

The Bees of Baghdad

do not stay.

Each year, they retrace
the places they have been.

Go full circle —
clover, lily, poppy, jasmine —
tread the parts of flowers

revealed only to them.

No need for ammo.

They are taking in

provisions for their rainy
day. Meanwhile the dust will
settle. Concrete will crumble.

They do not lie down
and weep
for the lost ziggurats of Babylon.

In the lull of the day
their own buzz stumbles
past sentinels and barricades,
over the patched and broken-
down walls,
into the green light of gardens.

Bees know this:
to climb one trellis
is to climb them all.

Deborah H. Doolittle

Warnings from a Rattlesnake

So, I have sauntered onto your path.
Deal with it.

The sand is warm and I like to bask
in its heat.

This task will not last for long; back
off now, Jack.

Perhaps, you have heard of my venom
and then some-

thing about original evil
in Eden,

something about my reptilean
next of kin.

It's not like I have sought you out.
You, no doubt,

think only of your inconvenience,
your own sense

of what is good or bad, right or wrong
about this

entire situation. News flash!
It is not

all about you. But I prattle on.
Now be gone!

Our Geography of Poets

Bali

James Penha

Colorado

Robert Cooperman

Kansas

Pat Anthony

Kentucky

Jane Stuart

Maryland

Charles Rammelkamp

New Jersey

Gilbert Honigfeld

North Carolina

Deborah H. Doolittle

B. R. Strahan

Rhode Island

John Grey

Vermont

Sylvia Manning

Virginia

William Corner Clarke

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