

The Heart's Season

I can't deliver myself into your song,
she said, her words a willow
in a high wind. He reminds her:
I have whistled accompaniment
low, have harmonized when you
had the melody, my bass keeping
the beat even for your long duets
when autumn darkened into dirge.
Look, she said, how summer
thickens now to green
so dense I cannot see through
the trees. Where is the light?
You say you're dancing in it,
but I can't hear
your voice rising and falling,
breath keeping time,
the grass crumpling damp
beneath your feet.

Susan Ludvigson

Magic

I have stood with friends at the woods' edge
hunting the wrinkled mushrooms
called morels, that appear, one book says, when
the oak leaves are the size of mouse-ears;
they hide from anyone carrying a bag. Around here
some years, three can be a week's worth of doubt.
For thirty you invite the neighbors to dinner.

Hours you look down, chanting,
moving slowly across the woods,
across the shape of each dead leaf, each stem,
and never know if you are seeing right.
This is where doubt takes shape. Each time
I've found one, I say Good Eyes, out loud
though as if not quite certain.
My mother claims I get my vision from her.

The magician must trust in the spell
like a doctor breathing life into one dying.
You must wonder if you are worthy of this,
and also, each time, accept the doubts
that will never be lost or won over.
You must consider only the words, the chant.
The old spells, too, call for a certain
character: loathing, to the point of despair.

Wild asparagus is easier, if you know
where to find it from the road, looking
through tall grasses for the right green stalks.
This was Augustus Caesar's favorite food,
sprouting from the seeds birds have scattered.
In late fall the dry shoots stand out
like thin Christmas trees. Come spring, they're gone,
leaving only anticipation and doubt.

Today, after an argument and its harsh words,
after the attempt to breathe joy into my wife
and raise her has failed one more time,
I think perhaps I am not meant
to be a magician. If it were only
as simple as finding dinner. I have good eyes.
I have looked in all the old sources.

David Keller

Pleasant Hill School

Out the ridge where the small
school used to stand, ruts of
water harbor tadpoles,
prosper beneath the trees.

From the soft breeze playing
in the branches, I try
to hear young voices loud
at tag or soft in watching,

or authoritative words
from the mistress, extolling
Roland's brave commitment
or merits of good spelling.

But I can only try,
for I have seen the ones
who moved to town, city
rounded or sick or dead

from cancer, and the ones
who stayed, gray upon their
heads, their eyes glassy with
age and remembrance.

And if there is singing
in these trees, it is for
the standing ruts filled with
water and bright nights when

the breeze rearranges
shadows, when young emerge
from frozen sleep and fill
the clearing with hoarse song.

Trent Busch

First Freeze

I.

Any cold rain
and you lie beside me mumbling.

Once, you sang out--
Martha Allengood, sweet sister,
Martha, Martha Allengood.

Or the wind shrieked in the pines.
"Hear that?" you whispered,
pulling the quilts loose.

And a freezing rain nails
everything shut, house and heart.

Nights, your rough cold feet
restless against my legs
long into the drizzling nights

until at last your rigid body
drifted into darkness like snow.

II.

"Of what?" father demanded of me.
"What are you afraid of?"

He rummaged through dark closets,
threw back heavy drapes, swiped
under the bed with a broom. "Nothing."

And he held his hands up empty, tired
of proving the same thing over and again.

III.

I could not ever keep you warm enough,
grandfather, could not sleep until you slept.

How stark that morning, the year's first freeze,
hoarfrost on the grass,
your face as lightly stubbled.

How pitiless whatever you could no longer
look away from.

How you had sat by the woodstove
each day of those winters
patting your foot,
Martha, Martha Allengood,
patting your right foot all day long.

James M. Smith, Jr.

Memorial Candle

A cage of branches
overhead, tattooed for death
in bronze and red.
A wreath of smoke.
A blackbird's
call. You die again
for me each fall.

Linda Pastan

Triangle

She knew love
as soup in the belly, a cuff
instead of a smack,
and Bogart's cigarette smile,
the snap of his syntax,
at those edgy forties movies
where she hid out
from her life.

He knew love
as a provocation
in the groin
that could explode
into shrapnel
any which way,
or as an animal
he kept
at heel, most
of the time.

The knife knew only
its own volition,
like a diver completing
a perfect arc,
then drowning
in flesh.

Linda Pastan

Domestic Violence

It flares from a rasp
of irritation as small
as a wooden match struck
on the bottom of a shoe,
igniting a purple
and orange bruise
beneath the woman's eye—
that place where the flesh
tells anyway of all
the usual devastations.
The children cluster
at the bathroom window
where just above the roof
the moon hangs somehow awry,
and even the several stars,
like the battered
bathroom door, seem
to have broken
from their hinges.

Linda Pastan

Back Walkover

The summer my mother died,
a neighbor drove me to gymnastics.
Round-off, and I sailed skyward, backwards,
fetal position, spinning. The coach's hand
did not rest on my back. I still
feel his absent touch,
the shock of my feet hitting the mat
as he yelled Chin up. Suck it in.
That a girl. My legs crumbled.

Today my students meet for tumbling club,
thrust airy bodies upward,
knowing they will be carried.
The smallest girl with the fearless eyes
works on her back walkover. She curls,
and I kneel, place my hand under her arch.
When she whirls her leg to the sky, I give
her calf a gentle push. Again and
again she makes it. Her leg. My hand.

I want to say the light comes in,
slants its golden arm
as an offering to this child and her teacher
in the center of the gym. But the room grows
dark, bitter. A heaviness is there.
I hold her with the tired arms
of a young girl who lifted herself
out of bed to the school bus
and back to that motherless home.

I want to drop the small gymnast,
pray for forgiveness as I let her slip
between the open spaces.

Tara Bray

Suddenly

sleep strips you down
and all the little deaths
flow between us. I
lift your sleeping hand,
feel its weight rise
up into my arm and run
my fingers down your palm
tracing myself back into your future.

Long strands of hours
lie stitched in silence.
I'm awake with the dead
moon for company, night
clean as driftwood,
cold as stone. I fall
to the furthest tip of sleep

and wake to a morning
bright with bird feathers,
sun slanting over houses
where small lights take hold.

In wide and quiet emptiness,
horizon's so far, it disappears,
air ripe with small winds,
star jasmine gone wild
and the marvelous machinery of dawn.

Ruth Daigon

Gravity

Maybe the lost are living now
in the world inside the world.
Their shadows smear the rooftops gray,
kiss whispers in the broken eyes of windows,
lean wildly across the sift of stars.
They do no speak in languages of words.
Sometimes their fingers dandle
in the warmth of moonlit snow.

Inside its little cage of bones
the heart believes in everything it can,
the sycamore branches carved from sky,
the blue tongue of the wind, the crust of pavement
cupping what would love to tug us deep inside
to rooms where those we've lost may well be laughing.

Tom Chandler

January, Storms

How to stay on the bare branches wind
carriages mow down? A dozen ranks
of crows want to sit statuesque
not flimsy as the green, months gone
from oaks. Like the repetitiously wed,
some flee branch on branch to find the sure
place, alight in their shaky neighborhood.
Now the sudden signal-break camp—
and all lift, robbing the tree vaults
of eyes and possibility. What
can they do but mutter into their wise beards,
these empty stations trains of wind pass through.

Carole Simmons Oles

Epithalamion

In Normal, Illinois, a flat place with few handholds
I am singing for you both in Helsinki, all you had to
scale just to reach yesterday. How many guards
how many borders visas bargains and bribes, how
many possible terrorists or random statistics
for one of you to step off the train from Leningrad
into the other's arms.

While nations fire missiles and bombs,
you declare peace. While the poisoned oceans
kill innocence, you are the elixir
schools of fish trail waving silver scarves.

While the mathematicians perform
their subtractions, you are doing additions,
multiplications, you are substituting for x.

While the leaders turn language
inside-out like empty gloves,

you speak with the acts of your hands:
fingers lacing two alphabets and tongues.

While republics defy their annexers, you
form a commonwealth, no one will go hungry.

While the market predicts
snow and wind chill, you speculate
peering deep through green waters.

While the trees here scratch wires
against a chalk sky,
in your orchard every pink promise bursts
into *Brian, Alisa*.

Carole Simmons Oles

The Tutor

Janet Kieffer

The math tutor had a wife, but he didn't know how to love her.

This is how I learn about math.

He is waiting for me in his little room. It must be eighty-five degrees in there and still he wears a blanket over his lap. The Catskills are covered with a light snow and the wind is blowing fiercely. The weather makes the whole experience all the more eerie. I am being dropped off by my mother—abandoned in the snow—at the rickety white farmhouse with the stinking old guy and his blanket. He is supposed to teach me algebra. There are a couple of pigs outside.

I was never good at math and Mother blames society since I am a girl. It is an old argument and I am tired of it; math of any kind has never interested me, with the possible exception of making change. My fifth grade math teacher was a little wrinkled woman with bleached blonde hair that was teased on the top of her head, who looked and walked like an emperor penguin. She wore black and was very compact, except for her upper arms, and beyond a doubt the most interesting aspect of class was when she passed out assignments or tests, toddling around the classroom in her little low-heeled black shoes. It must have been around this time that my math grades began to drop. The penguin/teacher combination intrigued me; I was not at all interested in New Math.

"Now," he says. He points to a simple algebraic equation in the book. "Now." He clears his throat, not very well. "Let's see what you know." His finger is yellowed, with a long nail. It looks like a piece of petrified wood. He runs his finger back and forth under the equation and I stare at it and he stares at it too.

"If A is less than B, and B is less than C, then A is less than C," I reply. "I think that's the property of transitivity." I squint at it because I'm really not sure, but it sounds logical.

There is a bottle of blackberry brandy and a glass half-full next to the book, and the tutor exhales the nauseous, sweet smell of disease, that sweet taste of flu congestion or the predecessor of puke, mixed with medicine and decay. "Right," he says.

Margaret Zinzelmeyer tiptoes into the room with a tray. She smiles radiantly with round sapphire eyes; her wrinkled face is still round and she has dimples. She is an old woman with dimples.

"I brought you your brandy, Malcolm," she says. She brings in smells of baking spices and moth balls when she comes, and wears stockings with seams on her plump and squeazy calves. She carefully places another half-filled crystal glass to one side of him on the card table.

He waves her away. "Bring another bottle," he says in distaste.

She smiles hopefully. "And would the little pupil like some apple bread?" she asks.

"Get out of here!" the tutor says.

She pats his bald head very softly, twice, and vanishes.

He frowns at the table and opens my algebra book, and then he looks at me directly. His milky eyes are magnified to golf ball circumference behind his glasses. "Life is a shit sandwich, and every day I take another bite!" he whispers. He blinks. "Now. Let's move on to positive and negative numbers."

* * *

The math tutor and I play Yahtzee and dominoes far more than we study algebra. Most of the time we play Yahtzee. The tutor likes to roll the dice. I love the sound they make in the little brown, felt-lined cups, which still smell new. The tutor throws them overhand and they fall off the table a lot, and he makes me crawl around on the oak floor to read them and tell him what he rolled. There is a rug on the floor; one of those that looks like a rope in an oval spiral and often smells like a dog. This one smells like a dog, too, but there is no dog anywhere around.

Before making any game decisions, the tutor takes his time, all the more interminable because of the emphasis added by the tic-tic-tic of the clock in his room. He takes a couple of belts of sherry and says "ahhh," after each, and says "now let me see." Then he breathes heavily through his hairy nose, which may have a whistle in it, and finally makes his move. After that he nods off like a bird, his head bob, bob,

bobbing before hitting his chest. After he passes out I practice my rolls or line up the dominoes on the card table around his bony hands and knock them down.

I hear the grinding of our station wagon tires on the snow and gravel outside and the tutor's wife comes in to tell me that it's time to leave. She pats her husband on the head before she follows me out of the room.

* * *

Once, when the tutor is asleep, and his wife has left the house I think to feed the pigs, I creep up the wood stairs, all the way up to the attic. From the attic window I see her flowered farm-wife dress blowing up against her legs and somehow this looks indecent; she is at other times so gracious and composed. She throws garbage in the pig trough and they come trotting up on stiff pig-legs.

There are framed photos in the attic, thrown in a corner. It smells like a barn attic even though it is a house attic, of timothy and rope. For a moment I am transfixed by a photo of the math tutor and his wife as I breathe the dusty farmhouse attic smell.

They are standing in front of this farmhouse, all dressed up, and I wouldn't have recognized the tutor, but he was bald even then and in the photo he has the same eyes, except in the photo they are smiling. His wife is easily recognizable. Her dimples are genuine and deep as she gazes up at him in adoration and with a bit of humor, as if she has just whispered something sexual or secret to him. He faces the camera with obvious pride and with a bit of a reaction to whatever it was she just said, a look of disbelief and appreciation at the same time. This is what I imagine, anyway. She has the classic shapely figure of a female of her time. The photo is black and white, of course, but her hair looks as if it might have been strawberry blonde. It is white now.

I look out the window again to see her heading back to the house, squinting against the blowing snow and barnyard dust. For a moment she gazes up at the house as if she knows I am watching, and the blue eyes twinkle all the way up to the attic. I descend the stairs then to wake the tutor and resume my algebra lesson.

* * *

"If A equals B, then B equals A. Reflexive property," I say.

"Good," breathes the tutor.

He pays no attention to his wife. She appears with a hopeful expression each day I am there, and since I have seen the photo I assume it is because she wants to recapture the past. She wants to whisper something humorously obscene in his ear and elicit at least a smile, if not more. She comes, she goes. She does whatever it is he wants her to do.

The repetition: the clock, the stink, the tutor, his wife, the numbers and small letters that are algebra and that make little sense to me. His finger moving back and forth under an equation. His wife patting his head before she goes. It is unbearable.

* * *

I show up and he is sitting with his back to the door to his room, as usual; his bald, veined head is bent forward toward the table. I can just barely see the corner of the Yahtzee box past his body on the right side. The algebra book must be open to page 79 in front of him. In my terror I know which page it is; I have not looked at it since my last visit with him, and he is destined to know once we get going.

The smells of medicine, piss, smoke, old blankets, the ghost-dog rug and brandy greet me and heighten the terror. The time is near.

Yet the time of reckoning never comes, because the math tutor is not alive.

I don't figure out he is dead until I have taken my seat at the table and waited, respectfully, for a few minutes. His head remains bowed and at first I think he is reading or contemplating the algebra book. Yet the book is not open; the Yahtzee dice are still in their cups in the box. The skin on his face, particularly around his eyes, is a pure, white-blue. So he is dead. I have not seen a dead body before, but the tutor's body is obviously vacant.

A faint creaking of hardwood floors outside the door grows louder. It is the tutor's wife bringing the bottle and glass! I stare at the Yahtzee box and take a couple of deep breaths— I do not want to see her reaction when she finds her husband is gone. If there were another door I would run out of it and walk home, and I even consider crashing through a

window to escape witnessing the destruction of a religious philosophy, a life perspective of duty, this disparate love. If he doesn't yell at her, then surely she will know he is dead! And then what will she do?

If only she refrains from patting his head this time. If she pats his head she will feel how cold it is.

"I brought you your brandy, Malcolm!" she says. She looks brighter today; she has applied a little make-up and a floral perfume.

"And cookies for you!" she says to me. "No matter what he says." She puts down the bottle and glass, still at his back, and slides the cookies over to me. They are set on a lace doily on a flowered china plate.

But oh, God, then she pats his head, one-two, and walks out the door. As she is closing it the corpse's head lolls to the right and rests on what had been the tutor's shoulder, and his glasses fall off and land on the card table.

* * *

Tic . . . tic . . . tic. I practice my rolls in an overhand fashion, the way the tutor used to. I have placed his hand around his brandy glass and filled the glass to the top.

When the station wagon tires make their grinding and crushing sound up the driveway I grab my book and run out the front door, making sure I don't encounter the tutor's wife on the way.

I don't want to look at her.

* * *

I needn't have worried, though. Mother and I pass her a couple of miles down the road toward town. She is bundled in a long brown coat and has wrapped a red paisley scarf around her head and tied it under her chin; wisps of white hair stick out from underneath it and frame her face, star-like. She hobbles in little brown boots and she is carrying a battered suitcase. She lowers her head and looks away as we drive by.

Now I can use a matrix to represent a system of equations, and using a coefficient I can convert it into triangular form. In turn I write other equations, from the bottom up, and substitute known values as before.

The Refuge

The snow geese took off in fours,
sometimes in fives, while the great blue heron,
singular and majestically weird,
complicated a rivulet. An egret,
fishing, did its lascivious Groucho Marx
walk, only slowly, neck and head
in odd accord, and hundreds of black ducks,
driven by memory, readied themselves
in the curious calm of New Jersey
for that long flight beyond winter.

This was the safe place,
famous for these birds and meetings
of adulterous lovers, everything endangered
protected. Turtle Cove was closed
to humans; the dunlin and the swan
acted as if the world weren't harsh, maniacal.
Absecon Bay stretched out toward the Atlantic,
the very ocean Burt Lancaster said—
with the wild accuracy of a saddened heart—
wasn't the same anymore. The horizon graphed
the ziggy, unequal stretch of casino hotels,
and in front of us on the hard, dirt road
gulls dropped clam shells from a height
so perfect they opened.

I had come with my sister-in-law
and my homophobic nephew, my tattletale niece—
a familial gesture, not exactly my style.
My brother was back on the couch
watching football, my wife cooking the dead-bird-
Thanksgiving-dinner that soon would bring us
together. Which one of us didn't need
to be thanked, and eventually forgiven?
A herring gull swallowed an eel.
Walking, the great blue heron

lost all of its grandeur. In a few hours
my brother would say grace at the table,
and we'd bow our heads, almost seriously,
but for now it was red-wing blackbird
and Canada goose, it was marshland and sky,
all the easily praised, the nothing like us.

Stephen Dunn

Saved

When I was a boy with a mind
soft and Baptist as potter's clay
I played in an alley a few blocks
away, hanging out, watching
the presses at Steele Cleaners hiss
out great steam angels
into the dimming afternoon.
One day bells from the nearby Convent
began to toll with such urgent pealing
I knew the world must be at its end
there and then beneath an odd lemon
tint of apocalyptic sky.

I ran
nowhere and everywhere at first,
then homeward, certain I would find
burning Seraphs lining Tracy Street,
Jesus, blood still streaming
from His pierced hands and feet,
calling my neighbors and parents
from their evening papers and warm
plates of dinner, herding them out
to the pavement into quaking
huddles of saved and damned.

The corner turned on anxious Keds,
I saw Jeannie Satchel in her yard at practice
with her baton, at thirteen already famous
all across the city for her twirling routine.
Billy Wakefield was punting long and
perfect spirals up and down the street.
Mrs. Archer was mowing her lawn
for the third time that week. My father
hailed me from the front porch swing
where he swayed, his day's edges smoothed
by stiffer and stiffer drinks. Mother was at her stove,

the odor of frying meat a gall and flay
to my agitated state. Upstairs, my brother
the sinner was playing Elvis in the bathroom
mirror, combing his rebel's hair, coaching
his lips toward their permanent sneer,
his lips twitching to the uninhibited beat
of *Jail House Rock*, their demons still
not yet cast out.

I descended
into the basement's semi-dark,
still half expecting Gabriel's knock
or promised trumpet calling us home.
On my work bench were spread
paper plans, my Flying Tiger,
its delicate balsa wings pinned
and left to dry. I sat, twisted off
the cap from my tube of Duco Cement,
sniffed, lifted like Icarus into sun
beckoning sky. I opened my heart
to Jesus in mumbled prayer, not quite
certain if it was gratitude or fear,
then fumbled for the string that hung
from the bulb overhead, found it,
paused with the infinite patience
of the saved before I pulled, hard.
Let there be light. I said.
There was, and I set to work.

Randall R. Freisinger

Taking No Prisoners

Tonight, *Sands of Iwo Jima*
on the late movie, I recall our olive-green
and camouflage summers, army surplus mean:
helmets, bayonet-tipped rifles, ammo
belts, canteens. Leaving Mother behind,
we'd establish our perimeter around the vacant lot,
you giving orders in your best Van Heflin
voice: *Take no prisoners!*

Weekends at the Southtown Theater
we would slog through German snow or French mud
or storm beaches on Pacific Islands, learning
little lessons about death, honor, love
of country, duty, the buddy system, about never
relaxing for a smoke when a sniper's bullet
might just as easily have your name on it.

At twenty-two, back from the Marines,
full of *esprit* and *semper fi*, you were fit
for nothing but trouble. When you died
I cursed your badly planned retreat:
jobless, too much vodka, your used
Cadillac left running behind closed
doors, you, who knew more about engines
than the workings of your low mileage
lemon life. Good soldier, you bore
your secrets to the commandeering flame,
taking no prisoners, leaving nothing
for us to interrogate but a vase
full of ashes, no one to torture
for truth's higher claims, you coward,
you traitor, you sniper's easy prey.

Randall R. Freisinger

Family Accounts

Counting, Medea squatted in the courtyard,
considered dead leaves floating in the fountain,
spindly oracles drifting widdershins
as languidly as if the basin brimmed
with blood. To snip the thread of someone's story
spoke, broke volumes. Ululations
later would bounce around the whitewashed square.
For now, on little wooden chairs three women
sat, arms folded, not speaking,
but swaying, calculating, keeping track
of spaces in the family almanac,
so many scarlet tallies gouged from black.

Rachel Hadas

The Slip

Empty and trembling, haloed by absences,
whooshings, invisible leavetakings, finishes,
images, closure: departures so gracefully
practice their gestures that when they do happen,
dazzled with sunlight, distracted by darkness,
mercifully often we miss the event.
So many hours, days, weeks, years, and decades
spent—no, slathered and lavished and squandered—
ardently, avidly gazing at nothing,
pacing the pavement or peering round corners,
setting the table and sniffing the twilight,
sitting and gazing at edges, horizons,
preparing occasions that leave us exhausted,
recovering, staggering back to a climax.
Dramas of use, inanition, repletion!
and there all along, except not there forever,
was the beloved. The foreground? The background?
Thoughtful, impatient, affectionate, angry,
tired, distracted, preoccupied, human,
part of our lives past quotidian limits,
there all the while and yet not there forever.

Rachel Hadas

The Myth of a Happy Childhood

Out of nowhere these six words have come.
I voice them. I produce them on my tongue.
Then, sitting sweating in the August noon,
I pick up a stone.

Smallish, green, it's one of several
I use to keep the oilcloth, the piled papers
covering the table on the lawn
from flapping in a sudden gust of wind.

To hand and eye the stone is warm and clean.
I hold it to my nose,
then to my mouth. I lick it.
It smells and tastes of city and of rain,

of pavement first sun-heated and then rinsed.
I put it down,
one side shiny, a more vivid green
where my tongue has been.

If I could somehow know, and know I knew,
how easily (no word fits—
“vision” or “version” or “reality”),
how easily this thing gets jarred, comes loose,

if I could remember how what's crucial
modestly wavers and is pushed aside
in favor of the superficial,
if I could grasp such knowledge in my hand!

But every minute twists
between my fingers, switching shapes with no
more warning than a mood or sky allows
when it turns color. Wind and rain and cloud,

anger, happiness, humidity—
all simply change, without consulting me,

as utterly unable to hold still
as if each were a living thing.

There's no as if. The world
is not inanimate,
so possibilities proliferate.
How should we live our lives from day to day?

What comes forward? What should be held back?
Not that human choice is infinite.
To keep our deep confusions at bay,
most of us concentrate

best on a single emblem at a time.
Whether the brute weight
of human sadness or a broken wing
keeps it pinned down, one monarch butterfly

has fluttered all week feebly on the lawn.
And to embody the enduring myth
of something precious going on and on,
here on the table, solid, warm with sun,

this strangely fragrant stone.

Rachel Hadas

Bringing in the Sea

Fifty-some years at my wordwork I've brought in
the sea again and again, pleading "Keep me
afloat! O, speed my ride!" and the sea,
that is sometimes healing, other times vicious,
careless, endless, made me sick
till I'd like to drown—it salted each wound,
it threw me out on the tide where I rest
like an unoiled gear tranced by metal-fatigue
in the rusting sun, and still I fondle
the gleam-word *brief*, and speak and speak
of the sea.

Barry Spacks

Survival Skills

*"They are not really telling us
what they are telling the families."
—TV newscaster*

Six miles from the airport
Flight 427 plummeted,
a nightjar into the thick woods
of Pennsylvania.
A boy seeing it all
from the soccer field
drew a bird shape
nose-diving in flames.
In TV language it was decimation,
carnage, Hiroshima. We are assured
mental health workers will meet
those waiting at the airport,
will deliver them to the Ritz-Carlton
to explain why it happened.
Coping skills will be taught.
Unattended in our family rooms,
we wait for the answers,
clutch our after-dinner coffee,
growing cold.

Janice Townley Moore

At a Mass Grave in the Former Yugoslavia

Troweling through dirt one comes upon
adipose tissue wrapped in moldered sleeves,

a rumpled sweatsuit, rusty pendant
with mud-crusting cross, shoes.

Red ribbons tied to trees mark
impressions left by bullets;

hoarfrost weighs down the terrified
conifers. Even now, in winter,

the smell of murder is in the air,
undiluted by the scent of flowers.

Cameras click. Forensic experts
gather evidence in plastic bags.

Details metastasize:
prisoners taken from hospital rooms,

trucked and bussed to a staging place
at this nearby farm, then off-loaded

and marched in groups to the old dump;
arranged row on row; dispensed with.

One day in courtrooms far from here
high moral issues will claim the day.

But for now fog obscures the stars
and night approaches like a predator.

Phillip Corwin

One Night on the Apalachicola

A rigid moon, and wind
that sings to water,
hold the bay of hounds
high in the moist night.
A scream splits the pines,
soars above the chorus
of the seasoned pack.
It is Gypsy Jewel, my favorite;
green, eager, she has rushed ahead.
I track my father's curses.

The smell of blood binds the clearing.
The boar, one tusk sticky with battle,
quivers past death, his skin riddled
with Father's rage. The wounded pup
welcomes his palm with one last lick,
takes the bullet like a beating.
I huddle in the tupelo.

In me, the river sings too loudly.
On the angry Apalach,
I straddle a twisting vessel.
"Heel, Jewel! Home!" I cry.
To my calling, clouds collide.
A bolting sky is webbed with fowl.
Rainbows of thin-skinned fish arc to the boat.
Everything wild is mine.

From the glistening thicket,
the brown boar listens.
In the distance,
against the rush
of fierce dark water,
a headless hound pulls toward me
with steady strokes.

Andrea King Kelly

Agents of Hunger, Agents of Fear

Fog sharks we called them
Those nights in the great valley
We couldn't account

For the waywardness of what
Sometimes happened,
When the tule-needed sloughs

Simmered so much mist
It took two to drive a car—
One to steer and one to walk ahead.

Fog sharks, we'd say, and laugh.
Fog sharks, we'd say, and shrug.
Odd to figure all that water

In the desert place the valley
Once was, year after year pooled
And poured out for crops that couldn't

Otherwise live at all, let alone
Summer under the sun of central California
Until the honeydews drew only bees and ants

And the stalks of cotton towered
Over workers in the field. Awesome
What men can do when they think,

And awesome where those thoughts come from—
All that snow on the visible mountains
And every river dammed to catch it,

Canals wide as highways bearing it on,
Blue waters swirled by catfish
Six and eight and ten feet long.

Arthur Smith

Crow

What a terrible
Racket he made
Filling the air
With hoarse
Black cant. Now, against
The brow of cloud, no
Speck of crow.
But in the vast
Absence behind it
Something winged and wracked
Screams itself silly
And will not
Be fed.

Jay Ladin

The Passion of 1934

The decade turns at Oberammergau;
It brings the Passion Year. If who perform
Are largely Party members, who attend
Show no concern. Those who have seen before
Might notice this year more self-confidence
Among the soldiery, Iscariot
More focused on the specie rate; or see
In Caiaphas the make-up man's construct
Of Marx and Engels. Pilate seems this time
Not bureaucrat so much as diplomat;
Like Herod, deferentially subdued.
Almost by definition, one could say,
The mob is neither less itself nor more.
And little altered too, the Christus. Twice
Appearing in the role before, the Man
Of Sorrows adds morosely to the rest
His fifty years. Behind the pale blue eyes,
However, nothing is that was not there
Offstage. They are a sort of program note,
Unsatisfactory, as précis are.
Spectators must themselves extrapolate
How far the Via Dolorosa goes
And what will be its end. They have as group
Some knowledge. Insufficient, probably,
To show them how the Stations, one by one,
Confirm the irreversible. Someone,
A conscript-Simon the Cyrenian-
At any moment will appear, take up
The burden, change the ending, will he not?
It cannot finish as it always has.
Except it will: Barrabas freed, two parts
Of theft and one of threatening the State.
Remember that the votive Play began
As gratitude for being spared the Plague.
Its repetition was to make secure
From pestilence the future. Up to now

That absit omen holds, although the blind,
The devil-ridden elsewhere in the cast
Exist to tell us there are plagues and plagues,
Betrayal ever bolder in the text,
One kiss we have no understudy for.
Thomas will doubt, though never quite enough;
Peter continue to deny, in Rome,
And later, in the dock at Nuremburg.

Turner Cassity

The Ghost of Soulmaking:

*"On that day it was decreed
who shall live and who shall die."
—Yom Kippur prayer*

*"ART IN ITS ULTIMATE ALWAYS
CELEBRATES THE VICTORY."*

The ghost appears in the dark of winter,
sometimes in the light of summer, in the light
of spring, confronts you behind the half-door
in the first shock of morning,
often after hours, with bad memories to stunt
your day, whines in twilight, whines in the umbrella
of trees.

He stands outside the locked doors, rain or shine;
he constructs the stuntwork of allegiances
in the form of students, in the form of the half-measure
of blankets—he comes to parade rest in the itch of frost
on the maple, on the cherry caught in the open field
of artillery; he remembers the battlefields of the democratic
order; he marks each accent through the gates of the orchard
singing in the cadences of books—
you remember books burned, a shattering of crystals,
prayers for now, and in the afterlife, Germany of the northern
lights of Kristallnacht, the ashes of synagogues.

The ghost turns to your mother as if he believed
in penance, in wages earned, in truth places these flowers
you have brought with your own hands,
irises certainly, and the dalmation rose,
whose fragrance calms every hunger in religious feast or fast.
In her hands, these blossoms, her fragrant palms.

There is no wedding ring in the life of ghosts,
no sacred asp on the wrist in imperial cool,

but there is a bowl on the reception table,
offerings of Swiss black licorice.
On good days the bowl would entice the dream
of husband, children, and grandchildren;
on good days one could build a synagogue in one's own city,
call it *city of testimony, conscious city of works*.
In this precinct male and female, the ghost commences, the ghost
disappears.

What of the lady in the half-door of the enlightenment:
tact, and a few scarves, a small indulgence for a frugal
woman; loyalty learned in the lost records of intricate relations:
how to remember, how to forget the priceless injuries
on a steno tablet, in the tenured cabinets of the files.
At birth, and before, the ghost taught understanding:
that no history is fully a record, for the food we will eat
is never sour on the tongue, lethal, or not, as a defenseless
scapegoat, the tongue turned over, as compost is turned over,
to sainthood which makes the palate sing. These are jewels
in the service of others; this is her song. She reaps
the great reward of praise, where answers do not answer,
when the self, unleashed from the delicate bottle,
wafts over the trees at sunrise and forgives the dusk.

Michael S. Harper

Lakefront

The house and car lights across
the lake sway like a string of lights strung
across the deck of a ship, the ship docked

in a shadow of the mountain behind
the water. Mist shrouds the distance
between us and breaks what we see

into what we need to see—last night
the moon spilling mercury
on the water and tonight sewing gold

thread into the small, dark waves.
Cottage lights and dock lights
rock slightly, as if the ship, urged

by a swell, was blurring the cabin lights,
so it could be hard to tell who had spent
more or less for a berth. Somewhere

on the mountain a campfire is dying
brightly enough to be the last drag
on a cigarette, a truck's tail light,

or the last light a passenger might
see in the narrow hallway next to
the hose and an axe under glass.

In the morning a woman walks
her daughter down to the filmy water,
and looks up across the shimmering

water to where she can't make out exactly
what the lights across the lake were about
and our lives that lit them for a rented week.

Gary Margolis

Beauty

His daughter, fooling around, sweeps
the porcelain dog off the window sill
chipping the terrier's brindled ear.

He doesn't know this until his son
says something under his breath about

his sister that only the dog can hear.
The next time he walks into that room
he smells the kitchen drawer's
transparent, quick-drying glue. No
ecstasy there, he sees his daughter

laughing with her friend who is
spending the night. They have not
been able to line the ear up right,
so now it could be a nose, a paw
or a doctored tail. He never told them

the real dog, from his past, bit his
father through the back of the hand,
when his father tried to carry the dog
from his sister's room, the only bed
in the house the dog loved. He never

told his children he named the little statue
Beauty, because that's what his father
called the dog he carried home for him
in his overcoat pocket, over the chipped
and cobbled streets of Boston.

Gary Margolis

Negatives II

One erases only in order to write again . . .

You don't know what you don't know,
We used to say in the CIC in Verona—
Negative space, negative operability
To counterposition the white drift of the unknown.
You can't see what you can't see.

It's still the best advice, but easy to overlook
As winter grinds out its cigarette
Across the landscape.

February.

Who could have known, in 1959, the balloon would not go up?
Who could have seen, back then, the new world's new disorder?

John Ruskin says all clouds are masses of light, even the darkest ones.
Hard to remember that these overcast afternoons,
Mid-week, ash-black and ash-white,
negative shapes sketched in
And luminous here and there in loose interstices
Elbowed and stacked between earth and sky.

Hard to remember that as the slip-stream of memory shifts
And shutters, massing what wasn't there as though it were.
Where are the secret codes these days for nuking the Brenner Pass?
And the Run, and the Trieste Station?
Like sculptured mist, sharp-edged and cut into form, they slide on by.

One only writes in order to erase again . . .

Charles Wright

Rehearsing for the Final Reckoning in Boston

During the Berlioz *Requiem* in Symphony Hall
which takes even longer than extra innings
in big league baseball, this restless Jewish agnostic
waits to be pounced on, jarred by the massed fanfare
of trombones and trumpets assembling now in the second
balcony, left side, right side, and at the rear.

Behind them, pagan gods in their niches
acoustically oversee this most Christian
of orchestrations: the resting Satyr
of Praxiteles, faun with infant Bacchus,
Apollo Belvedere, Athena, Diana
of Versailles with early greyhound.

When the wild mélange cries out
Dies irae, all of our bared hearts pulse
under Ozawa's baton. He is lithe as a cat
nimble as Nureyev, another expatriate.
But even Ozawa dressed in white sweats
cannot save us up here in peanut heaven, or save

patrons downstairs in the best seats canted back
for the view, who wear the rapt faces of the fifties
tilted to absorb the movie on the 3-D screen.
Naught shall remain unavenged, sings the chorus.
*What trembling there shall be when we rise again
to answer at the throne.* That's all of us

since Adam, standing on one another's shoulders
three or four deep, I should imagine,
acrobats of the final reckoning.
And what terror awaits those among us
whose moral priorities are unattached
to Yahweh, Allah, Buddha, Christ:

forgiving without praying for forgiveness,
 the doing unto others, scrubbing toilets,
 curbing lust, not taking luck for granted?
 Are the doubters reckoned up or just passed over?
 Hector was almost passed over, his *Requiem*
 unplayed, save for a general killed in battle . . .

How should one dress for the Day of Judgment?
 At a working rehearsal the chorus is motley,
 a newborn *fin de siècle* in t-shirts and jeans.
 But what will they wear when the statues have crumbled
 in 2094? Brasses and massive tympani close
 the *Lacrymosa*. Metallic spittle is hot in my throat.

Now we enter the key of G major, the Lamb
 of God key of catharsis and resolution.
 Like a Janus head looking backward and forward
 pockmarked by doubt I slip between cymbals
 to the other side of the century where our children's
 children's children ride out on the ranting brasses.

Maxine Kumin

Contributors

Tara Bray's poetry will next appear in *New York Quarterly*. She lives in Norcross, Georgia.

Trent Busch's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Hudson Review*, *Chicago Review*, *Southern Review*, *Georgia Review*, *New England Review*, *The American Scholar* and other literary journals. He grew up in rural West Virginia and teaches at Valdosta State College.

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Stephen Corey has published six collections of poems, most recently, *All These Lands You Call One Country* (University of Missouri Press, 1992), for which the Georgia Council of Writers and Journalists selected him Georgia Author of the Year in Poetry. They awarded him the same honor in 1993 for his reissued *Synchronized Swimming*. He is Associate Editor of *The Georgia Review*.

Phillip Corwin has been, since January, 1995, the chief political officer for the United Nations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He is the author of a short story collection, *The Way Things Are* (1985), and two books of poems, *Poems To Keep* (1985) and *Windows* (1990).

Ruth Daigon, whose latest book of poetry, *Between One Future and the Next*, appeared in 1995 from Papier Maché Press, spent half her life as a concert singer. She collaborated with W. H. Auden on a recording for Columbia Records of Elizabethan poetry and music, and sang at Dylan Thomas's funeral. She lives in Mill Valley, California, where she edits *Poets On:*.

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Randall Freisinger's poems have been published in *Tendrils*, *New Letters*, *Stone Country*, and other literary journals. *Running Patterns* won the 1985 Flume Press National Chapbook Competition, and *Hand Shadows* was published in 1988 by GreenTower Press. A professor at Michigan Technological University, he is Associate Editor for *The Laurel Review*.

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Josephine Jacobsen's most recent book, *In the Crevice of Time: New and Collected Poems*, appeared in June 1995 from Johns Hopkins. As her 1994 American Academy of the Arts Citation observed, in her distinguished career she has won "almost every major poetry award." She served two terms as Consultant to the Library of Congress, the position now titled National Poet Laureate. She has also published two books of criticism and three collections of short fiction. She lives in Baltimore with her husband.

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Yusef Komunyakaa is the author of five books of poetry: *Copacetic*, *I Apologize for the Eyes in My Head*, *Dien Cai Dau*, *Magic City*, and *Neon Vernacular*, which won both the Kingsly Tufts Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1994. He is also co-editor (with Sascha Feinstein) of *The Jazz Poetry Anthology* and its forthcoming companion volume, *The Second Set*. He currently teaches at Indiana University.

Maxine Kumin has published ten books of poems, most recently *Looking for Luck*, with W. W. Norton. Norton also published *Women, Animals, and Vegetables: Essays and Stories*. Kumin lives in New Hampshire, where she and her husband raise horses and vegetables.

Jay Ladin's poetry has appeared in many literary magazines, including *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, *The Minnesota Review*, *Exquisite Corpse*, and *Puerto del Sol*, and in anthologies, including the recent *A Loving Testimony* (Crossing Press). He teaches creative writing privately in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Susan Ludvigson's most recent collections of poems from LSU Press are *To Find the Gold* (1990) and *Everything Winged Must Be Dreaming* (1993). She is Poet-in-Residence and Professor of English at Winthrop University in South Carolina.

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Carole Simmons Oles has poems forthcoming in *The Kenyon Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal* and *Prairie Schooner*. An essay on Millay is forthcoming in an anthology from the University Press of New England. She will be teaching at Bread Loaf School of English this summer.

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Charles Simic: See page 23.

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Lee Upton's third book of poems, *Approximate Darling*, is forthcoming from the University of Georgia Press. Her second book, *No Mercy*, a winner in the National Poetry Series, was published by Atlantic Monthly Press. She teaches at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania.

Sidney Wade's poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Grand Street*, *The Yale Review*, *Shenandoah* and many other magazines. Her poetry collection *Empty Sleeves* (1991) was published in the Contemporary Poetry Series of The University of Georgia Press. She currently teaches poetry writing at the University of Florida.

Nancy Willard's collection of poems, *Among Angels*, will be published by Harcourt Brace in the fall. Recent publications include *Sister Water*, a novel, and *Telling Time: Angels, Ancestors and Stories*.

Charles Wright lives in Charlottesville, Virginia. He has two new books forthcoming this year: *Chickamauga*, poems, and *Quarter Notes*, essays and interviews. *The Point Where All Things Meet*, essays on his work, will also appear this year from Field Editions, Oberlin College Press.

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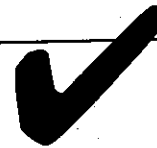
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