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Editor/E-Publisher – Poet-Tree Imagazine



Biography: Courtenay M. Nold, a long-time Indiana resident and poet, served as an enlisted and officer for almost 15 years (U.S. Navy), deploying to S. Korea and Kandahar, Afghanistan (now 100% Disabled Vet). She holds a Paralegal Certification; AS: Business Administration; BS: Org. Security and Mgmt. Contributed multiple articles to the 'Association of the U.S. Navy (AUSN) Magazine' and the 'AtEase! Veteran's Magazine', featured poet in 'Veterans Unchained' (2022), published 'Removing Interference' (7/2023); 'Total War on PTSD' (9/2023); and 'Through Our Eyes' (11/2023) through Southern Arizona Press (SAP). Editor/Founder of quarterly online 'Poet-Tree Imagazine' and working with SAP on publication of the 2025 and 2026 Poet-Tree Imagazine Anthologies. Maintains engagement on: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/poetrywarrior>. Books available: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/BOCHK4HRXY>

Poetry Corner - Mary Couch



Biography: A Past Premier Poet for the Poetry Society of Indiana, Mary studied poetry with her mother and two grandmothers. She enjoys writing poems showing her Celtic heritage about spirits living in nature and universal oneness with poems published in: Poetic Nature in the Hoosierland, Twin Muses: Art & Poetry, An Evening with the Writing Muse, and Poetry and Paint. She has six books on Amazon: Hoosier Haiku: Poetic Snippets from the Heartland, Hoosier WordArt: Communing with the Chippewa, A Garden of Thought Blossoms, Hoosier WordArt: Finicky Kitten's Book of Rhymes, Hoosier WordArt: Generations, and Nibby Ankleman & Other Poems.

Art of the Limerick

Limericks are a five-line humorous, nonsensical or sarcastic poem with a strict AABBA rhyme scheme. Limericks have a bouncy, anapestic rhythm, and often start with a person or place, featuring lines 1,2,5 with three beats, and lines 3 and 4 with two beats. Limericks are traditionally witty, bawdy, sarcastic and irreverent.

Structure and Rhyme Scheme

- **Lines 1, 2, & 5:** Long lines (usually 7-10 syllables) that rhyme with each other.
- **Lines 3 & 4:** Short lines (usually 5-7 syllables) that rhyme with each other.
- **Rhyme Scheme:** AABBA.

How to Write a Limerick

1. Begin with a person or place in the first line
2. Ensure the second line rhymes with the first and sets up a bouncy rhythm.
3. Use the shorter third and fourth lines to build suspense or introduce a silly plot point.
4. End with a fifth line rhyming with the first and second line, providing a funny, sarcastic or witty conclusion.

Limericks are a form of verse that appeared in England in the early years of the 18th century, and popularized by Edward Lear in his first “A Book of Nonsense” (1846), and from a [folkloric](#) point of view, the form is witty, funny, and sarcastic. The first line traditionally introduces a person and a place, with the place appearing at the end of the first line and establishing the rhyme scheme for the second and fifth lines. In early limericks, the last line was often essentially a repeat of the first line, although this is no longer customary. The most prized limericks incorporate a kind of twist, which may be revealed in the final line or lie in the way the rhymes are often intentionally tortured, or both. Many limericks show some form of [internal rhyme](#), [alliteration](#), or [assonance](#), or some element of [word play](#). Verses in limerick form are sometimes combined with a [refrain](#) to form a [limerick song](#), a traditional humorous [drinking song](#) often with obscene verses.

Example:

There once was a guy named Bill
who pressed iron with quite a will
Thought he was the best
then put to the test
was beat by a gal named Jill

<https://kingoglimericks.com> History of Limericks: From Shakespeare to Spirit Rock

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org> Limerick / The Poetry Foundation

Featured Poet - Rupert Chapman



Biography: Rupert Chapman was born in Oxford, Mississippi, on 2 April, 1950. He has a BA in Anthropology, an MA and PhD in Levantine Archaeology. He finished his career as Curator of Levantine Antiquities and Librarian in the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities of the British Museum, from which he retired in 2015. He now lives in Devon, where he is working on the publication of the excavations at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, Jordan directed by his friend Jonathan Tubb, and reading widely.



Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Drawing_of_the_procession_of_the_Aamu_group_tomb_of_Khnumhotep_II_at_Beni_Hassan.jpg)

[File:Drawing_of the procession of the Aamu group tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Drawing_of_the_procession_of_the_Aamu_group_tomb_of_Khnumhotep_II_at_Beni_Hassan.jpg)

The Canaanites:¹
A sonnet cycle

Ebla²

Record, Oh Scribe! how I have built this house
From nothing to the mighty pow'r it is!
Record my foe: how strengthless is his house;
Before my awesome wrath he quickly flees!
From mountains of the cedars standing tall,
to where the waters fail in Musri's sun,
To Mari of the dawn, kings heed my call,
And all that I command is quickly done!
No king before this day in any land
Had wealth like this, or ruled o'er such a host!
Record, Oh Scribe, all this as I command,
Lest any, coming after me, should boast!
Write this, Oh Scribe, and greater glories yet,
That to the end of time none dare forget!
27 June, 1978

Arad³

Behold! Our mighty walls and gates now stand
Unshaken, proof 'gainst even Musri's arm;
Our fields spread out sky-wide on every hand;
Our men and mighty gods guard us from harm!
Our gleaming copper bars buy Musri's grain,
Our asses and our sheep are without count;
No city in the land has such a plain
Or rules such lofty purple-shrouded mounts!
Our houses, no crude huts of sun-dried mud
Are built of solid, time-defying stone;
From far for door and beam we bring white wood;
Our potters' arts to Pharaoh's courts are known!
The whiteness of our walls shall be a sign
To mark our glories out through space and time!
27 June, 1978

'Ai

Ye gods, whose might no man would dare deny
Attend us now, who make this sacrifice,
And as our smould'ring incense fills the sky
Lift up your arms before our fearful eyes!
Our kingdom, wide, and rich, and mighty, once,

Its walls and gates, its temples greater far
Than those of any land, now quails and fronts
Disgusting, houseless rabble foes in war.
Support us now; restore our strength of heart
And in the ages which are yet to come
Thy altars without ceasing shall be hot
And great shall be the glory of thy home!
Save us from these our foes who mean us ill,
Else nought remain of 'Ai but barren hill!
27 June, 1978

Hazor

Behold! How here our mighty city we have raised
Greater than any which has gone before;
How where our foemen's flocks did graze
Our walls now stand, strong, proof in peace or war!
No kingdom great or small, of north or south,
Dare face our arms, nor yet approach our walls;
Fear weakens them as if it were a drought
and ev'ry foe that comes against us falls!
Our courts are sought by merchants of the lands
To north and south and east, and from the sea
Comes tribute in the island peoples' hands,
Who friendship seek, and our allies to be!
No foe again shall we permit to come
To where our princes make their rightful home!
28 June, 1978

Megiddo⁶

To me! O Kings and Princes great and small!
Before these walls, or, better, by the pass
Against the King of Egypt, stand or fall,
We must defend our lands or breathe our last!
Already in his fearful lust for land
He has destroyed our brothers to the south
And seeks to spread his blight on every hand
Far worse than any plague or Mot-sent drouth.
Yet if we gather here in mighty arms
And join our force against this foreign foe
Our priests unite in working awe-full charms
We can still force him back in haste to go
And hold our ancient rightful sovereign sway
Enrich ourselves, and all our gods obey.
19 July, 1978

Jericho

Loudly shall we weep our empty walls,
Forever mourn our lately buried friends;
Cast out by foeman's sword from ancient halls
And driven forth on journeys without ends.
For what, oh Ba'al, have we deserved thy wrath,
To waste our mighty city with disease
And bring upon us armies dealing death
To burn our homes and lay in waste our trees?
Let us remember, as we wander far,
The beauty of our home in ages past;
The spring, the palms, the temples, lost in war.
And pray this great injustice may not last;
And as for him, our haughty foreign foe
May plague and curse lay him forever low!
20 July, 1978

Kadesh-on-the-Orontes⁸

Standing atop our walls we saw them come,
Though distance heat and dust did stop the sound,
We saw the kings who led them choose their ground
And, helpless to affect our fate, were dumb.
In ancient times, our kingdom spreading wide,
We fought the mighty kingdom of the south,
And withered 'fore their anger as a drouth;
Then they the anger of the north did bide.
We saw the mighty charge the Hittites made,
We saw great Egypt's unprepared defence,
We saw their battle, and we asked the sense,
For land that neither knew in blood to wade.
They came, and fought, and went; and we remain;
Their vict'ries died with them; and we remain.
12 May, 1977

Byblos⁹

And have you come, and do you make demands?
You fathers came in lordship bearing gifts;
You bear no gifts and do not make amends
By promised gold, but seek to take by shifts
What power cannot command, nor wealth suffice
To buy. If you would have the ancient due
Of trees for Amon you must sacrifice

Some gold, or else your fallen strength renew!
No go, oh Wen-Amon, and pray your god
And send this message to your mighty king:
The trees still stand which now he might have had
And may have yet, if you their value bring.
Send thus, that we his answer here may know;
'Til then, back to your tent, and empty, go!
24 July, 1978

Ugarit

Oh Ba'al, oh Anat, oh almighty El!
In these dread days when we in hope's despite
Do dwell, and see our foes' most bloody sail
Protect thy priests, oh, El, from this dread night!
We call on thee, oh Ba'al, or warrior stroung,
To stand in place of ships now sailed away
And save us from our foemen's fearful wrong:
Oh Anat, plenty's guard and beauty's queen,
Witness how famine weighs our city down
And ward from us with power hunger's pain,
As you have done before, to great renown!
Oh mighty gods, who through the ages past
Have shielded us, stand by us in this blast!
11 August, 1978

Hama

Behold these mighty, many-pillared halls;
A palace passing those of other lands
Encircled by the tower-guarded wall:
May any other king such wealth command?
Through all the wars which wracked our people's past
Down endless centuries of tortured time
Our hearts, though tried, have stood the awful test
Until success and peace have crowned our line.
While empires east and west arose and fell
And kingdoms north and south did pass away
Our people stood and watched from this great hill
As each eternal kingdom had its day.
And now, in course of time, we are at peace;
In freedom, wealth, and power which will not cease.
15 November, 1978

Jerusalem

You houseless rabble with your foreign God
Who dare to come against our mighty walls
Should fear our wrath as children fear the rod!
Fierce gestures do not make a city fall!
And were our towers manned with blind and deaf
Instead of mighty soldiers such as we,
And did you come each man a mighty chief,
Yet still defeat before these walls you'd see!
So brave we should to those who stand below
And yet our city is the last of all
To stand against this nameless tented foe:
One by one we saw our brothers fall.
And though we speak of strength and shake our spears
We have no hope; our hearts are full of fears.
15 November, 1978

¹I have long admired the sonnet as a poetic form, for its brevity, which forces the writer to compress the thoughts into a very small space, and for its rigidity, which forces the writer to put the thoughts into strict form. This makes it a difficult form to use, and, therefore, the completion of a successful sonnet something of an achievement. For that reason I had long wanted to try my hand at a sonnet cycle, and it occurred to me that the history of the travails of the Canaanites, from the Early Bronze Age (in the case of Ebla, around 2500 B.C.) through to the conquest of Jerusalem by David as narrated in the biblical account. I chose to do this using actual events at historical, and excavated, places, and to speak in the voices of the kings of those places as they would have spoken when facing the events I had in mind. In each case the king's speech is boastful in the extreme (except in the case of Jerusalem, in which I have allowed doubt to creep in, as it would have done if the narrative were true), so that each sonnet is ironic, given the outcome of the event. This irony is displayed not least in the mis-placed faith in deities who would fail the people who called on them, and the final result, not spoken in any of the sonnets, is that after the events marked, among others, by the fall of Jerusalem (whoever captured it at the beginning of Iron Age II), those deities, worshipped for centuries by the Canaanites, are never mentioned again, and the lineal descendants of the Canaanites of the Bronze Age, the Phoenicians of the Iron Age and the Classical World, worshipped different, newer, deities.

Notes on the Individual Sonnets

²Ebla: Ebla is the ancient name of the modern Tell Mardikh, just south of Aleppo in Syria, one of the most important sites of Inland Western Syria in the Early, and later in the Middle, Bronze Ages. Italian excavations on the site since the 1960s recovered a massive Early Bronze Age palace, and some 15,000 texts, the earliest written records from the West Semitic, Canaanite, region. While it was

one of the great kingdoms of Inland Western Syria, it was nothing like as great, or as rich, as the contemporary kingdoms of Sumer, or as its eventual conqueror, the world's first great imperial ruler, Sargon of Akkad. In the sonnet Musri is the ancient Semitic name for Egypt, and Mari was a great Mesopotamian kingdom on the Euphrates far to the east of Ebla. Ebla was conquered, and destroyed, in about 2200 B.C., by Sargon, and again a generation later, with finality, by his grandson, Naram-Sin.

³Arad: Arad was an Early Bronze Age city in the south of what is now Israel where I worked for Dr. Ruth Amiran of the Israel Museum in 1973. While it was a large city in area, it was not densely populated, and its people appear to have been less urban and agricultural than rural and pastoral, although they lived in stone-built houses and were surrounded by a massive defensive wall. The city was destroyed by one of the Pharaohs of the Second Dynasty around 2500 B.C., and never rebuilt, with the Egyptians establishing a border zone in which they did not allow settlement. It is worth noting that since I wrote the sonnet Prof. Pierre de Miroschedji's excavations at Tell Yarmuth have revealed a much larger, and far more advanced and sophisticated kingdom than any other yet found in the Southern Levant, urban, stratified, and state-organized.

⁴'Ai: The name 'Ai means, in Hebrew, 'the ruin', as does the modern name of the site identified with the biblical 'Ai. We don't, in fact, know what the Early Bronze Age city was called. It flourished in the Early Bronze Age III period, which I would date between 2800-2200 B.C. (some scholars would end the period earlier, but I have published a strong argument against this higher dating). At the time when I wrote the sonnet the view amongst British Levantine archaeologists, following Kenyon, was that the site was probably destroyed by invading nomads known as Amorites, however I, along with everyone else, have now long since abandoned this view.

⁵Hazor: Hazor was by far the largest kingdom in Middle (1800-1550 B.C.) and Late (1550-1100 B.C.) Bronze Age Canaan. It was also the first site to be excavated by the rising Israeli archaeological establishment, led by Professor Yigael Yadin, in the 1950s. The king in the sonnet speaks of the trade which passes through the city, and, as the ancient kings always did, construed it not as trade, but as tribute. Hazor is mentioned in texts from Turkey, from Iraq, and from Egypt, and was certainly of the highest importance, but its king was not a 'Great King' on a par with the kings of the Hittites in Anatolia, the Pharaohs in Egypt, or the kings of the Mesopotamian empires.

⁶Megiddo: Megiddo, of course, resonates to this day, as it is Har Megiddon, the Mountain of Megiddo, and the site foretold in The Apocalypse of Saint John the Divine (aka The Book of Revelations) as the site of the final battle between good and evil at the Second Coming, Armageddon. The king of Egypt in question, Pharaoh Tuthmosis III, was the greatest warrior pharaoh Egypt ever produced, and the effective creator of Egypt's Asiatic empire in the New Kingdom. In 1479

B.C. he led his army north against a coalition of Canaanite princes, the leader of which was the King of Kadesh-on-the-Orontes, modern Tell en-Nebi Mendoh (where I spent two seasons excavating in 1977 and 1979 with Peter Parr's team). Tuthmosis III had a choice of three passes through the Mount Carmel Range by which he could approach the combined Canaanite armies, the western pass, which was a wide and easy road, and which emerged into the Plain of Jezreel at the city of Yokneam, the eastern pass, also wide and easy, which emerged into the plain at Ta'anach, and the central pass, which emerged just south of Megiddo, and was narrow, and therefore presented a major danger of ambush. It was obvious to the Canaanites that he would use either the eastern or the western pass, and they arranged their troops accordingly, to attack the lead division of the Egyptian army before it, and its supporting divisions could emerge from whichever pass they should choose and deploy for battle in the plain. Tuthmosis III, against the advice of his generals, chose to use the narrow and dangerous central pass, thus retaining the element of surprise, emerging at Megiddo and deploying between the two wings of the divided Canaanite coalition army, which then attempted to attack him from both flanks, but was defeated, because he had chosen his ground well and prepared his defence. The defeated Canaanites fled into Megiddo, which Tuthmosis III besieged, and whose surrender ('the surrender of a hundred cities') he accepted a year later. Mot was the Canaanite deity of the hot summer, and of drought. As part of the archaic voice in which I speak in the sonnet, I chose to use an archaic spelling of drought.

⁷Jericho: No explanation of the site of Jericho is, of course, required. While most people will be familiar with the biblical account of how 'Joshua fit de battle ob Jericho' (as it is phrased in the old Spiritual), this is not what is spoken of in the sonnet. In the Middle Bronze Age Jericho was one of the smaller towns of Canaan, due to its position inland and in the Jordan Valley, rather than on one of the main trade routes. It was, nevertheless, the peak of Jericho's historic occupation, and it boasted mighty ramparts topped by massive defensive walls. The city was destroyed, sometime not long after the Battle of Megiddo in 1479 B.C., and there is evidence from the last tombs before that destruction of an outbreak of epidemic disease, in which entire families died over a very short time, and were buried in their family tomb, which was closed and never used again. After this destruction the city of Jericho was never rebuilt.

⁸Kadesh-on-the-Orontes: Which I have already mentioned, is so called to distinguish it from other places also called Kadesh, such as Kadesh Barnea in Sinai. It is modern Tell en-Nebi Mendoh (aka, Tell Nebi Mend), and sits in a strategic location, at the inland end of the pass through the north-south mountain range which separates Coastal Syria/Lebanon from Inland Western Syria. In 1274 B.C. it was the scene of the first fully recorded battle in history, between Pharaoh Rameses II of Egypt and King Muwatalli II of Hatti (the Hittites). We have accounts of the battle from both imperial protagonists, which makes it even more interesting. Rameses II marched north to confront Muwatalli II, through the Bekaa, the central valley between the Lebanon and Anti-

Lebanon Mountain ranges, at the northern end of which stands Kadesh, one of the larger Syrian kingdoms of the era, but subject to the Great King of the Hittites. Muwatalli II, knowing from his scouts, where Rameses II was, and what his line of march, laid a massive trap for Rameses II, including the despatch of 'scouts' bearing false information as to Muwatalli II's location (they placed him far to the north of Kadesh), lulling Rameses II into a false sense of security, and leading him to take a detachment of his crack units off to the Lebanese coast to subdue the cities there, and secure the pass, while the main army continued its northward march. The reunion of the two wings of the army was planned to be at Kadesh, following which the re-united army would proceed north to attack the Hittites. Muwatalli II sprung his trap as the main Egyptian army approached Kadesh from the south, catching them in the flank, while they were still in line of march, and not properly deployed for battle. As the battle raged, and as the Egyptian army was on the point of being routed, Rameses II, alerted by a messenger from his army commander, raced back and counter-attacked the Hittites in their right flank, rescuing the army, and closing the battle as a draw (for which both sides claimed the victory). The conflict between the two empires for control of Syria continued for the next twenty years, until the rise of a third kingdom, Mitanni, in north-eastern Syria threatened both, at which point they signed a peace treaty which held until the demise of the Hittite Kingdom around 1120 B.C.

⁹Byblos: Byblos (this is the Greek name, the ancient name of the city was Gebail, and the modern name is Jebail) was the most important port city and trading emporium on the Lebanese coast from the late Neolithic until the end of the Late Bronze Age. It stood at the seaward end of the pass the landward end of which was guarded by Kadesh-on-the-Orontes. It was fabulously wealthy, and from the earliest Dynastic Era of Egypt, was an ally and the major trading partner of the Pharaohs. So close was the relationship that the Early Bronze Age kings of Byblos, who spoke Canaanite, produced luxury objects for their own use bearing their names in good Egyptian hieroglyphs. From the Old Kingdom onwards the High Priests of Amun brought cedar wood from the Lebanon Mountains via Byblos for the sacred ship of the god Amun, and the Pharaohs for their own royal ships to be used in life and in death when they travelled their country on the River Nile. Just after the final collapse of the New Kingdom, in the reign of Smendes, who controlled only the Nile Delta, the then High Priest of Amun of Thebes sent one of his subordinates, a priest named Wen-Amun, to bring back cedar timbers from Byblos for a new sacred ship for Amun. We have Wen-Amun's report, which is a tale of one disaster after another, and shows just how low the prestige of Egypt had sunk in this period at the end of the Late Bronze Age. Having been robbed at Dor, in what is now Israel, Wen-Amun arrived at Byblos, where he had to camp in a tent on the beach, and demanded the timber as tribute, but without offering the customary 'gifts' of gold and other goods in exchange, only to be told by the King of Byblos to stop talking nonsense, return to his tent, and not to come back into the city until he brought gold with him. The glory days of Egypt were well and truly over, while Byblos, now designated a Phoenician city

(but still inhabited by the same formerly Canaanite population) was thriving on the new trade with the Mediterranean world to the west. Wen-Amon did, eventually, wheedle some gold out of either Smendes or the High Priest of Amun, and got his timber, and, as we have his report, he must have managed to get back to Egypt, but the end of the report, in the only copy which survives, is lost, so we don't know how he managed any of it.

¹⁰Ugarit: Ugarit is the ancient name of the modern archaeological site of Ras Shamra (Cape Fennel), just north of Latakia, Syria. The site has been excavated by French and Syrian archaeologists working together since 1929. It was one of the greatest mercantile kingdoms of the ancient world in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, with links inland through another pass in the coastal mountain range. Visitors came to see the palace of the King of Ugarit from as far away as Mari, on the eastern borders of modern Syria, on the River Euphrates. The final destruction of Ugarit, around 1120 B.C., was dramatic, both in terms of the archaeological remains, which reveal a fiery destruction, and the cuneiform tablets, which tell an equally dramatic tale of a request for shiploads of grain to relieve a famine in the lands of the King of the Hittites, which is despatched, but then a further request, from the King of Alashiya in Cyprus, for rescue from a seaborne invasion, to which the King of Ugarit replies that all of his ships are with the King of the Hittites, following which there are references to the pirate/invading ships sighted off the coasts of Ugarit itself, then the fiery destruction, which marked the end of the city of Ugarit, which was never rebuilt.

¹¹Hama: Hama was the greatest kingdom of Inland Western Syria in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, during the period from 1120 B.C. until the reign of Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.), who conquered the city and the region, establishing the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The sonnet is set in this halcyon period, early on, when Hama was immensely wealthy, powerful, and controlled most of west-central Inland Syria, with trade routes north to Aleppo and south to Damascus, west to the Mediterranean via Byblos and east to Mesopotamia via the great oasis of Palmyra/Tadmor.

¹²Jerusalem: Again, no explanation of the site of Jerusalem is required. The incident I chose is the account in 2 Samuel 5:6-10 of David's conquest of the city, but told from the Canaanite point of view.

Candise Baker

A Day at the Beach

A warm gentle breeze
Sun beating you my skin
Butterflies fluttering
Kids splashing
Coarse sand
Time is an illusion
Time stands still
Butterfly scouting for a place to land
Kids laughing
Birds gliding in the wind
Waves splashing my warm skin
Boats humming
Waves crashing
Moments passing
A day at the beach

I Wish

I wish you could see me for who I am
I wish when I needed you, you held out your hand
I wish I could call you when I feel down
I wish you were here, but you're never around
I wish we had a better relationship in this life
I wish it wasn't always about your strife
I wish you would listen to what I have to say
I wish we were closer, maybe one day
I wish we could repair the time that's lost
I wish and I wish but it's never enough

Inner Child

There's an inner child inside of you
Inside of me
Fighting, screaming, clawing it's way to be free

My inner child has seen it all
The lies, the guilt, my total downfall

I try to push my inner child down
Silencing my happiness
Until no one's around

My inner child knows the true me
She hurts inside
Pain, suffering, negativity
She'll never let others see

A Blink of an Eye

Life passes by with a blink of an eye
Like living in a never ending dream
The days blur
Habits form
People mourn
Self-searching
Who am I?
I look up to the sky for advice
Is there anyone watching?
Can you hear me up there?
How do I get where I'm going?
Where do I go from here?
Time passes by in the blink of an eye?
What do I do with the second half of life?
My mind is racing
My body's aching
I blink,
Time passes by

Ronald Wayne Bebler

Morning to Mourn

At these crossroads
We gather this morning to watch
Gulls and beggars play
A child
With silent, vacant eyes
And a hopeless, smileless face
Dress in tears
As tattered as her clothes
Pleading, praying for a few coins
As she turns to collect dropped coins
A gull quickly steals her bread
And is gone
Now we gather here
We mourn this child no one knew

From Ashes to New Fire

Gray ashes lay around
Like abandoned papers in an alley
Slaves to the wind
Blowing in circles
Picked up, dropped again, and again
Swirling in a cell
No escape
Ashes not of combustibles
But ashes from the fires of my life
Relationships that burned too fast
Dreams that didn't burn long enough
Times I thought wouldn't burn out
But did
There are some embers still glowing
Albeit few and small
They offer a hope for rebirth
A rekindling of fires
To again have a life
That blazes with new flames

Warmth of Winter Sun

As I close the last door
Of my decaying house
Going out into this day
Of icy breezes that slice the air
It is the apricity
That hits me
I feel a warmth
Almost like a renewal
The warmth of the winter sun
Reaches into my crumbling house
Searching out fallen dreams
That were once strong beams
Or thoughts and hopes
That now are just pieces
Of worn-out walls
Floors pitted with holes
Old yellowish cobwebs hang
From collapsing ceilings
Over everything has
Settled a dark gray dust
Mildewy odor fills the empty air
That was my heart
Now that the last door is shut
Today offers a new sun

Jayden Bird

A Fish Out of Water

Pond full of fishes of beautiful pinks,
heart full of wishes of suitable links.
Looking for friends, my very own fold,
where companionship mends the sadness and cold.

Another water, another school—
these all blue, and oh, so cool.
I thought I might fit, that I could belong,
my longing so fervent, my yearning so strong.

Turning my head, I look at myself—
a rainbow of color, a beautiful self.
Where is my gang, my tribe, my crowd?
I want to holler, emphatic and loud!

But I am too shy, too worried of anger,
of chill and blame and way too much clangor.
In ponds full of fishes, I'm all alone,
my oneness endearing and yet unknown.

Deadly Fury

my fury lives
within
my chest—
breathes fire,
growls,
and snarls

whipping its tail,
grinding its teeth,
it bides its time
and waits

my fury lives
within
my chest—
its ire
barely controlled

I fight it,
suppress it,
force it
to its knees

‘cause once set free
to roam and rage,
it will burn me
to the ground

will tackle me,
suffocate me,
and not let me live—
for I have
kept it down

The Tribunal

a forceful meow echoes down the hall
demand for court clear and crisp
the ghost of old casts shadows at the wall
stealthy movement strong and brisk

demand for court clear and crisp
cat spirit knows what the problem is here
stealthy movement strong and brisk
it calls for justice for those it holds dear

cat spirit knows what the problem is here
waiting in the shadows ready to pounce
it calls for justice for those it holds dear
not willing to relent or give an ounce

waiting in the shadows ready to pounce
it watches the verdict being brought in
not willing to relent or give an ounce
cat spirit approves with a lift of its chin

it watches the verdict being brought in
the ghost of old casts shadows at the wall
cat spirit approves with a lift of its chin
a forceful meow echoes down the hall

Posted on Instagram and Facebook in January 2026

Michael Brockley

Ars Poetica (The Last Book)

The last book I read was a mystery that doubled as a love letter to the color green. In my one life, I have mastered the art of misplacing the ridiculous items a man who has too much believes he needs. A minuscule comb for grooming a mustache. Packets that contain velcro straps for hats a tad too large. And the wistfully-colored feathers that fit in the hatbands of fedoras and trilbies. I squander time being stymied by chopsticks. Everyday I dither away the hours trying to remember the second verse of a song no one sings but me.

Extinction Baseball

after Philip Dacey, *Mystery Baseball*

In the bottom of the ninth, the pitcher turns from the plate, confused by the catcher's fingers stabbing at the dust. Weakened by the bark of his infielders baying at the shadow of the new moon. Within the periphery of his pickoff point, he glimpses mastodons and dodoes as he adjusts the seams of the ball within the claw of his hand. From the cave within his glove, a Neanderthal shaman recites the rumors of a stargazing daughter and a fire-phobic son while the stadium lights strobe the ace's eyes. One by one, his teammates flash the cold heat of fireflies and vanish. The shortstop shudders and fades into the earth. The center fielder disappears into fog. As an owl talons moles along the warning track, the reliable right fielder flees to the sanctuary of the bullpen. On the infield, yellow bones, ghost feathers, coprolites. The boundaries of the park implode, and unlikely dinosaurs lumber toward the mound. As the crowd dies, the pitcher steps toward the silence on the fulcrum between abandon and cowardice. He pivots toward home against a lineup of dire wolves without the relief of balk or wild pitch. The sphere lobs from his fingers, ashing his skin with age. Vertigo strikes. Beyond the tunnel of his vision, a rout of Stone Age hunters surrounds him, herding the last beast of its kind toward the edge of another young Earth.

An Apology to Marcie for the Snowpocalypse Fiasco

I sat with Marcie on the hardwood bleachers of the Men's Gym at Ball State, waiting for Styx to appear. David Loggins had nailed his chart breaker, but a blizzard delayed the headliner's arrival deep into the amnesia of night. Marcie had dark hair and dark eyes. A Brockley girl, my friends would say. I squirmed on the bench seats, namedropping Wile E. Coyote, Conan the Barbarian, and Raquel Welch. Hem-hawing. Babbling about Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, my kindling enthusiasm for a Jersey rocker named Springsteen, my affinity for walking. I was in my twenties then. Had yet to become the dunce in the dating classes I would attend before gathering goose eggs in the speed-dating disasters of my middle age. I sang "Please Come to Boston" to Marcie when I didn't know how to flesh out my chatter. We could hear the armageddon of snow and ice assaulting the gymnasium walls. Styx took the stage at midnight, played "Lady" and "The Grand Illusion." A snippet. A medley. An encore. In the parking lot, my Mustang, a ne'er-do-well that ran when its horoscope permitted, ticked with the impotence that would hallmark amours de mon avenir. I don't remember a word she said to me. I don't remember the clothes she wore or the jewelry she chose. I have a dream in which I am robbed by a truck driver with a derringer who steals a Van Buren dollar coin and flees on a Conestoga wagon. I know the plot for the Elephant Grass War Crimes nightmare, where I am found guilty by the dogs I cherished. But Marcie's biography is a murky Picasso of Columbia City proms, art student masterpieces, and a cab ride home through a blizzard from the worst date of her life. At 59, I sang "Born to Run" in a trustworthy Cobalt. At 76, I a cappella "Running on Empty" in a stalwart Chevy Cruze. I purchase CDs by Neko Case, Lindi Ortega, and Charlotte Cornfield. But nothing, nada, not even a remaindered eight-track Greatest Hits by Styx.

Daniel Carpenter

On Linda Pastan's 'Spring'

When she writes of a season
– cast as female – that arrives
just as we lose hope
blowing dandelion breath in our ears
and we forgive her –
open our arms –
throw off our faithful sweaters –
is she implying infidelity
to the cruel peace of winter
some inequality to the seasons
that seduce us each in its turn?

or is she celebrating the generosity
of a world that would teach you and me
that faithfulness is not cast off
when we're freed to wander away
to the warmth and youth of Another
the heat and ache of still another
knowing home always waits
in all forms and all seasons
even when cold is to be the comfort
sweater draped over the easy chair
as hot breath gathers patiently
behind shut, darkened windows
forgiveness not ours to give
so much as to savor

He Who Exalts

old and vanquished
death having taken up residence
not yet in his house but just up the block
and across a world in thrall to bedlam
no more manly missions
to spring him from bed or lure him into one
he gropes for a Mary Oliver glimmer
spots the flame of a cardinal alert on the oak branch
that betokens no more miracle than the meter reader
against a low sky, celestial as streaked plexiglass

intimate and remote as the God of his childhood
a calico cat curls in his lap
responding to his every stroke
of opulent fur and sawtooth spine
with a rumble against the silence
that can only be from pleasure
occasioning a revelation
as he observes his hands
– seamed, bony, long done
with lovemaking and child-comforting –
as if for the first time
and turns his mind to the gentleness
they seem to have taught themselves
and is astonished

As Winter Persisted

through the usual hopes borne on bitter March breath
anxiety stirred by an April grey with thirst
panic in a May of grudging sunrises varicose with bare trees
Spring sat with arms folded asking why

why the good times of all these total strangers
even whose poets needed prodding to give thanks
were Spring's job to arrange
why it fell to Spring of all the Big Four
to play Mr. Nice Guy

but being exactly that under the Great Law
Spring inclined toward leniency
and elected for July to start the show
hoping that might make a blast of a wakeup call
but suspecting it was more likely
to fire up chatter about climate change

as if change were something to be avoided
but hey, when change is your whole damn life
you can get to know that feeling
year after year after epoch doing change –
you could use a change

Mary Couch

Sparkle Farts Saves the Day

Ebony Kitten spent her day,
riding a unicorn in play.
Sparkle Farts was the name he gave,
and her world he was out to save.

So, she rode him into battle
on his back without a saddle.
He raced around the yard with speed,
and fulfilled her heroic need.

Squirrel Wizard

Within the dark woods you may find,
a unique Squirrel of one kind.
He has fur, a deep reddish brown,
but beware he is not a clown.

With a name that's known far and wide.
Endowed with magic, he can't hide.
With precise words, sparks shoot from hands
and acorns fly across the lands.

A protector who is the best.
He guards forest creatures with zest
from outside dangers even man,
Squirrel Wizard protects his band.

Was that an Ent?

Within the woodlands by a stream,
I saw an Ent, or did I dream?
For Ents are fables, so I'm told.
Yet, here was one so very bold.
He walked in water to his knees
chasing after some honeybees.
This was the strangest sight I've seen
except for Bigfoot as a teen.

The Kiss of Life

Once in a while I would like a kiss
to keep my day from going amiss.
Sometimes, I need two or three.
Other times it takes more for me.
Sweet, light, and really fine,
kisses for me are quite sublime.
They make my day go much better
even when dealing with the Irish setter.
If I start the morning with just one,
nothing stops me till the setting sun.
Kisses were made for me to enjoy,
and I love them more than any boy.
Nothing in this world can ever compete
with a **Hershey Kiss**, life's special treat.

WORD PAINTERS

With words they paint brushstrokes of the world
captured in snippets of rhyme or free verse.
They flaunt displays of lavender meadows,
or frigid whistling winter snowstorms.

They use broad strokes, resounding kettledrums,
or faint splatters of tinkling wind chimes.
Daubs of words, echoes of hawk and eagle,
shades of darkness streaked with golden moonlight.

Their ink-stained pages render spider webs
with sapphire gemstones, autumn-hued woodlands,
tart strawberries melting on the tongue, or
plaintive cries raging against life's tempests.

They paint their canvas sheets with tints of light
and dark, life and death, laughter and sorrow.
Each brushstroke an expression of their thoughts,
a portrait from their poet painter's pen.

LIPSTICK ON A PIG

[The art of selling]

Farmer Brown drove to the market in Knot,
with a load of pigs, he wanted to sell.
He touted his wares from a likely spot,
but lost his sales to a woman named Nell.

He thought a gimmick would do the trick.
So he dressed a pig in tutu and hose.
A wig of red hair to match her lipstick,
and eyelashes curling down to her nose.

A tune he began to play on his flute,
as the pig danced around doing a jig.
The people laughed at its antics so cute,
that each decided they must buy a pig.

His wares quickly sold, faster than honey,
except for the one who he named MONEY.

“TOO MANY PETS”

I'm late for work, my tire is flat.
It doesn't matter, just feed the cat.

The baby's crying, there's a clog in the sink.
Just keep on moving and brush the mink.

My clothes don't fit, the kids won't rake.
Don't think about it, just find the snake.

The dinner's burnt, but I don't care,
for now its time to comb the mare.

Put the kids to bed, so I can jog.
Then go outside and wash the hog.

The day is done, the sun has set.
Thank God, I don't have another pet.

Mary Coulter

I Shake my Fists

I shake my fists
Leveled at the sky
Why have you taken
Her away from me?
Your kind of love
Mysteriously hidden
Taking everything, I have
Asking me to pray to thee
Is unacceptable
You can take your love
And throw it in the sea
Where darkness encases it
And drowns endlessly
I'll find my own love
Put it in my bloody heart
Gently pulsing and warm
And when you find it
And try to take it from me
You take me with it
So at last I'll be free!

Take it and go

I prayed to you
You took her away
If I pray more
Will you bring her back?
Why should I pray
When nothing matters anyway?
You promised me Heaven
But you gave me hell
You took all I have
To live in pain here on earth
But I would rather have her
For all my few years
Then have your heaven
For eternity
So go to hell
You manipulator of men
Go all the way down
Into the pit
You're not even close
To the pain I feel
You want me to rip open my heart
And let my real feelings flow
Well, you got it God
Take it and go!

Lonesome Cry

From the silence of my bedroom
I can hear her
Winter's cold is sending frozen air
Through the cracks in my windowsill
While I wait, I remember
Times gone by
Drifting off I listen
For her barren cry
It's been too long
Maybe she is gone
I pile my blankets high
Through the darkness
She cries
The snowy owl in the tree
From her lofty perch
She keeps watch
Over me.

Michael Ervin

Jannet Louise Anderson

Jannet Louise Anderson,
beautiful sweetheart soul,
my heart has become empty,
your death has taken its toll.

The days come different now,
with a clear uncertainty.
The pain within my side and back,
tears towards eternity.

Please don't stay too long,
hurry back if you can,
my heart and I need you here
to laugh with us again.

Drifting Cloud

In my car, at work, eating lunch
I look about me and see other cars
Quiet, still, as if waiting
Like yesterday and the day before that

The parking lot is the place where
Each has its spot
I look up, see drifting clouds
Wishing I was free like that

In Want Of Being Good At Something

I stand before a mirror combing my hair,
thinking about the day to come.
My anxiety talks to me, preparing a list to bare,
of things I probably will not get done.

Staying positive, I leave the bathroom,
drifting into the kitchen for pills and breakfast.
A good start has dispelled my sense of doom,
of continuing failings from my past.

As the day grows long, and the list is short,
there is no substitute for deliberate truth.
Persistence and integrity will never distort,
the purpose and direction of its proof.

Hope

A good friend lifted my heart by saying, 'You can do it'.

Saints and Angels

Above a doorway, inside the bookstore
Shakespeare and Company, reads:
“Be not inhospitable to strangers,
lest they be angels in disguise.”

Be kind and thoughtful wherever you go,
someone might need smile and a hello.
A person or animal might need help along the way.
Just holding a door open could help with their day.

Homeless are surviving on spare change,
Homeless are locked up in a prison cage,
Homeless are dying overnight from the cold,
Some may get a chance to own their own home.

During the war,
Dresden was fire bombed to the ground.
A POW steps out from slaughterhouse five,
Stunned, saints and angels died too.

Chris Hasara

Retire

By the time I retire
I will be too tired to be tired again.

I'm young enough
to be dumb enough
to have fun enough
for a dozen of us
but not so young
that I don't know
I'm being twice a fool my friend.

And I'd bet
everything I've earned
that I ain't learned
not to be burned
by holding fire
to the candle at both ends.

But in just a couple of years,
or so,
I sign off and clock out.
I can live like the other half,
wine and cheese and bubble baths
and have a Not-To-Do List
that's a mile and a half.

Today, I have to
mow the yard,
wash the car,
working twice as hard
as I would like to
in my "someday" dreams.

It helps me though,
to get to sleep
without counting sheep,
herbal teas
or smoking lettuce leaves.

I'm just regular, plain,
old man finally sitting down,
tired

Thunderclap

I hold my hands
like cups beneath my cheeks,
waiting for waterfalls
that will not come
unless I am compromised
by tired or hunger.

Then, they rage
in violent, racking
dribbles, cut off,
squeezed silent
by a face that cannot
allow the indignity,
weakness,
of free-fallen feelings.

Before I am fully fetal,
it passes like sky-broken clouds.
I am left wiping
my hands across my jeans,
red-eyed staring at
the shiny drop on the floor
that got past.

Exposed

Can you sing
the tree songs
of leaf and wind,
of sand and sky,
of ant and worm?

I cannot.
My voice is full
of steel and stone,
motor and motion,
need and never.

I can
dance
in the storm,
but never be fallen,
free as rain,
while I chain myself
like a rust-clotted Schwinn
on the bike rack outside
Wal-Mart.

Paul Jones

A Riot of Mercy

If you ride with me long enough
you will notice I cannot leave the water alone.

A quiet room is a dare.
A settled table is a challenge.
Comfort is a splinter in my heel.

I press on things.
I say the sentence nobody ordered.
I lean back in my chair
and let the silence start sweating.

Nothing has to be wrong.

Plates stacked high.
Kids laughing in the yard.
Preacher shaking hands at the door.
Everybody satisfied.

I still feel the rot under the floorboards though.

Red Alabama clay under my nails
no matter how hard I scrub.
My throat full of gravel from backroads.
I was born asking why
when everybody else was saying amen.

The standard is a fence line.
The norm is a pasture full of obedient heads.
I step over wire just to see who flinches.

I have broken good moods
to see if they could survive oxygen.
I have pressed a bruise in conversation
and watched truth rise to the surface.

People call that trouble.
They are not wrong.

But I am not fire.
I am weight on the beam.
I am the boot testing the porch step
before the whole family walks out.
Hate is low-hanging fruit.
Negativity grows wild.
Conformity is a recliner that swallows spines.

Love is field work.

Love is sunburn and sore shoulders.
Love is staying in the room
when pride demands different.

Love is looking a man dead in the face
after he cut you
and refusing to hand him back the knife.

Love sees the fear under the anger.
Love sees the child inside the loud mouth.
Love refuses to reduce a soul to a moment.

It would be easier to scorch the earth.
Easier to win.
Easier to gather applause for the sharp line.

But mercy carries more weight than rage.

Anyone can light a match.
Few will haul water bucket after bucket.
Anyone can build a following.
Few will build a bridge.

I rock the boat
because dead water breeds mosquitoes.

I stir the mud
because truth settles heavy.

I push on the wall
because I want it strong enough to hold us.

This is my riot.

No broken glass.
No smoke in the sky.

Just stubborn presence.
Just restraint with muscle.
Just tenderness that refuses to kneel to cruelty.
The wildest thing I have ever done
is choose love
when hate was begging for my signature.

That is rebellion.

That is my uprising.

A riot
of mercy.

Peter Kaczmarczyk

Bittersweet *

That moving on is bittersweet
Tells me it was right
To be with her
Even as I face the end
That I should not regret
That all that is left now
Is fading memories and growing pain

Bittersweet tells me
Had I never loved her
So much happiness
Would never have been
So much that she taught me
Never learned
That I must leave and begin again
Will never diminish
All the love
All the strength
That I still and always will
Carry along with me

* Bittersweet was previously published by Literary Revelations

A Subtle Smell *

I know you were here all around me
Your sweet subtle smell
Lingers in fabrics, things you touched
In everything that was us
A piece of you remains.
I know you will not return
But with your scent still here
It is as if you are not really gone.

I am the open meadow deep in snow
I will remain this way
Waiting for the late winter rain
To start the thaw so that I can grow again.
For now I am rotting leaves
Desiccated flowers
Hoping for the chance to unbury myself
To breathe again your sweet subtle smell.

* A Subtle Smell was previously published by Prosetrics

Brush of a Key

You were
A cacophony of words
The illusion of feelings
Plans made then undone
With the brush of a key

You felt
I could serve your needs
Be a voice of confirmation
A listener who didn't ask
Too many questions

You said
Don't hold my hand
Just hold my thoughts in your head
Carry me with you long after
I have left you behind

Talha Kahf

Sugar from Sunlight

I know how it feels to create art from the wood of a tree
But perhaps the tree feels just as artistic
Creating sugar from sunlight

In its own way, I am sure the tree feels
Just as graceful as Van Gogh
Just as eclectic as Picasso
Using its canopy as a paintbrush
Igniting the wind with color

Learning the language of the trees
Meanings sitting under them for many phases of the moon
Taking deep breaths

Their exhale
Feeds my inhale
And my exhale
Feeds their inhale
We synchronize the expanding of our chests so that none of us are low at the
same time

We are not competing for freshness

Sincerely, the Rain

The mornings are for observation
A light misting dusting dewing in the early sun rays
Temperatures that finally welcome my presence
Snow steps back
And I step forward to show off my talents

Humans love green
And so, they must love me
My arrival means turning the land into a house of worship

My best friend is the child who plays in the mud
The mother who reflects on the cleanse
The mother who tells her sisters about me
The mother who sticks her palms out the window
The father who worries for his driving children

Do you smell the petrichor
And smile
Because you know I follow?
Just don't mistake my presence for something depressing
I am here to take care of the womb
Without her there is no space for me
Which is why I am terrified of tomorrow
But hopeful for the future

For a justice so divine
One that honors my legacy as a green giver
A life producer
A cycle facilitator
Never still and still
A noisy individual

Guest Star

You are someone's love at first sight and I am
Honored to be the fairy that descends from the sky
Turns you into a pumpkin and builds for you a carriage made of glass
Or something like that
All for it to expire by midnight

Your free trial of my magic will have ended
I float I flee I fly
From person to person
From prince to princess
Queen to King

I am blessed to be surrounded by royalty
But I could never kiss them
I could never befriend them
I could never fall in love with their palace walls

Because to do so would mean
The story would finish
Parents would read to their children that
I lived happily ever after, the end

Never, I will remain the fairy with the magic wand
Keep me nameless
But call me ambitiously ambiguous
Obnoxiously anonymous

I do not envy the lives of those other men and women
They love so loudly and beautifully and nicely
But for me
When it is my turn to live out a tale as old as time
I want to have already gotten my happy ending
I want to have reconnected so deeply with nature that tree roots grow from my
chest
My fingers dissolve into the soil
And my hair is used for nesting material

I want to have already felt love
A love so divine
Not for a lover
Or for a friend
But for my place in a pomegranate paradise

Larry Langman

Bright Eyes

I woke that morn
upon the rise.
To see the sunrise
in your eyes.
To brush your hair
so fine and true.
For you're my heart
I must pursue.

I've watched you as
you've sadly wept
I've held your hand
in sad regret.
Your pain is mine
as mine's to you.
As your sultry smile
shall see us through.

My walls were strong
my heart encased.
With just one kiss
my guard erased.
That essence a mist
that deeply imbued.
I was the pursuer
being pursued.

Now daylight wanes
it seeks its path.
The nightlife grasps
now seeks it wrath.
Her magic hands
caress my head.
She calls me hero
from my scars I bled.

From now until eternity
I have never deserved.
This beautiful angel
that time has preserved.
Oh, what time has given
I shall never forget.
It has no expiration
or no final regret.

The In-Betweens

In the midst of a childhood dream,
are creatures called the in-betweens.
Crossing dimensions, they step on over,
out of a doorway, of a four-leaf clover.

Wee they are, but inside evil dwells,
mischief in nature, as they raise hell.
Scaring each and every kid with fear
can only leave through hanging mirrors.

At times, they do good, but at a price,
coming across like they're really nice.
Leprechaun cousins are their only kin,
able to cross that divide, over, within.

The child wakes, they do all their bidding,
unaware of the scoldings they'll be getting.
Looking back through their hanging portals,
one-way exits, are widows for the immortals.

They have no pot of gold or any rainbows.
Exactly where they come from, no one knows.
Neither here nor there, or whence they derive,
are they amongst the spirits, or are they alive?

All we know, they have free rein of our world.
entering children's minds, their deeds unfurled.
Before they are noticed, they make their escape,
leaving behind memories they've left in place.

Rivers of Tears

Every Friday night, I'd walk
down to the river's edge,
reminiscing of the nights,
I held you closely in my bed.

Tears like a flowing waterfall,
drenches the ground,
cries can be heard from
the mountainside resounds.

We used to come down to
this river, our special place,
together in one another's arms,
is where we felt safe.

You were able to break,
walls I built around my heart,
secrets I had kept to myself,
never ever to impart.

Yet you chipped away,
ever so carefully to expose,
my true feeling inside, bared soul
opened and reposed.

We used to talk for hours,
listening to the serene waters,

watching our lives blossom
with the birth of our daughter.

It's been almost five years now,
since you left my side,
losing you and raising our child,
has been a hell of a ride.

You wouldn't believe how much
she resembles your face.
Her eyes, her smiles, how she carries
herself with such grace.

She always mentions you in
her nightly bedtime prayers,
and so much more resilient
than me, I've fallen into despair.

Who'd have thought I'd find my
courage
through a child's eyes.
I can see you through them, telling me
to fight, and to survive.

So, I shall carry on like the soldier
I once was and move forward.
Like sounds echoing over water,
I shall always endear your words.

I LOVE YOU!!
And you too!

Mary June McNeill

View of a boy through bike spokes...

My friend I see you wait..
The rain no conundrum for me.
The day drips, our union awaits.
Tiny drums, a tune on my spokes...
Let's away!

Girl in the darkening stairwell.

Look up!!!
Light falls on every step...
Fading as it deepens..
She waits for dusk's cloak.

I borrowed the quiet.

I borrowed the quiet to smooth the loud
Times of bone-shaking sound
Send me under a soft silent cloud
Cool, snow places do
The same
Just for a moment
To remember
It exists.

Quiet.

Two views.

A view from the dark
A hope of light
A view from the light
The dark intrigues
Provokes stories
As yet
Untold

The conundrum.

She chose
A rose
To trap
A snack
The bee
Would not
Be happy!

10 things that make me happy....

One fun!
Two truth.
Three trees.
Four Amour 💕
Five thrive!
Six mix.
Seven children.
Eight fate.
Nine fine.
Ten hen!

Hiraeth.

This feeling
I have
Holds a home.
My sense is
I go there
in dreams.
A comfort
no one
can remove.
A gift from
The Universe
I treasure.

Bruce McRae

Rainy Day Library

A baby bawling in the library,
already angry with the world,
the young mum slightly embarrassed
but too tired to care much.

A drunk, sitting in a chair,
asleep, face planted in a volume
of classical Italian love sonnets,
dreaming of Venice in a storm,
the waters rising round his ankles.

The librarian, contemplating
the world's end, the biblical end-times,
the collapse of culture, empires,
the species homo sapiens sapiens,
writing out the word 'disappointment'
many times, her handwriting beautiful,
the art of penmanship lost to the ages.

A fly in a window,
dazed by its own double-glazed reflection.
The spider at her spinning wheel,
her web a spun perfection.

And me, scribbling glib quotations
gleaned from books that few have read.
An effect without cause.
A freeman on a lifelong journey.
A servant in search of a master.

Answers in the Form of a Question

Are you the man who talks to chickens?
The woman who reads heads?
The child born without a liver?

Are you famous for juggling knives?
Walking over fire? Coming back from the dead?
Famous for your outlandish skill set?
Your ability to hold two conversations at once,
and yet nothing gets said?

Do you communicate with spirits
on a regular basis?
Can you swim without water?
Has love ever kissed you, rough and hard,
on the mouth?

In these days of yours-and-mine.
In all this good green earth,
have you ever been touched
by the vagaries of compunction?
In the storm to end all storms,
which lover misses you most?

Dog Barking

A dog barking in the night.
Barking at phantasms and sylphs,
at moonshadow and sylvan matters.
A dog barking at the darkness
looming in the innards of Man,
its voice both fierce and fearful.

Dreams broken by a wolfish howl.
A black dog in a blackened night,
barking at the flag of the moon,
at star-crinkle, at the scent of Jupiter.

And another stink too.
A thing with blood on its breath
and smoke in its eyes.
An interloper born
from ragged sleep and ill intention

We have become the monster.

Tracy Mishkin

After the Children Have Been Excused

Three pieces of birthday cake linger on the platter. A man entering his seventh decade savors the taste of his second slice, the chandelier's light reflecting from his fork. His wife passes him the cream for his coffee, but he doesn't use it because there is a speck floating in the pitcher. His mother says, "I remember changing your diapers sixty years ago." The man looks out the window, sees his children (no, grandchildren) playing with the neighbor's dog. He does not want to believe that he ever wore diapers.

Come Back Soon

There goes the moon, walking
power lines in her pearly best
above my mother's place in California.
She doesn't strut like that here—
the Indiana moon is storm-faced, serious,
an elder stateswoman of the sky.

My mother stains her hands
harvesting walnuts, then dresses up,
strolls like a princess of the night.
She loves us because we tell good stories.
Mom says California's just a phase,
she'll return to Indiana in a year
or two. She just turned 86.
I hope the cycle will hold true.

Mom at Totality

Jane writes monthly letters
in her spider script,
thanks my mother
for saving her life
eighty years ago.

The girls had heard the new janitor sat kids
on his lap and told them stories.

In the furnace room, Jane perched
on the janitor's knees. The girl who would become
my mother crouched in coal dust.

Something wasn't right. Her clothes were dirty.
She told Jane they had to go.

They told their mothers. Then the judge
in the courtroom.

The moon hulks, blocks
all but diffuse sunlight.
Sitting on a bucket
in a blue down vest
she is radiant.

Lylanne Musselman

Mrs. McDonald's 3rd Grade Class

...was my favorite, sandwiched in between
a whimsical 2nd grade year when Mom realized
I didn't learn math, and 4th grade where mean Mrs. Myers
warmed her paddle on our behinds more than teaching us
anything important we'd remember.

Soft-spoken Mrs. McDonald wore cardigan sweaters
and big button earrings. She taught us to say el gato, and
to count unos, dos, tres; she read stories to us every afternoon.
My favorite was Paul Bunyon and Babe the Big Blue Ox.
We learned the kookaburra song but the song I loved to sing
to my Great Aunt Mimi's schnauzer: K-K-K-Katy, beautiful Katy,
you're the only g-g-g-girl that I adore. Katy licked my face
every time as I giggled, loving life more each day.

A Real Generation Gap

It is rather crazy
to hear my college students say,

“I know who Paul McCartney is
because grandma loves him,” or

“My grandparents play Help!
when I’m visiting their house.”

I think it’s a timing thing
from another dimension

as I don’t feel old – yet
I’m a grandma now too – and

it really shines the spotlight
on how much time has passed

since The Beatles took that stage
on The Ed Sullivan Show

when I was a kid All Those Years Ago,
and where I am now In My Life.

A Couple of Free Spirits

She wanted to drive my car,
that 1964 white Skylark convertible
with the black rag top and shiny red seats
to Indianapolis to see her boyfriend, Bruce,
who worked at a music shop on Keystone Avenue,
but that car freaked me out - it would stall
at the most unexpected times, on railroad tracks,
in the middle of intersections. If Mom found out
we'd left the dorm at Ball State and traveled
an hour south down I-69 to Indy, she would be livid.

Bert, short for Roberta, said she'd drive
assured me nothing bad would happen.
So, we set out that December Friday night,
convertible top down, our 1974 long hair
blowing in the chilled wind, singing along
to the radio, Cats in the Cradle, Freebird,
and Bungle in the Jungle. It was exhilarating,
not telling Mom I was leaving campus, and
to have the top down in the frigid weather,
feeling freedom. It was the beginning of my life
of fearless travels with friends or all alone -
as long as I had transportation I could trust.

Mike Nierste

Where No Footpath Is Found

Lichen spotted lightened trees cling to cairns,
A solitary burr oak marked by burls,
And a lightning scarred ash tree,
Serve as obscure markers,
Reminding us of a way
Back home as we
Traverse trails
Where no
Footpath
Is found.

Flowers Emerge

Deep purple morning glory blooms
Fade, shriveling in darkness
Fold and finally fall
From sky and stem
As sun sets then
Emerge again
Brilliant

Rope Burns

Can you expect them to fight fair when
you're on your knees or dangling?
Falling from revered to reviled
driven to your knees
they demand
compliance
submission
obedience.

Power to change does not come
from begging, suffering,
or hanging on while
slipping down
rope-burned
hands to
bruised
knees.
Rise.

Back to Earth

A tree, older, like me,
formed from seed
shaped and moved
by water, wind, and sun,
stands, knot still.

Worn by work and worries
of this year,
and our waning years,
searching as strength fades with time
from unseen and unforeseen forces.

Persisting, resisting, what
can not be endured
we will all finally fall
under strain of standing, or storm
returning, reincarnated, but recognizable.

Misfortune - It's More Fun – a poem using *anagrams*

We thought we'd study but gazed all night at *October sky* with other *rocket boys*.
Aspiring future *astronomers* all, we stared till there were *no more stars*.
Intending to study from *earliest* dawn, we would instead *arise late*.
It is not *ideal* to study *tired* and ill. We *tried* though a little *ailed*.
In class we stood *silent*, knowing it is vital to *listen*,
but we were inattentive, more *daydreamer* or *readymade* night schemer.
Fantasizing all day and *night* is a fun *thing* to do.
Daydreaming - *It's more fun* than book learning, but sometimes brings *misfortune*.

The eyes - they see but every so often we only see
the forms we dream – we see what a bright star or white *cloud* could be.
We were inattentive to what our *schoolmaster* taught in *the classroom*.
During dreaded testing, our *teachers* spotted *cheaters*.
Aspiring to *saintliness* oft times *entails sins* for star struck mortals.
Our teachers became *angered* and *enraged*.
They punished all until we feared it would be our *funeral*, not the *real fun* we envisioned.
Misfortune – it's more fun./

Courtenay Nold

Shape in time

if you wish to change the stars and dance upon a moonlit passage
you will be forced to search the darkest paths
within your world...and your shape in time
seeking light in haggard darkness and dark in fertile light

My Body



Broken Stone

child's play under blankets
turns into recitation of bedtime prayers
echoing parental supplications
blind faith guides worshipers' perception
toppling thoughts of youthful imagination and wonder
form an overpass between existences
build on an understanding of unspoken words
innocence dismantled by mortal constructs
inhabiting humanity but cheating humankind
but stomping hard on cracks and lines
the footbridge crumbles ahead, as behind
a spar to gain tickets for a free existence

strolling alongside a once-mute stream
prismatic-colored spheres jump into view
and wild vines weave themselves together
forever clinging to the broken stone
once a bridge...now footprints
doing their own bidding

Bookmark

books create elation and journeys to breathtaking places
where characters' lives are bled and built
letter by letter...word by word...worlds jump from the pages
and hearts quicken with each new understanding

hope hidden alongside flowers
that take your breath away
fluff blown free from a dandelion puff
you make a wish

a tire swing appears tied by a rope
you hold on for dear life
reach for silver cloud linings
pulling in the moon like a kite in the wind and...you're flying

embrace the safety of your own secret garden
lay down in cool grass gazing at the stars
the fireflies afloat play hide and seek in the dark
lighting passages where spirits roam

in comfort you close your book

Ruth Nott

The Rhyming Life

I didn't set out to become a poet.
The rhymes just seemed to flow
Coming from a word I heard
Or someplace I might go.
They wouldn't rest inside my head
They shouted, "Set us free!
Put us down upon the page for everyone to see!"

Safe at Last

You get a sense of safety
when you're dipped below the water
and you realize that from now on no harm can befall you
that Jesus Christ can't turn around in the holy name of God.
And when it's time for you to join Him and stand before our Father,
He'll speak on your behalf just as He has promised.
There is safety in the knowing that you'll never be alone
from the moment you are dipped into His living water
and when you need Him all you have to do is ask.

Pass It On

Just one small seed is all it takes to grow a faith that's strong...
A seed that sprouts inside your soul as you read God's holy Word...
A seed that's watered by your friends as they try to help you along...
A seed you can share with others by the Word that you have heard...

What Do You Say?

Sometimes it's hard to express yourself
When confusion and anger ruin your day.
The words won't come and silence reigns
And you can't figure out just what to say.
Perhaps saying nothing is the answer,
Or offering a hug to ease the pain.
Sometimes you need to just walk away
When it seems there is nothing to gain.

Open Your Heart

When times are changing and you're feeling down,
Open your heart and your ears for the sound
Of God's love trickling in...
Drop by drop, trickling in.
It may take a bit for your ears to hear it
But your heart welcomes and does not fear it.
God's love is trickling in...
Drop by drop, trickling in.
Though times are changing, they can turn around.
A new direction and purpose may be found
As God's love comes trickling in...
Drop by drop, trickling in!

Carl “Papa” Palmer

Generosity by Design

The two wooden sticks
sticking out the wrapper
of the frozen popsicle
is an obvious invitation
to break in half and share

the daily

7am Tacoma Washington
coffee thermos on the porch
house shoes & bath robe
sight shortened by morning fog
mist alters familiar landscape
erases neighborhood homes
street lamp glow barely reaches
the ground as her haze shadowed
Honda arrives, lights blink twice,
waits at bottom of my driveway
with warm folded news tribune
and empty mug for a daily refill.

autumn leaves unfulfilled

too busy
always my excuse before
now with all the time in the world
too late
days grow shorter
time speeds up
with dreams still unrealized

one of these days has turned
into I wish I would have
reading someone else's words
rather than writing my own
planning for tomorrow knowing
that day will be even shorter
than today

Lee Pennington

A WOUNDED GROUND

thoughts of love are wide and deep
just as dreams when we sleep

snow heals a wounded ground
melts away without a sound

dare I meet you under cloudy sky
count the bird songs flying by

turn our dance new to bend
even ways of flying wind

I move toward you deep in flight
sacred moment waved out of sight

BROKEN WATCHES

even in night of cheer
frogs wake bubble croak
foxfire burns not so bright
rising sun last that spoke

give leaves spring chance
tucked flowers deep bloom
geese announce wonder ways
winter loses her icy tomb

count your blessings slowly
fear not winds come to play
trees fall as they sometimes do
broken roots nothing to say

give me roses or daffodils
slip of odor lilac dream
all time in broken watches
things never as they seem

excited beat of the heart
should I love forever deep
never once break to pray
every night my soul to keep

CANINE PLAY

I turn to see some little dog
chase a leaf down the walk
morning touch kindly fog
hopscotch game left in chalk

is the leaf alive or not
nothing but canine play
day promises to get hot
shadows have their way

long this scene has waited
lost deep in my head
now merely contemplated
in the first book I read

alice and jerry and little jip
one room school long gone
scene again slips my lip
memory still moving on

how can this be so new
why do images come and go
another gravel in my shoe
another stone stump my toe

COMES THUNDERS

I will twirl my ringlets
of wavy black hair
dance all day for you
promise love I swear

I will hold your voice
hear your hearts song
make music my choice
where lovers belong

over distant waters
away from goofbye land
even ink blotters
stain the holders hand

if the gift is you
such amazing wonders
lightning flashes true
then comes thunders

let not sorrow be your bind
nor tragedy claim your pace
leave hate far behind
in loves greatest race

DOG CHASES SLEEP

in the morning light aglow
times belt is tight and trim
everything we seek to know
all beneath a silent brim

only traces thought in flight
can bear pain deep as sin
little more that setting right
ways for love to begin

give me if you will a sign
to lead me along the way
dreams that cannot define
hide and wait just to play

over in the wagon bed
a hound dog chases sleep
sun slips below horizon red
time begins to count sheep

pause if will or not
slip new saying into air
hold not back what you got
explode it all like a flair

do you ever question dark
wonder why light drips out
ask reasons wolves bark
probe why mad men shout

Matthew Pope

Hold Tight to Love

In shadows of grief, memories fade,
A fragile tapestry, once vividly laid.
Prescriptions entwined, a tangled thread,
Lost in the labyrinth of a mind misled.

Names dissolve like morning dew,
The self, a fleeting mirage, askew.
Dementia's cruel dance, relentless sway,
Erasing echoes of yesterday.

Yet hope persists, a candle's flame,
Guiding through the fog, a whispered name.
Hold tight to love, though memories fray,
For in the heart's chambers, they forever stay.

The Door on the Ridge

A door stood alone on the spine of the world,
its hinges whispering secrets to the wind.

No walls. No roof.
Just a frame of weathered wood
holding back a sky too wide for names.

I touched the handle -
cold as a promise, warm as a dare -
and the mountains below stirred
like old gods waking from stone.

Beyond the threshold, valleys unfurled
in green waves,
a lake catching sunlight
like a coin tossed by fate.

Clouds drifted slow,
as if waiting to see
whether I would cross.

Every adventure begins this way -
not with a map,
but with a question the heart answers
before the mind can protest.

So I stepped through.
The wind rose.
The ridge fell away.

And the world opened
like a story that had been
waiting for me
to turn the page.

Knock on the Door

Knock on the door,
and a quiet memory answers -
not of fame,
not of fight scenes,
but of classrooms and gym floors
where he knelt to look a child in the eyes
and tell them they were worth saving.

Knock again,
and the echo carries the heartbeat
of Kickstart Kids -
a place where lost paths were rerouted,
where discipline became a lifeline,
where a uniform and a bow
felt like the first steps
out of the shadows of addiction.

He knew the dangers waiting
on the corners, kids walked past,
the pressure that whispered
in locker rooms and empty homes.
So he built a refuge
out of kata and courage,
teaching them how to stand firm
long before life tried to knock them down.

In a world full of traps -
the kind that steal futures quietly -
he offered something louder:
purpose, belonging,
the steady rhythm of practice
that turns fear into focus
and temptation into dust.

Knock on the door,
and though he's gone from the doorway,
the halls he filled with hope
are still ringing with the shouts
of kids who found their strength
because he believed they could.

His legacy isn't measured
in the movies he made
or the myths told in his name.
It lives in the thousands of young lives
he pulled back from the edge,
one disciplined breath at a time.

And when the world knocks now,
those kids - grown stronger - answer.
They stand taller.
They choose better.
They walk the path he lit for them,
proof that a single life
committed to lifting others
can change generations.

Chris Ryan

I'm A Cat

In the sunbeam's glow, I stretch and purr,
whiskers twitching, soft as a whisper
with a heart that dances, wild and free,
in this cozy world, it's just you and me.

From windowsill, I leap, a dancer in flight,
pouncing on shadows, a fun delight.
With a flick of my tail and a playful leap,
I bring you joy, your secrets I keep.

With some mischief, my day's just begun
before I lazily bask in the warm sun.
Knocking knick-knacks off the table,
I guess they were too unstable.

Sometimes, I go hang out with the local stray.
We like to catch mice for they are our prey.
Inside I like to play with a ball of yarn,
it's much better than living in a barn.

I curl in your lap, a warm, furry ball.
In this cozy haven, I feel ten feet tall.
Your fingers through fur, touch so gently,
in this quiet moment I find intently.

Through soft meows and gentle sighs,
I weave a bond that never dies.
For in this life, both sweet and vast,
I'm your cat, and our love will last.

Fishbowl

Life drifts in circles,
a silent rhythm beneath the surface
where light dances through liquid,
and time stretches in silence whispers.

Within these glass confines,
tiny world filled of endless muted echo,
colorful pebbles cradle my existence,
some fronds of coral waves gently,

Each day is same cycle,
marked by the soft plop of flakes,
a moment of hope cures my appetite
with raining feast from the heavens.

Yet beyond this transparent barrier,
another world I can see far beyond,
many symphonies of possibility,
where I might leap to explore.

But fate holds me in this watery embrace,
where freedom is a dream,
and the glass, a fragile prison,
till next day starts all over again.

Really, Don't Kiss Me

Really don't kiss me.
I enjoy the life of a frog,
where sun spills its golden light
across the pond's smooth surface.
Surrounding tapestry of greens and blues,
a stillness of calm with relaxing peace.

Each morning, I awake
by the morning sunlight.
My skin glistens with a sheen of dew
not longing for the fleeting warmth,
but the sun kisses my back
while damp dirt beneath my feet.

Winds gentle rustle of reeds
swaying with crisp, cool breeze.
Willow tree leaves drape over
wading just enough under the surface.
Ripples stretching out over time
before they magically disappear.

The water calls to me,
you witness my graceful leaps,
jumping from pad to pad
before I find one to quietly sit on.
Conversing with you in croak language

making a human friend.
Insects flitting around spongy big
woven into my paradise world.
Each flutters a song of freedom
buzzing to the call of adventure.
Until my stomach starts to grumble
for which they are a tasty snack.

At night, moonlight pulls me
into the depths of the pond.
Brightness of twinkling stars
reflecting in water with guidance.
Fireflies dance throughout the night
whispering secrets of the unknown.

Here in my quiet sanctuary
I am the king of my realm.
My throne is a patch of moss,
my crown is made up of lily.
Stones are the moat of my castle
surrounding my watery kingdom.

Really, don't kiss me
for it will only sadden me.
Let whirlwind of emotions
fill the depth of another's heart.
With boundary of responsibilities
for what really promises a royal prince?

Rita S. Spalding

Broken English

broken pieces
of glass, puzzles, hearts, lives
some can be put back together
a vase that was cracked and resealed
no longer leaks when flowers fill its water
it does not cry but stands straight and strong
puzzle nearly finished though one piece missing
we see what is missing but know it is complete as it can be
through the jagged splinters hearts tell their stories with sad beats
we write knowing someone else will see and build bridges with us
what is poetry if not letting ourselves bleed through the fragments
knowing someone will see and bleed quietly along with us
broken pieces unbroken lives puzzles that mend our breaks
we stand in these moments and lay down our sadness

Come to the Table

the table is nicely set forks on left
spoon and knife on the right and all knives out
around the big circle we are polite
we pass recipes food and smiles and hope

we find our present emptiness is fed
from past banquet meals that made us happy
life was once a simpler patchwork of quilts
today's seasoned tablecloth is complex

unraveled years were sometimes kind to us
and when they were not our loud voices screamed
fireplace now settles into evening hours
poking through the ashes with a hot iron

Let There Be Peace

what does she do to keep the peace
within herself when a world spits
madness overflowing with sad

she walks on dirt that opens wide
swallows the darkness swallowing
her mind from hatred and death

she did not invite nor own this
all that defies goodness in the
name of fat hunger and gripped greed

she feels the earth between her toes
sugar sifting into a cake
pockets of empty do not feed

it is the sureness of the ground
that feeds its sweetness found inside
her fingers brush its kind earth veins

softness comes into sacredness
eyes close and slowly breath follows
peace be like the dirt walking home

Christopher Stolle

The Crisis

with apologies to Langston Hughes

I've known beds:
I've known beds as venerable as wizards
and as contemporary as fish flowing in rivers.

My suffering has grown calm like beds.

I slept in Germany long after the war.
I broke a bed in Indianapolis and caught insomnia.
I stared at the London Eye and dreamt about you.
I listened to the lullabies of the Pacific Ocean
after the baseball game at Candlestick
and learned what exploring your fears means.

I've known beds:
Venerable, luscious beds.

My suffering has grown calm like beds.

A Different Kind of Green Bean Galaxy

Late summers on Crowe Road
meant helping our grandparents
with harvesting fruits and vegetables:
apples, cherries, peas, corn, and strawberries,
among many other delicious delights.

But my favorite was green beans.
Great satisfaction comes from
filling a bucket full of green beans
and then enjoying an iced tea
while snapping them in half,
canning jars waiting for their arrival.

It sounded like breaking a small bone
and then covering the wounds with water.
I felt like I was taking part
in some newly developed sacrament,
the prayers and hymns giving life
to something that's been taken away.

That small garden is now all grass,
seeds and roots no longer taking hold.
I miss my grandparents and the opportunity
to learn how life goes for others.
And the green beans are silent now,
their bones healed and their flesh grateful.

Patois Acre

I wandered mystical depositories—
Alexandria, the Athenaeum,
und Die Bayerische Staatsbibliothek—
to look for words for this poem.

I flipped through tomes
at capitalistic libraries—
The Strand, City Lights,
et Shakespeare et Company—
to look for words for this poem.

I read all the ars poetica classics—
Horace, MacLeish, Neruda,
Snyder, Sexton, Szymborska,
and Merriam's "How to Eat a Poem"—
to look for words for this poem.

What you've read is the best I could do.

Robert Willoughby

Phoenix Logic

-The fire that outthinks the past

I am back in the old world—
The one where my mind doesn't matter.
This world is a wasteland of echoes,
A place where trauma stalks me openly
and "you are stupid" detonates in my skull
with the force of a childhood bomb
that never stopped ticking.

Dejection slams into me.
Rejection claws at my ribs.
Confidence Buckles,
crushed beneath the weight
of voices that should have lifted me
but instead carved their names
into my fear.

Yet as I sit in this ruin,
I know the truth:
I am a genius—
not in arrogance,
but in fact.
My mind is sharp enough
to cut through steel,
my knowledge deep enough
to drown the lies.

But logic and reason stand guard
while wounded emotions riot,
committing their treason
with the precision of old trauma—
a mutiny rehearsed
in the dark corners of childhood.

Those external voices—
the ones who should have cared—
became an internal tyrant
that hisses:
don't speak,

don't try,
don't dare.
You are too stupid
for your voice to matter anywhere.

And damn it,
I became too good
at finding people
who echo that harm,
too skilled at walking straight
into the arms of those
who wound without hesitation.

But even here—
in the ashes of this old world—
something ancient stirs.
The phoenix in me
shifts its wings.
Heat gathers
Fire remembers its name.

Rise up again from the ashes I shall.
Not gently.
Not quietly.
But with the force of a mind
that refuses to die
in a world too small to hold it.

This trauma that resurfaces—
I drag it into the light.
I lay it to rest.
I reject the old world
and the stupid, poisonous voice
that never belonged to me.

I rise.
I rise.
I rise.

The Scars You Bear

The scars you bear are the stories only you can tell.
They mark the places where life pressed hard against you, where something broke open, where something healed. Some can be seen. Others live beneath the surface. All of them are real.

But let us remember this:
While your scars are yours to carry, they are never another's to reject.

No one else has lived inside your skin.
No one else has felt the weight of your memories.
No one else has earned the right to name your wounds as unworthy.

Scars are not signs of failure.
They are signs of having lived.

And when we meet them with compassion — not avoidance, not shame — we begin the work of shaping their meaning. We learn to hold them gently, to understand what they once demanded of us, and to choose what they will mean going forward.

This is the quiet power of ownership:
the wound may not have been your choice,
but the meaning of the scar can be.

And this is the quiet power of empathy:
to see another's scars not as reasons to turn away,
but as invitations to understand the depth of their becoming.

Hiromi Yoshida

Cantaloupe

“Fresh Cantaloupe”:
the plastered label on the
plastic Kroger container
grins irony after the
issued CDC salmonella out-
break warning. Dewy orange

cantaloupe chunks
drop into the ISE, each
chunk a thud of
remorse, casting away 25¢
increments, toxic
gurgles down
the drain.

The Stubbed Toe

My toe, a
bloated pink baby,
its tiny mushroom
head throbbed
painfully on
my clumsy left
foot, cradled in
a black lint-
speckled Heat
Locker sock
with stunned
companion toes,
unequally stunted
and shriveling
for the same
relief.

Ulnar Tunnel Syndrome

My ulnar tunnelled left hand was
a withered gnome; gnarled
tree branch; stubborn bonsai,
adamantly clipped—pain flowering from arthritic fingertips—
flaring into one Zen hand

punching out electronic typescript—

the pinky throbbing
vulnerability (pink

cradled baby), curled inward
like a claw; an adamant fist

resisting blackly.

CERNUNNOS, GUARDIAN OF THE SACRED GROVES

DEEP IN WOODLANDS, A SACRED TREE IS FOUND
WHOSE WEATHERED BARK DISPLAYS A HUMAN FACE.
WITHIN LIES THE SPIRIT OF CERNUNNOS,
CELTIC LORD OF ANIMALS, WILD SPACES
BEYOND HUMAN CONTROL AND FERTILITY.

HE EMBODIES A SACRED MARRIAGE
BETWEEN HUMANITY AND NATURE THAT
DEFINES CELTIC SPIRITUALITY.

WITHIN ROUGH BARK HIS WEATHERED FACE APPEARS,
A PROTRUDING NOSE BENEATH JADED EYE.
ABOVE A RING OF GREEN LEAVES FORM HIS CROWN,
BRANCHES BECOME A SACRED TORC AND STAFF,
SYMBOLS OF HIS DIVINE AUTHORITY.
THIS IS NO SAVAGE DEMON OF WOODLANDS,
BUT A WISE DEITY OF RENEWAL,
AND MYSTERIOUS TRANSFORMATIONS.

BESIDE HIM TALL OAKS HOUSE TREE NYMPH SPIRITS,
WHO STEP FROM THEIR OAKS TO DANCE IN MOONLIGHT,
WHILE FAIRIES JOIN THEM IN THEIR MUSHROOM RINGS.
CERNUNNOS STEPS FORTH TO JOIN IN THE DANCE,
SOON SURROUNDED BY WOODLAND CREATURES.
MUSIC OF THE NIGHT INVADES THEIR SENSES,
AND THE HOUR OF MAGIC ARRIVES AT LAST.
THE WOODS TRANSFORM AND BECOME ONE WITH SPIRITS.

BY MARY COUCH