

1980

UA68/6/1 Zephyrus

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Zephyrus 1980

Contributors:

Kim Ball – The Loved One

Phil Barnett – Straw Man

Marcel Bush – untitled

Lisa Davis – Rickie Afternoon

 Last Night

Diane Elson – After Dinner

 Mole in a Hole

 Waiting Beside Empty Skates

 Provoked

 Brittle Night

Dorine Geeslin – Enforced Freedom

Gover, James – The Know Nothing

Dawn Jackson – Ballet

Randy Kinkel – Once I Looked for Flowers

Lisa Lewis – Death Again, Teasing

Gregory Nunn – Notes

Cheryl O'Donovan – The Old Cistern by the

Twisted Grapevine

Martha Parks – For Zach: the Bitter Poet

Leslie Riley – Dolls

 Knot

 Child Unconceived

 Shades of Gray

Sheila Riley – Lockport Dam

 She Wants Me to Reach

 Crazy Ray

 Zelmer D. Zern

 Mattie Ligon

Robert Rowe – Hester Wore Scarlet

Ann Scott – A Study of Contrasts

Tip Shanklin – The Thing is This

 Crow Man

 Using Up Daylight

 Ghost

Dorothy Spear – The Sacred Cow

 Reality

 Drink This Cup

 A Heritage

 The Time Warp

Pam Steagall - Pretend

Stephanie Taylor – The Quilt

Fred Wheeler – The Ballad of Asia and Waylon

Martha Zettlemoyer – Into the Fire

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ZEPHYRUS

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We thank Dr. Will Fridy and Mr. Robert Wurster for donating twenty-five dollar cash awards for the best poetry and prose submitted to *Zephrus* for this issue. Additional prizes of twenty-five dollars each are given each year by the Browning Literary Club of Bowling Green and a Bowling Green couple.

Tip Shanklin

THE THING IS THIS. . .

A leaf has fallen
and in an instant
curves in a motion
of wind and water
and then becomes them.

Quiet and clear
these first days of October
bathe me
in showers of sunlight and silver
like a stream
cleansing small brown pebbles.

Tip Shanklin

CROW MAN

Startled
I see him
deep as a pool
into himself.
Brown coarse face
and eyes
hard and sharp
like an axe,
he struggles with his
disjointed walk.
Furious wind pursues
hesitates
and clips him ragged again.
This marionette
uncertain of his own encounters
picked to the skin the bones the eyes
stops, cocks his head bird-like
and stoops to reach something in the gutter.
Retrieving a small piece of blue tile
he conceals it
a delicate treasure
and replaces his find with sleek quills
and three drops of blood.
This man
flapping forward.
a crow flying into storm.

Tip Shanklin

USING UP DAYLIGHT

The sun lapses
into a dusk of scarlet mist
hovering over miles of timbered silence.
In a rusting field
I linger motionless
like the very birth of air
and my fears grow
from the burdensome stillness.

The enamel moon
accelerates her ascent
hurries before there is
nothing left to revive;
hurries as the last vigil
of sunlight
disappears into dense woods.

Far beyond the barest
line of a hill
a pond's icy flesh cracks—
the sound comes tearing
through trees
and cuts the silence with cold sabres
while I stand
waiting to shatter into
pieces of jagged ice.

Tip Shanklin

GHOST

The day closes
like a dry mouth
and leaves him
deserted in the gloom
an inhuman glow
undulating,
lacking even the body
of a shadow.
Gently
a clock chimes
night is cadenced
with warm breathing
the red maples rustle.
From the corridor
comes a slight stirring
in the darkness,
the secret he carries
troubles his sleep.
As if a shaft of moonlight
had entered an open window,
he is gathered in one place
wringing his haunted hands
unable to speak
mouthing his silence with
white trembling lips.
Each night
I feel I am becoming
like him
imitating his silence
tracing with limp fingers
the image of an ashen face
opposite me in the mirror.

THE SACRED COW

Silent Valley was well named, lying hot and steaming between the towering peaks of the mountain sentinels. Thick, dense jungle hid the mass of teeming life beneath a velvet green cover. No sound of insects escaped the murky depths. Tigers prowled the stillness on padded feet; monkeys played among the vine-laced trees, chattering softly, their acrobatics muffled by the wall of trees and brush. The Great Indian Hornbill made an occasional splash of color as he darted from his roost to a distant tree.

Two hundred miles away, the State's Chief Minister was explaining to members of the press and worried conservationists why the construction of a proposed hydroelectric dam near Silent Valley would not endanger the forest or the wildlife inhabitants. Opposition to his explanation was evident in the angry faces before him. He had listened to arguments that no more electric power was needed; he had heard reasons why the dam would forever destroy a way of life for the natives; he had hoped for a reprieve when suddenly, in the very back of the room a diminutive, dark man stood up.

"I have relatives," he began, "who live in the village of Kerala, near the edge of Silent Valley. I go there to visit my people and pay my respects to the village elders." He paused, as though to give his words time to reach everyone in the room.

"They are in no need of the things the electric power could bring them. It could only bring them confusion and unhappiness. Those who are not content with the village life move on to the cities, send their children to the schools, and learn new skills. Their lives are different and they are happy in their new ways. Those who remain in the village are happy and secure with the old ways. If the dam is built, it will flood the forest at Kerala and the village would be flooded with it. My people would have to move out, and I fear they would not survive such a change." He slumped back in his chair, limp and exhausted from his efforts.

The Chief Minister knew it was useless, but he made one more attempt at reason. He was interrupted by Home Minister Reza Nadir, whose presence at the meeting was to add strength to the opposing segment.

"Building this dam would be an act of national folly," he stated flatly. "This area has enough electric power, but it doesn't have enough wildlife. Our wildlife in Silent Valley are an endangered species. The dam would destroy not only the animals, but the richest part of the rain forest. I am

not convinced this country would realize any benefit from a dam that would mean the destruction of the valley. It's too high a price to pay for a doubtful outcome."

The wearied Chief Minister adjourned the meeting; the resulting bedlam was too much. He hoped by the next meeting tempers would be under control and a more sober consideration given to the dam's construction. The Chief Minister knew the country's electric power was good for perhaps five more years. Without the dam, all the progress they had made to this point would be lost. Further advancement of his country would be impossible and he feared they would once again be swallowed into the primitive surroundings. Wishing for more insight and wisdom, the Chief Minister locked his chamber doors and left the building. Once outside, he became absorbed in the beauty of the pastel-hued sunset.

"I WISH I could make them see," he whispered to the sunset.

It was late before Home Minister Nadir left the city. He had made several stops before heading home, carefully laying the groundwork to secure his position. He knew the government had passed legislation to protect the valley, but the backward natives did not know it. The valley was not his concern. Nadir had been approached by a group of promoters with a scheme to sabotage the construction proposal. Their offer was much too tempting for Nadir to refuse. He was to clear the way for the promoters' own representative to move into the resulting confusion, present a rational proposal, and come away with the prime contract and a fat profit.

As his mind darted from one thought to another, Nadir did not notice his foot becoming heavy on the gas pedal. He was anxious to reach home and put the day's events behind him. Tomorrow would be a full day; he had been cautioned that time was critical. Speeding along the twisting road, the car's dusty headlights failed to pick up the dim form of the huge Brahman bull blocking his way. Too late the form took shape. Nadir jerked hard on the steering wheel in a desperate effort to miss the creature. He was faintly aware of an impact and the sound of shattering glass before darkness closed over him.

The newspapers carried the story of the tragic death of Home Minister Reza Nadir. Great detail was given to the concern of Nadir's followers that no one was left to carry on their fight. It appeared certain that the dam would be built in Silent valley. The news story concluded with a glowing account of Nadir's many accomplishments and of his influence among the state's high officials.

* * * * *

The huge generators whined as they labored to power the dam's electrical system. Tons of water poured through the open gates and churned into the stream below. Above the dam, the great lake lay mirrored in the sunlight. Its ripples lapped the shore at the edge of the rain forest. Here and there villagers cast their fishing nets into the clear water, while waterfowl dipped and dived for their daily meal. In the backwater of the lake, jungle animals drank quietly in the shadows.

The inspection plane flew low overhead, startling a sleeping monkey. The plane left the lake area following the jungle route to the city. The pilot looked below him at the velvet green cover.

Silent Valley lay hot and steaming between the mountain sentinels. Thick, dense jungle hid the mass of teeming life. Tigers prowled the stillness on padded feet; monkeys played among the vine-laced trees, and the Great Indian Hornbill made an occasional splash of color as he darted from his roost to a distant tree.

Dorothy Spear

REALITY

You clutched my hand so tightly through the night
That waves of pain receded to an ache
As blinding flashes gripped me in a vise
And dulling senses faded all from sight.

Your night-long vigil gave me added strength
To match my courage with your faith in me.
The earth exploded and the curtain fell
To rise like dawn in awe at our creation.

Dorothy Spear

DRINK THIS CUP

I looked into your anguished eyes
And saw no recognition there.
I uttered words of comfort
And felt them lost upon the air.

This nightmare world holds nothing
That you would care to see.
The shadowy forms that fill it
Bewilder you — including me.

Your tear-stained face is pleading,
Your mumbled words ask why
Are some of us so old
And our young allowed to die?

I left you numb and helpless,
Your world an alien place.
The anger burned within me
That no reason could erase.

Dorothy Spear

A HERITAGE

Lost in the lingering twilight of memories,
His gnarled hands fashioned a phantom work of art.
There in the quietness of the summer day
He relived the height of his creativity.
The intensity of his emotions playing across his weathered face.
Deep in his reverie
He unknowingly became the silver-haired model
For the serious young man
Whose palette and paintbrush
Gave character and life to the canvas
Capturing for all posterity
The pride and pathos of the man
Fashioning a phantom work of art with gnarled hands.

Dorothy Spear

THE TIME WARP

He sat gently rocking
The smoke from his pipe curling upward
As he dreamily drifted into a sea of nostalgia.
Longing overwhelmed him.
He sighed for remembered sights and sounds,
For porch swings and coon dogs
And for a time that could never be.

She moved quickly and quietly,
Smiling softly as she passed the door.
Glimpsing briefly the gleaming chrome and tile,
She stopped and looked inside
Reassuring herself
That the cold baths, chamber pots and privies
were gone forever.

INTO THE FIRE

Well, old gal, your momma always said you can't stay in the frying pan when you're yearning for the fire. Wonder how she knew. Wonder what she'd say if she saw what you're doing now. I know what she'd say. She'd say, "Baby, you should have listened to your momma." Well, Momma, can't say I'm not sorry, but you're right again, as usual. But what else was I supposed to do with Little Charlotte on the way and Lenny long gone to the oil fields or God knows where? After all, Eugene was right here.

I know, I know. I'm sorry a hundred times. God knows I've probably gotten mine and little Charlotte's things together ready to go at least that many times the past four years. Seems like a body'd get weary from all this folding and unfolding.

I still feel sick when I think about the last time Eugene was off helping his brothers work his folks' tobacco. I got everything packed and into the old Rambler wagon, got Charlotte gathered up and headed for the interstate. We'd barely gotten to the filling station before the exit when smoke came rolling out from under the hood so thick I couldn't see two feet in front of the car. Too bad that's as far as I got. I remember the guy at the station saying something about the radiator and his mechanic being gone for the day and where was I going and the best he could do was barely enough to get me back where I came from. "Texas would have to wait," he said, and "what on Earth is a gal like yourself going to do in Texas, anyway?" He sort of laughed and shrugged his shoulders. I gave him twenty dollars. Crawled the ten miles back home in second gear dragging my tail between my legs.

That was months ago. I won't have to go through that again, now that Eugene's got the Rambler in tip-top shape for the winter. He's so scared something's going to happen to little Charlotte and I'll have to get into town in a hurry. For once his cautious ways are going to pay off.

Now quit thinking such thoughts about your husband. It's just uncharitable, that's what it is. Eugene is a good and decent man. He's worked this God-forsaken fistful of rock and clay into a real farm. He raises the finest dark tobacco for counties around. He's been such a devoted father, no one would ever guess he wasn't Charlotte's real Daddy. She surely adores her Daddy.

Daddy, Daddy. If she could only know her real Daddy she'd know what stuff she was made of. When she gets older she wouldn't have to look at

Eugene's dull brown eyes and pale red hair and wonder where she got those baby blues and that headful of chocolate curls.

I swear sometimes I believe I carried something that was all Lenny's and none of mine. I wouldn't be surprised if it was so. I used to melt when I got near all that power and spirit that was his. I still get quiet and quiver a little when he comes to mind. I've been quiet and trembly most of the time here lately. Eugene has noticed it, too. He just smiles sadly and abides it. He figures it'll pass in time. It always has.

But it won't pass this time. I've got to get little Charlotte her real Daddy and me a real man if I have to search every oil field in Texas. And if that doesn't work I'll ransack every pool hall and redneck bar from here to California. I've got to. I'll just bust open if I don't get out of here. I don't love Eugene. He knew that when we agreed to marry. It just wouldn't be fair to him if I stayed. He thought in time I'd come to love him the way he loves me. I used to pray to God I could. But I find myself hating him more and more every day. I hate him looking at me with teary eyes and knowing that he wants me. He knows I hate it and it hurts him so much he's almost quit trying. Lately I hate even being in the same bed with him. I hate him for not being Lenny.

Oh, God, what a cruel animal you have created in me! I know Eugene is a man—a good, kind man. He can't help it that he's not Lenny. It's just not in his power to make my skin hum and my chest well up and my heart beat so fast I think I'm going to explode. It's not his fault he didn't get those big blue-ocean eyes of Lenny's that lap away at you like the waves on the beach. I'm sure he would have asked his Mother for those big black curls and that deep chest and those thick steel arms if he thought asking would do any good.

Okay. Get a hold of yourself. Time? What's the time? Almost four. Charlotte will be up from her nap soon and hungry. All that's left to do is get supper and wait for Eugene to call. Got to put his mind at ease. He'll be calling soon to ask if it's okay if he stays over at his Mother's for the night. Let's see. . . they're stripping today. What will it be this time? I know. The work hasn't gone as fast as they expected. They would have to work well into the evening and start early in the morning if they could hope to help Eugene work up his tobacco the rest of the week. He knows it's a two day job but he never makes plans to stay. I could've been half way to Texas by now. Oh—the phone—

"Hello?

"Yes, we're fine. Charlotte is just waking up from her nap. How's the work going?

"Well, I guess you'll be having to work well into this evening, then?

"Yes, sure. Besides, no sense in driving all the way across county just to

get up at the crack of dawn and go right back.

"Yes, you're right. It will do your poor Mother's heart good to have all her boys back around the supper table and for an overnight. Besides, you'd enjoy the visit. You see them so seldom these days.

"You know I don't mind. I understand.

"Of course, we'll be alright. Don't worry.

"Yes, there's plenty of gas in the Rambler.

"Okay. I'll look for you all tomorrow afternoon, then.

"You too. Bye."

Lisa Lewis

DEATH AGAIN, TEASING

Graves wink,
like silent night ladies
offering dark peace,
Death parts their soil
and Heaven is entered, there
Under and inside—lies
soft, pure mother earth
Where worms wiggle,
Eternal life tickles the dead.

Stephanie Parrish Taylor

THE QUILT

a faded patch
from the piecework history
of patterned women

soft swatches of cotton calico stitched
sparse triangles against a blank expanse
in the seventies of a woman's life

handed to a daughter, shuttered
in camphored rooms
handed to a daughter, stored
in a hope chest of dreams
handed to a brother's daughter
who draws it tight
around naked shoulders
savoring its mothballed paleness
saving it for no one.

Diane Eison

AFTER DINNER

At thirty-two a woman's world collapses
And scrambles her brain.
Emptiness, brash noise,
Salt on a slug,
Dissolves her fragile self-remains
Horded valium — Strange supper.
She's in 201
Resting from the edges
Of final sleep
Pumped clean —
Still empty.

Watch them ponder their guilt —
Throw it one to the other.
Who shared the meal?
Who would like dessert?
Hover below her hospital window.
Hope to inch away
From
Hope.

Hope for hope to inch away.
Decisions air lift when heavy packages shift.
Give it away.
After dinner, we should rest,
Slip away forget the menu.
Call me, will you?

Disappear.

Diane Eison

MOLE IN A HOLE

The brown mole
In the hole,
Squinty-eyed
Fellow, spied
Light up high —
DISTANT sky —
Anathema
Foreign to the
Soft crumbly
Mixture he
Usually plowed by
Way of going
To work, mowing
Through darkness—
Void blackness —
To tunnel
Alifull
Of dirt crumbs
Behind him.

He opens
Up mountains
Underground
Going down a
And across —
Pattern lost —
A designed
Undermine
Of earthly
Fixed contours.

Now surprised
By dazzled
Brightness found,

He blinks on
The blinding
Pain searing
His weak eyes
With light wise
Of seeing
And revealing
Fresh air freely
Moving, breezy,
Through red-tipped
Green leaves whipped
By windy whims
Moving through limbs
Out of trunks

Rooted and sunk
In the cool
Solid pool
Of damp earth
Without mirth
From which moles
Find their souls
As they create
To excavate
And discover
And uncover
Seeing with sight
Infinite light
To humble
A poor mole.

Diane Eison

WAITING BESIDE EMPTY SKATES

Carla can't skate.
At ten children should.
The rink is full of
Those who thought they could
Once and tried
Until, like Carla,
They also sat
Down and cried.

Her skates are discarded —
A sister's size too small —
a TOY ABANDONED
To roll empty on a child's frustration.
"At Christmas, maybe," she
Not trusting, says to me.

Children wait to flee
This waiting on adults
Like you and me.

Diane Eison

PROVOKED

Anger poured out
Blood red
To drip. Provoked wound
Deep within the heart
Drove his hand
To crush the glass.
Now shards stand
Bright and gleaming —
Miniature splinters
Tearing at proud flesh
Surprised. Winter's
Ice could never be so cold
With pain not felt where seen.

That towel won't help.
Don't stand where I might scream.

No what were you saying?

Diane Eison

BRITTLE NIGHT

Glass trees spike
The frozen black-blue white
Moon-chilled night like
Delicate spires,
Crisscrossing wires
Hung with curled and bent
Leaves, each a
Frozen ornament
Dancing with glitter-bright
Delicate touches of light.
 And frost-bitten limbs
 Hang close to splintering
 On the playful whims
 Of cold circumstance.
The grass stands
Dead to the wind's
Whispering below
Soft clouds promising snow.
Like shards of glass,
Once proud grass
Lies in brittle heaps
While icy earth sleeps
Through this attack — quietly
Creeping over the scenery —
A glassblower's art
Has captured nature's part.
 And I go home and weep,
 Shattered, unable to sleep.

Kim Ball

THE LOVED ONE

They had met such a short time ago. He was a terribly earnest young man from a small Southern town. She was a good-hearted native Californian who patiently gave him directions to his first class on the ridiculously large campus. In keeping with his Southern upbringing, he offered to buy her lunch. She accepted, then picked up both tabs herself. He was stunned and slightly offended and asked her out again. He made sure that he paid the bill the second time.

They spent more and more time together. She taught him the mysteries of health food and of getting the perfect tan, and he explained the process of raising tobacco and demonstrated the art of rolling flat rocks downhill on their edges. They didn't discuss religion much. He was brought up in the Southern Baptist Church and she came from strict Catholic stock. She smilingly confided once that she didn't really believe in God and that she'd never admitted it before. He laughed until he noticed the seriousness in her eyes. He felt slightly uneasy, but shrugged the feeling away. They were to be married and there would be plenty of time for serious discussions later on.

A few days later, he sat revising a term paper at his window. He received a phone call. The nonentity at the other end regretted to inform him that his fiancée had just died at St. Somebody's Hospital. She had had a car accident and had asked them to call him shortly before she died.

He lived twelve stories up. He deliberated for a very long time before he decided not to jump.

The funeral seemed bizarre, almost laughable. Her family and friends turned out in droves, sending thousands of short-lived blossoms to mourn her passing. She lay peacefully in the gleaming casket, dressed in a very nice suit that he knew she must have hated in life. Funny, but he could never quite remember her wearing that insipid expression. If you looked at her from the right angle, and if the artificial light hit her in precisely the right manner, you would think that it wasn't even the same person. Someone said something to him about being sorry that his loved one had passed away. He just stared vacantly ahead and walked off.

He slipped into the back pew of a Baptist Church on the next Sunday. He didn't know why he'd come, really. He didn't exactly feel on speaking terms with God, not the God who had allowed her to be snatched away.

As he numbly sat slumped in his seat, the words of the

fire-and-brimstone preacher battered him like a powerful stream from a fire hose. "Are you saved? You have to be saved or your immortal soul is in peril. Let me tell you, brothers and sisters, if you don't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal savior, you're lost! You are condemned to eternal damnation in the fiery pits of hell!" The preacher thumped the pulpit and scowled for emphasis.

Lost? Somehow it didn't sound right. It didn't seem quite fair. He got up and dazedly walked out, startling the staid church members.

He walked for hours. When he was totally soaked he noticed that it was raining. He sought refuge inside a Catholic church. He sat detachedly studying the statues in the room when a young priest sat beside him and asked if he needed any help. He said, "No, thank you," then, "Yes, I'd like to convert to Catholicism."

Every day he knelt and prayed for hours, his rosary in his hands. He was one of the most faithful parishioners, giving of his money and his time. He constantly had masses said for his dead fiancée, the girl who had died so tragically.

After all, she was baptized into the Catholic Church. She had been faithful all her life, continually doing good works. The God of the Catholics wouldn't keep her out of heaven on a technicality, like saying that she didn't believe in God. She was a good person. Purgatory was her soul's destination, not hell. She might even be in heaven already.

He feverishly said another prayer, gripping the rosary in his sweaty hands.

Robert Rowe

HESTER WORE SCARLET

A hammer hanging overhead,
Compressing, restricting, strangling,
taunting its four points-
Poor, Average, Good, Excellent,
Failure residing in all.
Judgment Day,
From Miss Winkle, the never changing
seventy-nine year old first grade teacher
to God, everyone wants a piece of the cake.
Stan the student studies hard
(Except on break when he heads south
to get a tan),
Why Stan? What for? Why for? Who for?
Oh! Your four,
Evaluate, examine, test, retest,
Drill, critique, quiz,
Drum roll, egg roll, egg head, honor roll,
STOP.
Why was the student so sick?
He suffered from a low grade infection,
Thus ends the tale of everyman

Phil Barnett

STRAW MAN

The gate is now an aged man
Its face a knotted grey.
The hinges creak, its arms are weak;
No longer does it bar the way.

Beyond the gate are swaying troops
Of grasses in the field.
They stand in rows of long ago-
The scars of plows that never healed.

And there among the brambling briars
A starving scarecrow stands
With shadowed face and cross to brace
His tattered coat and fodder hands.

A freying grass string belt still holds
His greying, sagging pants,
While on the breeze the wrinkled knees
Act out some ancient, mindless dance.

Beneath the ragged, slouching brim
His silent face has peered
With steady gaze for countless days-
His eyes hold dusty yellow tears.

Ambition finds no home in him,
No worries cross his face.
With burlap seams he dreams no dreams
Oh, how I'd like to take his place.

Cheryl O'Donovan

THE OLD CISTERN BY THE TWISTED GRAPEVINE

There's a hole
A deep, dark pit
Corroded with time and rain

As children we'd peer curiously down that hole
Where the cistern used to stand
My grandmother would send one of us outside
To fetch a bucket of water

In the cistern that did work

Arms churning, the metallic linkages stuck
The chains would gain momentum
Water rushing out the rust-covered opening
Pouring cold over our dirty little hands

One arm straining because of the weight
We'd try our hardest
Not to touch the grass bordering the stone-rock path

Tightwire performers at seven

Finally our destination in sight
We'd grope for the varnished black handle
To the screen door
Water slushed sloppily over the rim of the bucket
And Mom would lean over to grasp the thin wire

Those bucket handles pierced palm flesh

Maw-Maw, slicing tomatoes
Would shoo us away with a flour-incrusted dishtowel
While meat sizzled in the frypan
We returned to the empty hole surrounded by cement
Staring with fascination until supper

Gregory Nunn

NOTES

Awake in the morning,
throw a glance at the clock.
Life is so boring
and time is so young.
(but with a future shock.)

He was bred and raised
on disposable meals.
His eyes fixed a gaze
— television dreams.
(without watching the wheels.)

Bed until noon,
Noon until night,
Hardly a care,
Hardly a life.

Tired in the evening,
just sifting through sand.
With unsatiable cravings
for something unseen.
(just another old man)

Another misplaced soul,
without direction.
Takes his daily dole
with scarcely a thought.
(life is a question)

Short afternoon,
An early night,
Dark horizons,
Endless flight.

Sheila Riley

LOCKPORT DAM

Out for a drive to Lockport Dam in John L's Model T with
pantelas and whiskey under the rumble seat, stoppin' there and
here to shoot a groundhog,
then—
takin' curb and curve,
bitin' dust and—
don't it beat all—
knockin' them baby rabbits right off the road,
crackin' tarpin shells intwo,
just thinkin' about ridin' that innertube through white water—
gotta get to Lockport Dam before the boats go by.

Sheila Riley

SHE WANTS ME TO REACH

She wants me to reach
("Go this far, this high—")
for her
because I am her first,
her 20-year hope and future.
Before men on the moon
she stood on the porch-rail and
gathered too-ripe cherries,
too late.
She wants me to reach
("Go this far, this high—")
because she did not
when she could.
Being (primary, principle, precedent, foremost)
I am first mortgage on her life.
But I am tired of reaching
for the quarter moon
that Pa broke off and carried
in his pocket to heaven.

Sheila Riley

CRAZY RAY

Crazy Ray hands on the steps by the feedstore,
holding dust to rust on the crooked bannister.
His stiff-ashed cigar stub is soldered on a slobbering (sobering)
cleft-palate protrusion.
Crazy Ray, a hypnotized human rocking chair,
never young, never old—maybe—never there. . .
Crazy Ray, just an animation too noticeable,
like ink stains in white pockets,
like a paper cut in crayon flesh.
Crazy Ray on the corner,
used by some mother to teach her children to be
kind to midgets and mongoloid men.

Sheila Riley

ZELMER D. ZARN

Zelmer D. Zarn sowed her garden early when the sign was in the heart and
swapped her blade-worn mower for a bushel of tomato plants.
She leaned her water jug inside the corn-crib door—
beside the coal oil for broken blisters and sweat-bee stings.
Zelmer D. Zarn rested her roto-tiller under a locust tree and
broke ground with her smooth-handled hoe.
The morningtime was awful hot so
she cut a pattern and made a granny bonnet, with button-on strings,
for shade.
Zelmer D. Zarn planted 18 different vegetables and dropped 3 beans to a hill:
1 for the deer, 1 for the crow, and 1 bean left to seed and grow.
She bent her back to weed the rows and watched
the sun beat dry her hosed earth.
She buried her potatoes by the light of the moon and
marked the days 'til reaping on her complimentary Feed-Store calendar.
Zelmer D. Zarn strung a tin pie-plate fence to keep the varmits out and
tied her tomato plants up with old silk stockings.
She thought of late-summer canning and early-fall preserving and
gathered pieces for mid-winter quilting.
She harvested a plenty while her wrinkled blisters
crackled ever so loud in the morning sun.
And all good things are buried early by the light of the moon, in the sign
of the heart, under the shadow of a locust tree.

Sheila Riley

MATTIE LIGON

Mattie Ligon wore her orange beads to town and tied her balding head in a faded, pink plastic rain cap.

In the hollow of her left arm she carried her 12" x 6" black patent purse that opened every two steps when it banged against her leg.

Mattie Ligon used a 1969 Christmas due bill to buy a new dress at the local department store and

saw the cashiers laugh when her zipper broke in the dressing room.

She went to Mr. Watson's Shoe Repair and paid \$2.38 for a pair of heels and three patches on her sole at discount.

Mattie Ligon found a silver wig at the Methodist Church yard sale and wore it tag in front for two years.

She waited every fourth Tuesday for her water/sewer bill that she kept til Friday when her son drove down

to check her finances.

Mattie Ligon kept her orange beads in the cedar chest beside her diamonds and laughed when the bank told her she was overdrawn.

Marcel Bush

When I was just a kid, my brother and I—we used to make do-do traps in the back yard. When Blackie left a mess, we'd cover it all up with grass so no one could see it, and then wait like two Indians in ambush for someone to step right in it. No one ever did though. No one but me. It was awful, and Ma wouldn't let me in the house until I'd cleaned my feet in the creek and got it all off.

I'd say that creek was the nicest thing about our old house. Me and Bing caught little minnow fish there and watched 'em grow up to be frogs. For a long time I didn't believe they were changing. I thought my smart-faced brother—he was clever—was just finding weird fish and replacing the old ones, but then in school I learned they really do change.

The stream was a quiet place where I went to cry when I was upset at seein' Grandpa gripe at Ma. The cool green rug under my feet and the big log stump made it lots better than the sitting room at home. We didn't have no rug there; that's for sure. But the stream was. . . well, it was mine, all mine.

And besides, we weren't allowed to eat in the sitting room, but at the stream I could do anything I pleased. Lotsa times I'd sing out loud whether I had reason to or not, or I'd stand on the stump and dance around like a leprechaun. Sometimes I just talked to myself real quiet-like. When Grandma Young talked to herself they said it was 'cause she was old and crazy, so when I talked I made sure no one else was around, and then I whispered just in case. I know I'm not crazy, but some of the kids in school called me 'weirdo' so I had to be careful.

One time when I was all alone at my spot acting like Paw was still alive, and I was asking him about whether he thought Grandma was really crazy, and then I said no for him 'cause he would've said the same, well, I heard a noise and whirled around, and there was Bing, watching me with laughing brown eyes. Well, I was so mad—I ran at him and started hitting at him, but he just put his sun-baked arms around my shoulders and cried right along with me. I guess he felt lonely, too. After that we dragged Blackie in the creek and tried to wash all the tangles out of her hair, but she wouldn't be still and we ended up chasing her as she ran away back to the house. When Ma saw us we thought she'd be mad, but she just kinda laughed to herself like she knew what we'd been through.

Really Ma didn't get mad too much. And when she did spank us, she always looked like it hurt her more than it did us. She should've just let us be, and then she'd feel better, too. After we'd cried for a while, she's

always come in and hug us and say she loved us. I didn't understand it too good until she told me why she did it that way. She said that if we ever went off and got hurt and still thought she was mad, then it'd be bad for us and for her, too.

At school I learned to read and write proper. I don't talk right like I'm s'posed to though, 'cause Grandpa gets mad when I do. I can though. . . .

When I went to ask Mr. Russel for a job in his lumberyard, I talked proper and wore my best flannel shirt and combed my hair and everthing, but he said I was too young and not strong enough to help. I told him I was almost fifteen, and then I pulled off my shirt and showed him the muscle in my arm, but he still said no. Come back in two years, he said. Sure.

I wasn't gonna be anywhere near in two years. No siree. I was gonna be out on my own. Bing had left when he was sixteen and I sure planned to catch up with him wherever he'd gone to. I had a few friends at school but no one like him. They would've all laughed if they knew I talked to myself. They would've called me crazy.

After Bing was gone, I spent most of my time alone at my spot with Blackie. I also read every book I could get my hands on. I had a tiny flashlight, and when I was at home in the top bunkbed where Bing used to sleep, I'd pull the covers over my head and use the light so I could read. Ma slept about seven feet away, so I had to be real quiet turning pages, 'cause when Ma said bedtime, she meant it. But I never could get to sleep right away. . . .

Then Grandma died. It was awful hard—especially seeing Ma cry. For a while I thought Grandpa was glad, 'cause I never saw him shed no tears, but then at night I'd hear him walking back and forth in the sitting room. He'd never done that before, so I figured he must miss her after all.

After I turned sixteen, it was sorta hard stayin' around home, but I knew Ma and Grandpa needed me. They worked day and night that winter tryin' to keep all the chickens warm enough to stay alive. About eight of them died.

When spring came, I knew it was time. The widower Joe Collins started callin' on Ma, and she was lookin' younger every day; just like when the leaves came back on the trees, and everything was green again, she smiled and hummed to herself as she went about her chores—just like she was comin' back to life again, too. I wanted to stay around and see her wedding. I knew there'd be one, but I'd heard about the war, and I wanted my side to win it. So I left.

I never wanted to kill anybody. I wondered about the soldiers who I watched fall as I loaded the heavy metal musket—if they'd ever had a special place like the one I'd left behind. I wondered if they talked out

loud to themselves and if their moms were as good and kind as mine. And if they had a big brother. My God, I was only seventeen, I thought as I raised the gun to my shoulder and carefully aimed at the shaded silhouette I saw crawling across the ground a hundred yards away. I had good eyes. Paw always told me I had good eyes.

"Got him," I thought.

Dawn Jackson

BALLET

Tension, stress, frustration
All evanesce,
As I ballet across the floor.
I have no problems any more.
Chasse', demi-de'tourne',
Satiates me for the time.
I'm in my other

state
of
mind.

Pam Steagall

PRETEND

Let's pretend that we're grown up, and
I'll have a tea.
You can wear your satin sheets, and
I'll put daisies in my hair.
Together we can sit inside my private garden, and
nibble on cookies as the butler
gently fans us.
Then,
as the hour of departure arrives,
you say it was "divine" and slip
behind a tree.

"Rroar."
An African jungle with
snakes, spiders, and wild beasts—
all transformations.
Hand in hand we search the
wild terrain in hopes of an
adventure.
Over the mountains, through the
dense forests.
Beware of the scavengers!
The birds' songs become warnings—
a cry escapes from the night,
"Come home for supper!"

Fred Wheeler

THE BALLAD OF ASIA AND WAYLON

The cats and I were talking
About the universe.
I told them they were bad sometimes-
They said they could be worse.

"That's never an excuse," I said,
"No matter what you think."
Waylon said he disagreed
And knocked over my drink.

"If you expect perfrction,"
Said Asia with a mew,
"Check out any mirror
And see how well you do."

"You know I don't," I told them,
"But you know it's true
I've got many demands to meet
Without more caused by you."

"Grow up," they said in unison,
"We're not here for your whim.
Life's full of demands, my friend-
You're also one of them."

"I never ask a thing of you."
I answered, getting hot.
"I'm the human here," I said,
"And after all, you're not."

"You ignore our cat emotions,"
They answered looking sad.
"If you'd had many other cats
You'd know we aren't that bad."

"You just want something pleasant
Like a picture on the wall
That's dead but there for your pleasure
With no feelings at all."

Lisa Zahn Davis

RICKIE AFTERNOON

afternoon heat
keeps me hiding inside
feet up
fan on high
sipping cool memories
and smooth Glen dreams
I've got my feet
in a Tyree stream—
playing with ideas.
she's got a slow, oh,
yes ma'am kind of way
she's got loose eyes
in a tight society
skirt past her knees
easy-to-please legs
struttin' to a funky one-
two, one-two tune.
now he came to my door
summer at his back
he comes frequently
for more, more, more
refreshments in the kitchen
on this hot, hazy day
refreshments in my bedroom
turn the fan 'round this way.
he's got a slow, oh
yes ma'am way
loose eyes
tight society
hair pulled back
in a baseball cap
he's got my eyes
watchin' him from behind.

Lisa Zahn Davis

LAST NIGHT

last night
i laid on my back
on top of the ridge
in wet grass.
in the eastern sky
a light show flickered
for me
a hundred miles away.
i buried my fingers
into dewy grasses
and stared
into a still, northern darkness.
"he's somewhere,
there,
under the stars,"
i said.
"can you hear me?"
my answer came
on a warm breeze
as it played in the trees
and floated softly
across my face.

Randy Kinkel

ONCE I LOOKED FOR FLOWERS

Once I looked for flowers
in wheat fields, finding only wheat
and still rejoicing.

Now I watch the skies hopefully...
where is that once-promised
savior of old, carrying stars in his pocket
and the sun of brave tomorrows in his eyes?

The skies are filled with
jet-trails now,
no savior streaks across the blue
at lightning speed, but
only pigeons, who know where their deaths lie.

Dorine Geeslin

ENFORCED FREEDOM

I stood and watched the mother hen
Since I had oped her coop.
She scratched and clucked in every nook
Except the opening in the pen.

One chick she had.
She left confinement in a flash
As chick sought freedom, made his dash,
Intrepid lad!

Martha Parks

FOR ZACH; THE PITTER POET

You collect unicorns.
(A mythical beast led astray by virgins.)
You, my friend are like the creature
that you collect.
You are born out of your time-
led astray by virginal innocence,
(Your own innocence.)
into a world you cannot handle.
You like the unicorn,
will perish.
Only to be understood by those
who care for mythical
mixed-up beasts.

James Gover

THE KNOW NOTHING

Nothing is certain, nothing is sure,
nothing is free, you get what you pay for.
These words don't mean nothin,
but nothing don't care,
nothing ain't pretty,
but nothing is there.
Don't try to be a poet,
you just ain't prepared,
'cause when you see nothing
and know it,
you really get scared.

Ann Scott

A STUDY OF CONTRASTS

The snow lay on the black woods in comforting folds. Overhead, the morning sky was gray, yet Rebecca found the view through the cabin window a striking study of contrasts.

Although the sun wasn't up she was churning butter, for James had milked early, then hitched up the sleigh and gone to town. There were supplies they needed before they got cut off from the main roads again.

Rebecca sat with her back to the fire - keeping warm without ruining the butter. From there she could also watch the sleeping baby. She could see tufts of blond hair sticking out under the quilt in the cradle.

She smiled. This was her home and family. Cold and bleak outside, the inside of Rebecca's home bloomed with color and life.

Soon she felt the butter lump and taking it from the churn, she carried it to her cabinets. She took down her butter paddles and shaped it, when wrapped it in a clean cheese cloth.

As she finished the baby woke and fretted softly, then howled a demand for breakfast. Rebecca pulled her rocker to the light and warmth of the fire. Cooing, she gathered the child in her arms and stroked the soft cheeks and downy hair. She sat in the rocker and snuggled the open-mouthed child, who, oblivious of the caresses, searched for a meal.

Opening her blouse and basque, Rebecca guided the child to her breast, then leaned back and rocked in the chair.

Peace enclosed the cabin at the head of Froman Hollow. Inside, the fire popped and crackled, keeping the chill from Rebecca and her child. The cabin walls were fading to buckskin and the curtains were stiff and crisp at the frost covered windows.

In the kitchen corner stood a cupboard. James' people brought it with them when they came west. In the opposite corner was the four poster bed which James had built. And on it lay the wedding band quilt her friends had made for her when she married. It was a simple, solid cabin. And Rebecca was happy.

Soon the baby dozed, lost the breast, found it again, and sucked a few more times before sleeping. Silently, Rebecca rose from the rocker and carried the baby to the cradle.

The fire sputtered and hissed in warning as Rebecca passed. She took up her shawl and went out the cabin door to the wood pile. drawing the biting air into her lungs, she gathered an armload of wood and stretched

her stiff legs. As she turned to go in, a movement near the barn caught her eye.

"James forgot to close up the barn," she thought. "Well, the cow won't wander far in this weather."

Then Rebecca saw what stirred in the wind and heard a cry of misery.

Dropping her load of wood, saving a piece in her hand, Rebecca walked over and pulled back a dark cloak shrouding the figure in the snow.

She was a young nigger and in the crook of her arm she held a baby. Rebecca gently nudged her.

"Can you walk?" Rebecca asked. "My cabin's not far."

The girl said nothing. She pushed herself up on one arm, trying to clutch the baby in the other.

"Wait," said Rebecca, "I'll take the baby and come back for you."

She snatched the little bundle, amazed at its lightness. Inside she laid it near the fire, knowing it couldn't crawl.

She ran back to the girl and heaved her to her feet. Pulling one arm about her neck Rebecca dragged her to the cabin.

Inside, Rebecca lowered the girl slowly to the floor.

Rebecca gathered quilts and a rag rug and made a pallet by the fire for the girl and her child.

She heated the last of the morning milk and thickened it with flour and eggs.

"Eat this," Rebecca said, rousing the girl from her sleep.

Supporting the dark head with one hand, Rebecca steadied the bowl with the other.

The silent cabin echoed the gulps of the girl. Finally she finished and fell back on the pallet.

"My baby?" she asked softly.

"Right here beside you," said Rebecca, "but she needs milk. You must feed her."

"I don't have no milk, miss. It went bad and dried up. I got some goat's milk for her yesterday but I reckon she's hungry now. Please take care of my baby," she begged as she succumbed to the effects of food and fire.

"Yesterday!" thought Rebecca. She looked at the bundle which lay quiet by her mother. She was warm and dry; Rebecca had seen to that. But she needed milk and Rebecca had used all of the morning milk. Rebecca searched her mind and then her cabinets for food for the baby. But there was nothing.

She turned to the fire and noticed the baby was awake. At least the eyes were open. Such large brown eyes, as rich and deep as bourbon. The baby was too weak to cry. Her head bobbed from side to side, the little fists lifeless at her sides.

"Oh, baby," thought Rebecca, "if only your mother had milk."

"Dear God," she said out loud, "how can life be so unfair? I have so much and this poor nigger girl has. . . ."

Her eyes opened wide. Nurse a nigger baby?

"Oh no. I couldn't. I can't,"

A white woman nurse a nigger child?

She picked up the baby and lightly ran her fingers across the soft wooly hair.

She carried her across the room and stood by the cradle where her own baby lay sleeping. She looked from one to the other. Fat pink cheeks, taut black cheeks; creamy white eyelids, glazed brown eyes; fat sturdy arms, limp little hands.

She walked to the fire, the little black baby in her arms. She'd forgotten the firewood. The fire was dying, the ambers losing their glow and turning to ash.

She laid the baby in her mother's arms and ran outside for wood. Returning she stoked the fire and the ambers glowed again.

Rebecca turned, and picked up the little black baby once more. Then drew her rocking chair to the light and warmth of the fire.

Leslie Carol Riley

DOLLS

I have known china dolls
pallid like the moon
and calm.
With blue saucer eyes
and crenoline petticoats
which sometimes lift
for others' hands.
These pale ladies
break like porcelain
with their rose-scented
thighs,
while lovers console them
with frilly promises
and lilac bouquets.
Like doves,
they coo.
And expect their men
to bring the heavens to their feet,
but they never do.
So the sad ladies
powder their pain
with polite excuses.
On cold nights,
these shattered dolls
Claw their eyes
and shiver.

Leslie Carol Riley

KNOT

Like a severed stalk
we lash the earth
with prickly fingers.
We are a patchwork puzzle,
a piecemeal of passion.
Tilling soil on tip-toed seeds,
we harvest more than autumn
with these limbs

Leslie Carol Riley

CHILD UNCONCEIVED

Oh, lamb in amber light,
your love rubbed a blister
on my heart.
Pain-thrusts nudge
that wedge of grief
where no child sleeps.
Old bones prod my body
for new curves
which flow to
crimson.
Oh child, unconceived,
you pierce my soul
with veins.

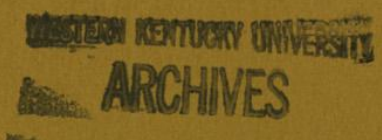
Leslie Carol Riley

SHADES OF GREY

You clutch your heart between your teeth
and slither beneath the indifferent moon.
You who dare to call me
Chameleon,
have clawed the earth and dug a tomb.
I gnaw your bones until my gums are torn
and my toes are mangled on jagged stones.
I am alone.
With the orbs of my eyes, I tear your soul.
Tears erupt like tiny volcanoes
oozing to quicksand.
Disgorging the changes from my mouth,
I leap from shades of grey.

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