

The Prompt



The Prompt

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Editor's Note

The Prompt is dedicated to being a place for all levels of writers to have an opportunity to publish, as well as for a community of writers to find new ways to expand creative writing horizons. In this, our fifth issue, you will find new and experienced writers, side by side, as well as forms that challenge the traditional styles that appear in conventional literary magazines. This issue has been long in production as we have shifted to a once-a-year issue. Rest assured we are still dedicated to bringing new and exciting work to our readers, as well as offering a home for writing that tests the boundaries of style and form. Enjoy!

Editor's Challenge

The last payphone.



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Cover art by Don Unger.

Last Seen

by Nancy Brewska-Clark

Tish sits in her kitchen at the glass table where onion-skinned narcissus bulbs nestle among wet pebbles in a sextet of tall, clear cylinders. She's counting a pool of spilled change.

On her porch, hairy begonias still defend their turf in a white box tacked to the gray wooden railing. For November, it's mild, eerily so, warm enough for her to paint and glue out there. Every Asian antique in this place, pristine or restored by her, has its price and the sticker to prove it. But in these numb days after 9/11, no one's looking for sixteenth-century Jesuit-inspired Japanese bibelots, ivory triptychs, harbors painted backward on glass, heavy Chinese silver tea sets with faux English hallmarks and teakwood handles, a cockerel-crested thumb ring, a card case carved of bone, or a silk chasuble the color and weight of dust.

Her robe is either a legitimate caftan or an old bedspread. It could be a remnant of the poor marriage or the rich one, art school or just the Sixties. In any event, she's watching me unpack the single grocery bag, smoking a thirty-cent cigarette from the pack I've just bought her, and coughing. Blood mottles the visible skin of her arms. After two insured probes at her heart, a lack of policy forsakes occidental medicine for oriental herbs. They simmer aromatically in an enameled orange pot licked by blue and gold tongues from one of two burners still firing.

"What do I owe you," she says from behind the squat fortress of quarters she's stacked up in a hard silver line on the table.

I shake my head. "My treat."

I put the dozen ice cream cups, vanilla veined with strawberry, or chocolate, into the freezer along with some lo-cal dinners. Ginger ale goes below, and the milk. I had bought food like this for my mother, trying to mend the growing gaps in an ailing life with bricks of frozen peas and colder mortar of advice: "Heat up the soup, make yourself some tea, then take a nap." Tish laughs. "I don't want you to go. I'm lonely." With her duckling tufts of hair, she looks and sounds like a little girl fighting a fear of the dark, half afraid you'll believe her.

Not knowing that in four days somebody else will find her halfway down the staircase in a blizzard of bills, her neck snapped as neatly as a porcelain doll's, I laugh, too.

Prompt: Editor's Challenge for Use of Four

The Last Payphone

by Kevin Ralph Bray

My girlfriend is the last woman on Earth you'd want to anger. She is easily able and willing to dismember me and feed my body to her cats. Her reaction to the simple declarative statement, "I do not love you," was quite extraordinary if one thinks about the cooing and mewling she did six months earlier following my similarly declarative "I love you." When I said that, we'd just finished having sex and really, it had as much gravitas as if I'd finished a Big Mac meal and said, "That was a great lunch." We'd screwed in her apartment for an entire afternoon. She opened her body and soul to me and included positions and techniques that required references to the Kama Sutra, The Joy of Sex and every erotic passage from every "literary" porn book (like anything by Anais Nin or Henry Miller; she eschewed online porn or currently popular textual renditions, judging them as crass and lowbrow) and then when we finished, or rather when she decided that her four orgasms to my one was a fair ending to the game, sort of like one team deciding not to play the ninth inning because they are so far ahead and then force the other team to concede, she drew a bath, got into her tub, and cried for twenty minutes.

Our first sexual communion happened on the same day we met as strangers at a Starbucks. She told the barista her name, "Aphrodite," and I stood at the condiments counter stirring my latte's foam until it disappeared, waiting for her to claim her coffee. We sat together at a small round table with two chairs, the last space on a crowded Saturday morning, and clicked our spiritual jigsaw pieces into something amazing and completely charged with high-wire sexual energy.

"We've met before, in other lives. I've slept with a lot of men and I have never anticipated an encounter like this one. I almost feel that sexing you (*yes, she said that*) will emancipate me from my hunger for flesh."

The sex exceeded my ability to honestly appraise the costs and benefits of dating her and the first month—three conjugations daily, at least—effectively rendered me intoxicated and driving on the centre line along some emotional costal highway that had steep cliffs on either side. We talked and walked and went to restaurants and movies and bowling, ironic and innocent ventures, but then "sexed" every moment between. Neither of us worked in time-constraining employment. She freelanced as a web content writer and I illustrated graphic novels and sold vintage clothing at weekend flea markets or house parties. We watched a lot of Netflix; our favourite show was the critically acclaimed *The Last Gasp*, a half hour documentary about a person, or thing, or animal, or cultural touchstone about to disappear from the planet. I thought the forthright and simpler *Extinct* might be a better title, but we loved the bittersweet humour and seriousness the producers brought to the show. Binge watching created odd sequences in episodes; one night, between her second and third orgasm, we saw "The Last NHL Player to Fight," "The Last Honest Politician," "The Last Cow to Give Milk," "The Last Cuban Beach to Welcome Americans," and "The Last Car Driven by a Human."

"I knew milk killed you. How can an entire species suckle the breasts of another species and not think they are violating the natural order?"

I suckled her breasts; were we the same species, I wondered?

She habitually talked throughout the episodes, which I didn't mind, since it gave me time to measure costs and benefits.

"The next one is 'The Last Payphone.' Let's bring out our iPhone 12's and let them watch the show."

Her iPhone chirped and glowed every time it was next to mine, apparently confirming Apple's assertion that if the phones liked each other, then the humans must have a bond. I thought the software might be a little wonky when my phone started getting red and hot when I made visits to my mother's home.

The last payphone stood in a post-post-industrial warehousing location where consumer goods shipped into the States from Mexico and North Korea sat until drones picked up packages for residential drops. The booth looked more like an art installation than working technology, an homage to a time when a person could disappear into everyday life, when the air did not ripple with invisible rays and waves, when every phone call in public took place in private, in a booth not unlike a confessional. All calls were prepaid, a dime and then twenty five cents, and searching for a number meant flipping through the phone book that hung from a swivelling metal dowel.

The show included clips about the first payphone in America, a few highlights from famous movie scenes in which a payphone prominently figured, and a graphic that showed the correlation between payphones and mobile phones. Apparently the only people left who used payphones were those who'd decided that Big Brother and Big Data were going to morph into something like The Matrix and we'd all be plugged into the network as pod bodies, or intelligent people committing crimes. The show explained how the Bonanno family, an organized elite crime unit, used to leave voicemails for one another with a code that told the listener what phone booth to use to make subsequent calls. Yes, the family fell to the law eventually, but then I got the idea that I could use the last payphone to tell my girlfriend I wanted to end the relationship. The payphone meant she could not find me using the latest Apple tracking software.

She was not a Mafioso, but she revealed her murderous revengeful side one night after we watched *The Last Gasp*.

"You are the last man who I will ever make love to. That doesn't mean that you can leave and I will be celibate. It means you can't leave."

"What if we broke up? What if one of us fell out of love?"

"What do you mean?"

"What if I said 'I don't love you'?"

She stared at me then made a sort of subdued lioness roar, baring her teeth too, and said, "Then it is murder-suicide, but you're the victim of both. I'd give you a choice."

I thought about this all night and the next day I settled the balance sheet and not surprisingly, the costs exceeded the benefits and I decided to end everything with her. I lived a minimalist life with few possessions; my library was in the Cloud, all my clothes fit into a traveller's shoulder bag, and I wore runners that needed replacing. If I left just enough at her apartment (I'd moved in three weeks after meeting her, to satisfy the sex-on-demand-service she required-- I thought I thought I'd won a sex lottery) she'd suspect nothing until I made the call from the last payphone and then it would be too late for her to find me. I'd move to Portland and live my life in the same way, only better, maybe greener.

Finding the payphone was easy since the show revealed the location and the city was not removing it for another week, anticipating the revenue stream from the phone to swell its banks as curious callers arrived to try it. I took a bus as close as possible to the location and then walked along a wide, crinkled and broken ashen boulevard that town planners included for low income workers to get to their warehouse jobs. Within five minutes I saw the pay phone, an eight foot tall cube painted in the flag's colors, still perpendicular to the Earth, with half the windows gone and the blue parts looking like the faded knees on a kid's denim pants.

No one was there. I checked the coin return and pushed the receiver up and down to confirm a dial tone. The long black cord needed a few twists to unknot it and I couldn't get enough length to step outside the booth and breathe urine-free air, but the open windows and light breeze helped tamp down the hamster-cage odour.

The physical numeric keypad felt good under my fingers. I tapped her phone number a few times, just to experience the feeling, clicking each key hard into the pad, holding it down for a second or two, as if I were taking her pulse on the femoral artery. I felt alive and free by what I could do in this booth. I felt cocooned and safe.

I took out a quarter and looked at the date, 1992, the year I was born, five years after her birthdate, and caressed the serrated edges. This little token, slipping into the last payphone, seemed propitious, a good luck charm, lucky seven at the craps table, the fastest horse in the quarter mile paying fifty-to-one, a twenty five cent slot machine about to pay a million dollars. Ten digits to freedom! Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, step right up and take your chances!

I dialed her number and then dropped the coin, the wrong order of course, and then did it correctly. Inserting the quarter and hearing it unlock the phone committed to me one side of that emotional highway I drove on and I hoped it was the right lane.

"Hello? Is that you? Where are you?"

I wish I had my iPhone so I knew where she might be lurking.

"I'm at home, just about to watch *The Last Gasp* and cooking an Indian chickpea stew for dinner. And you?"

We watched the show contiguously with lovemaking, so why did she think it was OK to do it without me?

"I have something to say."

"If you don't like Indian then just be honest. "

"I don't love you."

The wind blew in one side of the booth and out the other creating a slight whistling noise, a noisy nostril exhalation.

"What the fuck did you say? Say it again."

"I'm leaving because I don't love you. And you're a little crazy. Murder-suicide? Who says that?"

Suddenly the booth felt less like a cozy sleeping bag and more like a straightjacket. I had to get out.

"I know where you are."

Not possible. She couldn't trace this call and I had nothing with me that plugged into Big Brother, unless she attached a GPS to my traveller bag.

"No you don't. I'm never coming back and you will never find me. I'm going offline."

"You're on the show, dummy."

"What show?"

"You are. Right now. On a live edition of *The Last Gasp*."

"They don't do live shows on Netflix, dummy."

"Uh huh, this is streaming live on their affiliate. It's called 'The Last Private Call.' I can see you."

I hadn't seen the film crew or camera or the boom hidden inside a leafy maple tree. They came out from behind a lilac bush, with thumbs up and smiles, not saying anything, gesturing for me to stay inside the booth that now felt like an upright coffin, while they recorded my anguish. This is what a duck must feel like lying wounded in the marsh when the hunters come out from behind their duck blinds and the dogs bark.

Should I smile at the lilac bush? Or drop the phone and flee to the bus stop (I knew I couldn't get a cab in an industrial area). Two drones hovered sixty feet above my head, each one carrying a brown package. I looked up and imagined she controlled them from her apartment and could drop the heavy weight onto my head. "The Last Man Killed at a Payphone."

"You can't do anything. Not now. Everyone heard what I said. They'd be suspicious if I died."

A recorded female voice interrupted and told me that time had run out and that I'd need another quarter for four more minutes. I didn't have another quarter. The film crew seemed to know the call had ended and started talking at me.

I placed the black receiver onto its holster and backed out from the booth. I asked to borrow the boom operator's phone.

"Yeah, sure. What for?"

"I want to make sure that wasn't the last phone call I ever made. Or this is my last day on the planet."

He'd laughed.

"Yeah, that'd be an episode with great ratings."

The crew packed up and I texted her a heart emoticon.
She texted back a halo.
I left for Portland that night.

Prompt: Editor's Challenge: The Last Payphone

In the Bedroom

by Elizabeth A. Gibson

An easel; the soft shoulder of a naked sun.

I cannot unsee the beauty in every line,
in the curve of every thigh and breast.

Spear-carrier, carry me home, carry
me under your wing, lay me

in the warm down and let rosy-fingered dawn
wake me with a kiss.

Is this what love is?

No myiasis here, just the light.
We are not saxicolous creatures

but poets and drifters, seekers
of the beautiful and the wise.

Prompt: Describe a bedroom. Use the following words in the description:
soft shoulder, unsee, spear-carrier, myiasis, and saxicolous, as well as a
line from a famous work of literature.

Two Poems

by Tony Leuzzi

Haikus for the Opposite Hand

I tried to warn you,
bird, the window was closed, but
the window was closed.

*

There can only be
one flower in the valley
and it is scarlet.

*

Pelican. Weird word.
Weird bird. I like pelicans
more than woodpeckers.

*

I love wallpaper
when it isn't papered on
the inside of vans.

*

I hang your painting
upside down because I don't
know what I'm doing.

*

"Hello." "Hi, my name—"
"—For English, press 1, Spanish
press 2." I press 6.

*

Unfinished crossword
left on the seat to my right.
3 down: “companion.”

*

I can’t read a word
of your asymmetrical
Arp-like handwriting.

*

There is no reason
for anyone to play harp
in my living room.

*

When the Indians
heard bagpipes, they understood
their land would be lost.

*

“History sucks dick” —
Tuesday evenings, after class.
His cue, I obliged.

*

Mechanical bull—
seat of raunch and beery shouts—
you’re “Out of Order.”

*

Could you imagine
introducing yourself as

someone in stemware?

*

The purpose of this
assignment is obvious—
but I'll explain it.

*

She wears a totem
pole around her neck: crow and
blue jay painted green.

*

A voice through the wall
says, "I can't hear you." I can
hear it, too clearly.

*

Overheard: "He's got
long-ass hair." I'm assuming
there is a hyphen.

*

Let's say Stendhal wrote
six novels about the life
and times of Stendhal.

*

No white horses here.
Just some dingy sheep and cows
and above them crows.

*

“Something with spiders” —
Her words when I asked her
what movie to rent.

*

March acts like a boy
who won’t take his prescription
mood stabilizers.

*

When the station master
shouts “All aboard!” six people
disembark the train.

*

His voice is a drug.
I don’t do drugs anymore—
But I remember.

*

Few of the problems
dogs encounter everyday
are dog-related.

Prompt: Write a series of haikus using one’s opposite hand.

After Watching Marco Berger's "Hawaii"

I won't say a word
about pineapples.

I will only tell you

when clear water
pours from an outdoor spigot
you want it to wash over you

the way it washes over
the pale, chiseled torso
of a man whose eyes are

the eyes of a child, that when
he and another man stand
beneath a giant banyan—

backs lapping the stippled
light through its branches—
you forget what you learned

about movement and progress
and let each word of the sentence
you were about to utter dissolve

one letter at a time
while still on the tongue,
like an unleavened wafer.

And why not? How long
has it been since you tasted
wonder and called it silence?

Prompt: There are ekphrastic poems about photographs and paintings.
Try writing a poem about a film.

Conversations in the Art Gallery

by Anna Cotton

Part I

**Note to the Gentleman viewing Monet's *La Femme A L'Ombrelle*
(*Girl with an Umbrella*)**

You notice the light,
always the light

then the parasol protecting the maiden
(as if to be protected was really possible).

The yellow buttercups and dandelions are everywhere,
and no one minds them in this distant field.

Then you notice the new world green of tender stems
and youthful limbs

a gentle breeze blowing,
a flowing skirt,
a sheer scarf the color of tears.

Before you know it
you are filling in the details

a whispered sigh,
moist red lips,
auburn curls pulled loosely back

And the pretty girl you see isn't really a stranger,
she knows you

she's come looking for you,
calling your name.

Part II

Note from Monet's *La Femme A L'Ombrelle* (*Girl with an Umbrella*)

How did I get here
standing in hot sun for this crazy painter?

He was charming,
the smile on his lips,
the compliments
handed out like candy and I
so hungry for something sweet.

Before the day was over
my arm ached, and my
skin was sticky with sweat.

At last he said,
"The light has changed. We can go now."

I removed my shoes,
my stockings and
ran barefoot.
The flowers shook with laughter;
the bees grew confused.

Prompt: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AClaude Monet 012.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AClaude_Monet_012.jpg)

Misleading Poem

by Ben Heins

*for Rich Trama
and you,
as it were*

Listen: before the tornado
touched down, a mother and son
stumbled through a gas station,
followed by the Arkansas Marauder,
who blew bits of their skulls
over the dairy aisle like silos
shredded in the wind. See?
You already missed the point.
However.

This is the way my roommate
ends a conversation
wherein he's unpacked his soul.
I'm beginning to think
what follows the transition
is similar to the scene
after the scene
where Jessica Alba fucks
the protagonist: he, in the bathroom,
reeking of latex, pissing sideways;
she, finishing the job in quiet
panic. Then, the clouds. Then,
what feels like rain.

Why the distance between us?
That's a terrible joke. As a matter of fact,
here – take this as consolation:
when faced with nighttime traffic,
a deer dives off the Route 78
connector bridge, unaware

the darkness conceals hundreds
upon millions of misfortunes.
I think of my father. And,
as a matter of fact,
let's not go there.
How mournful the unravel
as I slowly peel
space from your body
till nothing left is sacred.
Can you feel the wind? Listen:
Between you and me,
I asked too much.

Prompt: Compose a misleading poem – a piece that breaks many
“accepted parts” of poetry in one foul swoop.

Meeting Dragons

by Nicholas Roos

We knew it was probably wrong to hoodwink Crazy Pete the car-salesman into meeting Miss Tilly, but something had to be done. “Taking one for the team,” Coach Hampton called it. You see, we were always packed to capacity in the early days, but now, the few people who attended town meetings would find themselves overwhelmed. And these meetings had been the lifeblood of our people: they allowed us to build a family-focused community; they set the laws that governed the town; and the coffee and cupcakes socials afterward always allowed the people to get acquainted with each other. All the people except Tilly Hamner, that is.

An unimposing figure—stumpy and slumpy in her old age—Miss Tilly scared none of us at first with her red-rimmed, Harry Caray glasses and high-rising, brownish green wig. She arrived a little before 6 p.m. (more than an hour early) and sat in the back row on the left, turning to point her nose eagerly at each set of newcomers who trickled in behind her.

We live in a friendly town, and when the people would come in and see an old woman they didn’t know sitting alone, they would join her and introduce themselves, after which one could rarely hear the people they’d known forever but could always hear Miss Tilly’s gravelly tenor careening recklessly off the walls.

“Well, it’s just wonderful to meet you folks. Such beautiful folks ya have here. It does a lonely old heart some good. Ya see, my Rupert is gone—taken by the same dragon that took my son Randy. Terrible, sad sicheashun. I come here to find them, or at least that selfish dragon. Been tracking ’im for years.”

At this point, the beaming townspeople would share a glance and stifle a giggle, but these were careless ways to spend the escaping seconds Tilly had offered them, for if they could muster no response, she would continue.

“Ya see, Dragons is just selfish by nature. Some say they can’t help it, but I don’t know so sure. Dragons is just like the rest of us . . . why should they be excused for stealin’ folks right up away from good wholesome families?”

At this point, the bemused townspeople had received one of their final windows for retreat, only they didn’t know it until they’d gone through the procedure once. If they didn’t get away right then, they’d end up listening to Tilly’s endless chatter throughout the meeting. Not that Miss Tilly wasn’t every bit as kind and friendly as a person had a right to be; she indisputably was. It was just that Miss Tilly never delivered a statement without involving dragons in whatever way she could, and she never left a silent moment silent, so Milton Webchuck, the always-serious meeting moderator, was constantly glaring in her direction in hopes of stemming her half-conscious blathering.

The story should have been interesting, but Tilly never explained what had in fact happened: how the dragon had taken her family, how she intended to track it down, or even what this particular dragon looked like. When she was asked that last question by an interrupting—even excited—listener, she would always say, “Oh I’ll recognize him when I see him; don’t you worry nothing ’bout that.” Left with so little detail, people found themselves picturing a stream of fire following the words out Miss Tilly’s mouth. She made for a pretty convincing mythic lizard, too, what with her long-flowing dresses, hunched posture, and tall spiky wigs. Even her big red glasses and mean, pointy nose lent themselves well to the image.

Before long, people got their own picture of old Miss Tilly and did their best to avoid her altogether. When people stopped sitting anywhere near her at the meetings—not to mention arriving at the last second to account for her pre-meeting, conversational mobility—the business of running our town became tricky, and when Miss Tilly felt comfortable enough to interrupt the meeting at any time in order to speak her piece, the town nearly shut down altogether.

That’s when a bunch of us got together at the church and decided that if one woman can dissolve a democracy in little more than four months, our way of life is doomed. That night, we began hatching a plan to take back the town from Miss Tilly and her dragon, which is where Crazy Pete comes in. Bob Pickle, a colleague of Crazy Pete’s, told him the festivities would begin at 6:30 and that he should arrive early if possible because the townspeople came to the meetings mostly to shoot the breeze before and after. Besides, Pete was something of a celebrity now, Bob explained, and the people only got to see him when he was trying to sell them a car. Crazy Pete had never put much stock into what other people were doing, but he liked Bob and agreed to go.

After his apprenticeship with a mechanic, Pete had quickly discovered he wasn’t much for fixing cars despite his training and sought another means through which he could put his knowledge to productive financial use. Thus, Crazy Pete’s Used Cars was born, and Pete had gotten crazier each month for the past 23 years as he became the person in his commercials, a man who told his audience, “I’ll beat any deal because I’m Crazy Pete and I’m CRAZY!” before blowing a giant kazoo at the camera.

At 5:45 on the big night, a small group of us were hiding in the choir room to witness the pairing of Miss Tilly with Crazy Pete. We didn’t have a great plan, per se, but we knew Crazy Pete would only ever say just what he was thinking at any given moment. And we knew he was a shouter. He didn’t mean anything by it, the town agreed, but this peculiar lack of filter for content or volume granted Crazy Pete the unique powers required to match Miss Tilly.

Tilly arrived at 6:12, and anticipation took a powerful hold over our group while she sat down on the right side of the small auditorium’s aisle, toward the front. The town hall has a stairway down to the choir room from which one can poke an eye up above the ground floor and see the sanctuary, but the stairway seemed conspicuous with the whole group of us standing there—many on tiptoes or leaning over another’s shoulder to get a keener view. The hall had excellent acoustics, so some were resigned to waiting further down the stairs for the audio to reach them. Needless to say, we felt certain that Miss

Tilly wouldn't notice us but nervous at the unlikely possibility that she might. We were scared half witless by the prospect of biting our tongues through one more dragon story.

Crazy Pete snuck in at 6:33 and immediately sat down in the first chair he noticed—second row from the back, aisle seat. Shifting uncomfortably, Pete pulled up his silver-gray jacket sleeve to peek at his watch. He looked confused. Miss Tilly had noticed the newcomer and made a beeline toward him the moment he let his sleeve fall to his wrist. We held our breath—not knowing what purpose it could serve—but holding it nonetheless.

“Well hello, Sah! How you this evening?” Tilly bellowed.

“I don't know for sure. Do these meetings usually take longer than three minutes? I fear I've missed the whole shebang. My first one, too,” shouted a dejected Crazy Pete.

“Oh don't be silly. That's just like a dragon, taking everything in the literal. Meeting won't start for a little while yet. Gotta have patience. Say . . . I ever tell you about how I lost my boy and my man to a dragon? That big ole selfish sonofabitchin dragon took 'em right up from under my nose. What'd he need with my family?”

“Dinner, I 'spect. A big ole dragon like that probably gets mighty hungry between meals.”

“Oh no, I don't think that at all. I think that dragon saw how wonderful my boys was and wanted a family his own. Kinda makes your little heart bleed a little, don't it? Must be lonely ... bein' a dragon.”

“Yeah, I reckon so. I don't figure there's too many around these days. Never thought of it that way, myself.” Pete postulated in silence for a moment. “Tell you the truth, I never even seen a dragon. What they look like?”

“Oh, you know, like they do in the movies, kinda. You ever seen a dragon movie?”

“Well, I think I heard 'bout one named Puff some time ago, but I ain't so sure he was the kinda dragon you're talking 'bout. But he was a lonely little dragon, if I remember rightly. Maybe this is the same one . . .”

“Could be. Maybe I'll take a camera when I find him so's we'll know for sure.”

“Well that'd be mighty nice: seeing a real dragon.” Pete smiled at Tilly for a long minute then said, “My apologies, Miss, I don't reckon I ever caught your name. I'm Cra—uhh—Pete . . . Peter Smarden.”

“Well hello, Mr. Smarden. My name's Tilly Hamner. Was Tilly Carrigan 'fore I met my Rupert and that damn dragon took 'im from me.”

“Shame.” Pete shook his crazy head slowly and sadly. We on the stairs had exhaled some time back, but we were once again holding our breath, for Pete looked to be readying himself to say something difficult. Whatever was going to happen would happen soon. Pete opened his mouth, closed it again, and gave his bald dome a three-fingered scratch. His window was closing.

“Know what I'm gonna do when I find that dragon?” Tilly posed.

“What's that?”

"I'm gonna ask him why he done it and where he put my family. And if he don't answer, well then I 'spose I'll have to slay 'im."

"How you gonna slay a whole dragon?" A mesmerized glaze washed Crazy Pete's face as he fiddled with a few scraggly gray hairs that crawled carelessly out of his left nostril.

"Now I ain't so sure 'bout that part. In the movies, they's always some strong, young man to do it, but I ain't young er strong er man. Imagine I'll have to bring one of Rupert's guns. Never much liked guns, myself, but I can shoot 'em straight; Rupert made sure of that 'cause he didn't want any bears er dragons er some such monsters botherin' the family all the time."

"And how you gonna get ta this dragon? They're awful fast at flyin', ain't they?"

"Well, now I ain't so sure o' that, neither. Supposed to ride a horse, but I never liked horses neither. Terrible, empty eyes, ya see. Plus, my sister Bonnie lost one o' her boys to a horse. He was learnin' ta ride it, and the horse just up and took off a runnin' and never come back." Tilly trailed off mysteriously.

"Aww hell! Now ain't that a shame!? Sounds to me like you need some fresh transport. Tell you what, you come on by and see me. I'm Crazy Pete from Crazy Pete's!" Apparently, Pete could no longer utter his catchphrase without screaming at the top of his lungs, for he seemed aware of the situation's demand for a different tone after Miss Tilly blinked astonished eyes at him. He looked bashfully down at this feet before continuing. "I'll getcha fixed right up with a slick set o' wheels you can use to chase that dragon."

"Oh now that's mighty sweet of ya." Tilly looked at Pete with watery eyes, and Pete looked right back at Tilly, flexing a grin. The time was 7:01, and people were entering quietly and taking seats on the opposite side of the aisle from Tilly and Pete. The noise in the sanctuary rose until it reached the crescendo of Milton the moderator gaveling everyone to order at 7:07. Tilly and Pete didn't seem to hear it.

"You got any cars that can fly?" Tilly wailed into the post-gavel silence.

"No, not yet anyway," Pete looked thoughtful for a second, "I heard something once 'bout a guy out West who was gettin' awful close though. Maybe I'll make some calls, see what I can see 'bout that."

"Good, good! Dragons been flyin' for ages and ages! You'd think cars'd figured it out by now."

Milton turned to our stairway contingent, and we all shrugged eyebrows at him. Milton gaveled again, but Tilly and Pete kept right on talking back and forth about dragons and cars while the rest of the town strained to weigh in on town matters. Milton's ears were red hot, and he was breathing in deep, controlled breaths, closing his eyes on the inhale. He looked our way, we looked back in despair, and so Milton brought the gavel down heavy and hard, sending several ringing thwacks reverberating through the room.

"And now to the last order of business: Miss Tilly!" The town gasped in the wake of Milton's words. Everyone except Tilly and Pete, that is.

Tilly recognized her name and bellowed, "Yessir? What's that you want?"

“Your cooperation, my dear woman. These meetings are the very fabric of our democracy. We cannot have you haphazardly entering the discussion and steering our conversation miles away from where it must go, let alone directing our thoughts toward your ridiculous dragon stories without even considering the issue under discussion.”

Well, it seemed Miss Tilly was immune to the language barbs that injure so many of us. Her face didn't change, and her voice was unbothered as she responded, “My Rupert always says life's not in the destination but in the trip itself. So smart, my Rupert, bless his heart. That dragon musta known 'bout his wonderful heart.” Nodding sagely around at the town, Tilly continued, “It's no excuse though. Just cause a man's got a good heart and you're a lonely dragon doesn't make it right.” Pete patted her on the shoulder and smiled his gray-dentured smile. And it was settled.

What could we say? Not even Milton could stand to hurt a sweet old woman's feelings, so we did the only rational thing; we re-scheduled the meetings. Constantly.

Miss Tilly would occasionally catch on and show up with Crazy Pete, ruining any chance we had of conducting business that night. We've met at 11 p.m. on rotating days for more than a month now. Attendance is suffering among the older demographic.

Many of the townspeople like to joke about how unlucky that dragon'll be the day Miss Tilly and Crazy Pete show up at his cave. Some even joke about following along to root for that dragon, especially Milton. He's said to have started a pool taking bets on when they'll find it, whether or not Rupert and Randy will be alive when they do, and even who will win the ensuing face-off. Milton's betting on never, no, and dragon, but most of us like to place little bets on sometime soon, yes, and Miss Tilly.

Prompt: Create your own version of a Mark Twain story.

Three Poems by Kay Retzlaff

I Remember

Dad and Dean
puking on the
red flowers off
the back porch
Fourth of July 1958.

I remember

Dad setting off
pop bottle
rockets and
sulphur smells and
mosquito whine.

I remember

a green bottle
fell, its rocket
sizzling up Dad's
pant leg and
he danced and
jigged until
it burnt through and
exploded over
his head and
silver sparks
rained down and the
boom bounced off the
house and Cleone
laughed that belly
laugh until she cried

and cried
Fourth of July 1960.

I remember

Doc Calvert who was
missing his left little
finger, saying, "Good,
God, woman, don't
you know a drunk
when you see one?"
Fourth of July 1963.

I remember

Cleone with a
card at the
Alzheimer's unit
in Wayne at
Christmas and her
birthday, but

She doesn't remember

Julys or me and
Dean doesn't talk
since the stroke and
Dad smokes on the
porch, hunched
around his
emphysema and the
lung cancer.

Dream Noir

Charles Durning,
old and fat, is
chasing two
bad guys, sweat
running down his
face.

His younger
partner turns the
wrong way.

The bad
guys are in the
bar down the
street to the left and
old, fat Charles
Durning knows because
he's done this
many times before—and
it's in the script—he
drops his sport coat.

It's hot and
heavy and
fat, old Charles
Durning runs to the
bar, slows, and walks in.

It's cool in here,
but everyone is
uneasy.

There are no
women in this
bar.

It's lit in blues and
violets. There's a
murmur of
lowered voices, and
veiled, but not
really, glances.

Fat, old Charles
Durning rolls up
to the man
behind the bar.

No words. Just a
raised eyebrow and a
head nod so
slight you'd have to
be looking for it.

Behind old fat
Charles Durning,
the two guys at the
high table in front of a
big blue-lit
window.

Then the sore rib
wakes me. Damn.
Did he get 'em?

I try to go back,
but now I'm an
editor's assistant in a
Paris publishing
house.

It's raining.

We take our
American visitors to
the Left Bank via the
metro and then I'm in a
patisserie and we're
ordering croissant.

But they can't do
those here.

They can't do chocolate
croissant in a Paris
patisserie?

I'm in Paris.

Then I'm dancing in the
Tuilerie and I can
dance, but I want to
lead.

Kienbusch's "Nebraska"

The blue's all wrong.

The blue is all
wrong.

Pale and easy,
nougat fields
tempt
like Christmas sweets.

Easy.
So easy from
up and away
at thirty thousand.

Nebraska winter's
sky: Sharp. Pointed. Blue.
Earth. Bitter chocolate
staining the snow like a tattoo.
Ice. Cobalt glass shards.
Wind sucking human breath
into itself like a black
cat at a nursing baby's mouth.

Beneath this black earth,
the sea creatures swim forever
in an inland sea of sandstone.
An eon later, rhino cows
nurse their calves beside
the long dead lake. All. All
buried in smothering ash, lungs
shredded by grains of
volcanic glass.

What do Kienbusch's colors
know of Nebraska? The blue's
all wrong. The blue is all
wrong.

Prompts: The first two poems were the results of prompts presented at a weekend workshop Ariel Greenberg ran. She told us to write a poem based on her prompt, "I remember," which had to become part of the poem. Her final prompt of the day-long Saturday workshop was to write a poem about a dream. She told us how she wanted us to dream consciously. We were to get up early Sunday morning, write a dream poem, then bring it to the workshop later that morning; thus, was "Dream Noir" born.

The final poem I submit was from a prompt in Kathleen Lignell's workshop back in the early 1990s, a week-long writing retreat offered by the Farnsworth Art Gallery (Rockland, Maine). The workshop was held in Christina's house (the Christina of Wyeth's paintings). We were to find a painting at the Farnsworth and write an ekphrastic poem. I chose Kienbusch's canvas, "Nebraska."

Grandma's Tomatoes

by Kathy French

Grandma's body moved like those chickens she raised,
roundness balancing on skinny legs..
I ate her apples, peaches, and red tomatoes
plumped by Illinois sun and rain.
Even roots seem to blossom in rich Midwest loam.

She taught me to save tomato seeds
and plant in spring,
but they don't grow well in Tucson desert grit.
Here my squash drink gray water,
jelly is made from cactus,
and tangerines shade the sidewalk.
Like me, Grandma would marvel and make do.

Prompt: Write about your grandmother's kitchen.

Four Poems

by Linda Wojtowick

Mortgage Lifter

Understand, Merle had to keep it quiet, the gold eggs.
She had wandered onto his lot somehow and now
things were different. He was manic, industrious.
He made a pen in the shed, he moved
the rakes and the enspidered flower pots.
He laid straw. He swept. The goose was oily and gray
with dark flakes in the grooves of her wings.
She was haughty in a low, unvanquished way.
Each morning he collected her eggs, heavy and slick,
and rinsed them with betadine in a warm sink.

Merle had arranged something with Walt, a crooked
banker from town. He led him to a back office
through rows of splotched mannequins and broken desks.
Walt's thin beard trickled down his collar like spit.
The money he gave Merle was limp and dirty.
He took it home and wrapped the pinched
stacks in plastic and buried them under the house.
At night. Merle paced and watched for lights from the swamp.
His mind now scrabbled feverishly about the bird's insides.
Where could they come from, the gold eggs? From something she ate?
From his land? Some demon ingot vein in the quarry?
He pictured her gizzards crying over, ore pearling in her gut.

The night Merle tore her apart mattered less than you might think.
See, word had spread and there were already men
coming up the back roads and slaking through the reeds and marsh.
It didn't even need to be pushed into motion; there was hunger,
a long-necked bird, and money from a mysterious source.
Merle shuffled across the lawn in the moon, stomach lurching
in the damp grasses, his head a flame of spastic moths.

Her sound came from faraway as she fought him
and her feathers pushed apart like dry rice. Her neck
gave way in his hands. He knew distantly he was destroying
his benefactor, his one good turn, but he couldn't really grasp it.
In the morning, maybe, his nerves failed and left to dry,
he could sink back into the horror of his urge and the luck
he was accustomed to. Crawling, weak. Now
there was just heat, and blood thick from the miracle fowl.
The long night waiting for his heart.

Camp Joy

I. The Road (the man)

He took the stage early in life and murdered scenes.
He had a flinty, glinting beauty but was thin in the heart.
His mother even said, seeing him bow on an opening night,
Cold from the eyes down to his perfect toes.
He felt things: love, stupid fire. It's just
he was best at the aping, the show.
His years before settling were a maw of hot cuts.
He ate sugar and studied plays and buffed his skin and ran.
On the highway with his wife, who was blonde and genius and clean,
he drove fast and thought of hard stars.

II. The Lake (the woman)

Her home was built on sticks from her brother's failed burns.
Her father had shrugged and switched plans.
She loved science and watching things morph
from one form to another. Over the lawn,
under rotting leaves, on a counter in white rooms.
The junebugs, the fireflies, died like kings in her jars.
Her husband shocked her into claim. Until she met him, a perfect
organism of slide, she spent her evenings with the amoebas, the ciliates.
Dripping them onto glass and holding her fogging breath.

III. The Forest (the marriage)

Remineralize: the process by which ground cover becomes food.
That forest was once home to communities of Svaal,
a warring people. They stole each other's beads and meat.
The trees were their teeth and the ghosts of their dead.
Then, on a swift and feared day, the mountain burst
and buried them like bones. Now campers come from the city
to sleep in bags and the boughs moan and the fish are hungry and slick.
Due to thickness of growth and the nearby caves,

other kinds will come too. People hiding. People with shame.
Because of this the parks will soon close for night visitors,
for the shelter of the lost.

Prize of the Trials

She came to his acres across the reeking garden.
The hour before sun. She stood in the cabbage,
moving strangely sideways to the fence.
Her thin black pipecleaner dog gasped like a copper horn.
He saw her through his kitchen sink window that morning
while the coffee poured clean, and he palmed crumbs
from his chest and mouth. His belly lurched
and farther south he was suddenly bloody, electric.

He let her in. He decided to open
all the doors. She poured herself into the places he could not
see- or, at least, had not thought of very much. The spaces
between cabinets, the gaps in his manuscripts, the dry
silken pockets of his coats. She smelled like silver
and rubbed somehow his aching breath.
Her thin pet sheared the countryside of cats.
In his bed her ribs went wide, erasing all his kin.

After a while, though, he couldn't stave the alarm, the awareness
of death. Though he felt handsome and strong,
assured of his work, assured of God, he also knew
that his breath had begun to stink, and the skin hung
cadaver-like under his shirt. Up the road, his neighbor
John's cow birthed a calf and he captured some steaming
membrane in a jar. He did the ritual, drove her out.
He built a fire, sobbed as she twisted and slid.
He could not mind the lame steps now, his drudge.
After that night, the garden turned to slime and the well congealed.
He occupied his bruised time for a few weeks
writing letters to everyone. To himself, to his sister.
To his long ago friend: *Although I have had some reckoning
experiences as of late- maybe the anniversary of Mary's death,
or the turning of summer to fall- my health is steady,
and my dreams are mild. In short, the morning has passed without incident.*

Tumbling Tiger

It was a game to learn at school. Not in the classroom,
on the chipped desks and soft felt and slate,
but outside, at recess. After ziplocks were smearily
pulled off sandwiches and the long white tables were wiped.
Like bodies in that emptying room, in the fume of bleach and meat.
Over cement on the grounds, girls vicious in cords and jumpers,
the long plastic beads of rope snap and sting.
One, three: see the ghost in the tree.
Two, four: Was it killed in the war?

You didn't know anything at that age. You were wilting
in confusion and your paper-thin shame.
You did strange things: Kevin Bean ate chalk in secret
and Donna burned the feet off her dolls. Even the chaos
without funk or stain. Your skin barely had a smell; the dirtiest
socks or shirt fronts merely smudged with yard dirt or food.
No blood, or salt. At forty, you're allowed

to lose things; your husband, your keys.
The house with the plums and the soaking tub
and the view of the trees. If you count
you go sideways, go lame. Instead you can pile
high your warm clothes and strong flour and walk
from the downtown streetcar to the sea.
The best songs you know swing from your neck like bones.
No one could have prepared you to offroad
with your insignificant jewelry, your
shards of old coats.

Prompt: The poems are from a series that I am currently working on: all of the poem titles are names of tomato strains. I start with a provocative name (i.e. Mr. Stripey, or Stump of the World) and the poem builds out from there. It's been a fun and consistently surprising way to work.

Beyond the Sea

by Alana Sherman

The mermaid is fine
with letting it all hang out—
the bits of fat at her belly
her scaly tale.
Her lover loves it
she's an open book.
He makes her gasp,
studies her to see if she's lying.
No need for sad stories,
he just watches. Before long
she starts to sense her lover
is restless. She shows him
her collection of keys
to convey a sense of openness.
She even reads aloud entries
from her diary. But he's convinced
she's hiding things and she is—
her long black hair, her perfect skin
her red mouth and how she secretly
loves that there are places here
or here, he can't touch.

Prompt: Write a Beyond poem.

Cooking for the Family Reunion

by John Davis

Because the sky burned like a molten chocolate cupcake,
I had to unhook my apron, dive deep
in the neighbor's pool, pretend I wasn't made
with genetically modified ingredients.

After downing a vat of vegetable broth
I failed the sobriety test, was placed in a detox
sweat lodge with bakers whose bellies
were high in saturated fat.

Once an hour an intern served us
a bowl of imagine and said You will
survive everything which is what I expected
from a voice garnished with parsley and chives.

When the world felt particularly familiar
and crunchy, we combed the tomato pallor
from our hair, the way Sister combed doubt
from her hair after she came out.

We pureed our tastebuds with savory herbs
and seasonings. Once again my skin
was smooth as whipped cream cheese.
Shame didn't matter.

I cooled my burnt fingers with my tongue,
walked back in the kitchen
where my hungry cousin lapped
a soufflé with her basil tongue.

Prompt: Open your cupboard. Remove several boxes of food: cake mixes, dry cereal, instant pudding, tabouli mix, etc. Use the phrasing on the directions and packaging to jumpstart a poem. Write about, or not about food as you wish. – from *The Daily Poet*, by Kelli Agodon & Martha Silano

Aunt Dorothy

by Christopher R. Vaughan

Answers the door hunched over her umbrella.
Dressed as Mary Poppins. Bony fingers.
On whose cracked skin the scent of Jergens lingers
as she considers these tiny Cinderellas
shivering, with their palms out, on the stoop.
Crossed the street to see her, came to find out
her world is somehow their world inside out—
cartoon mornings floating down Froot Loops,
babbles like she's half their age, bestows
all the shattering embraces they can handle.
Come see her fingerpainting hung for show.
Come light her unrelenting birthday candles.
Come bring her gifts of crisp new dollar bills
which flutter to the floor. And she howls. Thrills.

Prompt: After reading the exercise ["The Rites for Cousin Vit"] and examples which follow, write a sonnet in the style of Gwendolyn Brooks.

Hew closely to the basic shape of a sonnet, with fourteen lines of roughly ten syllables/five beats per line with a rhyme scheme. Notice how Brooks loosens standard metrical schemes, uses half-rhyme and plays with syntax and speech to create a poem. In her sonnets, the underlying rhythm and structure are not ruling the content of the poem.

Rather, they create a ladder for the senses to climb.

– from "Learning from Gwendolyn Brooks" course, Online School of Poetry, instructor Tom Daley)

Life in Architecture

by Mary Pacifico Curtis

I was born in the city of Bauhaus black buildings, Mies Van Der Rohe skyscrapers along a lake that sometimes shimmered with metallic smelt corpses washing ashore – a city famous for the wedding cake Robie brick house and the horizontal lines of Frank Lloyd Wright.

I came into a world of tall limestone, moved to a home half in the ground, walked broken sidewalks to a stone church – then to a mansion school with circular staircase to bedroom-classrooms, and then a brick high school with asphalt yard and cinder block converted coach house.

Next, I matriculated to a frozen lakefront campus where salt and snow whitened months of the year until spring greened its structures with ivy. There in a brick four-plex on Reba Street I found love with my boy/man with Jesus curls, a beard and mustache. His facial hair went, he stayed.

He drove his Fiat to California, to our stucco apartment on Wildwood, our stucco house on Mauricia, our boxcar house on Highland.

We rebuilt Highland with columns and recessed lighting on bright art - threw parties in primary colors for people in lipsticked smiles and handshakes built of four hands. We bore two daughters, and our exuberant girls greeted everyone with hugs and sloppy kisses. We ran businesses showcased in pages of advertising and colored circuit plots to be manufactured by people made indistinct in their white suits and masks.

Fluffy blonde curls and scarecrow white strands distinguished the two girls in the family that rested in a lakefront redwood cabin, rode up snowy slopes and shushed down, hiked dusty trails with a dogs dashing between boulders and humans, rocked in a lakeside hammock breathing the smell of burning logs, as snow melted by the fire inside avalanched from the roof to the ground.

And then a moment in a jumbled office filled with paper – files about people – and new words about them, about him Words with a hallow haunting sound.

New yellow limestone. Hardwood and flagstone, skylights and harp music as if a dream. Up stone stairs, wide white doors, rounded chairs, the steady beep as drugs entered a foundation now built of hope and hopelessness, and the two of us together.

With solid certainty, death met life's flimsy frame. The structure we thought sound was neither limestone, granite, wood, stucco, or even a sturdy tent. Life was the wind in daylight, barely touching our skin as we passed under a brilliant sun.

Prompt: My submission was inspired by Robin Romm's prompt to use architecture to tell a story from our life.

Orphans

Armenian Photograph, 1916

by Maureen O'Brien

Muffin, that is what my father called me;
Mamma whispered *little mushgush*.
Such sweet endearments
before my parents were marched behind
the last railroad car
full of hard red spring wheat for bread.
They disappeared

beyond our country's border, and my famine began.
I still answer to *Femi*
but I am no longer a girl.
All orphans look like boys
in our identical burlap jumpers,
like sacks of grain tilting in the wheelbarrow
through the backdoor
of our bakery in Constantinople
before three soldiers laughed, "Don't bother screaming,
no one will help you."
They feed me now at a long wooden table

here in the orphan's field.
The bread crust sticks in my throat, then disappears within me,
like the cry of their train
swallowed by the horizon.

Prompt: write a poem in response to Armenian genocide.

Three Poems

by Paul Hostovsky

Hostovsky

H,O,S, like Sam,
T, like Tom,
O,V, like Victor,
S, K, Y. My mother
always spelled it like that
over the phone. I was

an only child with many
imaginary friends to my name.

Rainer Maria Rilke said
we must all eventually
lay aside even our own name
like a broken toy.

Maybe for a man with
Maria for a middle name
this was something to look forward to.

As for me, my toy
is at the top of its game.
And I take my rightful place
in the organization of living things.

There are many species in a phylum.
There are many Pauls in a phone book.
But there was always only one
Hostovsky in the class,
and only one Paul Hostovsky
in the whole kingdom.

The Other Pauls

In first grade me and Paul the custodian
were famous friends. For what we had in common
was our first name—a phenomenon back then
that you could build a famous friendship on.
Or a religion. According to Paul, the first Paul ever
changed his name to Paul and then converted
over half the world. Centuries later
a great dispersion sprinkled us Pauls by the millions,
uprooted and estranged the whole world over.
We've nothing in common now but the vaguest sense
of having had something in common once
more than a name. And what that something was,
though me and Paul the custodian couldn't remember,
we knew we knew. And that was all that mattered.

Boy with Father with Foreign Accent

My father's name is Egon,
pronounced egg on.
He grew up in Czechoslovakia
so he pronounces a lot of his words

wrong. I help him with that and in turn
he helps me spell Czechoslovakia.
I'm the only kid in my class who can.
I'm writing it now on the placemat

at the International House of Pancakes.
We're international, me and Egon,
sitting across from each other in our booth
like nations at the table. A language

is a dialect with an army, so I drill him
in the names of all the syrups, and he
drills me in C-z-e-c-h-o-s-l-o-v-a-k-i-a
while we wait for my pancakes and his eggs.

"Egg on your face," I say to him,
and he reaches for a napkin.
"It's just an expression," I explain,
and he asks me what it means. I say

I'm not sure, but whenever I hear it
it makes me think of him. "You have Egon
on your face," he says. And I patiently
correct him. But he says again, "You have

Egon on your face—you have my nose
and mouth and chin. Egon on your face—
and you can't wipe him off."

Prompt: Write a poem about your own name. Where does it come from?
Do you like it or not? What does it make you think of? You've been living
with it for as long as you can remember, and probably longer than that—
surely, you must have something to say about it. Was it also your
father's name? Are you a Jr.? Were you named after a great aunt, a
great month, a great season, a favorite movie star, a favorite color? Do
you have your mother AND father's name, i.e., are you hyphenated?
Have you blamed, indicted, forgiven your parents for the burden of your
name? Or have you thanked them for it? Blessed them for it? Grab a
hold of your name, and run with it.

American Smile

By Jim Daniels

One eye is open
one eye is closed

do not trust either eye.

*

America's smile
temporary
permanent
under construction
a curtain behind which

*

America displays
its old roses
the ones that retain
the whiff of the ideal

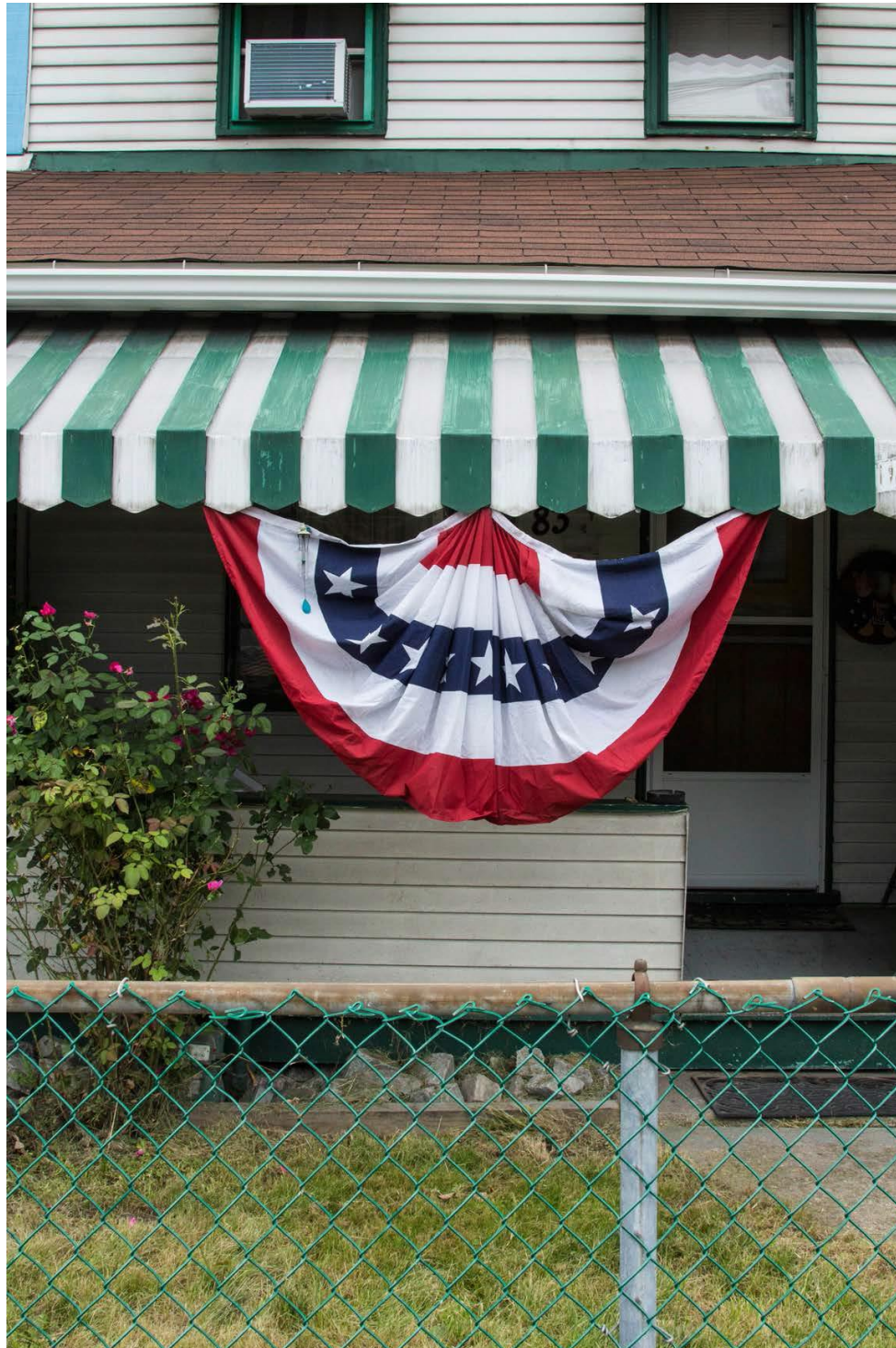
but they cannot be cut
or displayed

the unshaven whiskers
of America's past
will prick your skin
if you get to close

Thus the fence
thus the many, many fences.

Prompt: Draw inspiration from a photograph (see photo by Charlee Brodsky)

Untitled #1
By Charleee Brodsky



Training Wheels for Jesus

By Jim Daniels

First communion was great.
Donuts on the ping pong table in the basement.
Cards full of Jesus and dollar bills.
Her first bike. Training wheels.
Pink, with white wheels.
Her, pink, with white dress.
She sees the golden spires every day.
One is hers, the other is the other.
Same Jesus. She doesn't understand.
Right now, it's a long way
just to get off the property
much less out of God's sight.
All the guests gone home.
Communion girl asleep,
exhausted by the day's journey.
Rain on its way, the beginning
of rust on the chain, the wheels.
God outside, in one house or another,
not going anywhere.

Prompt: Use a photo for inspiration (see following photo by Charlee Brodsky)

Untitled

By Charleee Brodsky



Diary of a Winged Monkey

by S. D. Lishan

An egg, I think it was an egg. Because I didn't seem to grow from anything soft.
Could my mother have been soft? Draining darkness out of night? Evening out the places where it filled?
Filling out the fainter place I was? Green: Was that the place of father-mother? How do you remember a
color you've forgotten? Ink-like moonlight on the castle moat, joint out your beams into words: show me
what I would know.

Kindness, is that saturated in green? Long before my kidnapping, what was its scent of memory – like
father? Like mother?

Near me sits a gargoyle, a sort of troll with wings. Owlsh eyes above a monkey's mouth
peer into the wounds that moonlight makes, questioning the "I" I was before here. Raised to love a
castle's stone, its taste of salt, silt, and seasons blind that inch into cold, we seem
twins now, brothers at least, except that, under the thorny roots of my nightmares, voice-less shapes
burrow out of my dark. Wind-like, what is left of me has no shape, no direction, like an x'ed out "I" of "I
am."

You, who can't pity, make me you, within you,

zeitgeist of stone above turrets pointed at our kind.

Prompt: The assignment I gave my creative writing students was simple:
Write a poem based on a fairy-tale character in which every line or
sentence is a sequential or descending letter of the alphabet.

Your Coat Is Fixed

by Taly Oehler

With a smash, like a detonated scud, the door slammed. This door had been slammed time and time again, but never with such finality. This was the last time. The coat rack that hung on it came unhinged, falling to the floor silently, cushioned by a mass of coats, flannels, and scarves that the rack held for years.

She crawled to the door and punched it, each time peeling a little skin off of her knuckles along with a little paint off of the door. She picked up a coat. It was his heavy winter coat that he loved so much, especially in the rain. She clutched the black, woolen, silk-lined coat in her now bloodied hand, pressed the coat to her face, and inhaled deep and long. Rain, his favorite deodorant, and a bit of her oozed from it. She held these scents and her breath for those four yogic beats, and then screamed into the coat, muffled in the thick wool, until she couldn't exhale anymore.

Pulling the coat away from her teary face, this macro view of it revealed a hole, near where the sleeve meets the shoulder seam. On hand and knees, she retrieved her sewing kit, and pulled out thin black thread and a tiny needle. With caked blood on her hand, she sewed, suturing the hole that, until now, she didn't even know existed. She bit off the thread with her teeth, and secured a knot on the hole that was now mended.

She looked at the pile of coats and flannels and scarves, the chipped paint where her knuckles just were, and the fallen rack, and she stood up, still holding the sewed coat. She found an empty box she meant to throw out, and she stuffed the mended coat inside, sealing it with shipping tape. She placed the box with the coat outside the wounded door, and on top of the box placed a piece of paper. On this paper, she wrote, "your coat is fixed."

Prompt: Taken from "Where Leaving Takes Us" (<http://www.pw.org/writing-prompts-exercises>): Sometimes we are emotionally imprisoned by the ones we love. Overbearing parents, paranoid spouses, and needy children can make us—and our characters—feel trapped in an intolerable life. Write a scene where an antagonist in your writing leaves a loved one behind and begins life anew. Use details to express relief, guilt, and anger.

ChiKu

by Aaron Jackson

Chihuahua partner
We bond over steak and naps
Moments of comfort

Prompt: Use the prompt of Haiku as there is little wiggle room to misuse a syllable, but with dog as the subject, the words have an easier time forming a meaningful poem.

Bios

Kevin Bray is a Toronto writer/teacher. He studied at the Vermont College of Fine Arts and the Humber School for Writers. Some of his work is found in the *Globe and Mail* (Canada's national newspaper), *The Healing Muse*, *The Danforth Review*, *Penduline Press* and the *Journal of Compressed Creative Arts* (long listed for the Wigleaf Top 50 of 2014). His essay "The Fragmentary Blue of a Butterfly" is contained in the collection *How to Expect What You're Not Expecting* (Touchwood Editions).

Nancy Brewka-Clark began her writing career as features editor for a string of daily newspapers on Boston's North Shore. Her poems, short stories, and nonfiction have been published by Adams Media, Three Rivers Press, Smith and Kraus, the University of Iowa Press, Level Best Books, Conari/Red Wheel, Holy Cow! Press, Little Pear Press, The International Thomas Merton Society, *The Boston Globe*, and The Harvard Bookstore's Gutenberg Press among others. Her plays and monologues have been published by Smith and Kraus and YouthPLAYS of Los Angeles. She's a member of the Short Mystery Fiction Society and Sisters in Crime.

Charlee Brodsky, a fine art documentary photographer and a professor of photography at Carnegie Mellon University. In 2012 she was honored to be Pittsburgh's Artist of the Year chosen by Pittsburgh Center for the Arts. A selection of her awards includes the Tillie Olsen Award with writer Jim Daniels for their book, *Street*; an Emmy with the film team that created the documentary, *Stephanie*, which is based on her friend's life with breast cancer; the Pearl of Hope award given by Sojourner House for her work with her students in the Pittsburgh community; and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts fellowships

Anna Cotton is a (mostly) retired teacher who lives and writes in Lakeland, Florida. She is married and the mother of three adult girls. She spends a lot of time walking, reading and writing. Occasionally, she still teaches creative writing classes—for the joy of it.

Jim Daniels' fourteenth book of poems, *Birth Marks* (BOA Editions, 2013) was selected as a Michigan Notable Book and received the Milton Kessler Prize. His fifth book of short fiction, *Eight Mile High* (Michigan State University Press) appeared in 2014 and also was chosen as a Michigan Notable Book. Daniels is the Thomas Stockham Baker University Professor at Carnegie Mellon University.

John Davis is the author of *Gigs* and *The Reservist*. His recent work appears in *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *The North American Review*, and *Rio Grande Review*. He lives on an island near Seattle, teaches high school and performs in rock n roll bands. The prompt for "Cooking for the Family Reunion" comes from a book of prompts, *The Daily Poet*, by Kelli Agodon and Martha Silano.

Recently retired from teaching university students, **Kathy French** is exploring the West and the possibilities of time and space.

Elizabeth Gibson holds a B.A. in English and Creative Writing from Michigan State University, as well as an M.A. in American Studies, also from MSU. She currently works as a Senior Writer at Societe Internationale de Telecommunications Aeronautiques (SITA) in Atlanta.

Mentored by the late Dr. Len Roberts, **Ben Heins** is the author of two chapbooks of poetry: *Cut Me Free* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2014) and *Greatest Hits & B-Sides* (Vagabondage Press, 2012). "In addition, I am an Assistant Professor of English at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and an active member of the South Jersey Poets Collective. While browsing through a recent issue of *Poets & Writers*, I came upon your advertisement in the "Classifieds" section and became an instant fan of the work you publish."

Paul Hostovsky is the author of five books of poetry and six poetry chapbooks. His poems have won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net awards, and have been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, and *The Writer's Almanac*. His *Selected Poems* was published in 2014 by FutureCycle Press. Visit him at www.paulhostovsky.com

Aaron B. Jackson is a poet and writer. His poems have appeared in multiple publications including *The Bark Magazine*, *Instigatorzine*, *Fat City Review* and *Runaway Parade*, his work is also in many anthologies including *Like One: Poems for Boston* and *Seeing Past Sickness*. He is the former Poet Laureate of Jersey City, NJ (2005-06) and has twice been the recipient of grants from the Puffin Foundation. As a performer he has written and starred in an ad campaign for the Partnership for a Drug Free America and he also served as one of three poetry fellowship judges for the Connecticut Office of the Arts in 2013. Currently he is the Director of Visual Merchandising for the Strand Book Store. For more information please visit middlepoet.com.

Tony Leuzzi is the author of *Radiant Losses* (New Sins Press, 2010) and *The Burning Door* (Tiger Bark Press, 2014). In 2012, BOA Editions published *Passwords Primeval*, Leuzzi's interviews with 20 American poets.

S.D. Lishan is an associate professor of English at The Ohio State University. His book of poetry, *Body Tapestries* (Dream Horse Press), was awarded the Orphic Prize in Poetry and was published in 2006. His poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction have appeared in the *Arts & Letters*, *Kenyon Review*, *Boulevard*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, the *American Poetry Journal*, *Bellingham Review*, *XConnect*, *Barrow Street*, *Your Impossible Voice*, *Creative Nonfiction*, and other fine magazines. He lives in Delaware, Ohio, with his wife, Lynda, and their English Setter, KrackerJack.

Maureen O'Brien is the author of the novel "B-mother" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) and the poetry chapbook "The Other Cradling (Finishing Line Press). She has won the Patricia Dobler Poetry Award and her poem "Incoming Wounded" received first place in the New Millennium Writing Awards. Her work has appeared in, among others, the "Southern Women's Review", "The Louisville Review", and the "Red Rock Review". She teaches creative writing at a magnet arts high school in Connecticut, and is constantly on the prowl for new writing prompts.

Taly Oehler is a Los Angeles based writer and photographer. <http://talyoehlerphoto.tumblr.com/>

Mary Pacifico Curtis's poetry and prose have been published by LOST Magazine, The Rumpus, The Boston Literary Magazine, the Naugatuck River Review, the Pitkin Review, Calyx and The Crab Orchard Review amongst others. Her work is also included in the Las Positas Literary Anthology, The Times They Were A'Changin' and The Widows Handbook. "I received an MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College. When not writing, I lead a Silicon Valley life in PR and branding, and as an angel to technology startups."

Many years ago, while a student in Nebraska, **Kay Retzlaff** studied poetry with William Kloefkorn and Ted Kooser, who did their best to teach me the art. "In the past few years, I have studied with Kathleen Lignell and Ariel Greenberg in Maine, where I live and work. It is only recently that I have started sending out poems into the cold, cruel world. My first published poem in many years came out in the October 2014 issue of Plainsongs. Common Ground Review has graciously agreed to publish two poems in their fall/winter issue."

Nicholas Alexander Roos teaches writing, reading and thinking at the University of Northern Iowa. He began delivering papers as a boy, had his own route when he was 11, and used his earnings to buy Bill Watterson's CALVIN AND HOBBS collections. He has been focused on studying and telling great stories ever since and loves the idea of humans reading and writing to experience flashes of joy and truth.

Alana Sherman lives in Upstate New York on an old farm with her husband and dog. "I have been writing all my life, as well as being a teacher of writing at the high school and college level. Recently I published a children's book, ONE TREE. Currently I am working on another children's book NO MACKS NO!. This is of course in addition to writing poetry all the time. In March I will be the Poet in Residence at THE BIG GAME CLUB in Bikini."

Don Unger is an Assistant Professor of Writing & Rhetoric at St. Edward's University in Austin, TX. He's also an editor for the online journal *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society*. His recent work has appeared in *Computers & Composition*.

Christopher R. Vaughan is a teacher and poet based in the Twin Cities. His work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Amethyst Arsenic*, *Off the Coast*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Eunoia Review*, *Review Americana*, and *Prick of the Spindle*. He reviews poetry for *Prick of the Spindle*.

Linda Wojtowick grew up in Montana. She now lives and writes in Portland, Oregon where she indulges her film habit enthusiastically and without restraint. She is working on a new poetry manuscript called *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*, the poem prompts being either tomato strains, racehorse names, or minerals. Her work has appeared in *Cutbank*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Square Lake*, *Raven Chronicles*, *No Exit*, and *Coe Review*, among others.