

Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream



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Volume 44

Number 7

“No wonder we believe in ghosts,”
she said.

from “A Walk in the Maine Woods” by Ron Singer
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Volume 44 Number 7

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Charles Rammelkamp

Marm Mandelbaum Remembers

Everybody said Wolf was useless,
but I loved him anyway.
When he died
twenty-five years after we married,
leaving me with four kids,
I had to take over the business all on my own.
Sure, people were impressed.

Seven years after we left Prussia,
living in Kleindeutschland on the Lower East Side,
we made our move, after the Panic of 1857,
cultivating the local street kids,
training them as pickpockets, fencing their loot.
No more peddling junk, like broken watches,
for nickels and dimes.

I especially liked the girls, Black Lena, Big Mary,
Queen Liz, Little Annie, Kid Glove Rose,
and my favorite,
Sophie Lyons, who I schooled from the age of six
to steal wallets from men's pockets.
Most women, you know, waste their lives
being housekeepers and kept whores.

For nearly the next twenty years,
after Wolf died, I thrived,
but still I missed him.

Then the DA hired that snitch Stein from Pinkerton's
(his real name was Gustave Frank, it turned out),
and the cops raided my warehouses,
found all the silks and jewelry.
They arrested my son Julius, too,
but I jumped bail, fled to Ontario,
where I joined the Anshe Sholem
Hebrew Congregation
in Hamilton, became a respected citizen,
donating to charities and running my hat shop.
Of course I'd taken my savings with me.
A girl's got to look out for herself.
I sent money back home to my people, too.

But oh, I'd have given up every penny
just to breathe freely the air of the 13th Ward again –
and of course, if I could have my Wolf, too.

Robert Cooperman

Phone Call from My Nephew

We rave about the Nuggets,
kveling like proud parents over
their darling's Nobel Prize:
Denver finally the NBA champs.

Then he mentions his crappy work week
and how he needed to get away,
so he and his girlfriend caught
The Dead and Company on their farewell tour.

"Played all our favorites,
and played them great," Alby chuckles,
still hearing the music in his head.
"If not for you," he goes on, "I'd never
have known about the Dead,
when you took me to that outdoor concert
the year after Jerry died."

"I remember. We'd brought an extra
rain slicker for you, but didn't have one
for your friend, so you shared.
When the monsoon hit, man, you two
looked like drowned rats, so we left,
to avoid getting electrocuted,
like the Dead almost did at Woodstock."

But Alby wasn't even born then,
and I never attended: my cousin's wedding
that weekend; I wouldn't have missed it
for anything, especially if I'd known
how short a time Larry had left,

though if there is a heaven
I hope the Dead will play set after set
for my beautiful cousin.

Bradley R. Strahan

A Fall of Leaves

“As a generation of leaves, so is that of men.” — *Homer*

The people with the accents,
the ones who “came over on the boat”,
are all in “homes” where they gossip
about children’s lives
and forget their own.

Malka complains about her son;
“he never visits, never ‘phones,
only a card on my birthday and Yontif.*”

Elsa dreams of children playing in snow
and long hours at the “Singer”, her sweat
mixing with miles of sewn cloth.

In her mind Golda still lives
in a row house in Flatbush
with Jack and the scent of Sabbath.

At times they play cards, Mah Jong,
bingo... The numbers are called;
Some win.
Some lose.

Many are taken but few return.

*Jewish New Year when families normally gather together to celebrate.

D. R. James

**Infatuation Reconsidered,
This Time Right from the Start**

Later, after I've surely stopped thinking about her
in the form of more than every other fleeting focus

all my working days and goofy nights — pick up the kids,
her, this student's murky thesis, her, that student's

mother's cancer, her, taxes due, her, call her, her,
be with her now, always, her, will I always be with her?

Her! — will it be because, like the few other drifting
and single significant others, she, too, will have gone,

moved on, or I'll have moved on, again, perhaps another
ambush I can't imagine? Or because, together, content,

I will no longer have to wonder, its relaxed advantage
the unselfconscious vocabulary of forever: partner,

safety, ease, familiar-but-still-thrilling body, whose
cleansed or sweaty fragrance remains the perfect one?

And will I miss this current state of sensory inundation,
of cognitive befuddlement — this state of downright awe?

Deborah H. Doolittle

Who Do? Who Do You Think You're Fooling?

An owl calls from a nearby tree,
and if I am lucky, I will
see it swooping across the yard
before the dark shadows swallow
up all trace of its existence.
Except for its mournful message
breathless as the voice of the dove.

The Visit

I double back and there you are,
just as you were, beside the cats.
Then the light shifts and you are gone,
no cats in sight, only pale stripes
of light through blinds. The day nuzzles
against the bed, but no one comes.

Gilbert Honigfeld

The Celebrity Curse

If you can have it all, what's next?
she wondered, eyes bleared with smoke and booze,
dusks blurring into a string of anonymous dawns,
the curse of having everything eroding whatever is left.

Erosion, she thought, erosion, slowly, steadily,
the great silhouette and heroic stance diminishing
ever so slightly, one grain at a time, until
one day a chipped mirror gives back a discard.

Was I in fact thrown away like a stained skirt?
Or did they simply walk on, leaving me in place?
Somehow, the answer seems to matter but eludes,
another question rising from the fumes of the last.

Gilbert Honigfeld

A Life in Three Cardboard Boxes

Box 1

Two flannel shirts, a pair of white socks,
and a beat-up leather shaving kit.

The shirts folded. Socks rolled into a ball.

Box 2

The box is sealed with clear packing tape,
a name that used to be his taped on too,
wearable shoes going to Goodwill on Tuesday.

Box 3

His near-weightless paper trail will be shredded,
confetti'd, obliterated, for recycling into cheap napkins,
the last of three amnesic boxes set at the curb, waiting.

James Penha

Lost in Patience

with a nod to Joseph Fasano

Even the moon sometimes fails to inspire.
I tried. I woke each day in anticipation
I scrawled
I scribbled
I thought I was a poet
until I heard no applause
saw no one nod awake.

But then:
the albatross displaying in the breeding ground
fails to attract the one intended
yet still bobs
still calls
still goes right on dancing
for itself
and for any others who may eventually
want to join.

Mary Belardi Erickson

Trees with Second Thoughts

He bulldozes a graveyard
of roots where had grown a tree
hollowed by age and insects —
 a joy for the woodpecker.

Old trees do still bloom
like our ancient crabapple
 and catalpa,
grow leaves like our boxelder and ash
 after branches grow from stumps.

You cannot civilize the notions of trees.
Ergo, he must bulldoze stubborn roots.

Mary K. Lindberg

The Rage of Alexander

(Mozarteum concert salon, Salzburg, Austria)

(1997)

From the domed ceiling's blue sky
a frescoed Alexander the Great
stares wide-eyed at parquet floors
as musicians' bows and strings
touch, tremble to tune up.

Gold leaf tumbles from wall sconces,
prisms from candlelit chandeliers
scatter like swirling stars.
Long-haired violinists sway
before mirrored walls
where composer Mozart once stood. . . .

(1787)

Wearing his new white wig,
Mozart arrives, smiling.
The wig slips as he bows.
Baton raised, he draws his
Eine Kleine Nachtmusik
like a ball of silk from the orchestra.
Intent on conducting, he doesn't see
Alexander above him start to squirm —

nor how a dark, roiling rage
spreads across the great conqueror's face
as Mozart's music confirms

his deepest fears:
this short, bewigged genius
will enthrall listeners for millennia,
while his bold, bloody conquests
dwindle in obscure, dusty books.

Appeared in River of Stars:Poets of the the Vineyard Anthology
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Wraiths

They slip between the corn rows
tipping an ear here and there
for the deer to eat later

wraiths of old farmers
who tilled with horse and hand plow
picked rocks into piles
sowed corn by hand from sling pouch

they move now running a gray finger
down drying blades but drawing
no blood like when they tasseled
sweet corn in the flush of youth

now just wind passes through
their bodies making another song
like their memories calling
those that ever tilled that land.

Ghosts

soot covered
gray shrouds billowing
in ashy wind

snagging on a charred timber
bits of houses trees bones

these are the real
ghosts that will remain

never to leave Lahaina
shambling between
burned out buildings lives

theirs the echoes
of agony consumed
by fire wild and hungry

and ours the screams
the sobs as we sift
through nothingness

and the ghosts
place hands lightly
on our heaving shoulders

Sylvia Manning

For you this day for Valentine

Sometimes comfort in
words you used, in the
warmth of them in
winter when
all moves widdershins,
darkly wondering:
mott, you knew,
and berm, I learned, and for
the humming humble flow from
mountain down to brilliance
of the lake in autumn,
rill.

Our Geography of Poets

Bali

James Penha

Colorado

Robert Cooperman

Kansas

Pat Anthony

Maryland

Charles Rammelkamp

Michigan

D. R. James

Minnesota

Mary Belardi Erickson

New York

David Michael Nixon

Mary K. Lindberg

New Jersey

Gilbert Honigfeld

North Carolina

Bradley R. Strahan

Deborah H. Doolittle

Texas

Sylvia Manning