Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 26

#10

i met an avalanche coming down
as i was going up

archy climbs everest
from ARCHY DOES HIS PART

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 26 Number 10*

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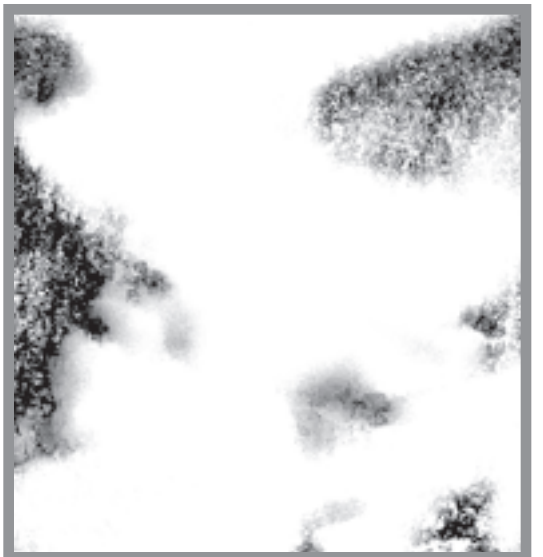

Mudslide — James Penha

Read history here
bound in the leaves
of a roof
like a flag palled,
upon a village
smothered in its own
wet earth.

Sung hymns hear
in sacred mud
by heart.

Dream Animals: Meanspiritus Rex — Fredrick Zydek

Occasionally something goes wrong with the entire structure of evolution and out pops a cantankerous, fault-finding, sharp-tongued, fire-spitting beast with long sharp claws spewing smoke from its nostrils like a gluttonous chain-smoker in a tobacco factory.

These creatures don't just kick a man when he's down — they find ways to keep him down. You can spot them coming from a great distance. They'll have huge chips on their shoulders, egos the size of planets and sacks of venom dangling from their

arms like shopping bags. There will be a strange smirk on their lips, a haughtiness in the way they turn their heads and a habit of looking down their noses instead of straight out into your eyes. Flowers wilt when they walk by, children reach for their

mothers, the old and infirmed pull their shawls up close around their shoulders, then turn their eyes to the floor. They think that by not being noticed they will escape unharmed. Not true. This beast is a monster. It will eat its own children for brunch.

Scarce Air — David Michael Nixon

All the air is scarce;
where has it gone,
now that I need to breathe?

Indistinct Women
Joanne Seltzer

they are combing the mountains
looking for something

never having had it
they don't know what it is

it's not for sale
at the country store

they push away sharp branches
force a path through undergrowth

looking for
a wild berry

a fallen leaf
a blue autumn wild flower

perhaps they will stumble on it
at the bottom of T Lake Falls

first published in the chapbook
'Adirondack Lake Poems'

Entropy — R. Yurman

When I got home last night
I found a huge hunk
of masonry crashed
to the front steps,
the exposed stucco
damp to the touch.

Inside, the wall felt dry and solid
but the cracks
in the living room ceiling
seemed more pronounced,
the whole stretch
of ancient plaster over my head
on the verge of collapse.

Today I sweep up the debris,
save the largest chunks,
fancy I can hire
someone to put it all back—
a paint job might help.

The floorboards creak
the front door sticks
my knees ache
A bit of spackle at least
A change of color perhaps

Easy — Mark Wisniewski

every year
our schedule

included St. John's
School for the Deaf

a sure win even though
they were a grade older

still I'd always
fear that game:

the shoves serving
as trash talk

the exaggerated
twists of their faces

the unspoken envy
as they'd

continue down court
to score at will

after the burst
of the whistle

The Pre-Death Scene
Ron Singer

Applicants are keen,
memberships, strong,
waiting lists, long,
for the pre-death scene.
I hear they say,
"Why wait
for the long haul
to get away
from it all?"

Demand is high
for sub-divis-
ions where
you can get
"them" out
of your hair,
and where
your pet
can have
a split-
level lair.
Away from this,
away from that,
aloof from roach

and encroach-
ing rat,
sub-divis-
ions where
you can hitch
your star
to a car
turn your kitch-
en to a bar.

Leisure and retire-
ment communities
(I hear they say)
also
abound
and appeal,
hide-
aways
priced low
or higher,
abut-
ting sea
and sound,
where you
can keep
a lit-
tle pet,
where you
don't have
to feel
a bit
cold,
but where
you do have
to be
a bit
old.

But these sta-
tions of
the pre-
death scene

certainly
do strain
the elec-
tricity,
and lo-
wer the wa-
ter table,
taxing
the amen-
ities,
provoking
the Erin-
yes,
(or Fu-
ries,
not to be
confused
with
the
Eumen-
ides).

So, before
you snooze,
make
your will,
exercise
your
right
(and left)
to vote,
to drive,
while you're
still
sort of
still
alive
(pre-
bereft),
and
still
able . . .
still.

A Mother's Death: in Retrospect
William Beyer

Standing above your narrow bed,
Watching your shrunken arms
Move occasionally,
Painfully
Under a faded patchwork quilt,
I could not speak.

Your closed eyes,
Difficult breathing
Suggested that the death-rattle
Was near;
Only minutes away.

Lingering over your dead face,
There was a child's question,
Regret
That before the end came
You did not speak my name,
Assure me,
Your youngest son,
That death is easy,
The final resignation;
A necessary compromise.

Hunger, 2003 — Jean Keskulla

A slick of ice covers the earth of April. The bright
goldfinch, perched in the yew, has molted
too early. Our pair of phoebes, just returned,
can't find insects to fill their empty gullets.

The daffodils still hide their yellow fires
from sight. Under our cypress tree, a russet
sparrow scratches for seed in the dirt;
earth spurts backward from his lanky legs.

Away in the East, tanks roll through the ash
and sand of an alien, brown-skinned nation,
seeking oil – black gold – to feed our busy furnaces.

The winter has been ravenous, relentless. It consumed one parent, then the other. Diminished, my father and mother fit into matching urns.

Tom and Christopher – Joan Payne Kincaid

Why was Tom shot in his jewelry store
we know that Christopher did it
but don't know what was done to him
by fate such as a mother who drove the get-away car
for heroin
who moved him thirteen times
in his first thirteen years
so finding friends was difficult still he did find them
and now at the young age of twenty-three
they worry about him
we know that he lived in our community
and knew Tom to be a gentle friendly man

that he went on to murder two more people
in the next few days in another state
for a never-ending need shared with his Mom
we don't know
if Tom attempted to stop Christopher
or whether either ever had a choice.

Heart Failure — Bill Roberts

His heart failure
was a natural progression
and self-induced
from the heartache
of losing her
        his for only ten short years
the lone last person
since his mother
and my mother
        his previous wife
who understood
and tolerated his quirks
and often childish way
of always getting his way
        his final act of peevishness
the heart failure
brought on
in a last fit of pique

Hog Heaven — Thomas Reynolds

Bliss used to come in small short gulps,
leaking slop buckets the farmer brought
or late afternoon kicks in the crowded wallow.
But now heaven seems a much wider place,
large enough for the greediest appetite.
How can I be satisfied with this trough
when I've seen brothers swallowed in rapture
vanishing in a crest of fragrant foam?

The world had become a pig's paradise,
a swirling ocean of fermented swill
that drove the old farmer from his home

and now slowly inched toward our pen,
twenty yards, fifteen yards, ten yards.
After such a feast, a fattening,
we could lie forever in the muddy sludge,
free to grunt, squeal, stretch, and snort,
bellies growling with delicious gas.
"I'm going to drink it all," I squealed,
"down the last little drop, then explode!"
Shaking, I put my forelegs in the trough
and raised my snout to gaze at heaven.
That's when I saw the farmer's boat
sweep around the barn and power down,
avoid the tractor cab, and come to rest
five yards from the pen. Five yards!

Then he began loading us into the boat,
one by one, but not without a fight.
"He's not taking me alive!" I screamed,
as he put his arms around my stomach,
lifted me to his shoulders, and let me drop.
I remember his breath, and his smooth hands
pinching my side as I briefly struggled,
tried to kick, and then let myself go.
Let my snout bounce against the seat
and my body quickly sink into resignation.
Fear and shame kept me quiet,
nuzzling the gray sludge under his boots,
as we motored off in the growing dark,
waves of heaven slapping at the sides.

Then the gray shoat began to crack,
squealing and squirming, not giving in,
the vision we'd all waited for so close,
just a breath away. Struggling, fighting,
as the man vainly grasped at the hooves
just as the shoat toppled off the lip,
broke the surface with a loud squeal,
then disappeared in a gathering foam,
free and clear and happy forever.

Cascades — Jeanne Whalen

who knew there was reckless inside?
pine trees to the left of
mountain cliff humming birds?
eating peanut butter and jelly crumbs
from the palm of my hand?
my tennis shoes were stained
and there – there was the reckless

the sword. the stomach.
the broken branch the stomach's sword.
my blood was none of your concern.
I cried alone on a bench

in darkness in a strange
waterfront town
and you never
came to find me

Live Free or Die — Lee Evans

The Old Man of the Mountain:
Is he what Daniel Webster
chose to call a Real Man?
He stares across the notch,
past the peregrine cliffs,
into the blind vistas
of his own granite eyes.

It is we who attribute to the crag
his Persona, composed from our own
storm-blasted fantasies—
to which we cling like mountaineers,

swaying beneath his Image
upon the stakes and cables
we drive into the Rushmores
that we have not yet conquered.

When Jefferson looked up
at the Old Man of the Mountain,
the Old Man looked down, for once,
and laughed a mocking laugh
that echoes from the White Mountains'
jagged slopes to this day.

Someone Came — Ida Fasel

When the clear crisp autumn day
without warning
whipped me white in snow to my hips
and blinded the mountain of the trail,
when cliff's edge threatened
every moment lost

Suddenly
a great peace came over me.
I was lifted in lightness
as if I slept
and in lightness
swiftly smoothly surely
borne through air.

My friends reject wings
as anatomically impossible;
call unaided flight through galaxies
improbable; deny as most unlikely
a Beyond minutely concerned with us.
Even for your Meister Eckhart, they say
an angel is only an idea of God,
and what proof is there of God?

Mountain Rescue, they explain —
human voices – didn't you hear them
reassure you, strap you on,
take you down? I remember only
Gossamer is warm.

Sing-Tale — Anselm Brocki

Gathering from a trickle
with medieval minstrels
and castle art songs;
coevolving through us
into rivulets of music
hall, vaudeville, waltz,
operetta, Tin Pan Alley,
ragtime, jazz, country;
syncopating into a river
of rhythm and blues,
rock and roll, disco,
heavy metal, punk rock,
and rap as we hunch
our shoulders, snap our
fingers, strut, swagger,
cakewalk, and sing-talk
down meaner and meaner
streets.

The 27th volume of Waterways will be published in 11 issues during 2006-7.
Monthly themes are from Samuel Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes*.

Number 1 (deadline May 14, 2006):

How Nations sink, by darling Schemes oppress'd,
When Vengeance listens to the Fool's Request.

Number 2 (deadline June 14, 2006):

Wealth heap'd on Wealth, nor Truth nor Safety buys,
The Dangers gather as the Treasures rise.

Number 3 (deadline July 14, 2006):

Once more Democritus, arise on Earth,
With chearful Wisdom and instructive Mirth,
See motley Life in modern Trappings dress'd,
And feed with varied Fools th'eternal Jest:

Number 4 (deadline September 14, 2006):

Where change of Fav'rites made no Change of Laws,
And Senates heard before they judg'd a Cause;

Number 5 (deadline October 14, 2006)

Deign on the passing World to turn thine Eyes,
And pause a while from Letters to be wise;
There mark what Ills the Scholar's Life assail,
Toil, Envy, Want, the Patron, and the Jail.

Number 6 (deadline November 14, 2006)

Around his Tomb let Art and Genius weep,
But hear his Death, ye Blockheads, hear and sleep.

Number 7 (deadline December 14, 2006):

Yet Reason frowns on War's unequal Game,
Where wasted Nations raise a single Name,

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