

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME
31



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME 31, #7

He claimed to love all humankind,
but was a despot and a fraud.

Ida Fasel

RICH AND FAMOUS

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WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 31

Number 7

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Watching the fish with J, trying Ruth Moon Kempfer

not to say the wrong thing, or cry
it all reminds me of the tree toad who lives in my sink
and drinks whatever scotch I leave, of evenings
rising, half-paralyzed, to greet me at dawn
one small green fist groping over the glass-rim. Hi.

The black ones are guppies and the long-nosed ones
that kiss are kissing fish and one is
a red and black bastard, going after — the scotch
will get his adrenaline going; if frogs have
adrenaline, or tree toads. They play the same old song
over and over on the juke box, country lover, it reminds me
the aquarium is a microcosm of the ocean, at its best
how they eat each other, spit out curls of gravel —

even fish know, some things you can't digest.

Motorcycles

Ruth Moon Kempher

He said
make a sound
violent or murderous

frightening sound
like the pump
sucking at the plumbing --

Some abysses are too deep
to bridge, and some cuts
can't be sutured

I don't think I'll listen
for the wounding
any more.

You Might As Well Love Me

H. Edgar Hix

I am a wolf in human's clothing.
I walk among humans as an other
and smell their fear, age and illness.
I am here to cleanse. To calm.
To claim as my own those
who cannot lay claim to themselves.

I am what you want to see in your mirror;
what you think you see, what you'll never see.
You think I will go for your jugular or soft underbelly.
You smell my scent in the streets and sweat in the snow.
I strike in Spring with a smile
whose teeth will still your calm heart.

Shining Moment

Scott Owens

One memorable line doesn't redeem
the poem; one memorable poem, the book;
one shining moment a lifetime.

Defined by a negative it becomes
even less becoming: the time
he didn't leave, didn't strike out,

didn't get drunk, all asleep, disappoint.
Even Norman can claim that once
in an otherwise good day, with the sky

clear, the temperature just right,
the past not pushing too hard against
his hands, he let the boys make too

much noise without the slap and yell;
he forgave, forgot, foreswore the familiar,
the comforts of rage and control

Night Blooming Plant

William Corner Clarke

This plant, Bella Donna Lacrimosa
(Sometimes known as
Break Your Heart Plant)
Has a special scent
Familiar but unknown
It will fill your room
With longing for a beauty
You cannot own

When night falls
And all the other flowers close
This one will open up
Its pallid blooms
But only when it knows
There's no one else
But you around

And although it naturally
Prefers to grow
In dark, forgotten places
Where no one sane
Will ever go
It will survive and thrive
In any spot
Where love has died

Gulled George Held

*He claimed to love all humankind
But was a despot and a fraud;
His people loved him like a god,
An icon ensconced in the mind.
Who knew that he would milk us dry,
Like a Ponzi of the spirit,
Investing beyond the limit
Of our dull wits' capacity?*

But while our guru took our wives
And led our children out of school
And made us husbands feel uncool
And bankrupted our woeful lives,
He gulled us with a gorgeous smile
That drew a veil across his guile.

In the Graveyard, With a Gun

Robert Cooperman

He walks from town,
taking his gun from the safe
where he'd stored it
when the boys were young.
With the note in his breast pocket,
he sniffs the crisp autumn air
as if his mother's pumpkin pies.

He stares at his mother's grave
as if he can see her, and knows
she'd never forgive him for this,
or for separating from his wife Connie,

for a woman who left him
after his business failed; with it,
Connie's chemo coverage,
her death sentence, unless
one of their sons can help.
Neither Ron nor Willy will talk to him
except to sneer they never
want to hear from him again.

He and Connie used to sneak
into the graveyard at night with a joint,
a six-pack, and some condoms.
Now, he brushes aside dry leaves,
pulls weeds, and takes out his gun,
heavier than his mother's granite.

“Stand straight,” he admonishes,
as if his father, who never approved of him,
and left his mother and is buried
in another state, next to the space
reserved for his young, second wife.

The barrel is so cold he gags.
He breathes deep as an oil drill
and tries again.

JANUS

Gregory Liffick

Though
wanting
to put up
a front,
breaking
into a grin
would
fracture
the features
of his face.

An urge
to care
is
smothered
by the
muscles
of his
dark heart.
Hard to
conceal
the dragon
in the
would-be
knight.

the hand that feeds Jennifer Jayne Scobie

the lottery
such a lucky thing
a lifetime's fortune
rained down upon him
and he was lost
to the glimmer of gold
forever

it did not change
his children
his wife
who cowered
in fear
of the bludgeoning
when late at night
he would arrive
whiskey-soaked
and stammering

by daybreak
his check book was out
empty hands were filled
shelters for stray animals
shelters for the homeless
shelters for the abused

and no one would suspect
the journey
so often taken
by his very own fist

Death and Its Visceral Aftermath – Bill Roberts

Just laying there, minding my own business,
trying to nap when all of a sudden
this long line of people approached,
gazed down at me, and singly or in pairs
uttered these totally obnoxious,
highly personal, edited comments:

Gotta admit, he looks better dead than alive.

Bastard still owes me twenty bucks.

We worked together. I did all the work.

*Never knew him to be like this...speechless.
Look at those hands. Couldn't keep 'em off me.
What, no children? Well, that's a blessing
Wonder how long it'll take his wife to remarry.
No religion? Going straight to hell for sure.
Heard he became a poet. Now there's a waste!
Paper said he was only 37. And dyslexic.
Ladies' man? I thought he was a laddie's man.
Ah, at peace at last...and so are we.
Weapons nut? Like maybe a hit man for the Mafia?
Damned guy could eat and talk at the same time.
Funny man, don't you think? Just not ha-ha funny.*

*Whatta guy. Never knew when he was kidding.
Only one thing on his mind. Can't remember what
Thanks for all the laughs, Billy . . . but
you never did finish cleaning the basement.*

Never thought they'd go, let me get some rest.

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Mystery

Rex Sexton

The new leads promise nothing except exhaustion and more black magic tricks in the Dead Zone's matrix, where missing persons wander in a trance through labyrinths of chance filled with secret passages, false walls, corridors cluttered with carnival mirrors, stairways to nowhere, trap doors — the only way to negotiate the maze being Ouija boards.



tablero de ouija

“All the measures have been recorded in ledgers.”

They informed me when I began my round of the underground. “But they disappeared altogether when the center fell apart forever.”

I move through light and shadow past doors which have no numbers, down streets which have no names, amidst shapes which have no faces, under clocks run out of time. Impossible to prove I reconstruct the clues, formulating fresh equations from known relations, shifting speculations, new suspicions, the whole mind devoted to the question, like a storm closing in from all directions.

What does it mean? When did it begin? How did it happen?
Where will it end? The diners that were seated at the table,
the dishes that were served, the drinks that were consumed,
the conversations that ensued, the omissions, contradictions,
affectations, the lies, asides, miss-directions — like rigged
roulette wheels, loaded dice, shell games, stacked decks,
parlor tricks. Who stole everyone's soul will never be
established.

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