

Front Porch Review



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A Simple Stillness
- Marianne Brems

A Great Blue Heron scans a river bed
with deep elegant wingbeats,
then folds her wings for landing.
Her long sinewy toes spread lightly
on marsh grass.
She stands motionless as in a photograph,
focused,
assured,
patient
as time slows before prey swims near.

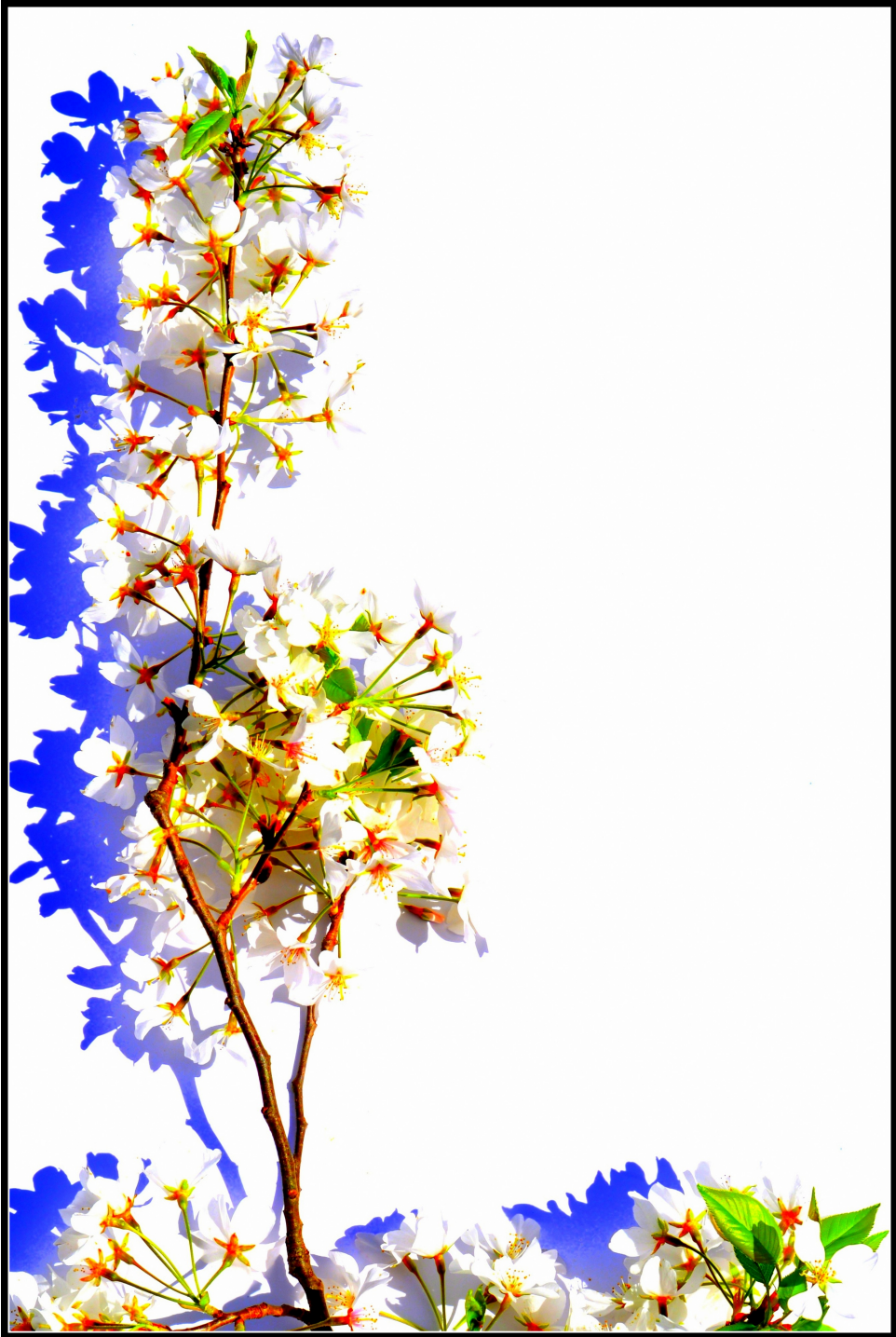
No clicks.
No likes.
No busy screens
or noise inside her head.

Amidst the urgency of sustenance,
just a simple story of stillness
like the last line in a book
before the cover closes.

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Cherry Blossoms

- Russell Struer



A Thought Groans Past an Open Field
- Antoni Ooto

how does it happen so quickly
the plow the planting a single track of deer

and in this very tenuous place I walk
meandering my open plains of winter

white barren fields now rustling in sleep
so who will warm these thoughts

without you – without light
only questions
why is the essential one

Brown Trains
- John L. Stanizzi

The Burial of the Dead from The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot for Ezra Pound

‘Il miglior fabbro’

*Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.*

passengers board brown trains
in brown cities
brown days-

the moon is livid –
its smirking grin
of fractured doubt
beneath snappish leaves

earthworms scribble
about brown menaces
on mud-engorged dirt roads
as the day simply occurs
everyone attempting
to hold tears at bay –

a fire wails –
its light is sure to aid
someone in need of a little brightness,
perhaps a small old woman
gathering twigs, dried and brown –

smoke from her fire
levitates and crackles
in cages of light

your eyes
brown in the heat
brown in the rain of long moments
are also full of the meagre glow
pulsing from behind
a massive stand of shadows
that guides passengers to brown trains
in brown cities
brown days

A Man's Reach

- Joanne Faries



Country Kitchens, or If You Can't Stand the Heat, Keep Your Nose Out of the Slicks!
- S. Keyron McDermott

Like many women, I run around with an eye perpetually peeled for a nifty decorating idea, antiques, wood floors and all the accouterments we see in the “country” living magazines – especially “country kitchens” with their miles of tile and granite counters, breathtaking window treatments, built-in appliances, cutting boards, cupboards, and islands.

The house where my mother raised us after my father died when I was ten had no counters, no island and only a couple of cupboards in the pantry. Early on, it didn't have running water either but for the pump from the cistern on the sink. In mini-droughts we occasionally pumped up a half-composed oak or elm leaf, but cistern water was always wet, cold, and soft.

More crucially this house, one of the first built in the village, at bottom of the old water tower hill in Cascade, Iowa, had a huge garden and attached to the buggy garage a barn with a stanchion and a space for a horse. What is now lawn and garden was, when I was young in the 50s and Mom drove a 1947 Chevy, sheep pasture. Before the advent of gas-powered riding mowers and weed whackers, sheep kept the weeds down.

And we had chickens. Oh, God, did we have chickens! In those days the Dahlem Feed Store gave away ten free baby chicks to any child under ten – an ingenious spring marketing device to stimulate the sale of chicken feed in summer and fall. As the Great Chicken Give-away happened in early March when it was too cold for a baby chick to be outside, we had twenty or thirty of them chair-barricaded around the oil burner (upgraded from a wood stove after my father passed away) in the kitchen until the weather warmed enough to move them outside to the barn. They kept us in eggs until my mother slaughtered them (a horrifying spectacle during which I made myself as scarce as their proverbial teeth) one by one for Sunday dinner over the fall and winter.

Chickens are notoriously stinky and stupid even when they are little, yellow, and adorable. I leave to your imagination what happened when my younger siblings got squabbling and tipped over the barricades. Altogether too mortifying for a teenager trying to be cool as Annette and Darlene on the Mickey Mouse Club!

Moreover, instead of spending our summers doing cool things, e.g., going to camp, swimming, and playing tennis, we pulled weeds in the garden, picked, peeled and canned tomatoes, beans, corn, and wild berries. Mom enrolled us girls in 4-H and taught us to make picture frames, refinish furniture and sew clothes, pillows, curtains, and dust ruffles. Along with learning to cook and hand sew hems and buttons on, my brothers were apprenticed to carpenters and mechanics.

Until I went to France on a press tour through a Denver magazine for which I worked (then a cool job) to hype skiing (a cool sport) to Denverites in 1975, I had always thought my childhood was unique to Iowa. A French friend graciously invited me to spend Christmas with some friends of his in a little town called Sallanches on the Franco-Swiss border. While I was there, they took me to a farm in the foothill country near Mont Blanc. The farmer's cattle, sheep, pigs, and goats, lived downstairs and the family upstairs. No point wasting ink describing the smell – reminiscent of our chickens!

The summer of 1985 I was living in Connecticut. Folks there lived in renovated barns with miles of tile, granite, and walnut floors, replete with Inglenook fireplaces that were certainly not there when the cows were, and spiral staircases leading to bedrooms in the hayloft with Ethan Allan canopy beds and French or English antique dressers, to-die-for plaid Queen Anne,

Restoration or Regency high boys and wing backs.

One day that summer my best friend drove up from NYC. Under a spreading chestnut tree, long-faced, she produced a decorating magazine featuring French country farmhouses with kitchens too sweet for words.

“God, those are adorable,” I concurred when she showed me the chairs at an old kitchen table – an artfully restored one just like ours at which Mom used to knead bread, pluck, de-gut and cut up Sunday chickens on Saturday and where we ate all the meals of our young lives. One spread featured cushions with ruffles tied in overgenerous bows to the back of the posts of each chair.

“I priced those chair cushions,” she explained sadly, “they cost \$150.”

“That’s bodacious; you could probably make them for \$50.”

“\$150 a piece!”

A couple weekends later, she returned with a portable sewing machine she had bought and some material. Well, you could make them for \$25 if you bought the material someplace reasonable, but not if you went to some fancy NYC boutique that imported fabric from France. I want you to know that I was sweating bricks and blocks cutting into that fancy \$37.50-a-yard French material. Nowadays, I chuckle at the irony of an Iowa woman sweating bricks in a Connecticut kitchen sewing French “country” chair cushions seen in an American decorating magazine destined for a Manhattan apartment.

That fall I returned to the “homeplace,” resolved to clean up my house decorating act and have cooler stuff. However, my life decisions – managing a small progressive/socialist newspaper which lost money – cost me a couple of jobs and totally sabotaged the coolness plan. Let me tell you what, country kitchens pictured in slick magazines cost plenty. Paradoxically, it is easier for people earning city salaries to have “country kitchens” than can people in the American countryside, where wages tend to be lower.

Over time though, I have begun to realize that the purpose of these magazines that so generously purport to give us decorating ideas is to cultivate demand. Stimulate coveting. My only consolation for being duped all those years is that I am not alone. While my adverse financial circumstances are the primary reason I am not as cool as I intended be, I also became something of an environmentalist. “Cool” requires a fair bit of casting off, tossing out plain old waste. Along with the “homeplace” where I live, I have inherited both from relatives and miscellaneous townswomen, lots of quilting and rug-making material, not always the coolest color and/or design (ones other people don’t want). I also developed compunctions, which is what makes an environmentalist an environmentalist.

Though perhaps the greatest irony of decorator magazine “country” kitchens is they are anything but. The ancient smelly, dirty, bloody connection between kitchen, garden and barnyard that I smelled in the French farmhouse and experienced as a child has been severed. The other country kitchen I was most familiar with was my Aunt Viola’s. I recall it best during threshing season when I was most often there, along with a crew of half dozen men, a dozen kids and usually a couple crew wives to lend a hand. From Vi’s gargantuan garden, women and girls picked messes of peas, green beans, mountains of leaf lettuce and tons of tomatoes, which we sliced onto platters. We dug pecks of new potatoes, boiled and served them mashed in heavy bowls alongside patties of fried pork chops, chicken fried steak and savory gravy. We made strawberry, rhubarb, apple, or berry pie for dessert. Spring, summer and fall, there seemed always to be something in season.

I suspect there is a lot of fast and prepared food, some of it very good, purchased from

expensive delis and eaten in city “country” kitchens. The modern urban lifestyle is a Disney sort of fantasy featuring ersatz kitchens more convincing than real ones like Aunt Vi’s or ours, now mine. This is an authentically urban capitalist vision designed to stimulate consumption and further the overall Washington goal of urbanizing America. Once, when I published the socialist newspaper that got me in hock, I interviewed Ronald Reagan’s Secretary of State, George Shultz. He told me the grand government plan was to get rid of 10% of the farming population every year. At that point less than two percent of Americans earned a living farming. His reasoning was that more economically productive high-tech and factory farming should take place here, and that “less productive” farming should happen in Third World Countries. Well, we see where that has landed us – states with high numbers of confined feeding operations (CAFOs) and 1,000-acre farms have experienced massive erosion and levels of toxic chemicals in their water that has landed at least one water districts in court.

Farmers selling to developers have removed a few hundred thousand acres every year to facilitate the building of “country homes with country kitchens,” which furthers Shultz’s plan. Farmers under duress – most of the small ones – can hardly refuse the lucrative return that selling a few acres nets. Dairy farms in the Midwest trying to compete with sprawling milk factories in California have little choice.

From William Dean Howells to Sinclair Lewis to today, “house” is a well-honed American class and socio-economic construct, part of the one-up ethic that underlies it. In my Denver days, the woman who lived next door, clearly on a higher trajectory than I was (then driving a taxi), married up and moved into an enviable house across the street from Washington Park. Every time I ran into her at the post office or grocery store, she invited me over saying, “You’ve *got* to come see my house.” It was abundantly clear to me that I was to go and ooh and ah a lot, evidence high levels of envy.

I never went. Had I gone I would never have been invited back. Friendship was the last thing she wanted from me. Most of the towns of Eastern Iowa clearly demonstrate these class and social divisions – the well-heeled in new houses on the hills or in subdivisions, the country equivalent of “moving uptown or out to the suburbs.”

In addition to waste, this artificial house ethic leaves one forever in the wrong place. I have felt embarrassed entertaining Europeans. This house (constructed in stages for a family of seven or eight people) is too large for one person, but it’s the homeplace, and I can’t bear to part with it. I recall it in pentimento with no counters, and a hand pump on a long- since defunct sink and Mom’s homemade café curtains. Likewise, I have been apologetic and/or embarrassed that my kitchen has not been remodeled for fifty years, and I have no deck or patio on which to station my unmatched yard chairs. For most of the time that I have lived here, if I had had the money, I would have spiffed the place up, remodeled the kitchen, bought a new this, that and the other, poured a patio, hired a carpenter to build a deck, etc. Now, I can’t be bothered.

Though now, because of the time I spent in Paris and Provence, Korea and elsewhere, my garden features arugula, Italian parsley, Swiss Chard, Belgian endive, boo-chou and bok choi. My beans are purple, yellow, and green. A far cry from the plain fare that came out of Vi’s or my mother’s kitchen gardens. (May they rest in peace; they made me a true country woman.)

I have lived here the lion’s share of my life with that connection between the kitchen and garden intact, now essential to my well-being. I treasure the picture frames and sewing boxes (I keep garden seeds in them.) we made in 4-H. When mom’s cotton curtains bit the dust, I put them as mulch on the walkways of the garden, and they returned to the earth from whence they

came. Now the garden is where the sheep grazed, and this place feels more authentic than any I have ever salivated over. You have to love country.

Sing With Me
- Flo Hayes



Cynthia
- Kay Kestner

Lace.

That is the best I can explain
about the way her fingers touched the keys.
She only played once for me on an old piano
in her mother's living room. I sat
in a folding chair beside her,
not really listening,
just watching her hands, strong wings.
I always wanted something solid,
some kind of evidence as to why
she was beautiful. There were so many reasons,
but I could never explain any of them.
Until she played that day
and I found one.

Lace.

Her hands
when she played
were perfect lace.

Esther
- Michael Rosenwasser

The wheels of this life
spin ever faster.
Ever faster.

The dizzying pace leaves
its indelible mark
on all I do,
all I think about.

Hardly a moment passes
without a questioning,
or concern at the
accelerating pace
the wheels spin.

As it becomes harder
to hold it all together.

As it becomes harder
to hold on to any moment.

As it becomes harder
to craft a beguiling smile
In the face of the sum total
of the moments.

And then there are,

the breathtaking moments,
the inescapably wondrous moments,
the indescribably beautiful moments,
the unmistakably treasure-filled moments.
Missing since this time began.
Missing no more.

As I scan the landscape
where you run with abandon.
Shouting whimsical nonsense.
At the trees.
At the birds.
At the sky.

Nonsense,

that echoes its way
back to my ears,
reflects its way
back to my eyes,
radiates its way
to my heart.

The moments,
an instant ago,
empty, pointless,
now filled with joy,
and, your abandonment.

For just these moments
the wheels slow down.

For just these moments.

Handiwork

- Gaby Bedetti





Melancholy's Song
- Michael Shoemaker

It's Friday and drizzling again
while you drive home
listening to the radio with me by your side
and the song comes on.

It's the one that sometimes thrills,
brings moods or something too hard to describe,
but somehow always
matches our souls.

You roll down the window to watch
tiny beads of water bounce off your skin
and just about everything smells as it was before –
something of lavender.

There used to be the taste of the sea breeze
on the tips of our tongues
and the warmth of our hearts
with tenderness and understanding.

You turn into my driveway, stop the engine and look at me.
Tears roll down our cheeks knowing what can no longer be
and what no longer needs to be said.
I get out of the car, shut the door, and walk away.
The last note floats skyward beyond our reach.

Moving On
- Judy DeCroe

in a while you will be forgetting me,
my voice, my face; the rest you will remember
the unforgettable parts, part laughter,
part presence, part... something else

that essence will be me
always me
a tiny wrinkle in your going on after...
so much after

Once Upon a Time in Salt Lake City

- Michael Shoemaker

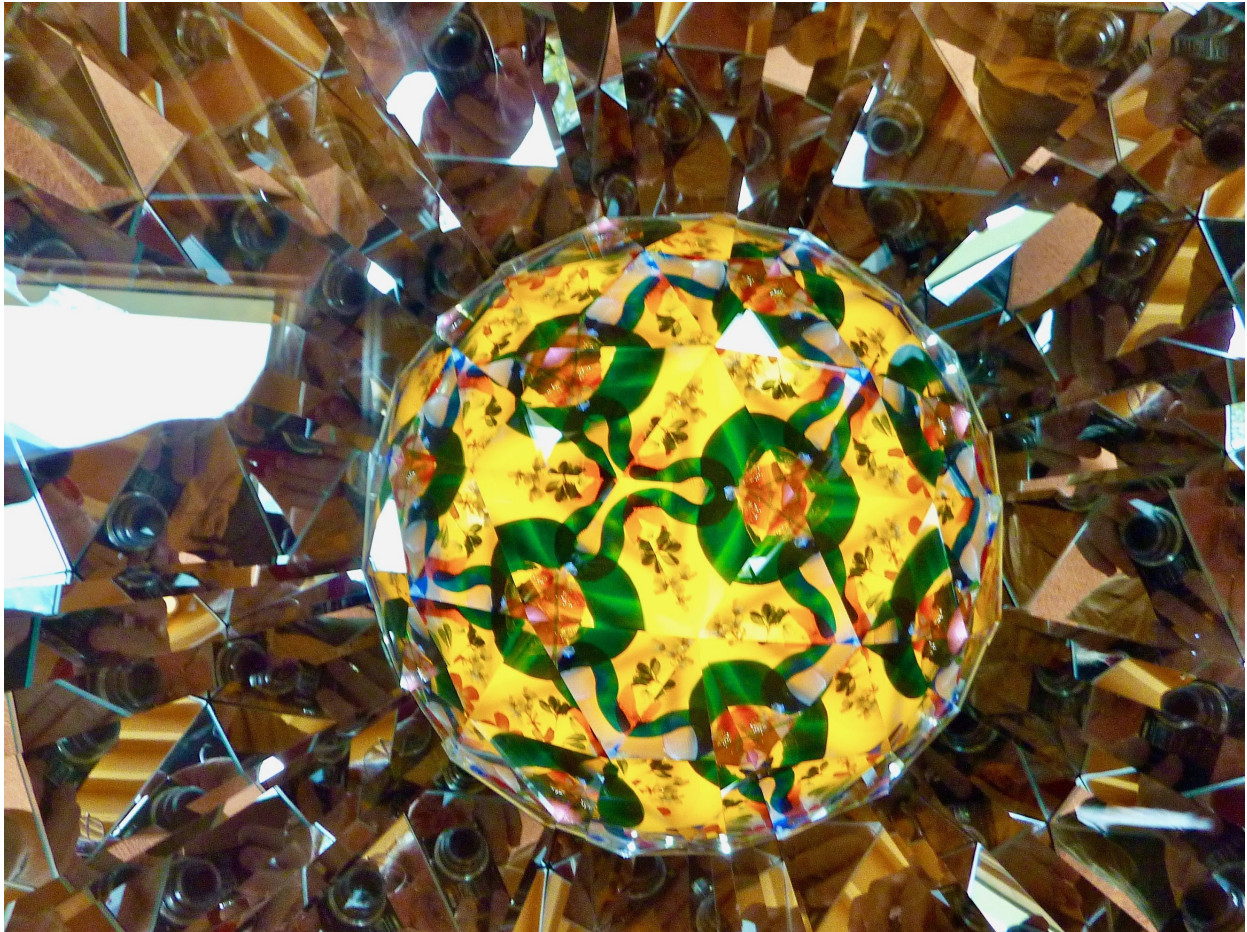


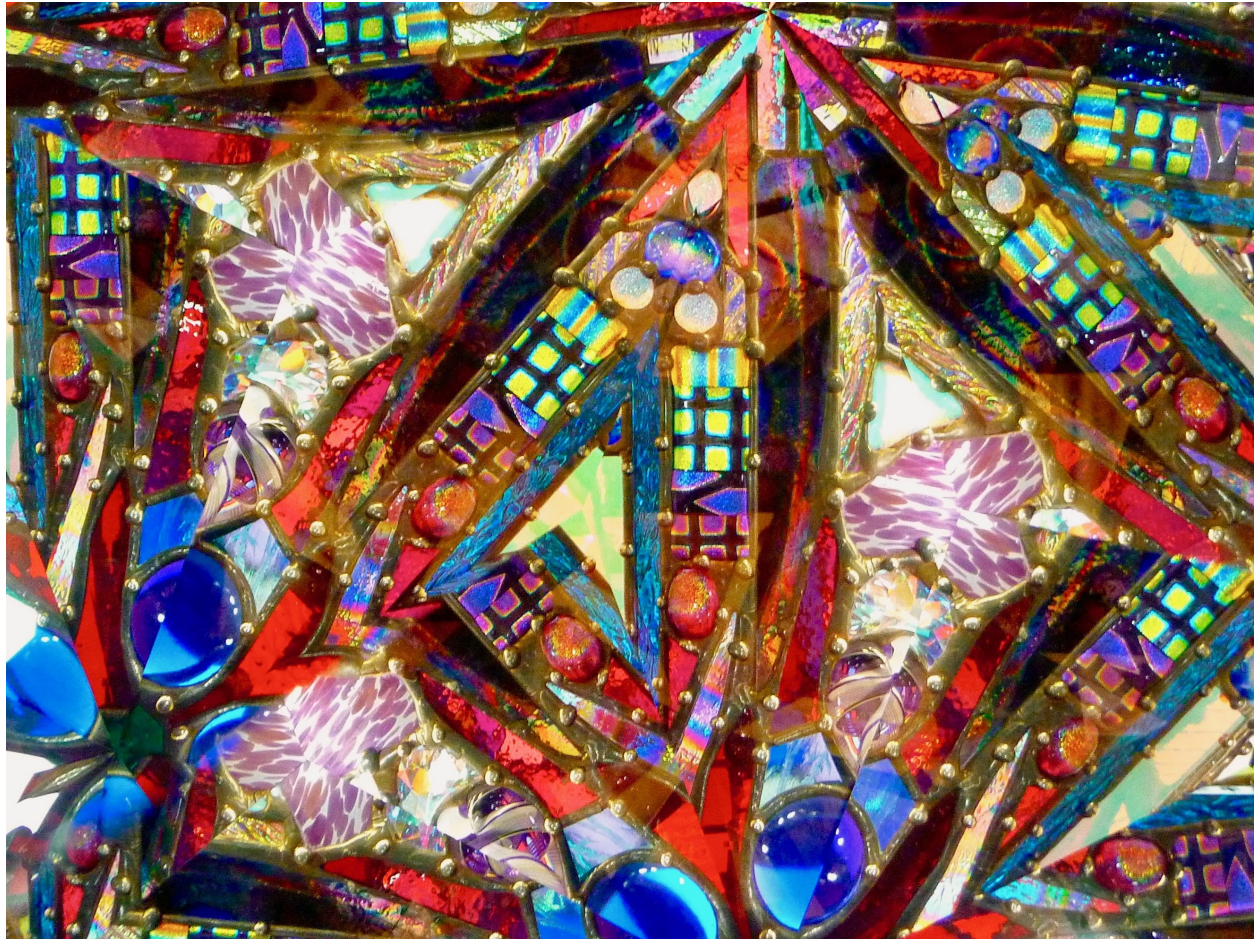
Intruder

- Claire Matturro

In the witching hour
when sleep eludes me
I tiptoe outside and listen
to the yip and hoot
from the woods and
follow a narrow trail
into the darkness of live oaks
and sweet gums whose shadows
clutch me like some
old warm embrace ignoring
my threadbare flannel but
catching feet barely clad in worn
sandals when the track of fox,
rat, squirrel, and bobcat
pull me deeper still,
my head tilted to
catch their elusive skitter
and tang until I am in a scrim
of huckleberry thickets
and palmetto fronds
where field mice go to ground
fleeing the rustle of the owl's
wings and the woods tremble
with a fullness of being
but an opossum's wild scurry
reminds me I am the intruder
whose heavy feet and human
smell imperil their world
until I tiptoe away,
only glancing at the cold
round glare of the owl which
follows as if to chase me out.

Looking Glass
- Joseph Glaser





Solstice

- Alexander Perez

Snowflakes float quietude down from the soundless sky
to the caroling earth: songs of wind and winter birds,
echoes of keening wolves

even your ax is singing
while the bare trees raise their arms in praise
for the dead's coming transformation into fire

at my kitchen window, quietness comes calm
and for once that day, amidst the work,
heard my hymn, joined the winter chorus

Spider
- Bob McAfee

There is a red fly swatter
on top of the refrigerator,
three steps away from any point
in the kitchen, sure death
for any airborne invader,
no mercy shown.

On the windowsill
is one of those lidded,
round containers
which originally held
balsamic vinegar
for a take-out salad.

She uses it to capture
spiders, gently,
easing them into the cylinder
then sliding on the cover
so she can safely release them
outside,

guarding the web of her kitchen.
I call it love.
I call it tenderness,
ecological concern,
maybe even
professional courtesy.

Wheels
- KJ Hannah Greenberg





Laying Claim
- Darrell Petska

Upon the great sea's back my forebears rode, days raining into
nights fraught with illness and despair till Ellis's maelstrom
swallowed them like flotsam. Brusque Nor'easters swept them
westward through perils and lashing switch grass,
at last serving them up to a grudging Sandhills Plain,
anchor's final drop. Their new lives atoning loss of their old,
they wrangled for their progeny an inheritance I demur to claim,
knowing those rolling surfs of grass suited best for cattle,
isolating hills shunning a world where habitations,
not lonesome trees, define the horizon, and neighbors,
not tumbleweeds, gather at your door – a birthright best tilled
in one's heart. Yet relentlessly my people call from their graves,
their ghostly arms pulling me in and sending me off
as they fill my shoes with their life-giving grit.

Tilting at Windmills
- Douglas J. Lanzo

tilting at windmills
under puzzled gaze of stars
a young boy turns
wrestling his wildest dreams
lit by trails of stardust

Geographics
- Len Kazmer



Buenos Aires Verbena



Virginia Bluebells

No Pressure
- C. Ford

*I'm so green at this, my mother says
on the phone, meaning,
I don't know how to do this yet, meaning,*

*Oh my God, sixty years on this planet
and I'm still unsure of even the nearest
geography. We think dying*

will be the hardest act, but the greatest
unknowns are right in front of us
when we wake, and we just have to keep

walking into them. *Of course
you're green at this, I want to say.
Let's not pretend it's easy to be*

*here. We've been living like
there's a way to be good at living,
but living is a landscape*

we can't fully see, some corner
of it always in our blind spot.
All we can do, really, is follow

the calls we hear to this tree,
that one, this patch of moss, this
murky river, this love, this swift song

from above, get lost, get wet, find
new land, let our lives unfold like
imperfect poetry, get greener and

greener and greener.

No Way Out of This Life Alive
- Claire Scott

How to live life out loud
have a heart full of eleven
braces and pigtails
tree houses and cartwheels
but ovaries closed shop
breasts slump
skin no longer full of want
(but wanting the wanting)
where are the twelve Hail Mary's
to get out of jail free
take, eat
the narcotic holiness of pills

Outdated maps guide my life
like light from burnt out stars
at night, I read bedtime stories
In the great green room
The night Max wore his wolf suit
I need a psychic or an MRI or a direct line to god
there must be laws
there must be rules
to guide us like a GPS
the hip bone connected to the thigh bone
or is it like the square root of 33
an answer that never ends
can we set the karmic clock to zero
and play hopscotch in the street before
we are wheeled down the hall
under a stark and stiff white sheet

Luxor
- Michael De Rosa



OWW (Older White Woman)
- Janet Young

Scene One: The KOA Campground, Plattekill, New York.

An extended family group of kids and adults throws a ball around in the swimming pool, laughing, jumping, lunging, playing keep-away. The group seems to be Latinx, possibly Dominican. The sound and action are exhilarating, and I, an older white woman, swim around and within the game, while others watch from the pool deck.

Many of the guests at the pool are staying in RVs, tents, and cabins on the grounds. Others however, may be locals who've purchased a day pass that entitles them to use the campground's amenities: pools, playground, bouncy pillow, arcade, catch-and-release fishing pond, nature trail, rock climbing wall, mini golf, snack bar, picnic area, and wine store.

When I get out to dry off, another OWW, wearing the yellow jersey of a KOA staff member, approaches in a golf cart and speaks to me through the fence. "We got a report that someone here was using profanity."

This is the day I learn I've been voted most likely to Karen. Or even GrandKaren. Apparently, since last summer I've been given the job of pool monitor. No, I reply, I haven't heard any profanity. Everyone's just having a good time.

A jagged edge of resentment begins to shimmer in my chest. I've been known to use profanity myself. For me to complain, the profanity would have to be extreme – like the c-word – and directed with hostility at another person.

I hadn't seen this large group in the camping area, so I assume they're here on a day pass. And for hours afterward I think about how badly this could have gone. The ball players and I were being pushed into roles in a kind of set piece. The actual complainer chose to remain anonymous, while I was placed at a tipping point. At a word from me, the group could have been thrown out of the pool and lost their pass.

What would I have done if someone tried to stop the game on account of my perceived verbal fragility? I would rush to the oldest family member in the pool, the matriarch or patriarch, and tell them I supported their continued play. I would plead "Don't stop playing, guys!" Maybe I would swat at the ball a few times to show that I, in my empowered position, endorsed the game. By then, of course, all the joy might be drained from the game, and the day would be tainted.

Later in the afternoon, some folks in their group have moved on to a climbing competition at the synthetic rock wall. They listen in silence as a staffer explains how the competition will work. One, a tall, skinny man in his twenties, had been one of the most boisterous and adroit players in the pool. Now he concentrates almost to the point of caricature: slow nod, furrowed brow, hand on chin, glancing from the staffer to the wall to assess the level of challenge. For some reason the way he listens summons a powerful empathy. Perhaps I feel that it confirms his nature, one I recognized when I recoiled from condemning the group. Or perhaps I see a simple similarity between the two of us: We both just want our shot at the game.

Scene Two: The same pool, maybe even the same day.

I'm in the pool, this time with a bunch of frolicking white children. A mother of thirty-five or forty, lying fully dressed on a chaise, looks up from her phone and says, "Don't play rough around that lady."

In her book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, the journalist Isabel Wilkerson wrote,

“Each of us is in a container of some kind. The label signals to the world what is presumed to be inside and what is to be done with it.” I am having to accept that my container looks different than it did just three to five years ago. My muscle tone is not what it once was. Brown spots caused by sun damage have erupted on my face. My silver hair is undyed. So, I’ve been assigned this role again at the pool, a role I never auditioned for.

Gross assumptions are being made about my level of athleticism. Yet I am quite a good swimmer and comfortable in the water. Crawl, breaststroke, backstroke, and sidestroke are all firmly in my wheelhouse, as is floating on my back serenely for three to five minutes without moving a muscle. I can swim underwater on a single breath for much of the pool length, and occasionally I bust out my butterfly. But no one asks my concerns or preferences, how rowdy I like to be. No one notices how strongly I can swim. I am the person folks are supposed to be careful around and not swear in front of.

I feel angry that people are deciding what I can and cannot do. “Don’t play rough around *me*?” I want to reply to the mother. “You’re too much of a wuss to even get in the pool.”

Scene Three: Somewhere on Route 9 near Cortlandt, New York.

My OWM husband is having knee surgery today. We are new to this area, and the surgery will take place in what I consider an odd spot for a hospital, tucked in behind a shopping mall on a hill overlooking a tributary of the Hudson River, accessed by a series of tight, counterintuitive ramps and rotaries. In our former home base of Massachusetts, hospitals were built on large tracts of land near major highways, with big blue H signs encouraging you all the way.

My husband drove himself to the surgical unit, with me in the passenger seat. It’s my job to get the car home and then return to retrieve my OWM with his repaired knee and his body full of painkillers. I left him at what may have been five a.m. but seemed more like three. I thought I paid good attention on the way here, so now I’m winging it back home without my GPS.

Heading toward Route 9 North (called a state highway but to me just a road winding through the woods), I can’t quite make out where my entrance is. It’s still dark and very few cars are on the road. If I saw some cars going by, I could merge with them, but I’m on my own. Recent construction may also have tampered with the usual layout of the entrances. I decide to go a few meters too far and turn right. Now, too late, I see other cars, and their headlights are coming right for me. I am going the wrong direction on a state highway, south in the northbound lane. A lone car passes me, honks. Directly after turning on, I see a generous shoulder. Thank God I can get out of everyone’s way, or we would all be in a lot of trouble.

I turn onto the shoulder, stop my car, and put my flashers on. I take my phone out and dial 911, reaching the local police, and struggle to describe my exact location to the dispatcher. But before I can finish my conversation, a state police car pulls up behind me, and a wide-hatted trooper walks toward the car.

“It’s all right,” I say, ending my call with the dispatcher. “Someone’s here to help me.”

Scene Four: Lilongwe, Malawi.

The flossy purple blossoms of the jacaranda tree; the long, low concrete buildings of shops; the forests outside the center which have been cut for firewood; the women’s stiff city dresses that pair indigenous sarong-type skirts with Victorian-imposed puff-sleeved bodices; the young men in suit jackets at the windows of banks and post offices; and most of all a feeling of relief at not being part of the group that runs everything.

Scene Five: Upper Manhattan.

At the university where I work, I need help completing a payroll timesheet. I walk down the hall to Human Resources, which in my area of the university is mostly run by Black women, beginning with the director. I've often wondered why this is, but I've never figured out a way to ask. The form seems like it should be easy, but I've tried filling it out three times on our online system, and it just won't "take." Now the bi-weekly pay period deadline is drawing close. I have less than half an hour to get this finished.

I approach HR sheepishly. I always think the HR associates like me, but I can't be entirely sure. They greet me warmly and never seem to get annoyed. I like to open the interaction with a self-effacing joke: "Yep, me again." I think I'm good at making HR laugh, and that's why they are kind to me.

As I joke and plead, I edge toward debasing myself. I can hear my voice and manner take on that familiar talking-to-HR tone. I sound dense. Daffy. Apologetic. Even scatter-brained. I may be babbling a bit.

Recently I described my behavior to an OWW colleague and learned that she acts inept around HR, too. I was even more astonished to find there is a name for the phenomenon: the Yale psychologist Cydney H. Dupree calls it "the white competence downshift."

Though I seem unable to stop downshifting, I am constantly aware of the paradox I must present to my HR peers. Do they wonder how I'm able to operate the back end of our school's website, but unable to fill out an online form? As we conclude our interaction, I do and don't have qualms about debasing myself in this manner. I would prefer to be more authentic at work, but I am greatly relieved about the timesheet. As I walk away from HR, competence gradually seeps back. Soon, no doubt, I'll return to being one of the people who run the world.

Scene Six: Southern Dutchess Country Club, New York.

A lazy summer evening at my neighborhood pool. It's not the hour for lap swimming, but the lifeguard decides to cordon off a section to separate the kids from adults who want to exercise. So, I mosey back and forth, not swimming laps exactly but not not-laps either. At one point I take a short breather in my backstroke, holding on to the wall at the deep end, my back to the pool. Suddenly another swimmer, face into the water, comes up too close and nearly crashes into me. Hand over hand I move away.

"You're safe," the swimmer, a woman in her thirties, reassures me. She has seen my container and mistaken my quick movements for fear. As soon as I clear her, I resume my backstroke, and she realizes that we're sharing the lane. "Sorry," she says.

On another evening, the pool is uncrowded. Non-swimmers lounge by the edge with their books, cocktails, and bags of potato chips. A friend and I meander around the deep end, reclining on Styrofoam noodles.

"Let's jump in," says the leader of a group of three boys, lining up at the water's edge.

"Uh-uh. No rough stuff," says my age-similar friend. "We have older people here." She nods toward herself and me, but I wonder if the true intent is to protect the dry loungers from splashing. Some people come to the pool with no intention of getting wet.

You don't represent me! I want to tell my friend, in another replay of the summer's theme. In a sense she does represent me, as she serves on the pool committee. But on the other hand, where else can the kids jump in but the deep end? If you jump into the shallow end, you may break your legs.

Somewhere amid these pool incidents I have formulated the response I intend to use next summer rather than rerun the events in my mind: “I know you’re just trying to be considerate, but I’m able bodied and would like to be treated the same as everyone else.”

Scene Seven: Key Foods, Beacon, New York.

In the pet aisle of my local supermarket, a store employee regularly stalks me if I slow down near the cat food display.

Scene Eight: Newburgh, New York.

On a sparkling fall day, my husband and I bring out-of-state friends to see Washington’s Headquarters, a favorite park built around the stone house where the General and his staff spent the last days of the Revolution. Two OWW/OWM couples, we range in age from sixty-four to eighty. Our male friend, Ron, camped in this region as a Boy Scout for his history badge. Now a superb photographer, he will make the most of the sweeping Hudson River views. Julie will love walking around the site’s seven sprawling acres.

But on arrival we find a sign on the tall iron fence: OPEN BY APPOINTMENT ONLY. “This can’t be,” I say, testing the gate. “We’ve been here several times, and it was never by appointment only.”

We walk along the fence until my husband finds a gate that’s slightly ajar. “Here we go,” he says. All four of us slip in. We’re the only ones in the park. Passing the stone house, I describe Washington’s private chambers, where George and Martha slept together on a very short bed, sitting upright. We read the plaque by the Liberty Tree (*liliodendron tulipifora*) and assess the sculptures around the sides of the centennial Tower of Victory. Then we spread out toward the open air, river, and sky.

But we are not in fact alone. A woman in office attire, holding an official-looking tote bag, is locking up the adjacent museum. She rushes downhill to the southeast corner, away from us. Soon we hear a man’s booming voice. “Folks? We’re closed.” He wears glasses and a necktie, and he seems to brook no nonsense. “Come out this way, please.” “Right now, please,” he says. “The museum is closed.”

We have trespassed at a state historic site, perhaps knowingly, but through some telepathy, are united in a decision not to act abashed about getting caught. The four of us amble toward one another, meeting at the corner where the two staffers are waiting.

“How did you get in here, anyway?” asks the man.

“The side gate was open,” we say.

“Ugh. I keep telling my director we should mark that as STAFF ONLY.” He isn’t friendly, and he gives us no encouragement to slow down; but Ron, camera in hand, stops short of the exit anyway to engage him with a long monologue about some historical detail.

But wait, I misspeak. There are three of us, not four. Julie isn’t with us. She’s still on the other side of the Tower of Victory, way in the northeast corner. “There’s one more in our party,” I say. Should I go back to get her? Probably not.

I turn back a few steps, but not so many that I seem to be contravening orders, and bellow, “Julie! They’re closed!” My voice seems to ring across the Hudson, and I feel we’re all suspended in time, waiting for a sign of Julie. She’s older than I, but even more physically robust, so I’m sure she’ll turn up soon.

Sentry Duty
- Peter Morris



Sunken Sadness
- Dawn Colclasure

The waves sing a forlorn tune
As I watch in silence.
Cries of seagulls overhead
Join in the chorus for those lost.
Crashing waves overshadow the mood,
White and blue and silken tears
Cascading over gray sharp rocks
Which seem to pay no mind.
The clouds above overpass
And blot out any signs of the sun.
The gray sky matches perfectly
In this cast of unheard sorrows.
What dreams does the ocean keep?
What treasures buried shall we never know?
Each cry from the deep blue water is echoed
With each new wave that pounds onto the shore.

unclosed poem
- Cynthia McCain

they come because they love us
they leave because they're angry
we're hurt when they're angry
and we're angry when they leave
why is it that love and anger
are in the same drawer
like forks and knives

When the Void Is Obvious
- Amanda Rosas

She sewed pockets into her uniform skirt,
said if she was going to be made to wear
this navy tablecloth, it needed purpose
beyond that of body and conformity,
past the roll call of religious and institution,
affiliation.

She wore glasses that she exchanged
for goggles to do her afternoon mechanics.

She, a poet of troubled thoughts of graphite
spread upon leaflets torn she wanted tucked
away until the midnight mind purge.

So she stitched in pockets to each side of her skirt,
the used blue cotton thick as overcast sky.

The things she needed now were near hugging
hip, and her hands were happy to
have a place to land as she smiled and
looked away mid-conversation.

Friends, sewing in some pockets isn't so much
thinking outside the box as it is giving the self what
it needs when the void is obvious and too often, like
the deepest of dreams, overlooked. When, really, an
elemental act like thread put to needle, its
dagger point urging over and again, is
what stands between us and a new way of living.

Guidelines

We publish thoughtful, provocative fiction, poetry, essays and visual arts.

Submissions are accepted year-round.

- If accepted, submissions may appear in any quarterly issue.
- Biographical information will be requested for accepted submissions.
- If your submission was previously published, please cite the reference.
- Simultaneous submissions should be accompanied by a statement stating so.
- If your work is accepted elsewhere prior to our evaluation, please notify us.
- All work must be original and in English.

We do not publish novel excerpts, memoirs, genre material, flash fiction (less than 1000 words), book reviews, erotica or works which rely upon explicit language or gratuitous violence.

Fiction can be up to 5000 words. It should be relevant to a general audience, compelling and thought provoking. Finally, it should contain a protagonist with a positive, articulated, universal goal (e.g., freedom from oppression) who actively struggles to achieve that goal, overcoming emotional obstacles in the process. We expect the protagonist's values and beliefs to be reflected in his or her behavior, which behavior initiates conflict with other characters. Ideally, the protagonist is motivated by a past wound which he or she attempts to heal. By story's end the protagonist learns something significant about human behavior.

Essays can be up to 5000 words. We do not publish essays which are life stories. We do publish essays which express perspectives about topics of general, timeless interest. That is, we are not interested in essays about current events but are interested in essays about the vagaries of human behavior. An example of an ideal essay is Mark Twain's *Corn-Pone Opinions*.

We are interested in poems which contain vivid images, resonating voice, rich language, discernible rhythm and thoughtful messaging. An example of these attributes is Mary Oliver's *Wild Geese*.

Visual arts which elicit the comment, "How interesting!" are desired. Submit visual arts as **.jpg** files; do not send **.tif** or **.bmp** files. Accepted visuals may be reduced to fit the available space.

Mac users, please be sure that your files are readable by Windows 10.

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