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Cover: Pablo Picasso, Head of a Woman.

Lithograph from the Beloit College Permanent Collection,
Theodore Lyman Wright Fine Arts Center.

NOTICE

As of 20 May 1984,
the new and permanent address of
The Beloit Poetry Journal
will be
RFD 2, Box 154
Ellsworth, Maine 04605

FIRST SNOW STORM

The baker is in a snit!—
it is too cold in his white clinical kitchen
so he throws flour in all our faces
and standing precariously up on tiptoes
heaves more flour over roofs
and cars and trees—then leaves
his soft white dough to swell
along the roadside, rising
mysteriously an inch or more every hour.
 It is too much for him
when boys and girls come in their
warm giggly bunches to pinch off balls
of it and sling them at each other,
laughing uproariously into their cross-
stitched mittens. Before he stamps
toward home, he hurls his tall white hat
into the spangled air—
you can see it there,
tottering at the very top
of the high pine.

Patricia Zontelli

TWO POEMS

Father and Daughter

It's so hot an egg would cook on an angel's face.
—family saying

This morning I crook my arm out the pickup window
hoping the sun will burn a sleeve line like his.
As we pass my bible school he accelerates.
I know we're going to set a headstone.
"Don't tell your mother."

I lean back in the cab crooning,
"Little ones to him belong
they are weak but he is strong."

"Yes Jesus loves me," he shouts
swerving through the wrought iron arch of Aetna Cemetery.

The sun's full on Alma Bridge's brand new angel
when he cracks a stolen grouse egg over its face.
Yolk bleeds like a wounded sun
white slipping down marble cheeks
until it cooks and he pricks the yolk with an awl,
scrapes what he can on a trowel.

"Eat it why don't you?"
He's had too much warm beer
that's why he talks like that.
"Okay I will."

Shutting my eyes I sink my teeth into his hand.

Undertaker's Granddaughter

We're at Einer's Pond till midnight
catching frogs for bait and watching mayflies hatch.
Heading home I fall asleep wrapped with my star quilt
in the way-back of the hearse.

Next thing Gramp's out of the car shouting.
The back door flings open, someone unrolling me
as if he owns the universe.

Two men with bloody hands keep mumbling.

All I can hear is *sorry*
but their eyes flicker like lit matches
as they spit and pass a bottle.

I hear a shovel scrape the pavement.
Someone shooing a hound away.

They lift the stretcher in beside me
a dead farm boy wrapped in my quilt,
a bucket of scared bull-frogs croaking.

Jane Birdsall

FINDINGS

In single file we traverse a slope
of stalks cut short the sky
like the harp of a giant piano
hinged low
tamping our voices
the flat vegetal sound
of our feet compacting ice
and earth

Stones graze in unused pasture
the girls break

run limber in damp December's
last day
their footsteps *jubilate*

We pick our way
through border woods avoid mud
little remains of color lichen
and leaf litter

Along the ravine ferns
fan downhill the girls take to the margins
their cries catch on the outcrop

Someone has quarried the rockface vandalized
the stone furniture
 in the debris a rock hammer
its claw cold
the understory is full of fossils
we look for some in the streambed
our hands numb fish in the shallows

When does the body turn to stone?
I would like to lay the fine line
 of my shoulder
the hand I reach with
 a cursive hip
onto soft ground

This is a fern this is a decade
this is a branch of a river

Ellen Wolfe

THREE POEMS**Sweet Sovereign Root**

My mother died in the Spring.
She died of thick blood. That grieved me
and I thought it astonishing; I thought
of her death as caused by a successful transition
to the middle class. I knew, without looking
behind the fruitwood veneer doors of her cupboards,
what I would not find.

No fever root, toothache root, sweet sassafras.

No sassafras. Mama, I thought, we've come a long way
from our childhoods, from black salve and sang
and spikenard to an empty cupboard
and you dead of thick blood.

No spicebush, flower of melilot, rose gold sassafras
tea of Spring, to thin the blood. Mama,
you never let me down; your paper packages
of bark followed me to college. You had never read
Proust, you only knew that it was dangerous
not to quicken wintry blood, but when I brewed
your roots it was suddenly Spring, even there,
among the unbelievers.

No more. The palm trees outside my mother's room
denied the existence of Spring. I thought, if there are ghosts
(yes—I hope there are ghosts) they will be wise women,
with aprons full of comfort, and they will take her home
to chamomile, star root, sweet sovereign sassafras.

That Fierce Energy

The thickets were almost pasture
when time ran out.

He spared nothing, tractor, tree,
live rock; he fought alders, weather;
he chainsawed his neighbors with a rough tongue;
he bit off more than he could chew; he
helped; bitched; preached.

Right from the beginning I believe he did see
pasture, thick with sheep; smoke
rising from stone chimneys;
all his kingdom sound and green; painted;
mended; whole and harmonious.

We saw more, and less:

The house unfinished; the jumble of bulldozed stumps
and man-high weeds; the causes and crusades;
a raw and chafed look on land and friend.

No one ever really goes, in a small town.

Ten rough acres full of popple and spruce
and rotting stumps will be "Buck's sheep pasture"
forever. I watched him sweat wife and kids and stone
all one summer: those chimneys are his.

Marriages dissolve, but the neighborhood is history,
indissoluble. We all own a piece, now, of
that fierce energy. No matter how the land goes,
we're the owners of record of Buck's dream.

VIGIL, WITH SUNFLOWERS AND LACE

1. Your second night of vigil
and nothing to fight but headaches
and nausea and eyes that burn.
The freezer sweats in the midnight heat
and you wait for the quarrel's end—
for the gentle flow of healing words
and the peace of a crowded bed.

Sleepless, you wipe blue mold
from the spines of your books
until at last he appears
gun held gently in his upturned hands
laughing as he crosses
the sedge grass yard.

*It's a gift he says don't be afraid
it's a gift so we can make up.*

*He comes closer. It's for you
a woman needs a gun
alone like this in the country.*

*A woman needs not to be alone
that's all But you
take his gun, feel its metal touch you
and remember when you were twelve,
your brother handed you a copperhead
and said *Hold its head firm**

like this.

Come on, it's safe.

2. Later, after the longest fight
you make love and there are
fireflies in the room
come in through the open windows.
Angry words give way
to movement and light
and you want to have his child
and cannot tell him.
Something that could hold him
while the room and the stars
move like fireflies
in slow, brief circles
of their own.
3. And still you do not sleep.
You hide his gun in the bureau
beneath your one lace gown
then keep your vigil
over the night's fragile peace.
- He finds you in the morning, pulling weeds
from around the sunflowers.
I want you out he says abruptly
as if you could just pack your bags
and leave.
I'm going to town till Friday
I want you out before I'm back
- You watch him cross
the muddy driveway
catching briefly in the
puddles the image of a man
walking angrily
across a clear blue sky.

4. The third night:

your eyes ache, your gums
blossom in furious white blisters,
you drop things and feel the smooth
layers of your skin peel up
like paper at the edges of your senses.
And yet there is a dull, insistent joy
holding vigil till your lover
comes at last. On Friday
he will come.

Sheets of rain run wildly
down the dirt road
the tin roof echoes
above your head.
You wait at the window
like a bride.

Only once do you reach
the borderlands of sleep:
you dream that you can no longer
understand words.
Not that words have grown meaningless
but they all have *new* meanings
radically different from all you've ever known.
You find that it has stopped raining
that you are sitting at a table
bludgeoning an onion harmlessly with the side
of a knife, repeating the word *homecoming*
with a feeling of wonder and fear.

5. Friday you wash your hair early
preparing for your lover's return.
He does not come. But then
at midnight there is a cry
behold the bridegroom.

You move towards him
like a somnambulist
hear him say *I hoped
you would be gone.*
You shake your head
watch him go into the house
and then suddenly you are awake
he has found the gun
is coming towards you
almost tenderly he
straightens
and fires.

You feel something
like a hand
graze you by the ear
watch from the floor
as he sticks the gun
in his own mouth
and pulls the trigger.
For a moment
you hear only the sound
of the bullet, still echoing
inside your body
filling you with a blaze
of red trilliums.

And then things seem to clear
the brilliant yellow walls
tower above you like sunflowers.
You crawl towards your lover
and find him dead, the walls themselves
live and he is dead.
You breathe for him
then squeeze his heart
between two bones

to some forgotten rhythm: *One and
two and three and four . . .* no,
the words escape you.
*One one thousand two one thousand
three . . .* but there isn't enough
air left to form the words.
You look up at the walls:
only walls
not trilliums or sunflowers
not even sheets of fire:
but they consume
the air around you
and leap up
brighter.

Theodore Deppe

SHAKING HANDS WITH MYSELF

Dar Chamico—*Datura Stramonium*

*"Don't you know that you can clip out any advertisement
for any jazz club, smoke it and get high."*

—Lenny Bruce

*Mad Apple or Devil's Trumpet.
It is a rank, ill-smelling, nauseating weed
possessing narcotic, poisonous qualities, but
its flowers are rather large and showy.
Early Mexicans and Indians used the plant
to dissolve gall and kidney stones,*

*as a remedy for saddle sores, scalds and burns,
spasmodic cough, neuralgia, colic, asthma,
rattlesnake and tarantula bites.*

*It was used to induce a hypnotic state
in order to unravel mysteries. It was given
to boys entering manhood, and the dreams
which they experienced were universal.*

I put the broken stems in a pot to boil
And sat down to write its poem
While the house began to fill with steam
With the sweet smell of overdue rain
On dry dirt—the way tequila tastes

Trying to type, I had my usual problem
With the left side of the keyboard
Three fingers numb, slipping off the letters
And it is only a matter of time

The right hand of my left hemisphere
Is trying to kill the left hand
Of my right hemisphere, and
I can only guess at the reason

The first time it caught my little finger off guard
And brought the power chop saw down in time
To leave it dangling from a thread of skin
Next it instructed my left hand to hold a two-by-four
Until it shot a compressor driven sixteen penny nail
Into the second shaft of my third finger. And just
The other day, as if adding insult to injury, it convinced
My index finger that it would be all right
To linger near the nail head as it brought
A twenty-two ounce framing hammer down
Destroying my own nail and nerves

My poor left hand has only been trying to do what is right
Working hard, building houses and raising a family
But my right hand is cunning, devising and executing
A plan to do away with my ability to work
For anything but its own ends

The white Easter lily of datura
The tripartite planes of earth, heaven and hell
Body, spirit and mind thinking about itself, resurrecting
Its uncompromising sense of place

Exactly sixty-six days after I wrote this poem
I rolled its handmade paper around my right index finger
Making miniature ballet shoes
As a Christmas gift for a beautiful woman
Who always makes me want to dance

I wanted to make a hardwood box for her shoes
But as I ran the last piece of oak
Through the tablesaw, it caught and pulled
Three fingers of my left hand through the carbide blade
As my right hand shook with nervous excitement
Just before I passed out

I think if my left hand could speak for itself
It would warn you
Not to smoke or eat this poem
If you ever expect
To count on your fingers

Michael West

TWO POEMS**The Last Child**

One child stood lame, says the old story,
and left behind, when the mad piper
wooded young Hamlin to his improper
ditty, saw the mountain loom, starry
and pied: for the vision he was quick
enough. Then stone closed on dance and catch,
one last note trilling along his crutch
which thrilled to leaf. He felt the earth quake
beneath him, heard ducks quack behind. What
to do? What could a boy do, the last
of boys, alone in his hometown lost?
What would he? gazing across the wheat,
so lightly trampled, dancing. We know
what depressed him: the burgherman's broad
foot and yawning chairman of the board,
the parent world. Did a small beast gnaw
his warped ankle for attention while
the world grew ranker than a beached whale?

At six he ticked to
calendar and clock; at seven put

his finger on whatever
nation or sea seemed clever.
At nine he knew a planet was not
a star. He answered as he was taught
and nobody knew

his secret lameness:
he didn't believe any of it;
took the sun. On a paved slab
under tenements he lay in wait,
cross eyes closed, until the stab
of meridian unscabbed his wit
with scarlet empress.

As he lay like that
one day came the rat,
just a tickle, first, that must
have been whiskers. His feet had winced back
before he looked. All the rest
of an infinite moment each took
to spell the other: sun bright, sun black.

There was another
time. Father, mother—
were out. Evening: he lighted their room.
The rat—a rat—jumped from the
bed. He slammed the door. Then a
cool dread crept down. He curled in an arm
chair: Our Father—lead us to no harm.

His mother, later,
strode through the door unpinning her hat.
He waited. He went to look: no rat.
Her mirror. Brushing her hair,
she smiled. Her face, reflected, smiled at
him. He breathed, felt tears. "My poor
dear, what's the matter?"

When he was thirteen
he witnessed this scene:
the rat ran from a warehouse
onto the street. A fat man in brown,
hot upon the creature, beat him down,
beat him with a shovel into stone.
The boy watched, as through a gauze
bandage, the world blur red and furry.
All this he threw up
in the gutter and went home
where he fell asleep
and slept all day and night: a scurry
of small claws scratched at his dream
seeking to enter purgatory.

About to marry our young man is.
Some years have passed: we're
told in school they will. On one of his
last nights cruising lonely avenues
he sees his rat. Queer
of him to think all rats—the
rat: his rat come so highly
recommended by the sun.
He sees it, once again, run
across a broad street
to pass, at his feet,
over, white and 6 x 8, a scrap.
Our friend scoops up the omen—a snap
shot: erect and unredeemed Priap.
The rat has not again come out of hiding
who made this contribution to the wedding.

One rat crouched trembling, we may assume,
tone deaf, if not lame, beneath the corn.

The piper seemed suddenly a crone.
The rat glimpsed the mountain loom and some
kin flame becoming star or flower;
heard discord surge at the dewy brim
that, humiliating as a broom,
promised paradise, but was fire.

Hamlin was enough. He hung behind
and hid. The moon passed once. Then he watched
the children's crusade parade, bewitched,
prancing over wheat fields hand in hand

into the mountain's motherly lap.
Stone closed and that was that. Noon came down:
sun seemed a stake reaping the world's din.
All things burn whether we lurk or leap.

Still: a boy leaned on a blooming bough.
The rat crossed under old Noah's bow.

Buying Condoms

Another April blew into town,
another month we discovered
it was not too late to be careful
and, the way the sap was running,
it was none too soon.

Between marriages and nearly thirty, I was shier
than the maples budding along the river
and sliming the pavement all the way up Union Street
in the spring rain. I passed the pharmacy twice: a nice
old-fashioned store looming under elms, dim and
unfrequented,
three-thirty in the afternoon, huge jug of colored water
in each window.

I worried what to ask for:
Trojan, Ramsey, Sheik were the only names
I knew, remembered from street corner

meetings in my teens, the alley cats,
old information of dubious authority.
I could not see myself a hector or fancy
desert rapist in a sweating tent.
I was not a scapegoat yet.
Young Boswell called it armor.
Sheath or sleeve I'd heard.
Why did prophylactic sound so nasty?
I wouldn't ask for rubbers on a rainy day.
I walked in to a giggle of small bells.

If a woman stood behind the counter, I'd buy aspirin;
though, perhaps, it would be easier, more honest really,
than having to deal with some slick guy
who'd ooze his oiled head in on the dirty joke,
our love life.
Nature really is hard knocks on romance.

I asked for condoms. The old gentleman
nodded, sober and professional.
Opening a small drawer beneath the marble counter,
he set out several brands and proceeded to explain,
words bland and simple,
the special qualities of each, a neutral
text: good health and mutual pleasure and common sense.
Finally his eyes smiled into mine: "One size fits all."
I thought he probably had sons and grandsons.
I felt good to be a man.

The sun dropped through small clouds.
I stood on the April sidewalk, stroking
the small brown bag, feeling
my lungs bloom forsythia, knowing
I was in love, grinning
about the funny girl
who was changing
my life.

INCIDENT AT THE ZOO IN OCTOBER

At the zoo people watch lions
 from high walkways safe enough
 to reach down like

the man in a Hawaiian shirt
 with the tails hanging out
 and a heinie.

He grabs the chain links
 of the fence and bangs them
 against the hollow support.

The lion, the lion-
 ess have seen it all before
 and go on, each
 softly grooming the other.

The man in the heinie
 rattles the fence again hey there

lion, look buddy, look
 at the lion, see

if we can make him roar buddy clang
 rattlebangrattlebangclang.

The lion gets up, turns
 in his place like a dog as though
 he will lie down again, changes
 his mind and walks to the fence.

He looks up at the man
 in the Hawaiian shirt and growls
 low like a Ferrari. There buddy, see
 the lion roar, clangrattlebangrattle

yeow goes the lion, mouth
 like a black cavern or a burnt bush
 with one pink flame

flickering. Clawless toes
curl round steel and he rises

high on hind legs. Clangrattle
roars again, rattlebang, cant get higher,
cant get higher cant get meaner, can he buddy
boy says the man in the shirt and the heinie,
made him mad, didnt daddy buddy rattlerattle
knock it off someone mutters.

Man steps back and puts his hands in his pockets,
grins, says blip lets go buddy.

Lion lowers
to the ground, goes growling head down
to lioness and mounts her
clamps her ruff in his teeth, starts
humping. She sits

still on her haunches like she was
thinking its too hot for
meatloaf and theyd just have

leftovers. Send him
on over to your house Millie
says one woman at the rail

to another. Yeah
could use some of that Ill say, she says.

Nancy Raeburn

TWO POEMS

Crofter Tea, Skye

Pig-squeal of scalded milk
piped into tea. Nothing but breath
and the slant rain congealing on
two sheep-bladder windows.

A kettle

swung above earth-fire.

A hard bed for birth,

love, death, waking. A fiddle,
and a Bible in an outlawed language.

The low lintel

oiled black by the head-knocks
of men too sure the world
was always their size.

Count only on tea twice boiled,
strength summoned from dregs;
and four walls, greasy as live wool,
so unresisting the iron wind
slides round them even while gulls
beat backwards and the three-hour sun
is stripped of light.

Wisely did they
in Gaelic or Pictish or Norn sing
their terror of winter. It petrifies still,
like the Bog People. It's the song
of ice-broken boulders
rooted on abandoned hillsides,
silent as the last glacier's scree
except where a chimney
has collapsed into a dolmen,
or a **ceilidh** floor
has upthrust a cairn.

Drinking Buddy

Drunk again the rat in my gut,
mean rat tonight, just two shots
of Russian vodka—molten diamonds
thick from the freezer—and he's back
clawing his favorite vein. On film
he's nothing but a diagnosis
gnawed in gray acid. Only I can see
his scar-pink eyes, jagged whiskers,
his busy, blood-smeared yellow choppers
scoring my stomach wall. For 25 years
no guilt or God, no fears
of hospitals or hearses—
but silty gin, limpid Jameson's,
all nights of T'Bird, Ten-High, cooking sherry,
Rock'n'Rye, Yukon Jack, name it.
My rat keeps on rehearsing
his tough-guy act. Sneer perfected
into a cast-iron wound, he demands
another round, bragging how he'll drink me
under the table, under the ground.

David Hilton

TWO POEMS**The Beaver Pond: Cause and Effect**

1. We hike up this trail every year
to the beaver pond, whenever our busy lives
let us. This year the trail is muddy,
the mountains heavy with water
and oozing rock. It has been a cold year
because ash was spewn into the stratosphere
from El Chichon, in Mexico. Ice clings
to the pond's edge. The landscape
is familiar. It has etched itself into our brains.
These cliffs look like the faces
of our grandparents. This year
we find a beaver bitch and pups
have been frozen in their den, and now,
den broken, pups thawing, they wait
on the shore to be picked over. Another inch
of twigs or mud and the winter
would've freed them from their den
to bask in this sun. Now beaver
is death, and death remains to be eaten.
2. Albert answered the phone. As he spoke,
his wife arose, needing to pee. She paced
in the corner, then walked
to the porch. The woman
on the other end of the line was standing
in a doorless phone booth, the rain falling fast,
the rain drops beading, full and round,
on the glass, then dividing and oozing down.
Puddles in the street. She was drunk. In Portland

it was 1:30, Austin 3:30 a.m. Sorry,
she said, I had time backwards. His wife
returns, still sleeping, and lies down. Why
did she go to the porch and pee? he thinks.
Because her sister died, she grieves, she sleepwalks.
Because the phone rang.
Because the woman in Portland was visiting her sister
who had run away three years ago. Because they drank
and fought and had time backwards.

3. In the beaver pond, the one-celled ones
divide and pop alive like bubbles. Suddenly,
a miscalculation. Longer cilia
turn one into a sprinter. By fall
the pond will be full of sprinters,
the slow ones starved. We hear a plop
in the water and expect to see
beaver, but it's gone fast. Only
ripples spreading
their strong circles
growing weaker against the opposite shore
where a fish on a stringer can,
for a few seconds more,
breathe without swimming.

Epithalamium for a July Wedding

In the Hole in the Wall saloon in Austin,
the motorcycle mamas drink beer
and tequila and pinch their midriffs. Two inches.
It is hot, still, midnight. In another hour
the men in their colors and cowboy hats
will begin to despair of going home
alone, of sleep without
the slam bam, the greasy hand,
and that sustaining odor.

The passion is clinging, like
a thickening waist. It is hard
to be a cowboy on a mechanical horse,
seeing across a flat landscape
for miles, no one in sight,
sweating through the routine fantasy
and squirt. Eventually most cowboys fall
in love. A woman rides behind
her man on their bike, her legs open,
his back against her breasts,
her pubis flat against his tail bone.
They ride. Each cowboy craves his woman's body,
seeks to join her, to crawl into her. It is hard
not to be cynical. Someday the cowboy
may marry. She will be his "old lady"
and claim half his flesh. Then
their passion will be no spasmodic jump and kick,
but a steady hum to fall asleep by, a habit
of flesh, a blanket. The women
still wait in the bar; the flat landscape,
the stiff heat, are still unbroken. But
when husband and wife turn out the lights
in the quiet after midnight, after making love,
when they turn from each other
into the cool darkness of their separate dreams,
they would say it is worth it.
Ask them. That's what they'd say.

Theodora Todd

EDGES

She has pulled her remains
This far, this high, this wide.
She will stop here. Undo
Crosswinds by loosening her
Hair; step to the edge with
Hands in her pockets, resist
Any 'deep-breathing' urge, attempt
To count each of seven hundred
Vertical feet between her
Toes and the embroidering
Sea.

She will stand so still
While the sky empties of light
That the rock under her feet
Will know every inch of her
Body in a way she has
Never been known before.
When at last there is nothing
Left overhead save a bright
Streak of bone, her eyelashes
Will flutter and she will back
Her stiff combatant body
Away from the squeezing sounds
Below.

Long after, days,
Months, maybe years later,
Alone with the ruthless stars,
A piece of the place where she
Stood will recall the trembling
Of her flesh and, without
Warning, crack, plunge to life.

ENVELOPE**(1) My birthday**

Mid-February. At 7 A.M. the red sun splits open the birches and thrusts shadows of pine needles onto the brick and white living room walls, the green painting. The leaves of houseplants—dieffenbachia, begonia—transparent in angled light, celebrate the sun's daily entrance.

(2) Matthew and Michael

The first year in this house, before Matthew was one, I'd wave his fist into the winter morning. "Sun," I'd say, wobbling his fat little shadow, and he'd laugh.

I call Matthew and Michael to look at the red light on the walls and warm up by the woodstove. Only in February can they see it before they leave for school: earlier in winter they're gone by sunrise, later the sun blinds us at the breakfast table. "It happens every day," I tell my sons. "I can pinpoint where it rises over the roof across the road." Matt shrugs. He's lived here his whole boring life, the sun swinging round all day long. Michael asks to borrow my gloves.

I tell him about a Filipino woman
I met last week. After forty dark
months in solitary—noon and night
no visitors—she held up a fist
against the dictator.
Now she lives in used clothing
and “new friends’ houses.”

Clothed in privilege we can barely imagine
her defiance. I bask
in the red light.
My house. My sons.

(3) Dave and Eli

Daily I measure my sons’ distance
and release them farther. I embrace
new male bodies: a man, his child,
sons of other women. Here they are
coming up the driveway with groceries
and furniture. This whole house
needs stretching.

Each time I dress Eli his head and fists pop
out of the T-shirt. Each time, I relive
my own sons’ births, observer
and parturient. No father
shares that pain, but watches
as the odd plum slips out,
then holds his child,
looks down at the arms and knees
of his own father and tightens his hold,
knowing that last year
thirty million children starved.

Dave and Eli wrestle on a mat.
With a plosive sigh as violent
as birth, Eli kicks free.

"Push from the toes,"
his father instructs, and gathers him back
in an embrace.

Yesterday I called Eli
a pet name I use for Michael.
Eli's ribcage
fits warm and fragile with his breathing
under my hand.

(4) The architect

I couldn't tell from the blueprints
how the house would envelope me,
how light would pierce my eyes,
how in calm midsummer the northwest window
would crack open briefly after dinner
with a shaft like sudden guilt
across the kitchen floor.
The house gathers
the sunlight in through south wall glass,
holds it,
exhales a gentle breath.
Slowly I relearn "our."
This change I mark
by writing the architect,
whom I daily praise as the sun
in its orbit celebrates her craft.

(5) Next door

Light bursts and my back yard glows
like a desert test site—
that intense white circle eating up the earth.
What I touch,
what enters my body from the air
or water or the food I eat
shines through my feet in a shoestore X-ray,
my bones as luminous as ribs and veins of plants.
The house is a fragile envelope,
hardly more than the skin
that after years of sunbathing
I now screen from summer sun.

Out my kitchen window
in this suburb of acre lots, fat crows
glut on the compost—
grapefruit seeds especially. Superimposed
upon my neighbor's lawn and its gazebo,
a city backyard spills
with old tubs, a junked Chevy flaking orange;
a frayed rainbow flaps on the clothesline,
a dog whines for meat.
Rats feast in my neighbor's garbage—
she'd buy herself pet food
if food stamps covered it.

I stand behind the glass, snagged
by the glare among the birches.
I call Matthew and Michael to see
where a refugee child lives
in the shelter of a hollow log.
The white circle opens anywhere
—Antarctica, Connecticut.

(6) The tent

Should the desolate tent
of the night sky, held up at its peak
by a she-bear, ache
for the huddle of the Milky Way?
Stars, I'm told, push away from each other.
There's Orion, reeling on the hunt,
and Cassiopoeia, raised to her proud throne,
brilliant exiles
in that maypole of constellations empty
as an atom.

I need
food and the warm carapace of affection.
I plan houses snug
in the sunlight, water the begonia,
gaze into the woods. The child,
all rib and hollow eye, returns my stare
crying "Take me in."

Joan Joffe Hall

WHEN THE LYNX CAME DOWN FROM CANADA

About the yard light
moths were the night.
she was with women,
the kids with kids.
when he was awakened
by a cry,
a cry so horrid
a man opened his eyes
in surgery
and saw himself
inside.

in September
just a man
 thin
 in his forties
 and long underwear
broke open the double-barrel breech.
two Winchester OO's
blue in the chamber. and
the linoleum was cold.

in the light
a doe, a fawn.
they were weary,
their tongues rough
like the vines of tomatoes
hung in the sun
to ripen.

in another light
a minister pauses.
he who is without words
weeps.
what is this cry that wakes us
in the night?
even the doctor does not know
and grows old.

Jim Johnson

CENTRALIA*the spider behind glass*

Our heartbeats. We talk ourselves
awake and listen to nothing
as we shrivel. The spider
behind glass has opened his home.

We gather each shred of light.
Our room is rearranged until
the untouched dust of neglect
is positioned for our feet.

We ought to move, percentages
still with us. So slowly, we
push ourselves up on elbows,
concentrate on the padded risks
that are not entirely silent.

Remember, this is no insect.
There are eight ways to hear its
eraser shuffle. We swallow
the syllables that rise, each
nerve listening for evidence.

centralia

Some places transform air
Into ash, every protest
Burned when it touches down.
Which is what 1000°F. does.
These hot spots that glow
In the night drizzle.
We watch them the way
We inspect our fireplace
Before sleep. One ember
May sputter to the carpet
Like lottery-luck.
We buy no tickets;

We are boarding up worry;
We are overlooking
The row house connection
Of our arson-prone lives.

That's our neighborhood
Testing our walls. At Park
And Locust the cellar
Collapsed like a feeble coup,
All we see of politics
That's the present metered
On our alarm: 35 parts
Per million sends a siren
Into our sleep because
We live over exhaust,
Because the hole for the hose
Shifts whenever whim grows bored.

Our canaries flutter
Like apprehension; nothing
Is sustained but cures:
How someone will shrink
Our tumors into power;
How he will heat our homes
For 1,000 years because
Niagara Falls tumbles
Underfoot . . .

December thins into
Our twenty-third year
Of this. Seen from above,
This constellation we
Walk on adds more detail,
Domestic animal feeding.

the field of hot spots

“One of us would steal a newspaper from a porch and we’d run back into that field of hot spots, crumpling the paper into basketball wads we’d shoot—jump hooks, three-pointers from way outside—checking our scores off each time our pages would take flame when they landed, though we got too good and one afternoon Joey Augustine hit seven in a row from twenty feet, exploding a whole Sunday financial section so fast we got bored and just balled up the rest of what we had and heaved it. We gave it up after that, remembering that last quick whoosh from four loose sections at once, something there is no sense doing again.”

the movers

We have come back to a house
 In Centralia, its body
 Boarded and locked, and we have
 Come for the last time, loading
 The things we have lived without.
 They are heavy with weather,
 Slush and smoke, the back yard vent
 Shaping our share of the fire
 Into a column. We are
 Not speaking though we are words
 Leaving the soil that burns
 Inside rain, but we have come
 Back to fill ourselves part-way
 And be satisfied though we
 Will dry before dark, tables
 And beds behind us in trucks.
 As flammable as our land,
 As breathless as our basement,
 We gut this house slowly and
 Retreat to the road, driving
 The detour until the first
 Fissure yawns in our red past.

claude wertz

"This is a town where every liquor store box is hauled off to be packed with clothes, dishes, books. My father has taken up shouting; my mother has taken to church. Which makes me sneer, both of them, because Art Rooker talks of rifles each time a commission examines us. He says, 'We should empty each body of words,' and yesterday I learned the paragraphs of Shirley Weaver's life when her story ran in the paper after her monoxide alarm malfunctioned: I learned her neighbors joked about 'Shirley's Schoolhouse' because of the frequent bells; I learned anger was nothing like one of those fist-fights with some local jerk. The manufacturer's explanation ran down the column beside Shirley's picture until it turned to blood."

the tourists

Now Route 61 has cracked
And these dry geyser
Steam clouds do not subtract
Vision in a dream of faults.
Now the soap smooth voice
At the press conference
Washes itself and leaves
Before the village sinks,
An unlucky oiled bird.

So we take a camera walk
And feel like poachers, think
Of the deer with the arrow
In its head that made
The paper last week, how,
Surrounded by fence, it shared
The West Aliquippa curse,
Backed up to the Ohio by trains.*

Look, we laughed about that island,
The necessary overpass, and half

The roads here are closed.
A winter of no snow
Squats over Pennsylvania
And refuses to go,
And we take pictures
And listen to the grocer say,
"Twenty-three years
We've been sleepin'
With a leper, twenty-three
Years we've been wakin'
Up surprised our faces
Are fallin' off,"
And nod, and expect a toll gate,
Someone ringing a contagious bell.

art rooker

"He was drunk at his wife's funeral. He spoke aloud when he meant to whisper, and that night, glass in hand, he made me walk with him into his vented field. There was a kind of halflight we had grown used to, knowing that a mile away the clear sky would not surprise us, draped at one end as if that window were ragged and broken. This time, standing beside him as he scuffed the soil for footing, I thought the moon was searching for us, a weak-battery flashlight that could never make out anything for certain, and whoever was holding it would have to call out and give himself away, saying something stupid like 'Is that you?' or 'Who's there?' It could have been a couple of minutes that he took to get his feet in place, shifting in tiny increments like wrist wrestlers trying to get that slim advantage of leverage. The nearest pipe was ten yards away. Another one stood twenty yards off. It was like walking on a factory roof except you had to imagine the looking down to where men would be busy when the shift-change came. 'Right now,' he said, 'we're the opposite of Noah, standing on the first piece of the Earth to die.' I wished I had brought a bottle with me—I had nothing to do with my hands except stick them in my pockets."

the stayers

We have begun to think like snakes,
 Aware of how we touch the earth,
 And the copperheads have taught us,
 Dragging our fear through Centralia.

Uneven, this crust over fire.
 We watch our shoes for the sinking
 First sign of collapse, and the snakes
 Inside us swim on the soil.

The copperheads speak of surface.
 These refugees talk through winter,
 Disregard their blood. Subsidence.
 Monoxide. Venom. Everything

Is feeding our choice. We coil.
 We watch the smoke-fissure highway
 Conceal each cracked house's travel.
 Below us the copperheads are
 Thinking of coal, thinking of feet.

donny knouse

"Later, I told her, as we lay on the unnatural warm earth, that we were becoming a national anecdote, and her expression explained that she did not understand me. So I let it pass, imagining I could hear the fire underneath the soil, watching for something to change on her face which was almost lit by the light that flared beneath us."

*West Aliquippa, Pa. is said to be the only inland town in the United States that can be entered or left in just one direction.

Gary Fincke

(After this issue had gone to press the editors learned that an earlier version of "the tourists" is to be published by **Black Willow** and an early version of "the movers" will appear in **Poetry** under the title "Mine Fire." We regret that we learned about this duplication too late to withhold those sections of "Centralia.")