



Carnival Magic



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POETRY EDITOR

Shannon Phillips

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Khloe *Kimberly Emilia*

Wand *Robert Morgan Fisher*

The Magnificent K. *Andrew Turner*

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Magic

“Magic, my ass!” she said, but he
performed the card trick over
and over until she believed, or wanted
to. Not the kind of want that keeps
you up at night, but an easy sort,
the kind that comes back to you
over boiled eggs or while you’re
standing on a platform waiting for a train
to take you to work or some other place
you’d rather not go. If only
there really existed a magic that could
be performed again and again
on demand, she thought.

Magic and trick seemed
a cruel combination of words
begging her to believe in something
he wasn’t. But this is how it begins
sometimes, love, all slight of hand and slip
of the tongue, disbelief suspended
out there in thin air. Not long after,
he showed her how, time after time,
he found her card—the two of hearts
or queen of diamonds, but by then
she didn’t care.

Now she has a hard time believing even
the smallest signs. She has stopped
taking pictures, stopped the writing
of poems. Finds only cryptic meaning
in her own words.

— *Suzanne Allen*

Rearview

Nearly morning, the sun beginning to chase me down the highway. Just hours ago, I saw the lights of the city of sin in my rearview. Now only dry desert. Thoughts of my sleeping friends, who stayed when I had to leave. *All I want to do is live in ecstasy.* There was a caravan on the way down, but just me the way back. 317 miles on my own. Home, with just enough time to strip away the Strip and make it to the children.

— *Natalee Wilding*

Bad Girl

He could smell thrill seeker
all over me.
But he wasn't like the others.
Tenderness so foreign, confusing.
He caressed me like I mattered,
kissed away all my misgivings,
breathed me in.
"Is this what you want?" he asked.

— *Alexis Rhone Fancher*

Perfect Mate

We make love, then spoon.
“Who’s your favorite poet?” I ask,
expect he’ll say Blake, Bukowski, Laux.
“Why you,” he smiles, blue eyes
sparkling. How perfect to belong to
this man, who knows me so well, and
loves me still.

— *Alexis Rhone Fancher*

College Roommates

I asked for it, coming
home 2am, disheveled,
reeking sex. Every
weekend for a year.

It was my fault,
always in his face,
those skimpy clothes,
teasing him with
my inaccessibility.
I knew he knew I was
giving it away.

I wasn't surprised when
he sat in wait, pushed me
up against the dresser,
grabbed my breasts,
tore at my blouse,
ripped my skirt, shoved
himself into me, even
then, only half-hard.

I didn't mind the rape.
It was the softness I minded,
how he couldn't get it up
when it mattered.
I fell for hard men
with bad intentions.
Not men who loved me.

We never spoke of it
but his shame hung in the air,
that hangdog apology
in his eyes, the
unrequited love that
spoiled him for
anyone else.

— *Alexis Rhone Fancher*

The Biggest Loser

Greased by his own bravado, the hooting audience,
the cleavage of the sultry legion of long-legged
girls lethal in red shifts, the beer-gut guy
whose five o'clock shadow barely hides

his extra chin, loses three-hundred-thousand dollars
on *Deal Or No Deal*. He has to keep skinning
the apple as he has all his life
even though his wife begs him to take the banker's

offer to spring them from his sister's home.
From center stage down the studio corridor
the ravenous camera stalks him
to see if he will crack, cough up his chagrin,

whimper like the All-American loser
the camera needs him to be. And we lose, too,
as we watch him struggle like a turtle
to get on his feet while a hawk
over head waits to claw his fleshy underbelly.

— *Liz Dolan*

A Sure Thing

When the Mega-Millions Jackpot
Had climbed to five-hundred-fifty-thousand dollars,
Toad announced to the Donut Shoppe,

“As soon as the first prize hits a billion bucks
I’m gonna forget about buying
One measly ticket
And buy two
To double my chances.”

— *Gerald Locklin*

***Memories of Madness, photograph, by Andrea Faseni, Front Cover,
Slipstream, #33***

I do not enjoy photographs
Of rooms without a sexual woman to objectify,
But now I can sense the traces of the seductress
In this particular picture of a room
Without a person or a painting of one
In it.

Not just the blue ball of cushion
Shaped like an eyeless head,
But the slant of a cold winter light
That has not warmed the rumpled sheet of the bed yet;
The crumbling plaster of the walls and ceiling;
The practically open drawer
Of the movable (medicine?) cabinet;
The moldy mattress extruding from beneath the pallet;
The thin wire encumbrances of the window frame;
The washed-out green of the garden leaves,
More like a diagonal rush of verticality,
Than a river of crushed lettuce.

Is this the attic of the Gilbert/Gubar *Madwoman*?
An above-ground dungeon?
The gothic past that haunts our hopes?
An awakening into Hamlet's nightmare:
Endless Being, freeze-framed.

Does this bear the Trace of Derrida?

The only answer to our prayers may be
The heaven that we never managed to imagine.

— *Gerald Locklin*

Double Call, photo, Nilserik Larson, Slipstream, #33

The silken blonde in the fetishistic undergarments
Invades the libidos of the tourist couple,
Both calling home to report
The utter but false joy of their honeymoon.
The new bride is a brunette and wears sunglasses,
Neither of them has gained a pound yet.
The rugged, somewhat scarred features
Of the groom still evoke a manliness
The young bride finds attractive.

The temptress, though not yet real
Is clearer to the eye than the couple or
Their reverse reflections in the showcase window
Of the upscale store from which their purchases
Will be delivered. She stretches and relaxes.
She is in no rush. Eventually she always wins
The man, the woman, their siblings, parents,
All of them.

— *Gerald Locklin*

Angel: The Incredible Shrinking Woman

Beautiful as a cameo
Renaissance smile, mother
of pearl skin, and hair to her waist
in waves.
People, speechless at her beauty, fought
to finger the hem of her dress
grab for the tissue
used on her delicate nose.

Best of all, her stories—
the same ones repeated—
of werewolves beneath her window
and letters threatening
with a Black Hand.

She told of toiling in serpent-filled
Argentinean coffee-fields
to earn passage
to America.
But on this side of the Atlantic
she began to shrink.

Something in the soil?
She pierced her flowing hair into a bun
with wire pins.
She vanished
under dark layers, cotton and wool,
lost a child once in a boiling laundry vat.

Soon there was less of her.
She shuffled about in slippers
then shrank into her bed—
a small audience of pills
on her nightstand. What remained
from the old country:
two pearl globes
fastened to fleshy lobes—
the only part of her that still grew—
refusing to let her go.

— *Linda Simone*

Love Poem with Blackjack

I'm standing at a carving station
in the downtown Detroit casino
listening to a Motown cover band
in sequined lycra belt *R-E-S-P-E-C-T*,
as the stench of warm meat
seeps into my jean jacket.

I'm just waiting for you
to get done with the blackjack
so we can cruise Greektown,
find a little dive with plastic olive vines
and checkerboard tablecloths,
get high in the alley before the appetizer
and laugh at the flaming cheese.

I placed a bet on a roulette wheel
earlier tonight just to hear
the tickety-tack,
but you know I always lose
like the liverspotted ladies
in sweat-pants who push in quarters
and rub their rosary beads
for a line of sevens.

Just behind the kosher franks
past the penny slots and keno tables,
I see your fingers pull at the air
calling *hit me*
and I want to tell you that this is America,
you might just get lucky.

— *Molly Prosser*

Table-side magic

Ocean view, gourmet cafe,
tiny tables, chairs back to back,
Raoul swoops in, cape aswirl,

snaps fingers—candles light.
He strokes young blonde's hair,
coins emerge, four then five.

Teal doves fly out one sleeve,
beak some bread, peck at brie,
become small eggs on salad greens.

Locked pepper handcuffs drop
from lights. Presto—slices intertwined,
yellow, red. Volunteer brought on stage,

shut in box, drum-roll, tense scene—
Raoul saws lovely radish in half,
vanishes as she screams.

— *Timothy Pilgrim*

What If The Whole World Were Las Vegas?

For Marci & Burt

The desert sun suspended in crystalline azure
would greet each uniform day

and time never again to be
so regulated by clocks, too mundane.

The greatest places known to man
consigned to palaces of marble and gold,

why bother with a blue passport
when the whole world is here to behold?

This city has a cure for your loneliness
just a 1-800-GOODLVN call away

while out on Las Vegas Blvd.
everyone is Elvis, at least for a day,

and the whole family gets to eat for \$19.95
at the Endless Chicken Bucket Buffet.

Here at last fulfilled is the western promise
of plenitude, a cornucopia of hope,

where every sucker gets a chance
and Thoreau was just a dope.

— *Tony Magistrale*

The Dark Matter of Graduation Day

Dark Matter —*noun*—Nonluminous material in the universe not seen by the naked eye.

Graduation day—
and later (with fake ID) that night:
A hotel room, booze, trilled song!

You raid the hotel room liquor bar!

Some years later

shuffling towards a cornered cubicle
drooped in your ergonomic chair with
caffeine to replace blood and computer to
displace brain, there under the slow tick of
the clock metering a motionless march.

A jet lag

hotel rooms of icy paintings staring over

nothing,

delving days with stormy eyes
searching
a sea of fleshy faces and plastic convention
name tags of lives mapped and wrapped,
stomachs filled with free shrimp,
clutching drink tokens ("Good for One Drink!")

soon they are slumped on the bar—pale and
pot bellied, like cadavers dissected in medical school.

You retreat to the 12th floor and remember
your hero, Siddhartha Buddha, who it
has been said -during his brief ascetic phase,
working in a pottery production shop, walked off
the job one day - "Thank God I'm outta that place,"
he murmured and then smiled—to no one in particular.

You raid the hotel room liquor bar, then

lay back on hard springs and
await the unshaven jaws of dawn.

— *Tony Walton*

Not Bats or Ghosts, Not Exactly

That summer we lived in Antrim County:
the moon was a button sprung from the sky.
Her white hot shine scorched the deer blind,
ran through the quarry and into the pines.
We followed sparks and singe marks all August,
found the moon living in our boathouse.
She'd made a bed among the magnets and star charts,
stitched dresses from torn sails and curtains.
This morning we went to spy on her sleep,
but felt her light in the shallows, heard her
fumbling with the oarlocks, whispering.
We caught the moon out long after night,
in the rowboat with my grandfather's wink,
her damp blush, a haze spread over the lake.

— *Rose Swartz*

Losing Count of Losses and Counting

In autumn I moved gracelessly west—
I began by throwing my dishes
off the platform at 95th and Dan Ryan.
What else have I ruined by a leaving so fast?
Impossible futures still bloom in the blacktop's cracks;
the first snow falls on the east campus hill;
rubber boots sink quick in the Au Sable swamp.
Luck is in the bed of a pickup, drinking a flat ginger ale.
Luck is watching the sun fall down the mouth of the Alcott paper mill.
Luck spends whole weeks in the yard, digging up rabbit feet:
If luck comes in here to find me
tell him I'm in the kitchen, hiding from the heat,
turning dish towels into bandages for scabbed-over knees.

— *Rose Swartz*

The Stray

Eighty light years from Earth
a gas planet burns mauve, white-
striped with clouds. Sunless it

orbits no star, drifting through
space alone. Some astronomers
wondered if solitaires perhaps

existed and now we know one's
real though maybe shouldn't be,
un-solid, fairly round, a smaller

random Jupiter. Hawaii's vast
telescope discovered the stray
world two years ago, searching

for "failed stars," brown dwarfs.
The lonely planet's young, 12
million years, compared to our

solar system's four billion and
a half, or oldest in the universe,
estimated three times our age.

The wandering but un-lost child
that seeks no sun and escapes no
star may help us learn how new

planets form as the orphan sails
past distant unknown lights and
satellites like a wayward ghost

who never lived on Earth, knew
approaching seasons, night or
day, floating by strange rooms

of sleepers silently, not pausing
to look in or curious what they
might dream or if they ever do.

— *Nels Hanson*

The Seeker

Scene: Laminated cards scattered
face-down on the sidewalk
present an opportunity. I flip
the nearest: Ace of Cups
reversed. An Hasidic chap
whispers in a tone convincing
even to himself “I know to you
I must look funny; I'm a bisexual
man. Do you know
where to find a male or female
I can spend the night with?”
to an agnostic in a du-rag,
myself. “No, but I sincerely
wish I could be of more help.
Do you know where I can find
a female to spend the life with?”
Drat. My next card is Three
of Swords: through a disarming
sorrow of unknown origin I smell
a far-too-likely interpretation.

— *AJ Urquidi*

They Say Cheater

Alright...let's focus
on positive aspects
of 'relationship' trick.

The cinnamon evenly
consumed, one tablespoon
swallowed in all

fairness quickly, though
witnesses don't believe
me. Half truth

is half full,
fact, half full
a dirty potion

in which magic
separates and sinks
to the bottom.

— *AJ Urquidi*

Las Vegas

Every time I see a new downtown city skyline
I compare it to the first time I saw Las Vegas:
at golden hour, the strip lit up at dusk,
a twinkling rainbow viewed from Interstate 15.

For miles I watched this city grow, jutting upward
from the middle of a hazy dark horizon:
suddenly and then all at once appearing
as a tall cutout from the middle of a flat nowhere.

Emerge, city, just like the tremendous rocks do
randomly along the road in the Nevada-Arizona desert:
emerge and shine like you have any purpose at all,
once never there and now forever diminishing.

— *Stephanie Schultz*

Highlands

Keep your love in a shoebox
With gray hairs
Of monsters and knitted
Cardigans. Weep no more.
I wish. And wish.
It will come true.
Love in a shoebox is eternal.
Love in a shoebox without
A lid is the march
Into the woods.

— *Kristi Nimmo*

She Knows the Faces of Money

It's a freak show, she knows.

Like a hungry worm,
she brings herself
to the lip of the stage,
opening soft thighs
into the harsh light. Squinting,
she picks out the faces
of money creasing around her.

Today she drank a quick pint of vodka
before coming into work—
where she'll find her real fix.

Stale air hugs her body as
she stares at the human faces below
which look green and tired too,
always needing more.
 But, so does she.

Lowering her young breasts
into the face of a forty-something
her insides weaken like dough
being punched to the bottom of the bowl.
But she waits for
her turn to feel powerful, to rise up,
hold the faces in her hands.

When did this become
all she had left?

Holding the wad in the brisk night
air, her boot heels click down
the sidewalk. Has her proof,
The money—
she rubs tangibly together
inhaling its scent deeply at her nose.

A small price to pay
for the raw pieces of her heart
being eaten away each night.

— *Uniel Critchley*

Vegas Poem

my fingers toss their line
deep into my pocket
and I catch myself
a quarter

my car's been towed
it gets good mileage that way
better even than on the highway

you left last night
and now it's a new morning
thanks for the gift

I'm in Vegas
and I take my one quarter
slip it into the slot machine
crack a cherry
and two quarters rattle down
into the bin below
thank you cherry
I ask myself what else do I have one of
that I'd like to turn into two
I can't think of~ anything

the hookers grin at me
they recognize something of themselves
in my pale face my haggard body
if only they knew the tricks I turn

there's so much neon
I'm beginning to feel like an actor
I smile a lot
but refuse to pay the price
my leading ladies ask

so I've fifty cents now
but that won't even buy me a cup of coffee
though it will get me a refill
this is the part of my life
I will from now on
refer to as "the refill"

I extract my book
of the poetry of Wallace Stevens
from my backpack
and read "The Dance Of The Macabre Mice"
for the forty seventh time

I imagined myself
being Wallace Stevens

and reading to the cowboys
and the hustlers and the hookers
and the restless wives of trillionaires
I have a hard time reading poetry
just for myself these days

it suddenly occurs to me that
I want to come back as a catfish
to be hooked in a muddy river
by the one lost soul
who expects to hear me purr

the coins feel sexless and cold
the face they bear
is such a waste of time

I sleep in the bus-station
I dream Wayne Newton
recognizes me as an old friend
and drives me back to his desert ranch
in a white limo longer than
two city blocks
and then he shows me some stuff he's written
and it turns into the nightmare
I was anticipating all along
until I just say "Danke Schoen"
to my mustachioed host
and leave

and me
who never had a shirt
spies a grim procession of the ones
who've just lost theirs
and I'm pleased to see
the bare chests are not just white
but black and Spanish and Asian
and even a Native American or two
"Give me your tired your poor
your huddled masses"
who'd have thunk the Statue of Liberty
would. turn out to be a cactus

I lie down on a park bench
rest the two quarters on my eyes
and no one bothers me

going home

remains number one
on my list of immediate ambitions
but opening up my own waffle house
is no longer number two

the sun is hot
it's not gee-that-feels-good hot
it's
you—are—not—now—nor—ever—will—be hot
it's as hot as the cops must be in those uniforms
as those distant mountains must be
saran—wrapped in that purple mirage

it's so hot
my quarters start to burn
I save them and myself from melting
by slipping into
one more air-conditioned casino

two times in my life have people looked down on me
God when I was three
and the security now

to avoid attention
I just keep moving
or at least
I stop stopping
I could play my quarters
maybe hit a jackpot
but then I'd more than likely lose
the little that I have

finally
a Coke machine
takes my quarters
for a moment or two
I hold America in my hand
but I'm so damn thirsty
I can't help but drink it dry

— *John Grey*

Literary Kryptonite

My father made no distinctions between high and low culture
On Sunday afternoons he would follow up several hours of Itzhak Perlman's
Violin concertos
With back to back viewings of *The Pink Panther* and *Felix the Cat*
Or on Friday nights after coming home from work he might recite entire passages
From Kafka's *The Trial*
Interspersed with play-by-play first person analyses of how the novel
Perfectly captured what it was like to live in Iran in the 1960s
And then suddenly spend an hour watching The Lakers with me on television
As fascinated by Magic Johnson's no-look passes and Hollywood flair for the dramatic
As he was by Shakespeare's *King Lear*
(Which, incidentally, he said reminded him equally of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
And *The Green Hornet*)
He was, in the truest sense of the word, a fan
In love with the creative process that led some men to create *Faust* and others to
write
Batman
And that's why I was so surprised the month I saw him lie on the sofa night after
night
With Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* sitting on his chest
Like an overweight infant
And never make it past the first page
It became something of a running joke with my mother and I
As my father's dinner went cold and the television went unwatched and yet the page
Never turned
And his expression never changed
His face possessed of the blank kind of look that a gambler wears when he has
Doubled-down on red with the mortgage to his house
And cannot believe that God has somehow let him down again
Until, one night, he closed the book
Calmly placed it back upon our overstuffed bookshelf
Looked at me and said
With the same level of seriousness with which he would later tell me
That Ronald Reagan was a war criminal
"No one will ever mistake Dostoyevsky for Chaplin, I can tell you that"
Before putting Beethoven's "Fifth Sonata" on the stereo
And asking my mother to dance with him

— Paul Kareem Tayyar

A Summer of Last Suppers

When I would come home from school,
She would look at me and ask,
(In Farsi, a language I had never learned to speak),
What I wanted for lunch.

For an answer I would just smile,
And nod my head,
Yes,
I would say,
Yes,
And then I would go and sit on the sofa and watch television while she cooked.

Fifteen minutes,
Sometimes a half an hour later,
She would emerge from the kitchen with a plate:

If she had made me a hamburger,
It was the largest hamburger the world had ever seen,
The meat patty the size of the plate itself,
And sliced into two halves,
Each of them needing two slices of bread to cover the meat.

On the days when she made fish,
It was a salmon the size of a dolphin,
Its eyes wide open,
As if it too couldn't believe that she thought I could eat the entire thing.

French fries?
They'd be as long as your nose,
As thick as your thumb,
And there'd be 80 or 100 of them,
Piled so high that it looked like its own, unhealthy food pyramid.

For snacks,
She'd bring an entire watermelon to the table,
Slice it open,
And hand me a fork.

The same with a cantaloupe.

At the time I thought she was worried that I was too skinny,
Or that the head nod, in Iranian culture,
Meant,
Give me the largest of everything.

But now I realize she wasn't feeding me for the day,
But for the rest of my life,

That those two months of meals were going to have to last me forever,
And that she wanted the taste of those burgers,
And those magical, outsized watermelons and cantaloupes,
To stay with me long after she had gone back to Shiraz,
Long after her temporary travel visa expired,
Long after she had become too old to board a plane and fly halfway across the world
To see us.

A full belly, after all, means “love” in any language.

— *Paul Kareem Tayyar*

Reading the Final Pages of Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*

My hand on the root of this book,
My wings above Ceylon,
My gaze upon a rooftop where a man sits with a bottle of gin,
A copy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in his hands,
His feet tapping out an invisible jitterbug of steps,
While his wife,
His many children,
The railway tunnels he would vanish within for hours at a time,
A knight certain that there were still dragons in this part of the world,
Shedding the skin of the 20th century like a swimmer stepping into the nude
Of the sea.
All sleep,
This man with one eye on the moon,
And another on the that magical forest where orphans and pucks,
Fairies and tailors let go of their hearts and watch them burn like a series
Of levitating candles,
Each of them lighting the way for the reader to return to a home he thought
He had lost.

— *Paul Kareem Tayyar*

Business is Good

Single malts. Thumb rings.
Cigars. Let it rain, Lord.

Lap cats. Political fun and bloopers.
Penthouse pools and suicides. Grins.

Crack or stocks, lobby. You think
we have faces. Well, they're everywhere

you want to be.

Taj Mahal of only lights
for the herd.

— *Vincent Caruso*

The Witness

I am
out of the hat that I come from,
and flying out of the black jacket,
and between two sawed boxes,
and chains made by the man
who has blonde big chested showgirls and albino tigers
that bore me, in a bestial orgy,
supervised by a big lug named Al,
in a warehouse just outside of county lines.

It was all on footage,
edited by a team of producers,
and the laughter was added,
the dinner was good,
the audience could barely see,
and the illusions haunt me
as I stare into the mirror.

— *Vincent Caruso*

Last Nights of Summer

Sky cracked to the yolk
dripping cosmos slick as
casino glitter—
we lapped it up 'til
tongues hung heavy,
stardust tinsel flossed
between teeth.

Heat like gauze
before it folds to
September-drenched
sidewalk spitting
shells of Milky Way
on the asphalt, a metallic
clink you're gone but
I'm still spitting.

— *Julie Bartoli*

Jacks

I've known a few,
dusty men who wear grit well,
full-lipped, long-haired tradesmen,
after-hours guitar pickers—
every last one of them good with his hands.

Or else they wear white shirts on weekdays,
mow their lawns each Saturday, steer clear of beer
and gambling, brown-bag their lunches—what
preachers call the salt of the earth.
Their eyes sparkle with dependability.

Extremes—some, like the knave of hearts, wily,
mustachioed. Others reserved, responsible,
soft-hearted, thick-skinned.

Then there's the playground diversion,
gem-colored, alloyed starbursts
our greedy hands gather before the rubber ball
bounces, before our friends can plot
how to boost the bounce. We learn to count seconds,
count chances, reach for what we need.
We grab, sometimes violently,
grip our treasures tightly until
the not-quite-sharp tips puncture our palms,
and still we sometimes lose our hold,
our hands left empty and smelling of metal—
the iron in lost prizes, the iron in our blood.

— *Jo Angela Edwins*

Solitaire

Let's accept from the outset
that everyone cheats.
And no, you're not
"cheating yourself," as the nuns
insisted when you
were young and easily
intimidated, when you believed
anything you did
for yourself alone
would render you blind
or insane. No, you cheat
the system, the process
where cards stack against you
by chance, by some cruelly
intelligent design.
Where is the king of hearts
when you need him?
How dare the jack of spades
dig up your deepest secrets
then run away with that bitch
the queen of diamonds?
If only you'd had money...
or longer hair, or thinner hips,
hell, that game of *if*
could go on all night,
and you know how it ends:
tears and vodka
staining the crimson felt
of your card table set
for one. Why not
stack the deck, get the dark
battle over with,
relish the thrill of victory
no matter the means?
You're alone. No one's hurt.
In this sport, no one's hurt.
Who will know the difference?
Breaking the rules
for yourself now and then: that's
your ace in the hole.

— Jo Angela Edwins

Vegas

I've never been there,
though I wouldn't refuse to go.
I've seen it on television and in movies,
lights throbbing in the dark sky,
wide streets studded with gyrating Elvises,
roulettes fanning like peacock feathers.
It's hell on wheels,
a gaudy god's Elysian Field.

My sister went there once for a convention,
then spent most of the trip in her hotel room,
arthritis gripping her like a tiger's claws,
or so I imagine since the only show she saw
was Sigfried and Roy taming wild cats
years before Roy's terrible accident.
She doesn't travel at all anymore.

I work with a woman who went there once.
She went to a saloon with friends,
sang drunken songs with the bartender.
She won't say what happened after that.

My father went there three times,
also for conventions. Twice before I was born.
He never took my mother,
who probably didn't want to go,
but I wonder if he ever thought to ask her,
and if he did, did she refuse?
Did they fight about that too?

She knew he would drink there.
She knew he would lose some of their money.
She knew he would likely do other things.

About the third trip, all I remember
is the Caesar's Palace ash trays he brought home,
the heavy glass, the strange silver letters
circling the glittering rim.
My mother used one each morning, when she smoked
in the quiet, fluorescent kitchen
before anyone else woke up.

Years later, when I asked her why
she never went to Vegas,
she said planes were scary things.
She would never fly unless one of her girls
was sick somewhere too far away to drive.

“You gamble with your life up there,” she said.

Even then I understood she had to know
how much of life we gamble with down here:
stacked decks, rigged machines,
chances slipping through fingers like desert sand.

— *Jo Angela Edwins*

Culture vulture come-ons

when my stand-up routine killed ‘em dead on Carnival cruises just stinks,
almost flat-out passed out
without the steady oxygen of laughter...

i. It’s a jungle out there: four out of five readers are women, as are

half the pros that critique my prose poetry.
Sometimes they circle

like hyenas drawn to bacon. But then when I ask the men if I

really am a misogynist,
alter-ego wildebeests grunt, Huh?

ii. Not Vegas, I schvitz while an ultra-blitzed café crowd of four passes

out as I work to deodorize poetry.
Arid shticks ignored,

customers roll-on toward the men’s room. If all fails I aerosol

Glad To See Me?s
at my mousiest most woebegone kindred spirit,

then proceed with our first published poet, Anne Bradstreet’s epigraph/poem,

“A SHIP that beares much saile,
And no ballast, is easily overset.

President Adams wrote to son Quincy, You will never be alone

with a Poem in your Poket.”
Mae West thought about it differently.

...Ethyl Merman would have belted it out, *There's no business like pobiz.*

— Gerard Sarnat

Pulling this bowl to your lips
as if traction was needed
though it must know by now

why you dig with the same whisper
that once beat back the wind
and the sky changing direction

—you lift with what became
the moon, still crawling in its cage
one end to the other, that no longer

struts in the open, is terrified by air
wants to cool and in your throat
crumbles from exhaustion and splashing

—you make a spray so this spoon
will empty in your arms overflowing
as grass and so many fingers.

— *Simon Perchik*

Luck

Is there good luck inherent in particular objects,
A force that stretches flexible fortune out
Regardless of who's touching, where you are, a misty rain,
Or the prolonged absence of silence? I've uncoiled well
Into middle age trying to find such tangible worth.
I know it's there, and I know you've disappeared.

How quick my tom cat makes an arcing leap
Past flowers and electronics, from carpet fibers
To the painted metal which cannot hide a radiator's
Noisy heat. This tom's my out-of-window sentinel,
Who never liked your wet-soil odor or gave a moment's
Thought to your absolute-proof belief in alchemy.

But I'm a believer now, and a beggar too: please
Don't slapdash change my genes, or re-engineer
My pet into a horseshoe, cloverleaf, or heads-up coin.
Let us be, and let me trace tom's nighttime movement
With a neon-tipped finger that spells out my faith: I
Know you're gone for good, I sense you need good luck.

— *William C. Blome*

I keep smiling while I read them. All three texts. Sitting at a Greek place with coworkers at a long table for fifteen. Middle aged women and their husbands are asking about you. They all want to meet the man who put stars under my skin. I just told them about the place we found with 30 minute lines down the block, where they create gourmet pizza to order. All of them want to try it. Three texts at once isn't like you. The waiter sets the cheese on fire and everyone is opening their mouths at the flames. I'm still burning on fumes from last Sunday when you'd kissed me full enough for days. I had felt lucky all week, lucky enough for months. I read them now. I keep smiling, but I am losing the ability to hear. My head goes underwater as our table splits like an aquarium wall, everyone else on the outside. All at once I am wishing there was a magic portal to stop time, an alarm clock for waking up, cameras to be revealed as a cruel joke played. Someone must have stolen your phone, is holding you hostage, making you text those things in English I cannot translate. I have to leave immediately. I leave my coat. I leave my purse. Leave my untouched food on the plate. I try to climb into the circuits of my phone, step through satellites, make you look me in the eyes. Make you face me when you fire that gun.

— *Sarah Thursday*

Sonic Screwdriver

I wish I had a sonic screwdriver
I wish I had a magic wand
I wish I had a time machine
or pixie dust or a book of spells

I wish I had a genie lamp
I wish I had the holy grail
I wish I had a flying carpet
or a portal or an Atlantis key

I wish you were three
in the back seat of my car
singing an 80s Cure song

I wish you were sixteen
driving with me to open mic
singing an 80s Cure song

I wish my love was enough
I wish you weren't there
I wish you and me were anywhere
far and away anywhere else

— *Sarah Thursday*

10 months wait

I cradled you in my arms
And smelled you.
I smelled you often.
Your soft hair
And your velvet coat
Sweet and a little like me.
You were wobbly
And you needed me.

Today, everything must be
negotiated.
Homework and TV time
Showers and dinner and
“Put your toys away” and
“Turn the light off!”

You were covered in fuzz
And your skin seemed too big for you
It was summer when you came.

— *Ana-Lia Marinelli*

The Slot Machine

she feeds pound coin after pound coin
into the greedy gut of the gaudy machine
it's all lights
razzmatazz
& electro show tunes,

she sits there, her large arse spilling
off the side of a tall chrome stool,

her rollies lined up next to the tumbler,

her foul breath damning
the Gods,
and somewhere deep in the maze of metal
and plastic—a noise

a 16 beat strumming pattern
a melody starting and ending with C.

— *Michael Ashley*

I can't count

a rock and flint sort of questioning

the security at Caesar's Palace
has a lockup just north of Paradise
with a single high watt bulb
above the metal folding chair

frantic scratch marks on the floor
a mop and bucket in the corner
on the bottom shelf—a jam jar
some paper towels a pair of pliers
& a roll of tough-wear bags

his eyebrows almost joined,
& as the pressure increased
I could feel his breath &
spittle on the ridge of my nose

the rounded vowels of hate
peeling back my skin.

— *Michael Ashley*

What're the Odds

Let's make a bet
On whether they find that airliner
In the Indian Ocean today
I'll give you ten to one odds
They don't
Let's bet on if Russia
Takes over the Ukraine
Four to one
Because we're not involved
We're juts outsiders
We have nothing to do with
The outcome of anything
I'll bet you the next pitch
Is a curveball
You wouldn't know a curve from a slider
So I'll give you two to one
On that one
Let's bet you won't bet me
On the next one
I know the odds
They're published daily
But I have nothing to do with them

— *Paul Smith*

11 months in London

As I turn left off Oxford Street
cloaked in a low sky and shuffling
along with the other furrowed brows

I search for the accent of my youth
"Tomato" or "Tomahto" or "Tomata"
"Aunt" or "Ant" or "Auntie"

Punching my cold fists into a
Harrods jacket I enter the tube,
shortly reaching another
grey gray station and soon see
a pub with an old fashioned
clock against the liquored mirror,

damn, it's way past our meeting time
and am I at the right place?

I really could go for
comfort food now, we need this

connection

"Buffalo Wings?" Or is it "Fish and Chips?"
Maybe "Saltfish?"

Which of these do I want?
Eh, it's too late for such a
search.

A sudden hiss of wind
angrily flaps my jacket, and
a raindrop

taps my shoulder—
as a stranger does when they have
wandered and need
direction.

— *Tony Walton*

Barlow Concord

Barlow Concord apartment complex, Upland.
Wine glasses everywhere—
Not the Christmas I had imagined.

The Picture Bible rests
On the kitchen counter.

I hid it away
In my treasure box
With the kittens on it,
Next to my dad's Queen record titled *Jazz*.

Nothing was stolen
From my spotless room.

Bed was made, closet was clean.
I hoped for rain.

— *Sarah Gurney*

Confessions of a Coffee with Cream Colored Boy

I love you but will never touch you again. You don't love me but despite this I am happy about the yellow leaves fluttering—windsailing across the sidewalks. In a rush, I hop on the city bus filled with faces reflected in windowpanes even more desperate than my own. Like the glowing eyes of cat caught in the headlights, the sign by the windshield reads 75 degrees and 5:02, and a baby screams in her mother's arms, while her father wipes the sweat from his sideburns.

Seated, my stomach is a bag of hammers dropped on twists of knots. We roll past store fronts with mannequins in contorted poses, and the red and blue flashing light of the police squad car rotate while an officer talks with a pulled over driver. She is nervously biting her lip lower, and the officer's hand rests on his holstered revolver. How gingerly the bus maneuvers around them and past the marquee of the glistening Englert Theatre, the spot where we kissed goodbye.

Do you remember? I placed a hand on your backless dress and touched your warm, soft skin. Sweat beaded on my nose, and my mouth was suddenly as dry as the Nevada desert we once crossed after a three sleepless days in Las Vegas. At the tables, you blew on the dice and good luck shadowed. We won enough for the hotel and gas but not even our hangovers deterred us from feeling some sense of banishment to where bald eagles talon salmon from the river.

— *Mario Duarte*

