

[The Write Place At the Write Time](#)

[Home](#)

[About Us](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Commentary/Reflections](#)

[Interviews](#)

[Fiction](#)

[Poetry](#)

["Our Stories" non-fiction](#)

[Writers' Craft Box](#)

[Writers' Contest!](#)

[Book Reviews](#)

[Exploration of Theme](#)

[Archives](#)

[Submission Guidelines](#)

[Feedback & Questions](#)

Come in...and be captivated...



"Earth Birth" by Jan Collins Selman; www.jancollinsselman.com

Trompe-l'œil

by Michelle Kennedy

It's a tricky little line
seems to blur and redefine itself

on its own accord
watercolor turns to sharp crisp lines
solitude to isolation
back again
dotted, solid, curved

A tree standing alone
against a forest
A black-tipped wing
against a blue velvet sky
A grain of sand
on the beach
A sea-tossed shell
caught in a tsunami
Lost, gone, disappeared
only to reshape, morph
find a contrasting color
in the palette of life

There is the hint
of an island scent
exotic orchids
in the still of the night
when a gentle breeze
blows around us
The lanterns flicker
winking at the irony
of how seriously
we take our
undulating lives

In the Land of Dementia

by Denise Bouchard

I try to understand the language there

The climate can change quickly
Lightning strikes and the hail pelts
Then suddenly the sun comes out
And she smiles as I comb her hair

The terrain on the way through is rocky
Hands reach out to pull me in
'Please help me', their eyes desperate as
They whisper to me in confidence "...they'll be mad at me if I'm late."

"Am I in the right place?" they ask
They're hoping I'm a gatekeeper, able to grant
Them a better fate

I see her and I know fear has come to
sit with her today as she was sipping her
morning coffee
"Why am I here? I need money for the bus..."
Hard for her to comprehend objects always morphing

A monster appears before her late in the afternoon
And she lunges for it, crying out,
"Don't talk to my daughter that way!"

I bring her gifts of laughter and chocolate,
Pictures of celebrities with cellulite but
The day wanes and I must go
My heart wrenches when she says,
"Why don't you ever stay?"

As I leave, the critical judgments rain down on me from
The new guard
Untruths only they could conceive

I'd rescue every single one of the inhabitants if I could,
But the scary thing is once you are assigned to Dementia,
You can never leave

On one particularly memorable visit to the planet
All the metal beds without their mattresses are contorted
Into crouching positions

Looking like Transformers about to attack
Her reading glasses, good clothes all gone missing
I'll have to replace them myself
Don't you know that in Dementia you don't get things back?
But on a good day the feelings still run so deep
She exhausts herself with meter and rhyme
My daughter sings to her lulling her into a light sleep

And as she drifts off she says, "I always knew you
Loved me but not like this... Oh, my Den..."

And I know I'll take that non-existent bus
To Dementia, walk once more
Through the gauntlet and hold her
Increasingly frail body in my arms again and again

Until the meter reaches its end

First Flight- Free of Inhibition

by Sara Marrs

Grasping the matted hair of a doll
with one hand
and ruffling her dress
with the other.
She stood.
Looking down
she shifted
back and forth
from the fifth to sixth stair.
On the fifth
she crouched setting the doll on the carpet
as if in a chair.
Her eyes, then, fixed ahead
looking into the horizon.

She jumped.
Suspended.
Poised in the air
hands above her head
with fingers spread wide.
She landed on her feet,
her arms smacked down to her sides.
Marching back up the stairs again,
she contemplated her next jump.

Bryant Park Lovesong

by J.E.A. Wallace

At the top of an empty skyscraper

A man tunes an electric guitar

He's one silhouette among many

Although the tiny movements

Of his twisting, tuning fingers

Make him the only possible monster

The last light left in the city

On top of a faraway crumbling tower

Swings around and illuminates

The crouching man
Wincing with listening
Surrounded by beaten up instruments

By the time the glow from the lighthouse has vanished
The electric guitar is in tune
The man reaches up
To push a button that clunks
On an enormous obsolete monitor
(everything's obsolete in this room)
A flickering straight green line appears
Beneath the numbers two, zero, zero and zero

He knows the girl he still loves
Is sitting in that year by her radio
(he remembers how lonely she was that night)
And he knows this is his last chance to tell
Of this impossible-to-contain that he feels for her
He must get her heart beating again
He looks around
At the instruments around him

And wonders how his song
Will begin

Summer Flies

by Elisabeth Stevens

This old gray house
has one white-rimmed window
facing the sea.

On the paint-peeled sill,
left from last summer,
flies.

Legs curled,
they lie on their backs,
rearranged by winds.

Lost days
wash back
like warm tides.

On The Sea Porch

by Elisabeth Stevens

The fog is burning off at ten o'clock
and streaming out to sea.
Sounds multiply.
It is impossible to distinguish
the hammer from the echo.

Distant dog barks are faint
but clear as farthest elms.

Wet white webs adorn
the tallest grasses, and
a creature impossible to see
scurries in the roots' tangle.
A fly buzzes, circles my head.
Someone across the road
laughs twice.

Bees work in jewel weed,
strip sweetness from purple nightshade.
A black butterfly lingers
on an orange flower.
I hear you breathing,
inside, still asleep.

Wild Lupines

by Elisabeth Stevens

Lie down in brown leaf tangles
in the overgrown seaside garden.
Look up at the sky through lupines,
purple spires against the sun disk,
sea blue spires touched with white,
a few pink spires, a few pure white.

Six foot yellow sap-channel stalks,
armed with red at the bottom,
have short, sparse, silver bristles
near the moist green root mounds
where fragile white spiders and
energetic black ants thrive.

Lupine leaves fierce, pointed ovals,
palmate with thin center veins

spread below as many as twenty
floreets with pollen-bloated bee cups
that cradle pale, notched pods. There
soft green seeds sleep side by side.

Warm, waiting to blossom, waiting
to rise, the lupines thrust upward as
flesh sinks farther into damp, dark soil,
almost willing, yes, willing to let lupines,
strong purple, blue, pink and white lupines,
wild lupines, eclipse midsummer sun.

Twelve Thoughts

by Brian Nailer

The enlightened are comfortable being left in the dark
The wise believe no claims that one is wise
It is easier to be old, there is less competition
You no longer desire that which you attain
A person can always count on the stars
Live music is entertainment, recordings are merely reviews
A person's worst mistake is thinking themselves perfect
The sky above is often reflected in the waters below
Dogs bark, cats meow, only people speak in many different tongues
Immortality waits at an eternal journey's end
When you dream, you are like a god
He who loves, lives

Colors

by Tony Iovino

The red of the wind sculpted rocks
We gaped at in awe at sunset

That summer in Sedona.

The orange of the Cott's soda
my brother and I sipped through bendy straws
On Nana's redwood deck.

The yellow of the beach chairs
We toted across the yielding sand
Those lazy Cape Cod getaway days.

The green of the dew laden fairways
My Dad and I walked freely
After hours in the car waiting for a tee time.

The blue of the Pennsylvania summer sky,
We sweat beneath with the kids
Tracing soldiers' steps at Gettysburg.

The violet of our lilac bush,
You and I holding hands
Engulfed in that sickningly sweet scent you love so much.

These are the colors of my rainbow.

Who Brought Me This Apple?

by Tony Iovino

Who brought me this apple?

The blond farmer who owned the land or

The brown hand who picked it from the low branch?

The old man, weary from weathered seasons past, who drove the tractor
from field to shed?

The linebacker working after school who loaded it, or
the tattooed driver who ferried the truckload

From farm to warehouse?

The laborer who never walked a graduation procession who swung the
basket

To the conveyor, or

The mother of three who boxed it?

The Walmart assistant manager, moonlighting to pay the cable, who loaded
the 18 wheeler or

The English major, CD of Poe keeping him company, who sailed the
concrete across state lines?

The Dominican, 16 but the man of the house, who unloaded the rig or
the father of three, 18 years in the Union, who opened the box

And built a gleaming red pyramid under the supermarket lights?

The bored cashier, hungover and without hope. who scanned it on a register

A device created by how many people, from how many places?

What about the Johnny Appleseed who first planted the tree?

Or those who gathered and processed and delivered

And spread the fertilizer?
Or designed and fabricated and installed the irrigation pipes and pumps?
The miners and engineers and factory workers,
The men and women
Who assembled the tractors, and forged the trucks,
Who laid the roads,
Who raised the bridges, who dug the tunnels,
Who weaved the baskets, who cut the boxes, or
The bankers and the taxpayers who financed it all?
The roughnecks who discovered and pumped and refined the oil,
Who produced the glue and the paper and the ink for the labels?
Who erected the store, lumbered the wood, floated the concrete,
Plumbed the pipes or
Those who supplied it all with power and light
And air-conditioning?

How many people gave their time
Their intelligence, their labor,
Their humanity,
For me to enjoy the crisp crackle of the first bite,
Sweet juice down my chin?

Aids in an African Woman

by Philip Fleisher

Villagers say she has 'Skinny'

An illness, like a blade that peels its victims

To the skin wrapped around their soul

Her family brings her food when they feed the dogs

They are afraid "Skinny" will enter their beds

So she remains outside in the rain and the wind.

The light in her eyes has been hushed to a whisper.

Her body has become the broken reflection

Of a stick in the river.

A piece of linen attached to life by only a pin;

She dries in the sun waiting for her spirit

And flesh to unhinge.

Then, like a song, she will float high to heaven

Leaving the world to the flies

And her bones to the wind.

Atlantic City

by Philip Fleisher

The teal apartment house

Where my grandparents, Dora and Hymie

Lived at the end of the boardwalk

In Atlantic City, before the casinos

When the diving horse

Performed daily at the Steel Pier

And the statue of Mr. Peanut, in top hat and monocle

Held out his gloved hand to greet customers

Entering the Planter's store.

Often bored because the black and white TV

Was in the slip covered living room,

I would sit on their bed to watch the white birds

Spiral between the buildings.

Once I opened the door and saw my grandmother

Naked, pulling a comb through her long gray hair

Never realizing its length, I was frightened,

Not by her nudity but the flash of her beauty.

Reminded of the one story she told

Of her youth; how the old Rabbi

With the Billy goat beard, tried to kiss her
Outside of school in an early Russian
Spring when the cherry blossoms
Fell prematurely from the trees.

With Almond Eyes

by Philip Fleisher

We tug at gravity
Watching the blanket full of bees
Pollinate the clouds.
Your mouth emits the tiniest of sounds.
What animal resides in you stretching its claws?
Each of us has a dream that does not belong to this world
That possess a fate and a myth that is all its own.
Burning out over time, slow like an ancient star
We witness the light with an inward eye
Listening to the stories repeated by constellations
Whose tales have spanned the night sky
We walk beneath the curve,

Holding hands, hoping for love
Never revealing the interpretations, we keep
In a secret pocket, filled with wishes.

For Liz...

by Jay Kaplan

Her words did no justice at this point.

“Enough” she would say impatiently

Her days have been spun, a just revolt

“Enough” She would say repetitively

Isolated, trapped, on deaf ears waiting

“Enough” She would say reflectively

Cursed, torturing himself

“Why?” he asked Self Consciously

Alone, chastising his chest

“Why?” he asked regretfully

Avoiding still, hurting his chance

“Why?” he asked ignorantly

Her tears running out, she knows with no doubt

Enough, she acted courageously
Her things packed up, locked heart and away
Enough, she left finally
Breathing in deep, her eyes wide open
“Enough” She said undoubtedly

Alone and cornered, full of tears
He wept, pathetically
A leper heart, cast out and alone
He stood no chance, depressingly
Regressing towards his ways again
“No tears for him” she said laughingly
Because unlike him, she knows why

Mother Returns

by Cheryl Sommese

Her brave, gentle manner seems only too real
as I gaze beyond the ice melting quickly in the sun.
I christen the warmth as I tried again to heal
the hurts that were over but have once again begun.

Is life but a question and we now its mystery,
reaping from the shadows of memories small and great?
Profiting from their toil but forgetting the history
do we falter from arrogance and arrive much too late?

Shall I put on a bright dress without blemish or spot
and frolic around town with a fresh view in tow?
Do I finally grasp all the lessons she taught,
will I now find the high path instead of the low?

Her face again shines as my heart hums in song,
I wash my wants fiercely, they're sparkly and new.
This remarkable exemplar for which I do long
cleanses me whole, like the earth bathed in dew.

The Crime in Lyme

by Cheryl Sommese

I often question
this road I default to.

Wishing to get off at every turn
only to be pushed back.
So I involuntarily stride
while pebbles settle
between my feet and shoes—sometimes really hurting,
mostly dictated
by the footing of the day.

How could a mother ever understand
this unwelcome journey
unless she becomes cast in the role?
Left to watch a grown child
struggle with everything imaginable
to become well.
Wanting so much to forfeit some or all of my own health
to make it happen.
Ready to barter covenants
rooted in fantasy.

Again I see her striving:
making impressive gains, and then faltering.

Trapped on a football field, dodging tackles,
she strategizes medication with a quarterback's heart.
I know I cannot fix it,
this dreadful disease more rife
than "experts" choose to say.
So like her
I walk as steadily as I can,
but sometimes I fall.

I Do Not Know How

by Marjorie Frazier

To let go of the stories of
yellow lab ears bouncing in tall grass,
and days steeped deep in meadow magic,
when senses needed to shut down
or be annihilated
by love.

To let go of moments that feel perfectly
like the end of the world
as the lowering sun turns the top
of one thousand grain tips
into iridescent fire.

To cut the heart chords
of memories of swimming in dark
wet fields christened with silver fog,
of knowing and not knowing
of aching, pulsing awakeness.

To accept the days and nights
of one small life pulled from its core,
its memories
and perfect moments.

I do not know how to let go.

The Act of Naming

by Shannon McKeehen

Following closely, sweet little birds, soft
drops in flight: I memorize the pattern.

The only prescription that works is lemon
and honey, and some time outside.

The symmetry of my ribcage molds fine wisdom;
my stomach is cancer-free for now. As the sweetened
citrus coats, an artificial membrane where lining
used to be, I note the birdsong, the notes falling,
a frail pattern of trills.

That's when they say the earth shook and wailed,
but it was too far for me to hear.

Following closely, sweet little birds, soft
drops in flight: I know nothing, a simple
fragment away from the real.

These birds dance by the weight of interpretation

and my awareness interrupts nothing, not a single damn thing, thankfully.

Generation's Tragedy

by Dana Facchine

I remember where I was
when the planes hit.
It was 11 am, 4th period,
United States History
and I was fifteen.
The closest thing I'd known
to death
had been the loss of a classmate
at the mercy of four squealing, bloody wheels
two years prior.
I didn't understand it then
and that new September
was no different,
as I was green and just cracking the surface
of coming-of-age and coming alive
in a school full of know-it-alls and small-town heroes
on the brinks of their dreams.

I wish I had been older,
who I am now
(a bit more confident and wise,
a little less jaded),
in order to have truly comprehended
the magnitude
of the history I was witnessing.
Because at fifteen
the only concerns for a girl
spinning in the world
are writing love notes never meant to be read

and trying to skirt the plasticity of stereotypes
that become so easy to fall into.

I don't believe at such a desperate age
thoughts of the world as we know it
being rocked and shaken down
like Jenga tiles
are present.

Yet there I sat, my peers sat,
in sophomore seats
as teacher put on a grave face
and said,
'Our nation is currently under attack.'
Many of us hung on the statement,
prepared to dive into another flashback lesson
heralding the country's pages and years.

Teacher stood steadfast in place
but the towers did not.
And then we knew this day
wouldn't be like any other.
A kind of smooth pandemonium
spread,
evolving through locker-lined hallways
through linoleum footfalls and up into physical soles
and eventually,
into less-tangible souls.

It was soon apparent
that history books would require rewrites.

I didn't really begin to comprehend
it all
until the old algebra teacher --
the curmudgeonly one

who took no prisoners if you were a smart aleck
and whom students avoided like the plague
when it came time to schedule classes --
she
ran from the recluse of her room,
wings sprouting from her heels,
tears escaping her eyes for her son in the city.
It wasn't until then that I truly understood
what this day was going to do to me,
to us, to the country and maybe even
the world.

And the coursework ceased
while televisions blared, one after another,
messengers of terror unfolding.
To this day I'm not sure which was worse:
watching firefighters forging ahead into
flame and fury
hoping to find someone alive
or watching toy soldier bodies
momentarily animated, flailing,
plunging out of windows,
hoping to die on the way down
before the ground could have its say.
I couldn't really blame them;
I'd much prefer to be in control of my fate
than to perish at some unknown time
at the hand of all-consuming hatred.

The days wore on
and the more the media beat things to death
and the more the weight of it all
washed over me
the more I wanted to throw up
and bawl for days
at the horror.

I was fifteen then.
I'm twenty-three now.

It's still as chilling
eight
years
later.

Other disasters since,
while devastating in their own right,
could never make me feel
this way,
this shattered
for I will never be fifteen again
and I will never be in that state of mind again.
I will never be in 10th grade
wondering if I know anyone who works in New York City
again.
I will never again be stuck at school until 3:30
when all I want to do is run home
and cry.
I will never again feel so insignificant
among so many people
feeling the same thing.

I'll never forget where I was.
My father still says that
about the day John F. Kennedy was shot.

I suppose
this is my generation's
Kennedy assassination.
And the generation before?
Probably something to do
with Pearl Harbor or D-Day
or something.

Maybe each generation's tragedy
is meant to make us think
wonder
inspire
remember.
Maybe we're supposed to tell our children
about it
in hopes that they'll be prepared
when another goes down
and shocks the world.

Or maybe they keep it to themselves
knowing
you can never actually ready yourself
for something
as horrific as this.

Colors

by Vince Corvaia

In Miami

the tree

was silver

and a gently

humming

color wheel

turned

the branches

blue and

green and red.

Call it kitsch,

but I never

dream in color

except for that tree

with its slow

promises of morning.

Kettle of Fish

by Vince Corvaia

I used to sit

in the Kettle of Fish

off Bleecker
and draft sestinas

on cocktail napkins.
It made me feel important

to be seen there,
nursing my beer,

sawdust on the floor yellow
with afternoon sunlight.

I was playing the part
of the young poet who drank

in order to create,
and it almost worked.

In the end, I sobered up
and saw more poems published

than I would have guessed.
But part of me is still in that booth,

and nobody knows my name.

Black & White Picture #143

by Darren C. Demaree

Go ahead
& go ahead
with that beautiful recklessness
of youth.
Trip, break, bleed
& then do it again, faster,
with more blood.
Hell is the high water
of a creek that you're too lazy to get out of.
Hell, is a body with no scars.
Hell, is a daughter that never cried
out for more of everything
& never did anything
to change the wind

her father spent his life creating.

Line

by Steve De France

As a child I would hold out my hand
for nickels & dimes.
He would reach into his vest,
next to his gold watch chain,
& jingle them into my hand like magic.
I remember my grandfather, bending down,
a distinguished man, in a striped three-piece suit.

Before I was 8 years old he died.
It seems so distant,
long ago now.
Almost like a film I'd once seen.
After his funeral I'd wait at the
corner expecting him to come home.
I waited for weeks until our neighbor told me
after a funeral people don't ever come back.

That night I dreamt
he was in front of a very long line.
Standing at the precipice
of some vast ethereal chasm.
I was at the back of the line.
I called.
He waved
& dissolved into shadow.

It doesn't seem so very long ago,
yet today, I'm standing in the same
line. There are a few in front of me.
But I'm close to the precipice.
The difference is
there is no one left
at the back of the line,
no one to wait at the corner
for me to return.

Preface to the Avenue of Souls
For Shaula

by Steve De France

Before
the last black crow struggles
on its creaking wings,
gliding across a green canopy of trees
to hastily clatter down on sharp talons,
clicking across ancient tombstones.

Before
falling evening---solemn as any soldier
going into battle, settles down
to wait for the striding of the dark.

Before the evening sun
squints out of sight at the far horizon
& a few gray clouds hover like
tattered hawks over a new kill.

Before
steamy wet & antique streets
in New Orleans gather the shameless,

homeless & heartless into a single beating
reptile heart & folds them
into nervous sleep and into the consciousness
of the long hot smells of the Mississippi night.

Before
the last bitter word
falls
from the last argument,
& the needle falls from the trembling hand.

Before suicide, revenge
& murder settle
over the peeling paint of window sills
in the meanest rooming houses
and in the rich man's mansion
on Saint Charles Street.

Before
my hand carves
words on this paper,
& before
my heart tells me it isn't worth doing,

before my mind starts
pulling funerary cars
for my dying spirit.

Before

you step on
or have your dreams
stepped on,

and

before

you mutter
into the growing night
that you believe
in nothing.

Not even

this gathering night.

Before

you swear to me

love

is the last hope of the desperate;

before

you tell me
about the hole in the ground
where they toss our bones
before
forever.

Before
you tell me the little guy
is the world's sucker—
and before you sing
to me of Wall Street
and international commerce
and how it
demeans and enslaves
us all.

Before
you tell me how
noble
you are.
How you'd set this

raving world right
with a benign
fiat
that would make all our sorrows
as soft
as kittens' tongues
in ivory milk.
Before
you paint a picture,
tell a story,
write a poem,
carve a rock,
pray to gods,
or raise hope in
willing flesh.
Before
these things are done,
take my hand.
Tell me
the biggest fear
you have ever known

that you still know...
And after
all this is said
and after all this is between us,
let us sit quietly
on what solid ground
there is, and agree
that none of our lives
are what we thought
they should be,
hoped they might be.
Before
the night gets
too thick to breathe,
or too dark to dream in,
before
all this
let's think of ourselves
as the last of the
rational beings.
And as we sit here

on the Avenue of Souls,
outside of Mexico City,
tentatively waiting for a
celestial translator
to interpret the garbles messages
spoken to us by the orderings of this night.

Give me your hand---it trembles so
and before we sleep, let's just say,
it's getting very dark now.

The Midnight Bird

by Nicole M. Bouchard

She came to me when I stopped sleeping
In shades of sapphire and pearl white,
I first heard her strummed harp song

As for me it was for she
We came alive inside the night

It seemed neither of us were aware
Of the natural order of things
Was it peculiar that we conversed
In shadow while others slept?

Were we different or the same-
Neither one worthy of blame
While she sang by the window

I wept

Enchanted by this sweet beauty
I felt nurtured though I had not
Thought to nurture myself
She said that at least for now
It was alright to love and dream in ungodly hours
Without thinking I listened,
Without my seeing her,
Eyes glistened
Perhaps we both forgot for a moment about locked cages and towers

When I told her anxiously that I'd lost my wings
She replied that though she could not give me hers,
She would lend her voice

I drew it in unconditionally-
Something like hope, love, forgiveness, colors of dawn
Romantically reborn

With her sound in my chest, I called home my own
Her gift to me was not mere comfort but choice.

Once she was assured that I'd retrieved my strength,
She left one morning just before the sun.

She and I, we still don't sleep
But time to time feathery blue, white and black
She comes of mutual need to me
And I wonder, oh how I wonder
When she spreads her wings by moonlight
If we don't in fact share the same identity.

The Pathological Placeholder

by Nicole M. Bouchard

From the onset of his act he thought himself quite clever
pulling artificial flowers from his sleeve

false card tricks
sawing her certainty in half

Never more never less than a temporary entertainment-
young adults go on to bigger and better things when they pass this stage

He pontificated about his awesome powers
this magician of limited stature
pulling promises, excuses and lies alike
printed on brightly colored fabric from his lapel
a seemingly endless stream of them meant to delight

A coin here or there pulled from thin air,
paltry jokes for a placating grin

pay no attention to the temper behind the saccharin curtain
a great master of illusion in his mind-
smoke, screens and mirrors to distort truth

The piece de resistance! May I have a volunteer please?
I never share my secrets

She extends her hand tentatively-
she had only attended the show to fill some spare, hollow hours

He kisses it, thinking he owns her consummate attention now

And with the proper incantation, one, two, three...

POOF! he disappears

But then there is no applause in the empty theatre, spare for her slight
smile

Perhaps the magician was not he and perhaps it was she
for she knew what he was all the while

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