

poetry by ***Dodie Meeks***

Letter To An Old Friend

Eighty-Four. Yeah. Still alive.
A goofy old gay hag.
Older by far
than grandmere when she shot herself.
Gnarled in her chair.
The bones in her legs gone loose at the knee.
Older than Uncle George ever got to be..
But he pretty much stayed drunk
toward the last, there, with that wimp of a son
didn't get his teeth fixed until fifty-one.
Back then that was old.

Older than my husbands.
Even old Brad.
Insisting he'd gotten older than sin.
However old that is.
But yeah. Here I am.
Right where I've been, Dear.
And you?

poetry by *Kyle Hemmings*

How Hannibal Crossed the Alps

It wasn't how the Ocaedes dies
bleating for their mothers,
those whiny whores or how
the young boys at Carpetani
fell like stones at the Han
man's feet as if he were
some pagan god demanding
torch and incestuous leanings.
It wasn't Africanus Major
who the Han thought was
as dizzy as a virgin
at a porgy orgy.
But rather, it was a slave girl
from Marsilla, who enjoyed
his short sword foreplay,
who-in-handing
the Han man a flower,
caused him to carry an
elephantine love on his back,
made him carry the moon
while he waited amidst the
moans of Numidian cavalrymen,
that made him grow small
as the child he once saw
reflected in his father's
eyes along the banks of Zama.

poetry by **Michael Lee Johnson**

Gingerbread Lady

Gingerbread lady,
no sugar or cinnamon spice;
years ago arthritis and senility took their toll.
Crippled mind moves in then out, like an old sexual adventure
blurred in an imagination of fingertip thoughts.
Who in hell remembers the characters?
There was George, her lover, near the bridge at the Chicago River:
she missed his funeral; her friends were there.
She always made feather-light of people dwelling on death,
but black and white she remembers well.
The past is the present; the present is forgotten.
Who remembers Gingerbread Lady?
Sometimes lazy-time tea with a twist of lime,
sometimes drunken-time screwdriver twist with clarity.
She walks in scandals; sometimes she walks in soft night shoes.

Her live-in maid smirks as Gingerbread Lady gums her food,
false teeth forgotten in a custom-imprinted cup
with water, vinegar, and ginger.
The maid died. Gingerbread Lady looks for a new maid.
Years ago, arthritis and senility took their toll.
Yesterday, a new maid walked into the nursing home.
Ginger forgot to rise out of bed;
no sugar, or cinnamon toast.

poetry by *Eliza Victoria*

News About the End of the World

She slips into the apartment, dreaming of blue sheets, how it will go with the yellow flowers on her curtains. We watch the curious way she moves, so similar to all the others. For example: she is standing by the windows but she is still at the doorway, a survivor surveying the wreckage. We must tell her that no one will survive, but she thinks of the child she is supposed to have at her age, and the child welcomes her as she throws open the door, drowning our voices. She walks across the room and it is five years ago, she is walking down an unfamiliar street to a job interview, how did this happen, she asks as she turns on the light, as her living room comes into being. She enters her room and thinks of transformation. We must point out to her the pointlessness of this plan, but already she is undressing the bed, marveling at the blank mattress, applauding its sudden anonymity. She decides that there is still hope, it is just one of those nights, she must be grateful for her health. We must tell her that there is no more hope, but she walks out of her room, away from this morning, the silence of a friend's bedside, and meets the doctor by the windows. She looks at the city as he says something about blood, and is it so selfish of her, she thinks, to beg the city for more years, more years? We tell her that there will be no more years, only hours, and she looks at us, smiles at her friend's doctor, and says I see, and Thank you.

poetry by **Melanie Browne**

Tilting

some tilt
the whiskey bottle,
slowly
clawing their
way towards home

Some
'tilt at windmills'
quiet rage
blooming
behind
rain-soaked masks

but some
tilt towards the albatross,
they lean in towards
the sea, they toss
a pearl behind their
backs, a feather
in the breeze

poetry by ***S J Brooks***

Grand Slam

Grand slam.
Bottom of the sixth.
You'll never know what it's like to
crush the ball with the wood, to
send it out toward someone's smiling head at ninety miles an hour.

What a poor bastard
you've almost let yourself become
someone you can't believe,
who can only see
the truth in lies and elegies.

The moving tape is packed.
The road is waiting.
The grand slam is complete.

poetry by *Lena Judith Drake*

Beginning

She's the god of the classroom and she tells us
to speak with one another. We're the only two picking added work,
Thoreau and Emerson.

Thoreau and Emerson were close,
I'm gratuitously friendly,
my throat clacks, closing up,
and I think your hair is beautiful.

Me, in a plastic school chair, you,
in an oversized sweatshirt,
shoulder bones under heavy cloth, the smallness of your waist;
my stomach clenches.

I think it's odd, mostly, why I'm even looking.

I shake my cheap ballpoint pen in my hand,
the coppery tip. Your hair.

poetry by Jeffrey Qualls

Light Switch

secret room
on the second floor
third if you count

the basement, with
the paperback version of
Children of the Corn,

first room on the left
through the closet
into the room with the light

switch, not grounded, that
effected memory

about the room
with one latch

poetry by ***Sarah Colona***

To My Inner Nun

Another tally mark in your column,
Attic-stomper that you are. Dear phantom,
I still shiver through First's clumsy rush,
Each complicit fumble teens chalk up to Love.

Once, up quite late, you wound rosaries round
A questing thought—so tight—you feared God fled.
Cathedral spires and prisons of syntax:
Priests keep Him on such a short leash these days.

Bravo for transformative disappointment.
You'll join in, another time, perhaps?

Love, do you still press your ear to heaven's door?
Trust me, *that* party ended long ago.

poetry by *Sarah Colona*

Visiting John, 1990

We've brought you a Game Boy,
Its orange padded travel case with black straps
Assurance you will leave St. Christopher's.

We sit on your bed, trying not to upset your sterile balance.
Tangled blankets. Careful not to touch you,
With your skin as thin as tracing paper.

My mouth is raw with new vocabulary.
You pronounce everything properly,
Catalog the machines that stand sentinel beside us.

When it's time to leave, we're told we can't hug you.
We lean over you, just enough,
So you can slip pale fingers through our hair.

Mom and Dad exchange car keys with sibilant whispers.
On the way home, over the Burlington-Bristol bridge,
I hear you testing the orange zipper.

poetry by ***Sarah Colona***

Circus of Winter

after the poem by Elizabeth Bishop

Winter is the season of confection.
Ribbons of steam waft from mugs of hot coffee.
Garland coats branches like piped icing.

One is easily overwhelmed in this setting:
Lost beneath the punch-buzzed laughter of aunts
Trapped in the first half of an uncle's dirty joke.

My brothers escape to smoke on the front steps
And my sister pins a smile to her husband's lips.
This is Christmas for twenty-somethings.

My teen cousins still shake their Secret Santa boxes,
Sneak bottles of beer to the basement enclave—
Video games and homework still fresh in their heads.

I relate life's latest for the tenth set of ears,
Then freshen my glass and retreat to the guest bedroom.
Coats, scarves, and hats obscure the bed's surface.

One wall wears a plaque of Christ's nativity:
Another, the crucifix, wrapped in my grandmother's rosary—
We sometimes confuse faith with sentimentality.

I jiggle ice in my glass then inspect the plaque's figures.
Mary's head is bowed in adoration.
Joseph looks down in bearded wonder.

A camel represents three absent wise men.
Its glossy black eye refracts Christ's halo.
There is something grim about its bridled mouth.

Its eye is like the star
That spills light like an angel in the rafters.
It looks at me, as if we share a secret.

Facing each other rather desperately—
Its eye, a beacon in the dark—
We stare and a worn voice joins ours to say,
“Yes. This is why we have come so far.”

poetry by ***Ivy Page***

Roosters

We had four
shipped to us in a bunch
from the hatchery. At eight
years old on a farm
it happens...

The hatchet went through the neck
of the first smooth and easy,
blood spurted out
the body flew to the top
of my mother's car
parked half way across the yard.

It flopped and sputtered then suddenly...death
on the cream colored roof.
A bright red gush running down
the windshield.

You can only have one rooster.

poetry by **Constance Stadler**

Chowder Days

A sunless dawn;
the pregnant fog –
white caps
announce
grey tide.

A day for chowder...
real cream and
butter,
brimming with
sweet meat.

A day as this has always
comforted.
For in the years you
fought
the Axis and insanity
watching brothers blown
to pieces
and you so blatantly alive,
I felt the world was aching
as much as you –
as much as I.

I can see your silhouette
with fishing pole
totally unaware of bend
or sway
or any sign of
sportsman's play;
you're back with Mackie
and
Little Mike
and Sarge right as he fell.

You will come back to me
as you have
for better than
half a century.

And I will
light soft hurricane lamps;
feed you the richest chowder;
rub away all the chill ...

... and you will look at me
through stars.

poetry by ***Felino Soriano***

Painters' Exhalations 411

—after Sam Nejati's *Fallen*

Moon-kissed
tissue-
faint
 wraparound the
 falling
child of branch's priorly green
hands.
 Its fingers handle feminine
air
caressing the body figurine
 landing
death's permission overwhelming
night's mellow weep, heard
in the spinning echoes
reaching toward absence.

poetry by *Carol Lynn Grellas*

Notes for Burning

Pray to the dancers of coal-fire
and courage. They beckon your
waking to wicked untruths.

And still you earthquake your
undying heart to wallowing spins
of seismic emotion.

Delight in the tremors of shuddering
journeys, you with the veins
of cowardly blue

Why must you quiver, pour salt
past your shoulder, you soap
licking freak and punishing fool?

Listen to me, there's a hat on
the bed, and welcoming ladder
with cracks on cement for everyone's

shoes. But this is your destiny,
you fondler of madness, sucker
for fallacy, taker of bait.

poetry by *Michael Neal Morris*

Moments Before The Voice Lesson

She yawns, slouches forward, listens.
She tried to get enough sleep
before this lesson, but these
are the days where no clothes
fit and energy must be spent
on complaints about little
brother's annoyances and how
no time is left for her
on the computer or to watch
her shows on television. She
wonders a moment
about the coming soccer season.
Then she hears her name.
Grinning as only the called can
she leaps forward.

poetry by **Jody Bickett**

Hot & Cold

Texas is hot
People buy ice to put in their swimming pools.
I walk outside and feel like I'm standing next to the dryer vent

Decades ago, in a cooler climate, face pressed to it picking out pieces of gray blue lint
Barefoot in real grass trying to gather enough for a baby bed
So soft, maybe this is like swaddling clothes

I miss the smell of snow
Vinyl gloves drying on the heat vent
Wet Moon Boots standing by the back door

I miss the sound of snow
Softening your footsteps when fresh and crunching when old
Cars slosh by through gray Icees that gather at the corners

And in late winter between days of frost and thaw I miss the way it retreats
Leaving tentacles of ice hovering over brown matted grass
Slowly loosing its grip as the days grows longer and we're no longer watching
Electric Company in the dark.

Texas is hot
I wore shorts at Christmas last year

poetry by **Robert Greene**

Drunkard Drives a Mother

a drunk, a crash and a loss,
the 9-hour cloud ride,
Anchorage to Salt Lake,
the four-hour layover
en route to San Antonio

this, all to see her son
who lays on cold metal
after being wheeled
from an ice-box, walk-in freezer

from the Texas wake
she flew six more hours east,
her son, now prepped,
laying under her feet
with the luggage

three days later Mom flew
to friends, so reliable,
always eager to pick her up
with a half-dozen syringes

poetry by *Kathleen Fagley*

Late Shift

The hospital has a thousand thresholds,
each door a Station of the Cross,
each patient a pilgrim traveling
their singular Way of Sorrows.
Phones rest in their cradles.
An operator tethered to her station
opens a line to hear the hum of the phone
then severs the connection.
Three a.m. and the video cameras
scan the dark corners.
Nine screens play emptiness
save for the wolverine
who stalks the hallways.
Closed doorways mean nothing to him.
He brings the Northern cold like
tiny knives working under their skin.
Staff put on their coats and hats so
they can do their work, avoiding
his shadow.

poetry by *Kathleen Fagley*

Vigil

I come close to kiss your forehead
and smell roses.
Your eye opens, revolving
in its socket, without focus
a shade of color not your own—
bluish-brown like a polished stone.
Behind this eye, trauma resides
in a home that is shutting down.
The caretaker closes off rooms
one by one
until there is one chamber
where you will spend the night.

poetry by *Adam Hughes*

Caricature

I was a twelve
year old origami
swan. We stopped
in front of the artist
slouched on a stool
near his booth at
Cedar Point.

I wanted nothing
more than to have him
paint my picture.
Thirty dollars and I
sat statued for twenty
minutes.

Teeth that fell somewhere
between Bobby Kennedy
and Bugs Bunny - beavers
were jealous.

My ears were jackass
big and car-door
open. The bronze
arrowhead necklace
prominent beneath
my hairless, pointless
chin. My parents
and the seagulls
laughed.
I did not.

The picture is long
gone now - my teeth
and wide ears
remain. But
that sketch
wasn't me.

poetry by **Adam Hughes**

Variations on a Theme by Gregory Nazianzen

*"I know we are as though making a great voyage on a raft,
or hastening towards the starry sky upon small wings" --- Gregory Nazianzen*

I.

In the obsidian ocean
depths, we waited
for salvation. Instead we found lots
of zooplankton. Above, Jasconius
waited like a giant
warm-blooded taxi
and so we floated
to the surface like so many
pieces of cork - bouyant
and full of holes.

II.

This oar is getting heavy.
And still no one has asked me
what it is I'm
carrying. Damned
danceless ghouls pulling at
this inland mariner.

III.

I wonder what happened
to Henry Hudson. Drifting
rowboat-bound adrift in
fly-boat wake,
what good is a name-
sake if it becomes
a tomb?

IV.

Today my daughter
smiled at me while drinking
her mother's milk. She

starts butternut squash
next week. Enamel
appears out of
gums like Surrey
out of the north Atlantic
but she remains
six-months
bald.

