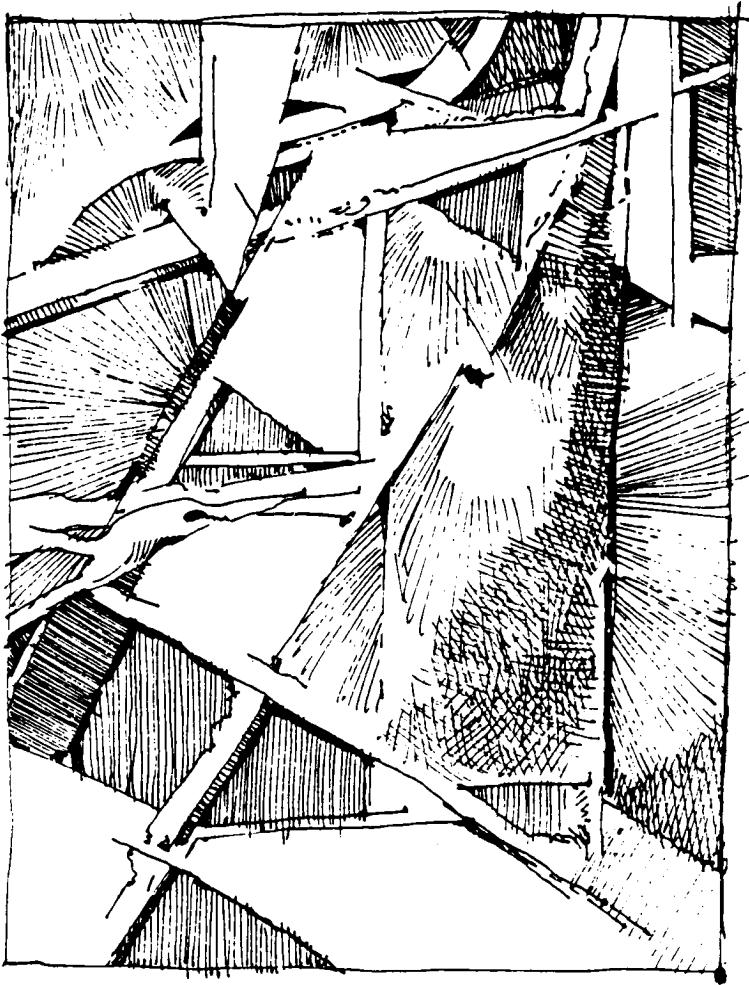


# ALBATROSS



#10

**“God save thee, ancient Mariner!  
From the fiends that plague thee thus!—  
Why lookst thou so?”—With my crossbow  
I shot the ALBATROSS.**

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# ALBATROSS

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# ALBATROSS

## #10

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*Poor God*

God worked so hard making things  
he forgot his own body.  
Seventh day: too late.

Which helps explain his wrestling arena fetish.  
He hops a shaft of the aurora borealis  
and slides down like an invisible fireman.

The angels give it to him second hand  
and besides, they always get it wrong.  
Good guys, bad guys,

God doesn't much care for the soul part.  
He loves the slapping wetness of the imbecile bodies  
as they smack full-speed from across the elastic ropes,

these sides of thawed meat bruising.  
But the hotdogs taste like wind  
and the lady wrestlers give him erections of air.

Pity God!  
Pity God!  
He worked so hard making things

he forgot his own body.

*A Visit to the Holy Land*

After forty days of desert fasting  
and crawling on gritty knee-rags,  
you find the oasis, manifest finally  
with the black perfume of pomegranate  
and the green unfolding fronds of date trees  
to wake the dusty tenants of the soul.  
But where is the circle of white stones,  
where is the wooden bucket with its hemp coil,  
that distant cool dripping? And where is she,  
you ask, the keeper of this wellhead spring,  
the poor mother of this horrible place,  
what have you all done with her? But of course  
you've always known: snatched off to ladle tar  
on hospitals and schools by day,  
trundled back to dance the lascivious  
goddess dance at night, by men who butcher  
simply for the power and the privilege  
of holding onto her for half the time.  
By men who after all are just like you  
beneath the poetry of your sad quest:  
abandoned, lost, parched to hysteria.

*Ancient Religion*

It's hospital white and violent on high  
the branches sway and hum  
in the topmost twigs a garbage bag clings  
outside sanity like a widow  
the treetops shake  
they speak in tongues  
it's morning in America  
time for continental breakfast  
that grasping repast  
coffee on the house  
burning holes for everyone  
and crumbs for the lucky

but the trees are too distraught to eat  
driven blind by hunger or virus  
we can only guess  
for they refuse medical attention

downtown a surgeon holds his stethoscope  
to the glass panel of a sky scraper  
"normal" he says "healthy"  
the sky is bleeding down  
she won't last half an hour  
she's a dead duck

*Myth of Beasts*

Is this my own body  
you helped ride the street  
even the darkness didn't notice?

Is it this September night I fear  
or the silence weeping  
on your side of the bed?

We've seen a rainbow stand straight up  
like a fence post that would never fall  
you called it an omen worth waiting for,

Even saved up corn meal for the blessing,  
raised both hands to horses running by.  
What are we afraid of?

Where has the noise of our sound gone?  
Was it listening to the myth of beasts  
made us afraid to scoop up honey together?

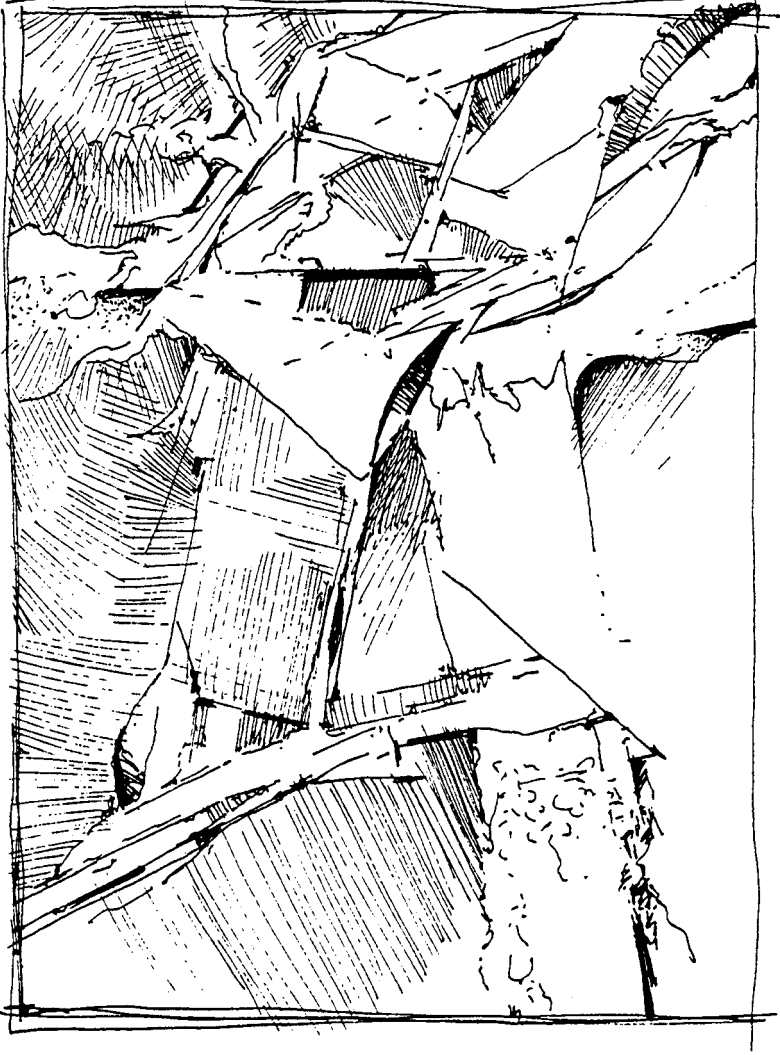


*Disparate*

"And here, or there . . ."

—Elizabeth Bishop

Threshold children,  
they walk Tara's red clay  
so close to the county line, like  
my friend from last summer  
who went first, a dilapidated wormwood  
ark of many colors masquerading  
as the Mother-Ship, I cry  
for all of us  
stranded in earth's halfway house, I cry  
gigantic speckled tears that do not last, in  
the patent-leather shoes of patient fishermen, in  
the hearts and minds of Atlantis, something  
is moving, fermenting, ruling over us, something  
very small yet growing in intensity, like  
the sun coming up from a far country, like  
the shallow tadpole pools of Dixie, there  
is a bigger house gobbling up the little people  
not exactly "right," of course, just  
the endless blue pattern of the master-plan  
the tune of a wise old Cajun fiddler  
pampering his dying songbird.



\*

I teach Marieke  
whisper about winter the way a bear  
bathes its cub, my tongue  
half for the umpteenth time, half  
that lullaby implanted word by word  
between her skin and the heat  
she is expected to remember.

I barely sing so that even a new word  
seems familiar, shaped  
by the same restoring nod  
that will become the one heart more  
already nearing Gemini, The Little Bear  
Sagittarius —my song never ends  
while her eyes are open, are looking  
for that figure on horseback  
I haven't come to yet —low and slow

each word returning from a faraway cold  
as molten ore :campfires and evenings  
half feathers, half waterfall  
non-stop so she'll sleep still listening  
for lift-off :her first step  
breaking loose, still damp  
though there was no splash  
—on both toes! asleep  
as if she would forget  
nightfall and cooling stone.

*Passing Time*

We four women sit in the kitchen  
drinking coffee out of white mugs  
while the men sit in the living room  
with the football game too loud,  
playing chess on the floor.

We women sit in the kitchen,  
and I, being the youngest,  
stare out the window  
at the net of suet  
hanging in the birch tree.  
The old Cardinal is there,  
a slice of red  
against the new white snow.  
His feet cling to the net  
as it swings back and forth  
while he eats the salty fat.

Grandma is sucking her dentures and  
talking about Wal-Mart as she  
leans against the counter.  
Agnes sits in her chair  
with worn blue slippers  
on her feet and a gray cardigan  
over her shoulders.  
Mom perches on the stool  
and watches us all  
like a frightened bird,  
cornered.

The Cardinal has left,  
but here I still sit.  
I am with the women in my life,  
learning their patterns,  
trying to understand myself in them—  
how I will stand at counters when  
my back is curved, the way my  
arms will look when the skin goes slack,  
the map my wrinkles will make  
to lead my own children along the path  
that winds through the mountains of time.

Mom looks over at me  
and gives me a tired smile.  
Happy new year, she says.

*Instinct*

I

In my mother's house  
I am lost,  
a white mouse  
inside her maze  
of rooms.

On holidays I go there,  
scurry around  
misplaced furniture,  
revisit the places  
where I left my scent:

the edge of the kitchen counter,  
the cluttered closets,  
the stairway leading to  
a sterile bedroom.

II

My mother is at the sink  
washing vegetables for dinner.  
The kitchen is narrow,  
so I don't get in her way,  
but sit on the counter  
with legs tucked up.

She tells me about the cat  
outside, the stray one  
with frostdamaged ears.  
She tells me he likes tuna,  
turkey, bacon bits  
from leftover salads,

tells me she watches him  
from inside the window,  
worries about him  
on cold nights.

---

### III

Our indoor cat is strange  
and lonely,  
hides in the air ducts,  
covers the chairs in black fur.

At night she is a monster,  
carries mice in her mouth,  
playfully bats them  
across the hardwood floors  
until they die of fright.

Then she deposits them  
in pieces at the base of the stairs,  
sometimes a tail and four neat feet,  
sometimes just a nose  
with the whiskers still attached.

Claire Hero

---

*To the Flying Girl*

for Lindsay Perkins

Tonight I am reminded  
by the cold air of another autumn  
of the flying girl.  
Not the girl in the casket  
painted orange to mask  
the bruises of our failure,  
but the girl who took that final leap  
where few of us will dare,  
and how she must have looked that final moment,  
perched on the edge of the concrete  
with the rows of shiny cars around her  
and the headlights of anonymity  
passing below on the freeway.  
There she stood,  
about to pass through the door  
into never another sunrise,  
never another salty tear on cool pale cheek,  
never another frozen moon,  
never another thawing smile.  
I can see her removing that final pretense,  
the burden of a disguise that  
failed to protect from the elements,  
her red hair tumbling in the wind,  
the goosebumps surfacing on young thighs and young arms,  
the way her face must have glowed with fear and cold,  
tilted upward in a final search  
for the stars behind the cold facade of city lights,  
and taking that final step.

And in that last moment  
before her young form crumpled  
on the unforgiving ground of a constructed world,  
I can see the dignity  
in her dance of final flight.

*Response*

Dark to bend the wings of what is said,  
and pulling back the grove of what is said.  
Tell me the location to return  
in no one harmed,  
the track of a crow  
in no one else waking.

Root binding your answer,  
no faces under century air,  
no place to hide small birds.  
Only silver pins from  
the river worn dark,  
not hidden,  
but feared  
when you say it for me.

*Names for Winter*

Snow without tracks.  
Space unparted by profiles.  
Sleepers stir near windowpanes  
where the chill droplets cling.  
The wind lifts slanting trestles,  
shoulders a bridge for coal-black birds.  
Even now the hermit is hunting radishes.  
He will not turn to face again  
the shed where his old father waits,  
unable to soothe a sputtering lamp.  
No longer will he curse the iron pots  
or smooth the wrinkled maps at table.  
He has gone out walking over matted roots.

You may ask how he came to leave.  
He will not answer. He never could.  
There are no other names for winter.



*At Moments in Your Soul*

At moments in your soul, love, a green stone  
rolls slowly out from an ocean even greener  
and away from the others you pass, far  
from all the shadows amassed in afternoon.

Your voice low and sad, secretive,  
like a wing folded back upon itself.  
Sad, also, your once brimming smile,  
a ribbon of bees now, torn from the hive.

Far, you are far from clocks, from fountains,  
from the letters and the coffee,  
the eager windows of the shops,  
from numbers, stars, embers, far  
even from the ashen bell at your bedside  
and from your lunar methods of loneliness.

At moments, as guest of the gathering mist,  
your eyes disfigure the clear light given them  
and even the roughhewn voice in my songs  
falls utterly silent upon the paving stones.

Your small hands have fled to the shoreline  
where once my longing burned unseen,  
as a ruined wall burns softly  
beneath an ochre mask of moss.  
You inherit the rain. You inhabit the hours.

At moments there is no moon, but  
its distillate drips like organ music  
from the high and branching balconies.  
There is no weeping, only doves.  
No tomb, only moths in flight.  
No stone, no sea, no distance  
without your once mysterious name.

Still, the azure horizon of night lies  
punctured, love, pecked at by birds,  
and riddled with ships without number,  
without anchor, without everything,  
until at last you turn to look at me,  
at last, at length, at once, love,  
at moments in your soul.

Daniel Comiskey

---

*A Man Writes to a Woman He Has Already Met  
on the Eve of His First Meeting with Her*

from this once yet to come I am writing to tell you  
that which you have for some time known  
but now and then one must struggle to find the words

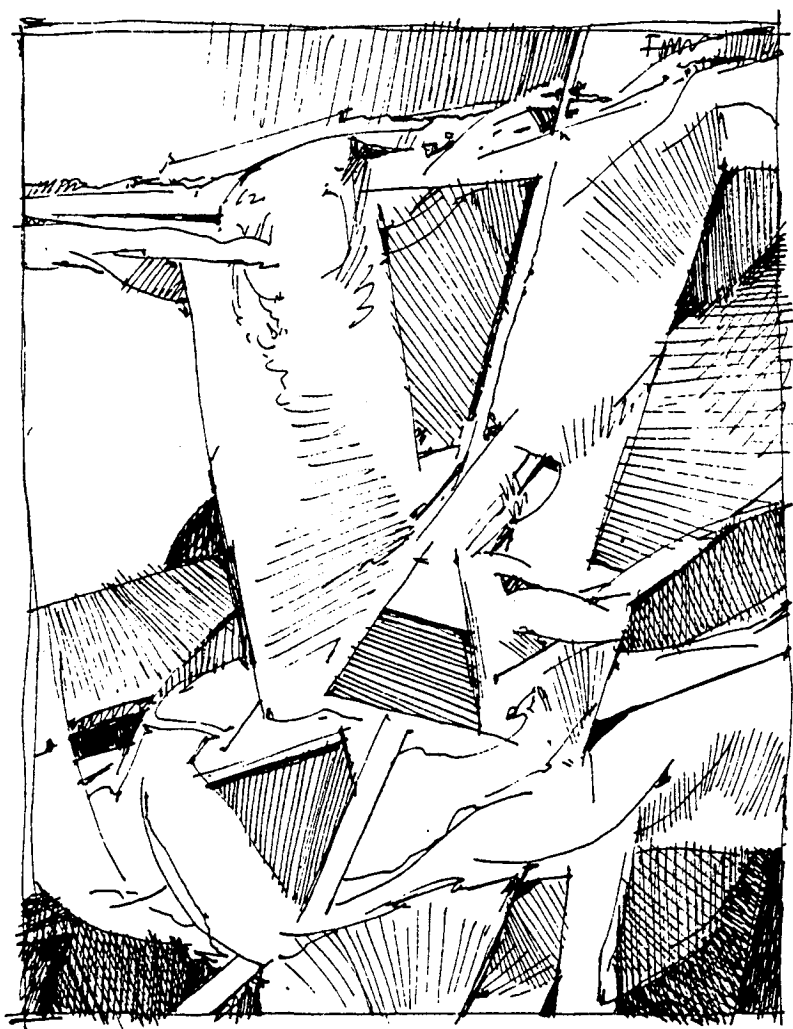
so you must try to remember how it all will happen  
for that has always helped in these matters before

and after everything you will look forward to it still  
as if that which took place were yet taking shape

between forgetting and foretelling there is a pulse  
from beginning to end and ending all together  
and so I am writing now to tell you then  
of this only once, only once yet to come

*Crows in Japanese Plum*

It is not to say that this storm  
surrounds the japanese plum tree.  
There are birds gathering  
who see things differently.  
If we remain silent,  
face down in the wet grass,  
we may be covered by crows.  
Then perhaps we will see  
each blade of grass as they do—  
dark beneath the weight of their many bodies.



*Snowy Owl*

An abrupt shift in the weather  
brought you here  
on the threshold of my twelfth year,  
the ptarmigans  
and hares of the arctic  
too scarce this year.

You were shunting home  
from a winter down South,  
back to where the tundra  
glitters in its thaw.

Early in the spring,  
the skin of winter barely shed,  
I found you in a secluded park,  
between the buffalo fenced-in  
at the Illinois Veteran's Home  
and the Mississippi,  
here in my small hometown  
in the middle of nowhere,  
somewhere between  
your departure and arrival.

All afternoon  
in the gray rock face  
carved into hillside  
above a still pool,  
sheltered from the sun  
by thick trees,

lulled by the soft woosh  
of traffic from the nearby highway,  
your white down  
stirred only by breezes.

The book I found called you  
immaculate.  
I knew this word,  
this light that dazzles—  
the white of wedding gowns  
and Easter vestments.  
Your eyes held the sun,  
and power  
bunched in those shoulders.  
I could imagine you

---

soaring in cold night air,  
talons gripping their prey.

In a few days, you would be gone—  
a few weeks, you'd be home.  
By summer,  
the branches of the peach trees  
cracked under their own weight,  
the bakery where my father worked  
went bankrupt,  
and I began  
to turn with the tides,  
my body, too,  
now governed by the moon.

Donald E. Byrne, Jr.

---

*Heirloom Roses on the Iron Fence*

I prune them in July. The sharktoothed canes  
looped high over the iron fence hook my cap.  
As if a vassal in my own domain,  
I have to kneel in full view of traffic  
to get it back, humbly reach for my sweatstained,  
dirty crown suspended delicately  
overhead from a dead thorn. Obeisance  
is not my intention, even to antique tea  
roses fifty years older than me and named  
for British royalty. In January  
I grub them out of the frozen ground. Canes  
snaked in the grass pierce my calves, through corduroy.  
My ax clips stones, strikes sparks, splits and frees  
rose roots streaked pink, with the faint sap whiff of tea.

*Autumn Comes*

and the air tightens  
into a cold fist.  
Get ready.

It is time to regret  
the opulence of summer.

Get ready.  
Your heart.  
The real one.  
The one given you before your birth.  
The one promised you  
from a time before  
stars began to open  
their flowering bodies.

That one is coming back to you.

So close the doors.  
The swallows have gone and left  
you alone with the kestrels  
who yip and glide  
on the gales of fall.

Turn off the lamps  
and attend the shadows.  
The way they move  
is how to find the dark  
stairs to the inner door

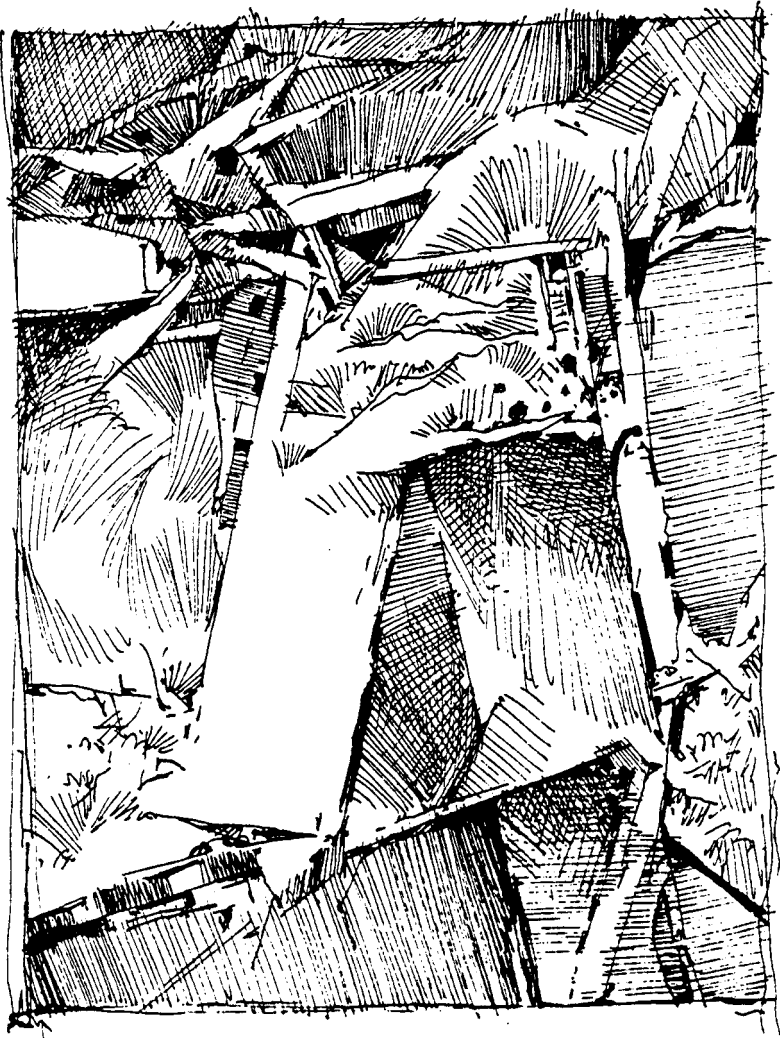
And what to pray:

*take me back, let me in*

*Behind Motel 6*

The fog lifts just enough for color.  
A sandy hollow quilted over with morning glory,  
jimson vine, nasturtiums wild among weeds.  
Orange and yellow daisies climb the fringe  
of laurel-sumac, pungent in damp air.  
Everywhere the scent of crushed anise  
heavy as earth that holds, still,  
rabbit prints.      All this  
before the sun.





*In the Company of Pastures and Streams*

Here I have come  
seeking peace from the stinking city  
amid the serenity of cattle,  
the occasional rustle of grass  
and the silence of drifting cloud.  
And I find myself immersed in city-like noises.  
Angry are the noises of engines:  
the vengeful screaming of mowers  
exerting their smug abuse on the soil.  
These people cannot hear the world,  
for their machines stand as filters around them.  
They cannot know the world,  
for their machines are all that touch it.  
There is no composure, even here among the trees,  
in the company of pastures and streams.  
Our neighbors oppress the sound and the land;  
they fail to live with the wind,  
and in their loud indulgence they carry all along.

*New Islands*

A clot of droppings: needles, leaves,  
and cropped grass, drifts  
loose in the rain-flow, gutter  
to drain, gathering seed  
as if to show how  
islands begin, how the land itself  
might have fallen in autumn  
from some great tree  
shedding its excess from heaven.

We will sweep it aside, of course,  
clean the street with machines,  
scoops, brushes, a vacuum,  
leave nothing to chance,  
not even the gracious reflections  
of clouds in these puddles,

the original idea of dry land,  
were we to let it grow,  
were we to step aside this once  
and let things be,  
new islands on our horizon,  
a place to set foot and abide.

*The Mad Girl Hears About Stinky Penis Fungus*

taking over lawns and  
trees, sticky and stinky.  
Once it gets a hold  
nothing is the same.  
Bury it fifteen years  
and it's still living.  
She thinks it's not  
that different than  
having a cock, the last  
thing that would leave her,  
pulsing, alive, giving a  
last shot even at death.  
Maybe she could grow a  
penis next to her  
tongue so if she  
couldn't ask for what  
she needed, the penis  
would grab it if she  
felt tongue tied, or  
strange. It would  
stand up, demand or  
just take. A mast head  
that rescue pilots would  
spot if she was lost  
at sea. It would be a  
stake to claim another  
planet, a rocket she  
could ride out of where  
she's landlocked,  
blood and muscle  
shuddering, lifting  
her up out of where  
gravity sucks on  
her hips and thighs

## Contributor's Notes

---

**E. G. Burrows'** chapbook **THE BIRDS UNDER THE EARTH** is winner of this year's Green Lake Award and is being published by Owl Creek Press. This is his ninth collection of poetry. He has previously published in **ALBATROSS**.

**Donald E. Byrne, Jr.** teaches American Studies at Lebanon Valley College, Annville, PA. His work has appeared in **CREAM CITY REVIEW**, **NEGATIVE CAPABILITY**, **WEST BRANCH**, **KARAMU**, and **WINDLESS ORCHARD**.

**Caroline Collins** received an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Arkansas in 1989, and since then has been working on a Ph.D. in Nineteenth Century American Literature. As an MFA candidate, she received the Felix Christopher McKean Award for Poetry from the Department of English and the C. Vann Woodward Award for Nonfiction from the University of Arkansas Press. Her poems have appeared in **POEM**, **YARROW**, **TEXAS REVIEW**, **SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW**, and **MISSISSIPPI VALLEY REVIEW**.

**Daniel Comiskey** now lives in Seattle, Washington. He has previously published in **ALBATROSS**, and will be publishing his first chapbook, **OUT ALONG THE STARLIT ROADS**, as the first in the Duane Locke Chapbook Series of the Anabiosis Press.

**Leslie K. Cronin** holds an MFA in Poetry Writing from the University of Iowa where she studied with James Tate, Jorie Graham, James Galvin, Linda Gregg, and Gerald Stern. Her work has appeared in a number of journals, including **DENVER QUARTERLY**, **PLUM REVIEW**, and **EXQUISITE CORPSE**. She teaches English at Widener University and edits the **WIDENER REVIEW**.

**Bruce K. Ferguson** has worked for 20 years in environmental management, which has resulted in more than 100 scientific and professional publications, including two books. This is his first poetry publication.

**Taylor Graham** is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler and, with her husband, is active in a local bluebird recovery program. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in **AMERICA**, **THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR**, **THE NEW YORK QUARTERLY**, **SOUTHERN HUMANITIES REVIEW**, **WILLOW SPRINGS**, and elsewhere. Her latest chapbook is **CASUALTIES: SEARCH AND RESCUE POEMS** (Coal City, 1995).

**Claire Hero** received her BA in English in 1997 from Hamline University. This is her first publication.

---

**Jennifer Hohensteiner** lives near Frankfurt, Germany and is pursuing a degree in comparative religion at the J.W. Goethe University in Frankfurt. She is originally from Flagstaff, Arizona. She has a Master's degree in Political Science from the University of Colorado at Boulder. She has poems forthcoming in KUMQUAT MERINGUE and POEM.

**Mitchell LesCarbeau** has published poems in such magazines as THE THREEPENNY REVIEW, THE NEW ENGLAND REVIEW, THE NATION, and THE CAROLINAQUARTERLY, as well as in WEST BRANCH. He also has poems forthcoming in THE BOSTON PHOENIX, THE GRAHAM HOUSE REVIEW, THE BERKELEY POETRY REVIEW, and THE LITERARY REVIEW. He has won the Grolier Prize, the Galway Kinnell Poetry Prize, and has been invited to stay at Yaddo and the Dorland Mountain Colony. Currently, he is professor of English and Creative Writing at Green Mountain College in Vermont.

**Lyn Lifshin** has a big book coming out from Black Sparrow Press called COLD COMFORT. Other books out recently include BLUE TATTOO from Event Horizon, MARILYN MONROE from Quiet Lion, PARADE from Wormwood, COLOR AND LIGHT from A Modest Proposal and SHOOTING KODACHROMES IN THE DARK from Penumbra Press. She has previously published in ALBATROSS.

**Errol Miller** has recently been published in AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW, CHATTAHOOCHEE REVIEW, CHICAGO QUARTERLY REVIEW, GREENSBORO REVIEW, and PAINTED BRIDE QUARTERLY. He has poems forthcoming in THE BERKELEY POETRY REVIEW, THE MARYLAND REVIEW, and others, and has a new chapbook titled THE DOWNTOWN DINER forthcoming from God's Bar Unplugged Press. He has previously published in ALBATROSS.

**Ann Newell** teaches workshops and writes from an oasis on the edge of the Chihuahuahua Desert in New Mexico. She is Coordinator of the New Mexico Arts funded Tularosa Basin Tumblewords Project. The Tumblewords Project, serving eight western states, is funded by the Lannon Foundation, and the Western States Arts Foundation, in order to bring literature to underserved communities. She has previously published in ALBATROSS.

**Simon Perchik** has published in such magazines as POETRY, AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW, THE NEW YORKER, and many others, and he has published numerous books of poetry, the latest being THE WESTON POEMS (Stride Publications, 1996) and THESE HANDS FILLED WITH NUMBNESS (Dusty Dog Press, 1996).

**Jerry Rudquist** is a Professor in the Art Department at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota.

And I had done a hellish thing  
And it would work 'em woe:  
For all averred, I had killed the bird  
That made the breeze to blow.  
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,  
That made the breeze to blow!

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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