

# ALBATROSS



#25

“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

## #25

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*Genesis of Mud*

Mother Dust  
Father Water

Grandparents  
Prince Proton  
Princess Electron

All the mud pies & mud plates  
In Nebraska  
Tasted like the Snake in the Garden  
And cracked in sunlight

The vase on my desk  
With a white heron  
Hovering in a light blue sky  
Says *Look There is another way*  
*Above the Garden and beyond*

*Calcium Tablet from Bone Meal*

White ice smooth host  
Last bit of breakfast

Fragment  
Of ox rib  
Bull skull

How frail  
You once were  
Wisp of green grass  
Soft kernels of corn

Some mornings  
I squirm when I feel sunlight  
Pour through the window  
and tell these frail bones  
*Every bit of you was all once sunlight*

*Blow Your Horn and Ring the Bell*

Every step's a small thanksgiving.  
In a mere two years I've grown a tongue  
and come to sing a stranger song.  
With me now, the cedars sing  
*hosanna* in familiar woods  
while white pines cry *kyrie, kyrie*,  
the crickets rehearse their *arias*,  
and evergreen needles play brushstrokes across  
the snare drum of my mind.

Sing one last song, you reservoir,  
before the sun falls into the trees.  
Sing notes the shapes of spiderwebs,  
with treble clefs & higher C's.  
Sing and breathe the autumn ghost,  
you caravan keepers, watchers at night.  
Teach me to walk each day in thanks.  
Teach me, red maple, the scale of my life.

*At Marston's Landing*

The river god is trying to speak to you.  
Not speak, exactly — maybe more like sing.  
His rippled tongue is licking the banks,  
causing trees to lean, cling to what's left,  
their last leaves whispering like a light rain.  
Walking along, you cross a braided brook  
giggling over rocks; crickets discourse  
on the subject of Octobered earth.  
On the other side, a new construction site  
grinds out its daily quota of steel noise.  
It's hard to hear as just another strain  
of the god's fluid music — maybe more  
like shards of the glass silence shattering,  
source of all sound, and all else flowing by.

*Living With a Dying Man*

I.

This summer has been unseasonable with rain.  
The news has called it Biblical, and I tend to agree,  
Yet it may only be that I am currently acute  
To such signs and omens. Even now lightning  
Forks out over the Gulf, near where the earth  
Ends, sending a disciple to testify that nothing  
Is ever totally forgotten. No thing will escape  
Wholly overlooked. I look out at the gray  
Curled in the clouds, curled around the street-  
Lamps illuminated in mid-afternoon, swirling  
Down the desolate street of no destination,  
As thick as oil blowing across chiseled asphalt.  
“This would be a perfect day to sleep,” I think.  
This would be an ideal time to lie back  
And float out of the dark room in the moistly spun uterus  
Of thunder. And then I think of my wife, home  
After eight hours of stocking beer bottles and mopping,  
Coming home with dinner planned all out  
And with no house key; and I think of my son,  
Home from college courses, filled with a twenty-year-old’s  
Bombasts or delicate mood, home after an evening shift  
Serving at the senior citizens home for dementia.  
And so I lie and lie back and close my eyes and wait.

II.

Here a different gray grows—the gray dust  
That settles on the couch; the gray light  
Of a dim lamp across the room always too  
Dark to work; even the words recited back  
Are heavy with gray and fall to the floor,  
Crack like ceramic. No gray! Not tonight!  
Tonight, when they arrive, I will laugh and  
Talk and come out of my room and join them  
And pretend that we are all still living. Perhaps,



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A good movie would be in order, perhaps  
Reminiscing about a past vacation when we all  
Could walk the one half mile to Anna Ruby Falls  
Or tube down the Chattahoochee. We will  
Function as a family tonight. It is still possible  
I tell myself, still, it is possible. Tonight they will  
Not enter my room and have to turn away  
With moist eyes and speak to me as lightly as a bird  
And have  
To pretend.

### III.

The rain now has slackened by several degrees,  
While the sun leaves only an echo of light and gray.  
Capes rise up from ditches and fields, flutter  
Off the dampness and feed upon the stars. It is so vast,  
The universe, that is, and I think of black holes stretching  
Energy, stretching time, where everything is curved and returns,  
Eventually, in whatever form it takes. Tonight it will be easy  
To be light, to be alive, to laugh again. Yes, to be so minute  
Is to be alive! To be temporarily mortal is to be alive!  
I sit back and wait for them to arrive. Tonight they will not know  
That we are any different.

*The Last Hallelujah*

i.

My mother wishes I could believe  
in something, as if faith is a hobby  
like knitting.

ii.

We are Christmas-and-Easter  
Catholics: two days  
when my mother pretends  
we still go to church every Sunday  
like when I was young  
and still knew the words  
to the Hail Mary — she is  
*full of grace*; I am  
full of shit. Sometimes I wonder  
if my parents gave me  
my middle name as a prayer;  
now Grace just seems like irony.

iii.

I have no god  
to ask for forgiveness.  
All I have  
are empty pill bottles  
like hymns that my mouth  
can no longer sing.

My altar is a leather couch  
in a therapist's office.

I preach to the choir  
for one hundred and sixty dollars  
an hour; the parish of health  
insurance will not donate.

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I receive communion  
in folded hands: leaves  
from a blue prescription pad.

*This is my body, which will  
be given up for you.*

*Amen.*

*This Is Not an Advertisement*

My father would say, I feel a little  
sick in the bell  
and flip an alka-seltzer

into his empty whisky glass  
and I liked the fizz and the way  
it looked breaking up in water

flakes slowly floating to the bottom  
I stole sips and loved the bitter  
chalky taste hissing on my tongue

taste of adulthood more promising  
than grandma's milky tea or chocolate  
more like the golden drinks left in glasses

I sneaked down to sample  
after the guests left—sharp, sour,  
rotten-fruity, forbidden.

Once I stole the whole long round bottle,  
put a disk in the toilet, put two  
in the birdbath

some rudimentary sense  
of self-preservation  
stayed my hand above the fish tank

and somehow I never was found out  
and Sunday nights, long after church  
I had communion at midnight:

the wafer, the excited water,  
the transformation, the homage.

*Thousand Autumn Snow*

—for Tu Fu

Wu Jinzhu, father of gardens,  
cups the tender light  
condensing at his thatched halo.

The swirled, burned tissue of his face, arms—  
dawn on a small river—

earthenware hands tend  
a moment in the sun's reminiscence,  
a silent philosophy:

oriole in the roof tile hollow,  
rain sheen of slender terra-cotta,

sky—with child and chipped shale—  
softened gold in ghost-blossoms.

I close my eyes into the thousand autumn  
snow of your arms,  
made a moment in the sun's reminiscence.

*Kindling*

Sun and water made warmth  
in the flicker and phantom at my hands.

Soon enough, I shall be drawn  
into the fragrant cross-section of centuries,

and comfort the next day-worn explorer  
with warmth and a chattering camp-stove,

or as risen prayer sown in smoke  
to the ancient hours of night.

Perhaps my soul's been sewn  
from several—and loosely bound—  
unwound then  
when silence comes as stillness  
sounds.

*The Herbalist*

Doubled by metal tines, her  
    troving hand plunged each damp depth  
one by one to pry, wrench up,  
scrape out hard holes all morning,  
a strain that sweated her cold,

with scant help from a half-grey,  
    watery sun, her dangling  
hairends wet-bright from effort  
of faith, dropped salt spots dark on  
clods that attested a sage belief

in the balm of a waiting  
return, begun again through  
feverroot and the spring of  
thyme to come, filled with grace from  
its blistering, blessed kin.

*On Going*

An unleafed tree, shards of rock;  
not bird nor blade disturbs  
what seems the tomb's huge round.  
Farmers used to burn off fields;  
rabbits fled, found greener squares  
or died and grew to mold.  
The shadows of the valley of the dead  
pervade the graveyard universe;  
the single cemetery gapes,  
and the seed drops silent for its wake.

*Late Harvest*

Leaves still cling but will turn, are turning,  
brightness starts that will maze wood hill,  
in unreaped fields colors flood and fade.

Frost-flowers light, early and few,  
just brushing low ground, their  
crystal horizons holding back  
for a time, and the crops not in.

A flight or two of southbound birds  
whose clouds come soon, snowclouds then,  
with the harvest standing.

Skies go grey; arrowhead geese divide—  
why they have waited, I wonder.  
They too have waited. I wonder why,  
Standing in the field ungathered.



*Summer's Enchantment*

Before last summer came, we thought of snow.  
We both remembered how long winter was  
And it was hard to see spring's gentle light  
Although the trees were green and life was good.  
This year, I wait for summer here alone—  
You left when snow was gone but we found spring,  
A little thing but bright from flowered hills,  
Then such warm wind that rippled greening grass.  
Summer brings starlight and a round full moon.  
The owl cries in flight on forest nights.  
The heavy rolling river sleeps in streams  
But time stumbles under summer's crimson sun.  
Earth is as beautiful as it first was;  
Our love's enchantment keeps these hours true.

*The Man from Vermont*

He keeps his green plates and the old pick-up running,  
plants saved seed: sunflower, corn, beans and squash;  
and for the girlfriend, flowers to cut, herbs for the pot.

The man from Vermont is hungry and lean. He has  
no fear of blade or writhing creature, goes barefoot  
all summer, wields the scythe his father left him,

tells me these mushrooms laddering this tree  
are best sautéed in butter. The kids from next door  
are taught to chop kindling for sweet sap. They grab

flying wood like squirrels gather nuts. Now acorns  
cease rattling the tin-roofed hut walled in on two sides  
by fuel, and leaves grow thick on the garden plot.

Sometimes, on cold days, he plays fiddle tunes  
he hears in the wind, glances at his girlfriend  
knitting by the fire.

*Who would be hungry like this?*

In March, he will tap the sugar trees,  
be master of fire all day, inhaling a maple mist

and when spring comes at last, he will feel his limbs  
unlock like the brook behind the sugarhouse  
unhinged from winter's ice.

*Cowboy*

The driver pulled in at eight a.m., which let us put one last milking in the bank. "Don't feed them in the morning," he'd said. "I don't want my truck all shitted up."

This was the end of granddad's dream:  
an idyllic Ohio farm, the grass greener than Finland's,  
the cows bearing names from the Old World:  
Kolehmainen, Isso Valkonen, Väärä Sarvi . . .

Stroke cut him out of the picture and left  
a spinster daughter and a schoolboy grandson  
running things (down, it turned out) as best they could.  
Death's meager mercy spared him this last act.

The dream was his, not mine, for whom  
the hated work was never more than chores,  
and disposing of the herd a grim but longed-for wish.

The bewildered cows stumbled across the empty  
hay mow floor and rattled up the metal ramp  
into the truck, the driver and I ushering them  
out of their life and mine while my aunt,  
refusing a role in this finale, cried bitterly in the house.

Down the drive and up the road. It was over, then.  
The cows on their way to dinner rush and I to chemistry,  
of which I remember little.

But the names . . .  
the names graze my memory still, six decades since:

Kaisa, Ainikki, gargantuan Hirvi, doe-eyed, tranquil Peura.

*The Bees and Their Flowers*

The Army is trying to teach young soldiers  
how to bounce back after trauma. Limbs twisted  
off their axis, flesh burning like logs  
in the fireplace, screams roiling the air.  
All those with PTSD are costing millions.  
Maybe there is a trick that can be taught.

But they've forgotten about the body. They don't know  
a lover's touch on the inner arc of your thigh  
once carried the whole history of love.  
They don't know you could use your hands  
to call pleasure down from the stars.

Your body is home now, but still saying stop.  
After all the drenching tears, your body is still saying no.  
Your ears are bent from the blast and then  
that strange moment of silence almost like peace  
just before everything shrieked, even ancient ferns  
etched in rocks.

The Army can't help you escape your body,  
your breath has refused to leave. The breath memory  
is there, hunkered down. Your eyes soldier on, peering  
into an ash colored world. But you can't leave  
your eyes. You're still there behind them.

So we who live in our bodies will reach out  
and when our fingers meet, touching  
will be like scarlet, like gold, like indigo.  
Touching will be like the bees telling  
where the flowers are.

*Breathing Together*

may all beings breathe  
may they breathe  
the flowing silk air  
may they feel their lungs  
hold and release  
again, again  
may they breathe together  
curled in safe burrows  
in drafty stables where  
horse breath turns white  
with frost  
may they breathe together  
in the panting sprint  
of predator and prey  
pushing each breath  
to the limit.

may we remember  
that all beings breathe  
may we look up and see  
the white gull's belly  
and breathe together  
may we gently put our hand  
on the flank of the goat  
and feel it rise and fall.

may we hear the sound  
under all sound  
all beings breathing  
all beings breathing together  
may we know we are not alone  
may we know we are held  
in the gentle arms of breath.

*The Animals Behind My Wall Are Preparing For Winter*

They are whispering to each other right now,  
though I can hear their bodies  
and hushed voices  
echo between the wood studs  
and the cedar clapboard,  
discussing the only things  
on their mind at the moment —  
food and weather —  
knowing they have a safe place for the night,  
yet at the same time not taking it for granted.  
I hope they realize that their nest  
is temporary, that they appreciate  
the dry space that they return to.  
I bang on the wall a few times  
to let them know who's boss.  
I hold the mortgage on this place  
and I do the snow removal, too.  
The taxes don't come cheap, either.  
I've worked all my life to buy this house,  
so you will not do damage here  
or scare my children.  
I'm an understanding man and agree  
that we can all coexist.  
We all have months ahead of us,  
some more than others,  
and a series of long, cold nights,  
when the only thing  
we can all do is survive  
and absorb heat wherever we  
can get it. So in the meantime  
I might ask them  
to keep it down a little,  
staying out of sight, too,  
wouldn't hurt, either,  
and they'll have their place,  
in my insulated wall,  
and we can live together,  
side by side, with only  
this sheet rock between us.

*The Dance*

Out among the trees past midnight  
moonlight and wood smoke  
speak in ether tongues

"Why is it you love me?" asks the smoke.

"You turn me into rivers.  
Without you I am still."

"And you, you hold me buoyant,  
the weight of light is our discretion."

"You fill the space between the branches  
with my wishes."

"I was once a tree like these  
and knew your soft caress.  
I chose to die to find you."

"I saw you then but could not taste you.  
Now I sip you slowly."

"I flow across your lips  
in the patterns of the grain  
I knew beneath but never saw."

"And we become the shape and color  
of water."

"And the sound of pearls  
underneath all currents."

"Do you miss standing?"

"I am no longer afraid to fall."

"I used to whisper on your shoulder,  
hoping you would hear."

---

“I felt the silver of your breath.”

“I was asking if one day  
you would dance with me.”



*Mt. Diablo Fire, September 2013*

Today I smell smoke,  
see haze on the horizon.

The summit smoulders with preparation:  
an emptiness to let in light  
for those of us germinated by fire

scorched by this life of bliss and flame—

like a pine cone once sealed with resin,  
I was burned open, released,  
my old life scattered like so many seeds.

Tomorrow: fire poppies  
infused with smoke.

*America*

We are pressing on. Getting up  
most mornings with breakfast  
on a wooden table. A  
table our grandfather  
made with his own tools. We're getting  
the kids to school. They learn there.  
They learn counting and colors.  
They learn about emancipation  
and new deals and historic presidencies.  
They manipulate polynomials and identify  
logical fallacies and then some go to college  
and some go to fight  
and some go to factories, turning out wooden tables,  
sanded, polished, stained. We produce.  
We move on. We reach out across the distance  
and listen. We lose each other in the flashing lights.  
Unexpectedly, we find each other at the airport.  
Our lips are still soft.  
We sometimes see eye to eye.  
We sometimes feel what it's like for the other.  
And sometimes, we just walk away.  
Out of work. Out of time.  
Staring out the window at the neighborhood  
trees turning all golden in the city sunset.  
We know we will walk again in the wild spaces.  
We will sleep under familiar stars  
even  
if we don't know their names.

*Ezekiel*

People keep pressing me to explain that night—  
what I saw, the fire within the fire, one creature alive  
with myriad faces, and all I can tell you is this:

We exist inversely with the stars. In these times  
there is scarcely night, and we do not fear the desert.  
The clamour of humanity, now many waters, floods

through the cities: we have the appetites of manticores,  
we subsume the oceans. As children we could see  
everything—dust motes revealed themselves

in the sunlight of our morning. Now we are blind;  
the evening blazes. You ask me, but still,  
I do not know under what throne we shall live.

Mary Fitzpatrick

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*When Elevation Predicts Survival*

—for Tokelau, Kiribati, Tuvalu

O sea—  
there is so little green  
on you I put  
my trust in life,  
I live and breathe  
and have my being  
on earth  
not water though she is  
my source  
of treasure  
and storm. Small  
green island,  
I know you as  
I do my wife sinking  
in the rising sea  
sinking  
the harmony  
of things we make  
even words  
our tongue  
and who who  
could take  
the last boat?

## Contributor's Notes

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**Richard Brobst** is a retired English teacher who was born, raised and resides in Sarasota County, FL. He has pub'd in a wide variety of journals, reviews, and anthologies, including *The California Quarterly*, *The Kentucky Poetry Review*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and *Florida in Verse: An Anthology*. Richard also has published three chapbooks.

**Tim Cremin** is a member of Grey Court Poets, and several of his poems are included in their 2013 anthology, *Songs from the Castle's Remains*. His poetry has appeared in *Methuen Life* and the *Eagle Tribune*.

**Hannah Dellabella** graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in 2014 with degrees in creative writing and professional writing. She lives in Bayonne, NJ. Her work has previously appeared in *jmwv*, *Seltzer*, and the *Of Sand and Sand* anthology by Kind of a Hurricane Press.

**Christian Downes** is an MFA candidate for Poetry from Seattle Pacific University. He received Allegheny College's 2013 Poetry Prize and was recognized as an Outstanding Author by Nota Bene (2011). His work has appeared in *Town Creek Poetry*, *The Rectangle*, and others.

**Mary Fitzpatrick** has had poems featured in *Mississippi Review*, *Atlanta Review* and *North American Review* as contest finalists, and she has been published in *Agenda*, *The Dos Passos Review*, *ASKEW*, *The Georgetown Review*, and others.

**Sonja Johanson** currently serves as training coordinator for the MA Master Gardener Association. She has work appearing in *Albatross*, *Dandelion Farm*, and *Shot Glass Poetry*. Sonja divides her time between work in Massachusetts and her home in the mountains of Maine.

**Alexander Levering Kirm** is a poet, writer, educator, and Quaker environmental and peace activist who has published in *Georgetown Review*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Concho River Review*, and others.

**Joan Kresich** is a long time educator with 35 years in public schools in both general and special education. She currently works to bring restorative justice to her communities in Livingston, MT and Berkeley, CA.

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**Stephen Malin** was selected for the *Southwest Review* half-century anthology and also has translated verse into Russian. He has also pub'd in *Antioch Review*, *Beloit Poetry Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, and others.

**Janet McCann** is a 1989 NEA Creative Writing Fellowship winner. She has taught at Texas A&M University since 1969 and has co-edited three anthologies. Her most recent poetry collection is *Emily's Dress* (Pecan Grove Press, 2004).

**John McKernan** grew up in Omaha, NE and is now retired after teaching many years at Marshall University. He (mostly) lives in WV where he edits ABZ Press. His most recent book is *Resurrection of the Dust: Selected Poems*. He has published in *The Atlantic Review*, *The Paris Review*, *The New Yorker*, and many others.

**David Polochanin** is a teacher, poet, freelance writer and former journalist living in CT. His poems have appeared in *Toasted Cheese* and *Negative Suck* as well as in an anthology by Native West Press, and is forthcoming in *Sentence*.

**Christine Anne Pratt** is a retired early childhood ed teacher living in western MA with a background in theater, music, and psychology. Her work has appeared in *The Aureorean* and *Silkworm*.

**Jane Stuart** is from Greenup, KY. She has an M.A. degree in Classical Language and Literature and a Ph.D. in Italian Studies. She latches hooks, makes bread, and plays with the dog.

**Beth Suter** grew up in rural Missouri and lives in northern CA. She studied Environmental Science at U.C. Davis and has worked as a naturalist and teacher. She is also an award-winning poet and has pieces in *The American River Review*, *Tule Review*, and *The Avocet*.

**Kate M. Wells** teaches English at a small charter high school in Placerville, CA. Her work has appeared in *Rattlesnake Review*, *Ash Canyon Review*, and *Poetry Motel*.

**Kirk S. Westphal** is an environmental consultant living outside of Boston. He has written for many technical journals on water management, but by night he writes poetry and nonfiction. His poems have appeared in *Dunes Review*, *The Road Not Taken*, and on NPR. He is also the author of a nonfiction book titled *Ordinary Games* to be pub'd in June 2015.

**Carl Zettelmeyer** is a graduate of the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers. He lives in West Palm Beach, FL.

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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