

# ALBATROSS



#26

“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

## #26

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*Logos*

*"Who hears not me but the word will say all is one."*

— Heraclitus

A cold ecstasy this night sky,  
star-strung milky wet and aching  
to be: let love and lovers here  
the metaphor complete.

Ineffable fire spill down in me,  
heaven's presence — poem  
of everything — be now.

*Revelation*

For three days Iowa's been snuffed  
By fog and the newsreaders' smack  
Of limited visibility and slick  
Surfaces. This morning every bulb  
Was a halo, and every beam caught  
The atmosphere's heavy rest:  
Fog shows light and air,  
Those weird sisters we hope for  
When they've struck out,  
And how the world, that can feel  
Hollow, is so brimming we're more  
Like the fish than we can see,  
And that even light, with its blessing  
And blazing speed, has its end.

*Anointing*

Travel the slow moving streets of the Spanish town  
alive with the songs of the ages, the cobblestone  
pathways leading to small cafes, where you will eat,  
and drink café con leche with a loved one.

Where these roads reach, no one can say.  
Possibly to history's doorway, a humble entrance  
to cathedrals under whose stones lay saints and men  
walked upon now by the faithful, as they once walked  
with the glow of a thousand candles lighted inside  
a small enclave, to lay flowers at the Virgin's feet.

Having been here, having tasted her wine, your way  
back will never be the same, storied as it is with  
the lilting tune of a foreign tongue, and the wisdom  
found in old men's offerings, in the humble gifts  
of the poor, and the small wooden rosaries sold  
by the side of the road.

Let the journey quell the ache in you of a hunger  
only the traveler knows, may the kindness of strangers  
whose words you cannot fully grasp fill the spaces  
inside you when at last you arrive home, wordless  
at the grace of miles and poverty and riches,  
and landscapes that will shape your dreams.

Everyone you meet is calling out for welcome,  
for a prayer to anoint them along their way,  
in the bus station in old Salamanca, in the modern  
airport as you board the plane to America.  
Everyone beside you is saying, however silently,  
share with me the peace of what you have seen:  
It's difficult here, and beautiful, and lonely as a  
language you cannot understand, yet one that comforts  
in its gestures for you to sit, and listen to its cadence  
just the same, for a connection, for a blessing,  
for some small token of this broken world.

*The Spell*

—for Willow

The magical boy  
who believed he could fly  
because there was a voice  
only he could hear in the wind  
is singing. Singing because  
he hears her voice in the trees again,  
and after spending years  
on the sun's black wheel,  
he dances in her light,  
pours the water of his disbelief  
from his soul.  
She is the place he goes all night  
to watch summer end.  
At the end of the world he paints  
the long tomorrow of her eyes.

*Off the Blue Ridge Parkway*

I touch the ground of fire-roads  
where sky and mountain talk  
a rumbling acre of hemlock,  
shake trees for leaves  
the color of wild days  
while a thousand birds of evening sing.  
Light in fifty feet of water  
fills me like an empty church  
and the breath in me finds a long way out into the world.



*The World And All That's In It*

There must be a million  
Things in this world  
Over which to converse,  
At least a million thoughts.

I contemplate cat food —  
If I have enough to feed the strays  
That I have adopted  
Tonight and tomorrow.

I realize that my thoughts  
Are no longer complicated.  
I accept that.  
Still it seems a priority

Much like poetry once was.  
Something almost Biblical in proportion,  
These feedings.  
Something almost within my grasp

*Reunion*

It ends with a group photograph,  
putting on a face that you have practiced  
for so many years.  
Fifty-seven for the birthday boy  
holding up a grandson  
who is focused on a group of rabbits  
playing chase. Someone  
mentions the weather,  
the grey weight of rain  
dragging back from the gulf,  
the fistful clouds, the sun  
that promises nothing. That  
is the weather in Florida  
in April. And there is weather  
in California, in Idaho,  
those distances that have called us,  
for one reason or another,  
away from what we once  
called home. The distances  
overcome to return one more time  
to this time, this place, this  
photograph. Someone  
praises God. We count thirteen  
and uncover enough food for twice  
that many — boxes of fried chicken,  
salad, root beer  
and red wine.  
Talk of cancer treatments  
and colored hair:  
so much to say, so much  
to make up for, so much  
that will never be said  
in the two hours before  
what remains of the light  
disappears. Not in two hours,  
not in this lifetime.  
And then  
that is it.

---

We speak of  
doing this again,  
sooner next time,  
sooner than  
it has never happened before  
or ever will happen again,  
and we all know that.  
So we smile at the camera,  
arms interlocked, clasp hands, wave  
and wave goodbye,  
one car at a time  
giving back the park  
to the rabbits.

*Any Less Mortal*

Remember the roadside sparkle  
that meant a cassette had finally given out,  
its blown innards glinting  
from the tips of dead brambles and milk thistle —  
trash that winked like Tinkerbell,  
like some magic reluctant to leave us?

Plastic bottle caps, cellophane wrappers  
snag on the storm drain's pile of dead leaves.  
Freeway medians gather commute-scum and dirt  
in their cement seams, and somehow from this  
something grows, like a child, for no reason but itself,  
grows because the heart beneath this concrete skin  
still beats. Exhausted pines shoulder the road,  
host black crows and fox squirrels.  
Through the driver's side window I think  
I can hear them scrabbling among the branches —  
branches that could move to encircle, soothe me  
did they want me to be any less mortal than I am.

From the windows of half-empty buildings  
a thousand setting suns cast gold into our eyes  
on the drive home. Torn snack bags roam  
the intersection, and someone's got the bass  
turned up, someone's cracking the window  
and blowing smoke into the air we all breathe.  
Above our heads streetlights bow their stacked eyes  
from the weight of pigeons landing, taking flight,  
or are they moved by the stopped traffic's hot sighs  
rising like incense, like prayers we emit  
in spite of ourselves, while we sit,  
so many supplicants at the wheel, waiting?

*Easter Island's Last Best Hope*

I, like she, think of them often,  
they, like us, having overused resources.  
History tells they did not look within  
but, desperate, sought help from great gods  
beyond the seas. She learned they used up  
the last of their trees rolling the great stone  
offerings to stand and call out for help.  
The Byzantines in Constantinople, too,  
as the Ottoman Turks drew near, haloed the dome  
of Hagia Sophia, prayed, awaited deliverance.

I lived on the Cuyahoga River when it caught fire.  
Lake Erie was being wheeled to the morgue.  
Years later, Mike took me to dinner  
as darkness fell and Cleveland's skyline  
twinkled on across the living, darkening waters.  
I am flea-hopping around the timeline, here,  
and the now, as always, offers more of the same.  
Same menu of options, same array of voices.  
Desperate action. Panic. Despair. Do something.  
Anything. Take a first step. Make a modest plan.

Only then am I allowed to pray.  
Before my surgery my experienced friend  
told me she began to improve  
when she cut back taking the pain pills.  
I, too, found this true.

*Harvest*

Already dead  
when I got to the hospital late,  
found mother and sister and nephew  
in the waiting room outside the room  
where he lay, still on a gurney, still in his supper-  
time clothes, pajama top and trousers, belt,  
feet bare the veins always so sick

so dark.  
How do you say farewell  
forever? but it wasn't long  
before I took a call from the ghouls,  
the agency that harvested marrow.  
I said, His legs are a mess, he's crippled  
from arthritis and gout, phlebitis! there's nothing  
you can do with these legs, but the voice kept going,  
Just a few more questions, and I finally donated  
the legs of my father, the gristle and tallow,  
to someone who could use them anew.

The night before, I phoned and listened  
to his insistence that he would not last for long.  
I smiled and thought him small,  
a little old lady, and when I stood by the pallet  
I recalled you, my child, your  
limbs, like the first day I held you  
and in so many ways you said Behold, you must try  
to turn these legs into words, thigh  
and calf, swell, patella, instep, hip,  
and you shall fail, you must fail,  
but keep trying, Oh, keep going.

\*

It takes stone though your breath  
heats by waiting for something to change  
the way sunlight inhales, unnoticed

is floating alongside these graves  
in riverbeds and kisses — stone  
can save her now that the ground

has more time to count  
each mourner coming by empty handed  
looking for someone else

—stone! without the rush, left in the open  
in a pillow filled with mountains, not yet  
the one day more as a ready-made hole

melting your lips for their brightness  
—every afternoon is blinded  
by a stone made from wood

as if smoke could start over  
and you hear a long ago name  
rising from the light and emptiness.

\*

You fold your arms the way this pasture  
gnaws on the wooden fence  
left standing in water —make a raft

though it's these rotting staves  
side by side that set the Earth on fire  
with smoke rising from the ponds

as emptiness and ice —you dead  
are winter now, need more wood  
to breathe and from a single finger

point, warmed with ashes and lips  
no longer brittle —under you  
a gate is opened for the cold

and though there's no sea you drink  
from your hands where all tears blacken  
—you can see yourself in the flames.



*Saffron*

Saffron on its  
silk white stalk  
will bloom for just one day  
and wilt the next  
even in the sun,  
but still the flower will open  
on the ground, it tries  
so hard, and each year  
I will find a dried magnolia  
leaf to prop it up,  
raise it to the air,  
in time to love the sky.

*Rachel Carson's White Hyacinth Letter to Dorothy Freeman*

You know the parable about the man  
with only two pennies to his name.

One penny buys the bread  
the other, the white hyacinths  
because their loveliness is beyond rescue.

You are my white hyacinth.

You are the marginal world  
where the moon-drawn tides  
spin a million sweet riddles.

Kneeling on a carpet of sea moss  
I confess the reflected images  
in the melodious pool are of you.

Water flashing with minnow eyes  
swirling the spark and waste of the universe  
birthing the stone and biology of love.

I need you to know how much I cradle  
this flower, how the winter white petals  
cool my serious science.

*Rachel Carson Responds to Her Critics*

Gentlemen, I've spotted you in my gaslight,  
held the burning match for too long.

Pity, that you deem it a heresy to care  
more about birds than business.

But I do remember that you too  
were once a pure blue egg

warm and opening beneath a belly of fur.  
I understand that you too

were once a desperate cry from the crib  
when your mother was numb and spent.

Still, I've wondered how many miles from mercy  
is the buried beggar inside of you

who can be touched by kindness  
on a cold highway.

When you stand before me I see  
an allergy even the drenched earth can't cure.

My mouth, sour with bad medicine,  
sweetens when I say, *no more*.

*A toast to the rogue pit bull who terrorizes my neighborhood at night*

How easily it all comes,  
the insecurity like a thin blanket,  
the agreement in the brain in the daylight  
in the supermarket by the day old baked goods  
to buy the cheaper wine  
because after a while  
all things are the same and there is no measure;  
it's the rationalization that city glow  
will mask any far-off defining speck that Tycho ever saw  
with his naked eye.

This is how it comes, then, the giving in to things,  
the gentle erosion of courage,  
the sloughing off of the markers of time,  
how we learn to depend on the radio, the phone,  
the ice cream truck.  
At night I see the shadows of my neighbors  
in their living rooms. They have given in.  
Chaos is outside in the darkness.  
Order is inside, and it's soothing.  
And the sheets are clean and warm.

But tonight I am raising a glass to you,  
dread pit bull, all speed and fiery bark.  
You who run through these streets at night  
like an uncharted comet.

The full moon is rising, tonight, just to the left,  
at the end of the street, over the railroad tracks.  
I am not so dull yet I have forgotten to look.

*Zoomorphic*

In the cage between her legs, there lives a frigatebird.  
Prevented from flexing its three-foot wings.  
Pecking at the fingers that poke it through the bars.  
Yoked to its pubic roost.  
Feathers caked in dark.  
And, despite the lack of space,  
its bright red gular sac perpetually inflated.

She tight-squeezes her thighs.  
Tugs her skirt hem past her knees.  
Shifts from cheek to cheek on the two-seater settee.  
Though she really should feed it pieces of marine iguana,  
she wills herself to believe it isn't there.  
Sit still. You're such a fidget, her mother sighs,  
eyes never migrating from the TV.

Yet the frigatebird's eyes keep brimming  
with sky — if the frigatebird were permitted  
to fly, it would glide without  
pause for weeks, tweaking fish from  
shearwaters' beaks, seeking uplifts  
to ride, thrilling never to reach the sides  
of either air or sea.

*Unraveling the Endless Knot*

Sulawesi flying foxes  
are returning to the forest  
in a river of night sky  
following the scent  
of eucalyptus and banksias  
on the warm winds  
blowing seaward  
towards their island reclaimed  
at least for the time being  
because a man is paid  
to put away his cruel snares  
but next year may be different.

This year Coho salmon are returning  
to a small restored stream near Seattle  
renewing their natal journey broken  
for a hundred years  
yet somehow they return again  
following a genetic map  
of scent to source  
from a thousand miles of ocean  
and home again, at least this year  
because a company is paid  
to leave its land undeveloped  
but next year, or the next  
a parking lot.

*Before Leaving*

A hummingbird of a screen  
fascinates me — lured by  
each new twerk in technology,  
my virtual universe keeps

expanding, while  
drought / storms / river-rise  
threaten us: omens, perhaps,  
like the extinct dodo / the Mexican grizzly

the quagga / the passenger  
pigeon. Some expert

claims we lose ten to  
one hundred thousand species a year,  
but what can one individual

do? I've heard the Caribbean north seal, the golden  
toad of Costa Rica have joined the list. Some  
say the bees and butterflies are  
becoming as scarce as hen's teeth.

We can't be saving every living thing —

we have to have a life too.

*False Spring*

Easy winter. No snow to speak of.  
Maybe six inches total that melted  
faster than it fell. Daffodils  
spring up early and skunk cabbage  
starts its slow unfurling  
in February. Shotgun shells litter  
the trail's margin, colorful as party favors.  
Hunting season's not yet over.

The ducks are skittish. Since  
there are no islands of ice and snow left  
to shrink back and reveal  
how winter ravages vegetable matter,  
the field's dun-colored body  
stands naked everywhere.

Each season bears its share of joy and sorrow,  
but these ducks circling the shallows startle  
whether the footsteps bring  
a hunter or a watcher come to see.  
How do they know which spot to return to  
and why? Except they know,  
even in this false spring, that nature  
wants nothing from her creatures  
but each to do exactly as it should.  
The note of sadness added to the wood-  
dove's cooing is exaggeration. The happiness  
the sparrow sings nobody knows.



*Out of Season*

First bumblebee here.  
Dandelions bloomed early. Bees  
should still be sleeping.

Magnolia blossoms  
burst open, then froze. Petals  
turned brown overnight.

Kestrels are nesting  
already. If they lay eggs  
now, chicks may see snow.

The dog had a tick  
on him. Blood is warmer than  
the warmest spring day.

Little snow, and now  
hardly any rain. Warnings  
abound about fire.

Grass is growing fast.  
I may wait, but still it will  
be too soon to mow.

The geese seem confused.  
Some that flew south were passed by  
others flying north.

*Suffer Them*

Suffer the insects  
The small and meek  
Of the sidewalk cracks    The ants  
Suffer them for their homes  
Are below and they gather  
In good fellowship  
The hornets        Suffer them  
In your yard for they will  
Teach you humility        The black flies  
Suffer them, for they will  
Teach you to forbear  
The bees        Suffer them  
Nesting in the garage  
As they make honey and would  
Share it with you if you  
Give them succor        Dim the porch  
Light should you injure the  
Wayward moths        In their greed  
Mistaking light for riches  
On the monarch        Have compassion  
As it lights upon you, in its hunger  
Mistaking you for sustenance  
And the mosquito        Who puts herself in  
Mortal danger so her  
Offspring shall live, kill her  
With a prayer        The roach  
On the counter, spare it as it  
Lusts for food, share with it a morsel  
Revere        All beetles  
In their shining multitude  
For they have prospered  
Suffer        The centipede  
Much reviled, wash its  
Many legs in your        Mercy  
The spiders        In the corners

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Suffer them, as they bring the  
Joy of creation into  
Your home      Mend your screens  
Lest the insects are tempted  
To enter and go astray  
Suffer them      Bless them  
For they shall inherit the earth

*Letter to My Unborn Daughter #2: The Last Glacier*

He will be the last of them  
of his kind.

He will come in, heaving  
and panting for breath.  
Icicles will have formed  
on the tip of his beard  
and his coat,  
which had lasted him  
many hundreds of years,  
will be in tatters.

“Fetch hot water!”  
she will shout, and you will wait,  
acid fear on your tongue,  
while the flow from the sink  
warms on your fingertips.  
But when you return,  
she and I will be bent over  
his naked form,  
shaking our heads.  
It will be too late.  
You will let the glass  
fall and shatter on the floor,  
but the rest of the city  
won’t hear it.  
You will feel guilty,  
but it wasn’t your fault.

**Alan Birkelbach** has appeared in journal and anthologies such as *Grasslands Review*, *Borderlands*, and *Concho River Review*. He has nine collections of poetry.

**Richard Brobst** was born, raised and resides in Sarasota County, FL. He has published 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 and is former co-editor of *Albatross*.

**Martin Conte** was raised on the Downeast Coast of Maine and has been awarded the Barbara Mandigo Kelly Poetry Award and the Dos Cosas Award from *Word & Images*.

**Lenny DellaRocca** lives in Delray Beach, FL, and has published poems in many journals since 1980, including *Albatross*. He has two poems in the new Mauve issue of *Fairy Tale Review* and was recently guest editor of *Poetrybay*.

**Donelle Dreese** is an English professor at Northern Kentucky University and has authored three poetry collections: *Sophrosyne* (Aldrich Press), *A Wild Turn* (Finishing Line) and *Looking for a Sunday Afternoon* (Pudding House) in addition to publishing poetry and fiction in many journals.

**Julia Finch** has published poetry and short stories in *BlazeVox*, *The Kitchen Poet*, and *Beatdom Books*, among others. She currently resides in Houston, TX, where she works in the staffing industry.

**Carol Hamilton** is former poet laureate of Oklahoma and has published 17 books of children's novels, legends and poetry, the most recent being *Such Deaths*. Recent publications include *Louisiana Review*, *Boston Literary Review*, *Tar River Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, and others.

**Gary Hanna** lives in southern Delaware and has received two fellowships in poetry and five individual artist awards. He is the author of two chap-books from Broadkill Press: *The Homestead Poems* and *Sediment and Other Poems*.

**David Iasevoli** lives and teaches in the Adirondack Mountains in upstate NY. He received his Ed.D. from Columbia University and has published both poetry and non-fiction.

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**Abbie Kurtz** lives in Madison, WI, and has been writing since she was a teenager. She has a B.A. in English from Barnard College and published her first poem in *Verse Wisconsin*.

**Sandra Noel** lives on Vashon Island, WA, and works as an illustrator creating art for environmental orgs. She is the author of a chapbook, *The Gypsy in My Kitchen* (Finishing Line Press, 2015), and has poetry in *Haunted Waters Press*, *Buddhist Poetry Review* and others.

**Jared Pearce** teaches writing and literature at William Penn University. He has poems recently pub'd or forthcoming in *Derronda Review*, *Four-teen Hills*, and *BYU Studies*, where he won the 2014 poetry competition.

**Adam Penna** has authored two books of poetry: *Little Songs & Lyrics to Genji* and *The Love of a Sleeper*. His work has appeared in *Nimrod*, *Cimarron Review* and *Albatross*. He teaches at Suffolk County Community College and lives in East Moriches, NY.

**Simon Perchik** is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *The New Yorker* and previously in *Albatross*. His most recent collection is *Almost Rain* (River Otter Press, 2013).

**Erin Redfern** serves on the board of the Poetry Center San Jose and as an editor for the 2015 issue of *Caesura*, its print publication. Her poems have appeared in *Zyzzyva*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, and *The Hamilton Stone Review*.

**Susan Richardson** is a poet, performer and educator based in Wales whose third collection of poetry, *skindancing*, was published by Cinnamon Press in 2015.

**Don Russ** is author of *Dream Driving* (Kennesaw State UP, 2007) and the chapbooks *Adam's Nap* (Billy Goat Press, 2005) and *World's One Heart* (The Next Review, 2015) and has a poem in *Best American Poetry 2012*.

**Matthew J. Spireng** has previously pub'd in *Albatross* and has two poetry books, *What Focus Is* (Word Press, 2011) and *Out of Body* (Bluestem Press, 2006) as well as five chapbooks. He has poems in *Southern Poetry Review*, *Connecticut Review*, and others.

**Kit Zak** regularly publishes in *Newversenews* and *Avocet* and has published in *California Quarterly*, *The Blue Collar Review*, *The Broadkill Review*, and several anthologies.

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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