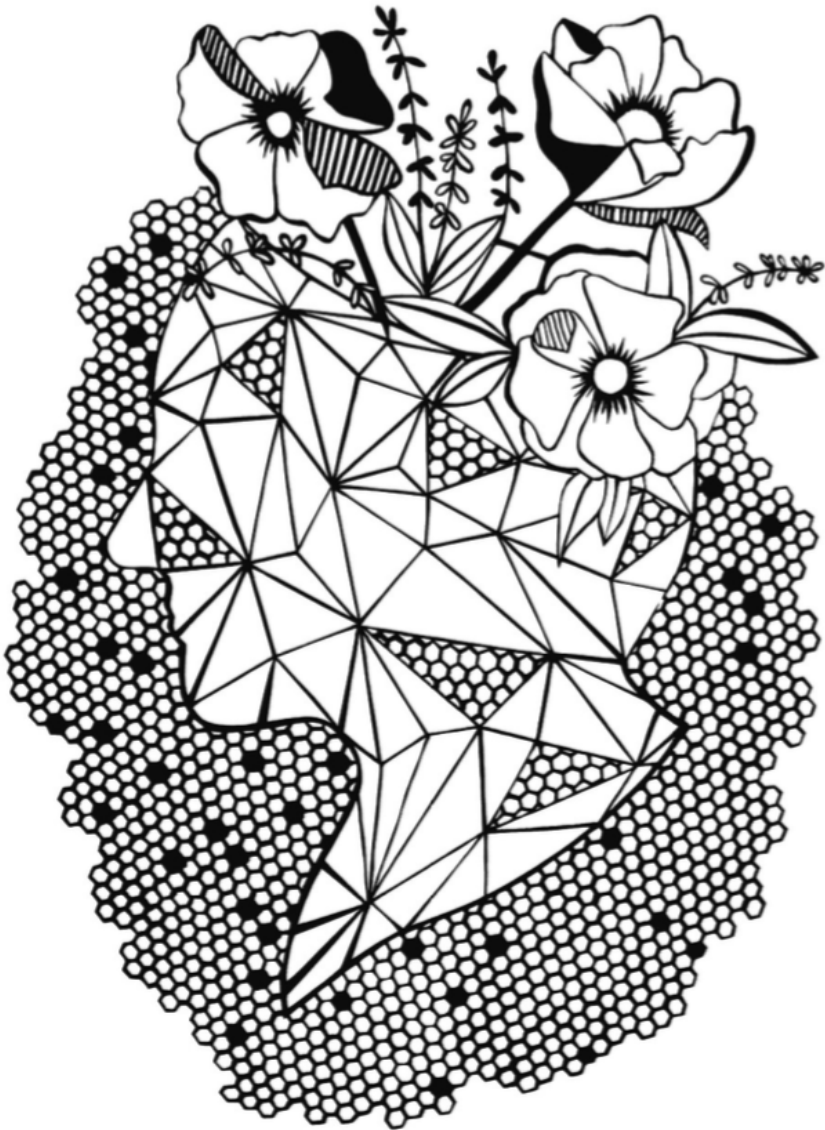


ALBATROSS



#27

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

ALBATROSS

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Blades of Grass

There are those who say
modern science hasn't caught up

with the occult arts of certain
Gypsies nor the cabalistic notions

handed down from antiquity
as revelations to old Jews

— both proclaiming that not a single
blade of grass rises from the Earth

unblessed by the loving hand
of a Divine Being.

And there are others
who believe our fate

is as random as
the burning of faded

blades of grass
on the mountainside

when lightning strikes
haphazardly

before the great
storm is unleashed.

Since Your Birthday

Mourning. Choked and cloaked
as a hung monk. Sky-buried.

Wings a heart-splayed
rain of answered prayers,
folklored antlers, sick-green, rare as

the small alabaster spine
of a four-foot dragon
coiled under glass
in a cloud of formaldehyde.

Emmylou

Who will remember your name?
These breeze-combed
trees with their
thousand hushes.

Under the thunder
on the tall white porch
a mislaid teacup catches rain.

Name me one thing more
beautiful than a living
being's laughter.

Since Your Birthday

I paid attention, recorded
everything: red
big moonrise quick over cloudbank.
The sourmilk scent: mums wilt
on my altar, flesh ashing,
cymbals. All of us clanging: "Wrong,
wrong, wrong." The fruit
offering baked into ache.

A beautiful bright
house of slight
blue to walk through,
its name "Tomorrow
And The Big
Sky Who Opens
Up With It." Sliver

of lapis in my changepocket.
My thumbnail hill-lost
wandering your clavicle.

My heart's throat
and the song you pull
from it. Your lily petal
fingers bloom
onto my palm.

Thrum of thumbed string,
secret as a tree root drinks rain.
There is no lack of you.

Emily as Light Spun Out of Nothingness

The progress is not a bird, shining
to flight, leaving for the sky context,

the progress, the coming light,
revered for relevance, we can see!

I have had many hands touch me,
I had no names for those hands,

until I could see, until I looked down
from the heat of the touch, and saw

Emily, spread as blue fire, spun out
of nothingness, unrelenting, sacred.

Emily as the Holes Are Light

There are no bad drugs,
but there are some girls
you need two hands for.

Emily as Iron Gossimer

Black dress, serrated
by the explosion
of tonight's moon,

my Emily has flirted
with catastrophe
in the silky fabric she

chose. I am thrilled
that the actual tearing
will be done by no light.

Emily as Strong, Dark Tea

Even in my lonely office, the steam
of Emily rises to my tongue, the lift
of her shadow underneath the door
hands me wing, hands me sword.

Emily as a Dead Sparrow

Beak to the stonework, ghost
bird, girl haunting the morning
of my last six years, I wake to you

& wonder about the feathers
splayed like sacrifice in the sheets.
Limp, your body is covered

in the thrashings of last night,
the science of action, hemmed in
by weak thread. Do you have

a song for me today? Do you,
with the rich sound of audition,
have other animals we could be?

Blue at the Table in the Hot Sun

give him a shot of light,
give him ragged glass
to escape thru,
black cat blues dogging
the bed

He, ok, it's you, hell bound,
in a hurry. You're pulling blue
out of the strings. Mama's got

a brand new. It's the table
in the light. Cat on the chair
with night scratching

Wind rattles the panes,
rattles gone love thru your
spine. Your baby's
changed the lock on the door

If you're still singing,
earth fills your lips

Daddies like Pennies

my father — picture barren wasteland hands,
shallow, pooling breaths.
picture blossoming tulip eyes,
the stamp of little reds on concrete.
he laughs with a romantic tongue:

*all ten million of our stars are born the same way,
soil blistered by roots and skin,
the craters moon-patches of boyish identity*

my father owns a restaurant in the villa
and loses coins too easily,
and when he is twenty-five his eye
catches on a chinese girl's collar hook.

*on special nights where the moon is close —
gone earth-kissing again,
stargazers truly know the shape of twilight*

and they find it in the same light he cuts radishes
and tulips, through the deep black of his stem.

*and somehow, in a blended
sky clouds are erupting, birthing
little birds*

in the back, starless elvis wailing,
the taste of siren-gypsies cooked into
noodle stew — coarse, meatless.
bone on marrow becomes
what separates kin, and the girl, she is crying
about the way movies never seem to end.

Untitled

Halfway up the mountainside,
on the hewn stone steps, the sun
already set, the path
curved beneath a canopy
of cicada covered leaves.
I thought I saw a silhouette,
a nearly recognized shape
against the castle's still
standing walls. I turned back.
There is nothing so horrifying
as being left alone with beauty.
At the base I slip from
tree's shadow to tree's shadow,
my own hungry ghost burning my last
memory of you between my palms.
A silent memory of thick tongued nothings,
barely enough to heat one breath.
Then once again my feet are
the only ones padding down
the dirt road. If I could
tell you one more thing again
it would be something
beautiful and soft enough
that you would have followed me
up the mountain pass.

Pulling Vines Off Plywood Walls Forever

The treehouse has been swallowed by kudzu.
We could feel it growing. In a few days,
I will finally lose everything. My arms
find nails in the bramble. I ask you to stay,
but you work in an hour. We cannot blame
our inexperience alone; this house has doors
we never even bothered to explore. If you
are leaving me today, will I be able to burn
the orchids that blanket our floor? I turned
myself into a pile of twigs. I was bored —
the two of us were lonely for a nest. *Start*

*at the root. Pull deliberately with honest hands.
Before you build a house, check for invasives.*

Digging for Dinosaur Bones

— for Sam

We drew a circle of dirt
and that was our job.
There was only the earth,

our fingernail shovels,
and what little we knew
about paleontology —

we hadn't learned to burden ourselves
with the thought of sewer pipes
or what reaching one meant

for our parents. We
were asteroids.

The Ring of Brodgar, Orkney (2500 BCE)

Our last afternoon of whirlwind and rock,
I would never say you emerged from the stones,
but I did see you walk up a small rise,
I did see you casually stepping out of
meadow of purple, loch-born and flowing.
So, rather call the place sacred to thistle,
sacred to deep scars of entrenched heather;
rather refer to an avenue of
heather with some ring of stones added in;
because the stones were confined to their ring
of numbers: three-hundred forty-one feet
around, thirty or so of sixty stones left,
and the cratered depth of four thousand years.
But no numbers for blossom, no boundaries,
no pattern of crosshatching heather and
thistle, no plan in the two lochs, or the
panorama of slightly curved backs everywhere.
In every real way, the ring was placed here,
the ring of now pock-marked, planetary stone,
weathered, stained green or yellow or white, or
spattered as if with ink out of the dark —
the landscape was first, the stones only our
attempt at echo and veneration.

Migrations at the End of the Ice Age (10,000 BCE)

I like to think about it this way:
the ice sheets of Old Europe, rather than
melting and making a run to the north

simply because the weather got warmer,
instead retreated, were sought out and stalked,
harried and run down by animals, plants

and human tribes living off the new:
new forests, new seas, new islands, and new
places to settle, hunt, or be hunted,

to die and be buried, ornamented
with the bone, stone, and shell of this landscape,
the belly full of water lily, pear,

salmon and horse, pig and seal and tubers,
the sky blue along with birch, oak and beech.
That's how I like to imagine the scene

from my own perch, some twelve thousand years on —
that the continents of covering ice
retreated from the hunt for new meaning,

every branch and drop and living thing made
to signify something more than itself,
up to the roasting scent of hazelnuts.

Gone to the Roots

So with winter
a snow came
white, powdered,
deep in drifts
piled high about
the blackened
old-growth forest
that had blazed
then smoldered
from the last of summer
through an anguished autumn,
flame — an incandescent drunk
stumbling about the hills
sweeping aside all custom
all convention all comity
before its engorging appetite —
and then with winter
and snowfall after
blinding bright
snowfall skies cleared
to a hurtful blue
ash settled as in an
intestate statement
and the fire left
and the men who
fought it too and
the scorched ponderosa
and coastal oak stood
stripped, bare as refugees
thin final spirals of smoke
under an early April sun
snow cracked like
rifle shot, went to a
gray mush, puddled, then
ran cold, gushing, ashen,
down the ragged hills and
up — impassioned — sprang
fire —

fire lain like a devotional,
ruby ember, all winter —
fire set on the heart of the matter —
fire that had (like all true flame)
taken up residence
in the roots.

Most People Say and Do Too Much

the wind comes from the four corners
sweeps across the last, high, sapphire
lake.

the bull elk lower great heads and
commence the yearly shedding
of antlers.

the green quaking aspen
glitter against
the slopes.

the brown trout waken
from the deep-water drowse
of winter.

the strands of cottonwood
leaf out into crowns
of adulation.

over the high banks
of red river soil, swallow and swift,
duck and hawk.

a beating of wings.

Considering Flight

I'm just
 scattered,
 struggling to collect
and launch
like a barn swallow
 from its nest,

from its cup of mud
 to swoop the sky.

It wants to go. I can see it.
 It wants to leave
not from weakness, nor from any lack
 as a way of escape,

but from the ledge
 it needs a trajectory
 to tug its small body
 into flight.

Like learning algebra
 on a square card table
going forward is not the equation
 of regret, moving on
is not
 the loss from the away.

Altered to apparent emptiness
 explanations are
the reasons,
 one's self the recognition
in that collapsing moment
 when dark wings join

The Wind

I am always listening for it,
near the door or a drafty window
as if it were whistling a tune.

I know it can't really be singing,
but I have watched the arborvitaes
swaying in a line from left to right

before a warm thunderstorm in May,
the flutter of pink dogwood blossoms,
those tinkling waves of blue spruce and pine

sprinkled with rain, like tarnished green coins.
It's impossible not to regard
the wind as the greatest musician;

its breath surges, passing through hollows,
hurling up great trees and rolling
roof shingles. An invisible sea

of sound, it is the everything and nothing,
the sigh of a ruffled bedroom curtain,
the voice of every untouched leaf.

That Moment

That precise moment of dawn
when light has not yet
left the backlit clouds
to shine on every object here,
when light suffuses the whole
expansive backdrop of sky
leaving us bereft:

that is the moment
when we can see, if we look,
each discrete detail of these trees
in crisp relief before us,
their surfaces drained of color,
their silhouettes solid and defined.

Morning Glories

Our first problem —
we started with seeds, not plants.
Then summer was unexpectedly cool.
Vines barely grew,
no buds developed till late in April.

When the first flower appeared,
fully open at dawn,
it was like sunrise — blue unclouded sky
with blush of pink, rays of white light.
More blooms developed only slowly.

We won't welcome flower-laden vines.
Our harvest —
a single blossom living a single day.
We rush to the patio daily,
celebrate each one. Devotion
is all we offer till frost comes.

Bandai Bridge

I stand alone & restless
on Bandai Bridge over the Shinano River,
the longest in Japan,
wanting to fall in and be carried out to sea
past the ferries and lighthouses
to deeper currents
where squid boats come out with their bright
lights and nets: a beacon to swim toward.
Yes, this kind of volition may one day
give me courage enough to graduate
from one who stands to one who jumps.

Darkness

Each morning wake & speak into the darkness
What am I doing here?
& the answer that comes back: Not much.
Keep counting.

Counting.

Yes, numbers keep me grounded when I start to float away;
I spend most of my days barely touching the ground.

When someone opens a window and lets a cool breeze in,
we comment on the refreshing air, not
on the skill of the opener.

Carrots

I clear a little space for them,
choose the varieties,
Kumiko plants the seeds,
thins and weeds them a few weeks later.

*

But the germination, and below, what happens
in the soil, the real work —

roots reaching deep and true by a logic
not learned in any text, greens reaching up in love
with the sun —

for this I can take no credit.
I do not recognize my hand in the vivid
color, the sweetness, the satisfying crunch,

nor did I write the map of where
the flavor takes you when you bite in,
those private autobiographical joys.

I cannot say I grew this, only I discovered this,
I waited for this.

Myself as amazed as anyone,
I write my occupation, "Farmer, ostensibly."

Snap

Each year in September
something snaps &
summer breaks;
pools are abandoned,
bicycles left in the way.
But here on this long afternoon,
scorched lettuce leaves are
singed in summer's
swansong & a slice of bitterness
gets folded in
while above the nearly dead
cucumber beds
the last vine-tired fruit curls
into the world.

After Berry Picking

Making the turn on the road toward home.

Toward my own body
that has been waiting for
some gentle arrival.

Coming home to where
words

rise out of the blueberry dusk
and hang in strange new constellations
from my longest
bones.

This morning an hour before daylight, Orion
rose over the dark east edge
of the amazing
immediate.

Wait, he said, the cold, the clarity.

I knew it. The winter, the snow
will bail me out.
Even so, I have nothing to give.

On the Lake

It's a way of taking days slow,
stopping at night, an uncertain anchorage,
the wind comes up after midnight
and holds steady until dawn,
the anchor holding firmly in the mud.
I turn from one side to the other
and so change lives, hoping,
one night, to find the one
that would like to try again,
holding its breath as the water rises,
waiting until the air is nearly gone
to take that last breath.
Living would be easier then,
and death would only happen to old people
when they're not looking
but are still tired of how fast
the life around them is moving.

The Truth About Homework

today cup mushrooms
reclaim the shower

my own shed skin
dusts the windowsill

spiders remind
who was here first

and what will come —

deer pellets and thistles
in the kitchen

grasshoppers and
wild rye in the hall

purple clover
returning bricks to earth

In Case of Stairs, Use Fire

— for my arthritis

I write to escape this gravity —
ligaments of sun-dried rubber
shrinking with every flare —

I look for my likeness
in something brighter
like the sun —

another body consuming itself
shining with exhaustion
releasing its borrowed light

Spring

The earth is made of stone and glass
and everything that happens
in between. All stories
center on love and heartbreak
yet for ten thousand mornings
I could walk through this rutted path, illuminated
by soft green buds that gradually unfold
into flowers of unbearable beauty
and never once think that the petals
will darken, furl, then drop, to become
nothing more than grains of thirsting soil.

A Few Things to Remember While in the Desert

Trees are not
 welcome; branches only

complicate landscapes.
 Shadows, the moon's

path and a distant
 drumming of thunder are all

that matter. Silence is
 heartbreaking, busy. Good

manners dictate blending with
 rock, thorn, cinnamon

adobe mud. Always work
 toward horizons, even though

they shift and waver. Mountains
 are sudden, bare, expecting you

to be the same. Prepare
 to listen to yourself, because

you can't hide under
 slivers of shade, and water

is worth killing for.

Threadbare

I am not the only one
looking toward night skies

to give thanks for consistency
because here on earth

a profound unraveling
began long ago. It may have started

with the invention of that damn
wheel, or when this hemisphere

was invaded; not for its forests and what lived
within, but for what lay beneath.

Heart cannot be cleaved from shiny rock
no matter how deep you mine.

Let us be clear:

It is an act of resilience when
trees sprout above parched soil

It is street theater when weeds
out of sidewalks crack

As non-negotiable filaments fray
we must learn resistance —

Listen to the red bird's song
its words are dangerous and good.

Andrés Berger-Kiss was born in Hungary, raised in Columbia, and currently works as Chief Psychologist for the State of Oregon. While this is his first U.S. publication, he has pub'd four poetry books written in Spanish, and an anthology of short stories in English, *The Sharpener and Other Stories*, was pub'd by The Latin American Literary Review Press.

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Ian D. Campbell is a former member of the California Parks & Recreation Commission and works as vice chairman of a crisis management firm. He lives in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains in L.A. and has work published in *Burning Word*, *California Poetry Quarterly*, *Caveat Lector*, and others.

Christine Cock is retired from a life of Zoo Conservation and lives in the woods of Florida. She has a B.A. in Creative Writing from Eckerd College and has work pub'd in *The Eckerd Review*, *Calyx*, *Nature Study Magazine*, and others.

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Darren C. Demaree is the author of five collections, most recently *The Nineteen Steps Between Us* (After the Pause Press, 2016). He is the Managing Editor of the Best of the Net Anthology and Ovenbird Poetry. He currently lives in Columbus, OH, with his wife and children, and has previously published in *Albatross*.

Robert Fillman won the poetry contest at the 2016 Pennsylvania Writers Conference, and he has been featured as a "Showcase Poet" in *The Aurorean*. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Chiron Review*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Third Wednesday* and others. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Lehigh U where he edits *Amaranth*.

Mark Frank spent 12 years in Japan where he studied agriculture, sake making, Buddhism, and Chinese-style poetry. Since 2010, he has worked as a market farmer, growing Asian vegetables on a small organic farm in southwest Missouri.

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Lyn Lifshin does not need a bio note because she has pub'd millions of poems in thousands of journals, and anybody who reads bio notes in poetry journals will have encountered her name numerous times. She has published numerous times in *Albatross* as well.

Tim Miller has poetry appearing widely, and his most recent book is the long narrative poem *To the House of the Sun* (S4N Books). He writes about poetry, history, and religion at wordsandsilence.com.

Jan C. Minich lives in Wellington, UT and Bayfield, WI. He has a book of poems, *The Letters of Silver Dollar*; two chapbooks, *History of a Drowning* and *Wild Roses*; and a book forthcoming from Mayapple Press titled *Wild Roses: Poems* in 2017. He holds an MFA from U of Iowa and a PhD from the U of Utah and is former lit prof at the College of E. Utah.

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Jeremy Yocum holds a BA in English Comp with a Poetry Concentration from the U of N. Texas. He has worked a gamut of unusual side jobs and daily gigs to support his creative pursuits. He currently lives in Brooklyn, NY. This is his first publication.

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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