

**POEMS OF TRANSITION**  
**February 2022**

**Februwinter**

a flat place next to the rock in the front flowerbed  
expects bright beaks of daffodils to break soil  
when earth unfreezes

chickadees remain quiet darting from feeder to fir  
as if they promised not to get my hopes up  
until earth unfreezes

daylight feels larger though the sun  
remains a faint disk in an undecided sky  
before earth unfreezes

in youth I would be at the river  
pressing bubbling ice under rubber boots

in youth I would be tramping a crusted beach  
hearing crackling sizzling waves of slush

in youth I would be hunting deer with my eyes  
between groves of beech and maple

in age I am at the window wondering  
mind wandering

—Tad Phippen Wente

## Shifting Delights

No matter the season, time was expansive  
wide open, abundant  
filled with softness, slowness.  
Even boredom was celebrated.  
The days of youth were spent outdoors  
rooted in holy ground, wonderment in the

return of the robin, rhubarb  
pastures of buttercups  
mud pies and cow pies  
endless nights under moonlight  
fireflies, cloudless skies  
monarchs, milkweed wishes  
troves of acorns, hickory nuts  
maple leaves to bury in, piles of burning brush  
paths forged through tall grasses, precarious houses in trees  
first snowfall, ponds scraped in eights by skates  
steeps hills for sleds, drifts of shrouded silence  
angels and men of snow

Time rolled with ease  
following nature's lead  
seasons marked only by shifting delights  
which over time  
became wasted time  
measured time  
scarce, against the time  
ticking on the clock.

All is relative with seasons.  
Near the end, I wait again, for the return of the robin.

—Angela Hoffman

## Health

In the emergency room  
the doctor says,  
like a brother to you,  
*Come on man, I'm begging,  
let me help.*

And I, after all these years  
having gotten this far, say  
*I'll leave if you don't.*

And the doctor like a lover  
down on one knee, says  
*Please*, he says

*Please*. And you,  
undone, say *Yes*.

Yes to better or worse,  
'til death do us part.

At twenty-three, we didn't know  
what it meant.

For richer or poorer.

In sickness or health.

And the doctor,  
solemn like God in His mystery,  
leads the way to the ward  
through another and another  
and another locked door.

—Mari Reitsma Chevako

## A Universal Question

Like that time, I knew there was a question I couldn't answer and the boys were flummoxed as well, about the meaning of the universe.

It was just a day at the shore, three classmates on summer vacation, kids talking kids talk, our bodies open to the sun's rays, bare torsos,

our heels digging into the sand, infinite grains running through our hands. It doesn't take much to make a ten-year-old dizzy, like

spinning, up-ended, even sick and scared. Just before, life had been perfect – classic blue sky, calm of a repetitive ocean breaking before us.

And then, it was over, that minute seared into the brain's circuitry. Kittens, when they see their reflection for the first time, will walk

around the mirror, trying to compass it. Every species surely has some moment to fathom a purpose. And then, it's over.

We move on, not out of boredom but because of the day's exigencies. We walk home from the beach, play games indoors, argue.

Who among us remembers that moment, becomes the astronomer or the poet bent on drawing lines through the sky?

—Ronnie Hess

## Redundancy

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Montana to Wisconsin  
in '75 our VW van rolled  
head over heels,  
spun end to end,  
black ice kicked that can

then down the road  
and through the years,  
Wisconsin to Montana

US 2, wide-load  
truck on truck: flatbed truck  
hay bales strapped beyond the bed,  
carries a pickup truck, tire flat,  
stacked high with hay bales;  
rental car and driver shudder

ii

Stanton Peak on Going-to-The-Sun  
pristine reflection  
floats on Lake McDonald

clear down, going-to-the-depth  
prisms ripple on red rocks, green rocks

snow on glacier,  
ice into river  
twin fawns  
eyes blink

—Mary Louise Peters

## Repavement

In springtime every year,  
when Eisenhower was president,  
the streets of our little Midwest farm town were recovered with tar.  
First came the gravel truck sprinkling out the back its load of stones  
over the winter worn asphalt road.  
Then came the tar truck—  
a steaming pot-bellied rotund barrel covered in gooey black splashes of hot smelly lava  
spitting out its fresh hot tar through a row of spigots just behind its own back wheels.  
The tar stuck to anything that touched it for days...  
clothes, hands, bike tires, car wheelwells, animal paws....

Most everyone hated it,  
it was a threat to car finishes, an impediment to getting to your house for a day,  
and a sleepless stinky night  
especially if the day had warmed up and windows were open for the evening's rest.  
But it marked spring.  
The lawns started needing hand mowing, the apple trees were blooming,  
everywhere green leaves emerged,  
in dad's garden little green puffs of potatoes, beans, lettuce, and radishes were emerging,  
and school would soon be out  
which was as close to a feeling of emancipation that us kids from five to eighteen  
would ever get.  
After a day, the gravel and tar would harden  
and become that year's layer  
added atop the many layers of years gone by.

But after a summer of freedom and fun  
fall came,  
and before the first cold snap and snow,  
trees bared themselves, we were recaptured by school,  
the residue of dad's garden laid in clumps,  
abandoned swatches of leftover leaves from potatoes, cucumbers, carrot tops, and onions--  
left to fertilize for next year.  
Then, when the sun cooled and daylight waned,  
we would rake what the trees had dropped,  
push those remnants into rounded piles,  
and burn those brown tattered and crusty leaves  
atop that tar covered road.

—Fred Kreutz

## Solstice

In my girlhood in the southern Midwest, summer was stepping into a sauna, the humidity teasing out a corona of frizz around my head that I would slick down with hair gel. And there was so much light. I loved summer's longer days, though not the collapse of school's structure, the scattering of pupils after the final bell.

Years later, in graduate school, I found an enclave of fellow lovers of words, of their sound and shape, how they could turn a person's inner world inside out. We did not need to explain to each other why we wrote words that no one might read or hear, that a story or poem has its own life.

The summer solstice has the most daylight of the year. I find its sunset bittersweet, thinking of the slow chipping away of the illuminated hours before the process has even started.

Months before my final graduation day, I looked frantically in each direction my classmates would fly, and I saw the sunset of lengthening days. New memories were weighted with the coming loss. A classmate asked me what I looked forward to after graduation, and I saw a cloudy midnight.

But I moved on because I had to and grew where I landed. In the years after, there have been many summer solstices: new friends, old friends, fellow writers, and adventures. I learned that while a season lasts, and after, there is still so much light in it. How when I saw night, it was because I had closed my eyes. Each perfect moment is its own and cannot be remade, but it can be lived in.

—Jenelle Clausen

## 8AM

Today I sit in front of  
my light box  
thirty minutes, 18" away  
early morning works best

A "Happy Light," they call it  
the latest tactic to remedy  
the creeping exhaustion  
that shadows my days

I remember a time when  
at 5 AM, I was cheerily outside  
bare feet in dew drenched grass  
swinging as high  
as I could go

I remember a time when  
at 6 AM, I was in the gym  
Jazzercising away those fifteen pounds  
that have always stood between me  
and happiness

I remember a time when  
at 7 AM every Saturday morning,  
I would call my mother on  
the phone down the hall from my room  
to talk about boys and midterms

I remember a time when  
at 6:30 AM, I was standing a snowbank, in the dark,  
waiting for a bus  
to get into my laboratory first  
for dibs on the best equipment

I remember a time  
when by 8 AM, I'd been up for 4 hours already  
with an insomniac toddler  
doing paperwork on the couch  
Teletubbies theme song  
playing in the background

I remember a time when  
when at 8 AM, buried in comforters and flannel  
in our theoretically heated apartment  
my husband could convince me  
that there was no real hurry  
to leave the bed  
that early

I remember a time when  
at 7 AM I'd come downstairs  
to the smell of frying eggs, toast in the toaster  
my backpack packed, sitting next to the kitchen table  
my baby sister in her highchair  
bouncing with joy as she saw me

I remember a time  
when energy was not an issue  
when there was more future ahead of me  
than past behind me  
the future boundless  
and full of opportunity

I tell myself  
that this is SADS  
just a seasonal thing  
and not some harbinger  
of darker things  
to come

But I'm not sure that's true

—Julie Kramer

## **The Shore of Me**

Pain  
rolling in  
like the tide,  
subtle at first then  
undeniably surrounding me,  
crashing on me, covering everything  
obliterating the rocks and sand, the grit of who I am,  
Everywhere and endless - no more peaceful shore, no happy picnic,  
no sunshine sand. Covered in cold despair I cry for what is gone and changed forever.  
Slowly ... slowly the tide of pain recedes. Bits and pieces of shoreline re-emerge  
a familiar rock in shifted sand, the same tree under a new sun,  
the shore of me still there – forever changed yet still me.  
I am left to discover the shore anew  
a healing peace emerging  
from the aftermath  
of storm.

—Katrina Serwe

## **Remembering Forever**

Did you ever have a day  
You believed you would remember forever?  
Promised yourself you would never forget?  
And then you forgot the details  
While recalling you had those days  
And you long to recapture them?  
My memory, like yours, holds those days  
Along with the many slights and hurts  
And traumas that I would like to forget  
But efforts fail and I often,  
Unexpectedly – recall these with pain.

—Jocelyn Boor

## **After Clara's Passing**

An eagle waits over a frozen field of snow after the funeral.  
I pull into the driveway,  
shake off my boots at the back door.  
Heat would be helpful in tea form  
or another log in the fireplace.  
I sit at the writing desk to notice what the pause brings.

Clouds prevent the sun from glistening  
off a frosted pane, a pole, the trees, a fence.  
The cat on the stair, absent the afternoon sun, curls into itself.  
The urge to cry goads me until I bark out a contralto strain.  
A kindly tissue softens the tension.  
Past the shivering is a deep well of calm.

Suzy Wedeward

## Ubi Sunt?

Back then, the apples in the orchard, ripe,  
the acorns and the berries of the mountain ash;  
we ran in jeans and flapping flannel shirts,  
with slingshots aimed the acorns and the berries  
at each other. And after dark built bonfires in the swamp.

Now I wait for colder days with apprehension,  
watch the weather forecasts, migratory birds.  
I mark the dying gardens, burning leaves,  
the neighbor's tree that – overnight, it seems –  
drops gold to form a carpet on the lawn.

Back then the neighbor's cousin, nubile, game  
to wrestle with us boys. Where is she now?  
Our fires in the swamp, the snares we used to trap  
the hares -- whose red urine trails led to their homes  
beneath the piles of brush – we roasted whole.

Back then the candles of our lives burned  
bright and hot. Our days were shaped  
by passion and desire. Now I watch  
the fading streetlights as they wink off,  
old men closing sleep-filled eyes.

And now my days are ending with a question.  
What is left? The fire's nearly out, pooled wax  
around a candle's base, while yet the stubborn wick  
still glows – the edge of darkness that's my soul.

—Ed Block

## **On the Rope Bridge**

swaying  
serrated shadows where  
there must be trees  
Parallel ropes seem  
to meet in the distance  
droplets scintillate on mist

look into abyss  
swallow  
soar above yourself  
standing  
small  
jute cutting  
into your fist  
blood pulsing – what  
made you rush  
into the middle  
and only then  
stop  
look back  
at beginnings, learn  
there is no guide  
no one beside you.

Take one step  
then another.  
Hold fast. Carry on.  
Reunion beckons.

—Shauna Singh Baldwin

## Riddle

When I was a girl, I whispered *Let me tell you my loves, my dear, my passions, and my fears.* With you alone, I shared the name of my first-born child—Julia— my favorite colors, a sketch of my high school crush, a drummer with long hair and thick lips like Mick Jagger's. To you alone, I revealed my destiny-- to be a painter. I vowed to go to the sea if the darkness ever consumed me. At night, I'd lock you up and hide the key inside a little yellow pillow, safe from six siblings.

A young woman, I wanted you in black and white, like the French movies I loved, perfect-bound. I piled you high, shut you in a box like Pandora's. I scrawled impossible stories, snippets of dialogue, fervent prayers and alchemical formulae, cacophonies of crows, murders of caresses, dreams of embroidered denim wedding dresses. Once I built a cedar chest to house you in and promptly lost the key. It crouches in the basement, a forty-year-old coffin that taunts, *Open me!*

Today I scribble random notes in narrow-lined scarlet notebooks, college-bound, that I kidnapped to my isolated home in the woods. Obsessed, I mark you every day, squaring sphinx with larynx, fiddle with muddle and ladle. I'm no longer afraid of losing you, since nothing rhymes, almost perfectly, with everything.

—Elizabeth Ternes

## Ordinary Days

We promised  
in sickness and health,  
through the depths and heights  
of our experiences  
to love until death do us part.  
After the I do's we assumed  
heights, not depths,  
only good times ahead.  
Forever young and healthy.

I could not have known  
I would hold my mother's hand  
for two weeks in a hospice  
until she was gone.

I could not have known my brother would  
die young, from war-related cancer, then  
you would get war-cancer, but survive  
after six months of chemo, two ambulance rides,  
and two stays in intensive care.

We've endured knee replacements,  
cataract implants, hand surgery,  
a pacemaker and two small strokes,  
grateful to take care of each other,  
coming out on the other side, repaired, restored.

When did we realize it was half over?  
Each birthday moving the notch of halfway ahead  
35? 40? 45? It does not compute.  
We have outlived our grandparents.  
Our parents are gone.  
It happened so quickly to be next in line.

Our job now, to enjoy ordinary days:  
this tree, this hammock in the breeze,  
these kayaks on quiet water,  
autumn's golden light on a wooded trail,  
the dry-cold night  
of this January full moon.

—Annette Langlois Grunseth

## **Witness**

I watched the succession of spring  
in flowers. Begun  
with crocus, then forsythia,  
lilac scent, bridal wreath, daffodil  
on until out of school.

Graduate and become,  
carefree summers done.

Now, it's scilla, bluebells,  
forsythia burst,  
lilac, bride's white spray,  
still the daffodil,  
on to tulips, roses, iris gems.

And with that yellow burst array,  
see kinglets range through, ruby-crowned,  
surprise tree charms,  
spark and move on  
to summer rite rendez-vous.

Graduate and become  
witness, caring one.

—Heidi C. Hallett

## **The Big Black Trunk**

When the seasons changed, my three older sisters and I would dive into the big black trunk in our upstairs, pull out all the clothes, heap everything onto a bed, and appraise our chances of finding items we could wear to school. Most of the clothing dated back to two Michigan cousins. A few newer items were presents from an aunt. As the youngest child, I had many options—few of them appealing. Skirts could be too short, too long, or just too worn out. Never mind out of style.

This trunk belonged to our Finnish grandmother who immigrated to Michigan's UP in 1895. Ironically, she arrived with this trunk filled with her clothes and the tools of her trade—she was a seamstress. She opened a shop and made dresses, even beautiful wedding gowns, for Finnish immigrants. Once she married, she made and sold clothing from their home, but failed to pass on her skill to our mother, her youngest daughter.

Are you a foreign exchange student? a substitute teacher once asked one of my sisters. Our clothes set us apart. Our working father grew up poor. A double whammy, he lived through the Great Depression. Money was to save, not to spend frivolously on anything as foolish as clothes. Once we sisters could babysit and earn our own money, we bought blouses, sweaters, and skirts as our funds allowed. A luxury, to walk into a store, select items from racks of clothing, go into a changing room, try things on, buy something new, hang it up in the closet at home, admire it, wear it—clothes that fit and that we had chosen.

Today, most of the local clothing stores have closed due to Covid-19 and online shopping. But I fondly remember those stores, that experience—options, options, dazzling arrays of clothing.

Now I shelter wearing old jeans and fleeces.  
My childhood prepared me for this—  
a closet full of old clothes that will see me through.

—Linda Aschbrenner

## **The Photographer**

Since he was a young editor,  
he has noticed the subtle changes  
in the oaks, the sky, the lakes,  
has trekked all four seasons  
through woodlands and wetlands  
with his Nikon or Pentax  
slung over his back.

But now he falls, has fallen,  
has put his house up for sale,  
will move into assisted living.  
Though aging, he still enjoys  
changes in the oaks, the sky, the lakes,  
still wants to amble where he once strode.

So, he bought a walker  
with big wheels and a seat.  
It's working pretty well, he says,  
except on the down slopes.  
The coneflowers welcome him.  
They don't care about the walker.  
They just want to have their picture taken.

—Jan Bosman

## **A Change of Seasons**

Strong winds tumble dry oak  
leaves across white floor  
of winter, one season tripping,  
spilling across the next.

In her zest for spring cleaning,  
my mother would always roll  
the living room's wool rug,  
somersault braids for a season of rest,

put down airy sewn squares  
of sisal or sea grass  
to cushion our busy feet  
for the hot summer.

My mother is gone,  
her influence of rolling rugs  
nearly forgotten in gray ashes,  
but in the lonely vacancy

of rasping leaves dancing  
across snow, I find  
unencumbered strength  
for my own next season.

—Lucy Tyrrell

## **Cancer, Love and Hope in the Afternoon**

You come beside my bed to whisper love  
as I lie weakened by my tumored nerves.  
A feeling, a white swath of silk above,  
floats on a breeze and touches me with curves  
so briefly, what your words declare down low.  
I know my mind and so my body's grief.  
I lift my heart to your soft sound, incho-  
ate, and the silken hum your voice in brief  
creates. Your murmurs dear inspire my hope.  
I ask for pillows covered with blue silk.  
I think I smell your body—cantaloupe--  
a subtle scent with gentle orange tilt.  
Towards the earth, away from heaven's hun-  
ger, I, on chiffon, glide. So, love's breath won.

—Sara Burr

**\*\* EXTRA POEMS \*\***

**After Ever**

Greater than the Greatest Story Ever Told  
are all the stories never told.

Back noise on TV murmurs of illegals  
lost on the thirsty Texas border.  
The Wolf moon's frosty breath draws  
stories on windows. Alone, a good night  
for a book, I cocoon under the heirloom  
throw, heavy with past perfumes.

As a child, I snuggled with my dad before bed  
under the same wool throw, comforted  
by the familiarity of lava soap and peppermint,  
when from the tattered red book, Snow White,  
Hansel and Gretel, and the jumping cow emerged,  
again and again, to live happily after.  
But a child doesn't want tales to end;

what happens after ever? Did the dwarfs grow;  
did the witch wither in the woods; whose face  
is on the moon? At last, all the tales read,  
because it is time for bed, *tell me a story*  
*about you, Dad*; but, too late, always  
bed won. So much still left unasked

when I found a prince hidden in my own book,  
and storied my own mostly happily after, telling  
those same great tales to my kids, grandkids, my father's  
presence woven into the old throw's threads. Still,  
wanting his story, I imagined his face in the full moon;  
heard whispers of stories to questions, never asked.

The backbone of my backstory remains unformed.  
I am not sure what my book is about.  
On TV, the stench attracts buzzards to thousands  
of nameless remains. With no prince,  
stories vaporize into the after ever;  
their families' grief,  
hanging...

—Macy Washow

## The Monday I Missed Yoga Class

The young woman who manages the prairie  
my partner works in two days a week until  
winter just emailed that her own mom—  
who is my age—is in the hospital for a stroke  
after she had two last year and couldn't be  
with her two granddaughters after school  
because she wasn't safe but also Covid  
and the flu or other respiratory things  
like whatever has gotten ahold of my partner  
this month, coughing and so short of breath  
I am back to 1998 and a previous partner  
in that last round of home hospice care  
after the denials, delays and treatments  
that bought time but not enough, and  
to that day I stumbled into our back yard,  
grabbed all the clothespins from the line,  
and threw them as hard as I could,

one

by one,

because I'd lost patience, complained  
how loud the oxygen concentrator was,  
how often I woke to the ringing of the  
little bronze bell by the bed, and I see  
I've done it again, I've lost it over fetching  
cough syrup, urging phone calls, though  
now I know nothing repeats exactly,

this is

another winter, another person and  
set of circumstances and symptoms,  
so please, this time can I just nudge,  
bring food and tea, and stay quiet  
after I walk the patient dog who,  
devoted and deaf,

didn't hear me yell

anyway.

—Sandy Stark

## **The Worst Winter of Our Lives**

It was the holidays that marked the seasons  
in my childhood since I couldn't tell from  
subtle changes in plants that flowered  
in November to April just where Fall  
ended and Winter or Spring began  
in southern states. Thanksgiving  
Christmas, Easter were my markers  
and Christmas was best because  
we visited family or they came to us  
The Pandemic hit me hard.  
No family for Christmas.

Unable to see our son after  
a skiing accident in mid-December  
we worried, even being reassured  
each day by phone that his leg  
was healing perfectly. He was in  
good spirits, taking gifts to neighbors  
planning to go back on the slope  
with his sons, feeling hopeful about  
American politics and vaccines.  
Then came January 6th.

We spoke that night at length  
appalled at the day's ravagement  
relieved that Congress would continue  
to do its rightful work. We all went to sleep  
thinking we had missed a cannon ball.

Then came January 7th, beginning with a call  
from Nick's wife to say he had passed out twice  
and was on his way to the ER in an ambulance  
soon followed by another saying simply  
Nick died. They did everything they could.  
The M.E. will give us a report. Come tomorrow.

I grew up knowing that my father's life  
was full of tragedies but didn't fully realize just  
how much it must have hurt to lose two mothers  
and a brother who had lived  
only half the normal span of life.  
I couldn't know how this death  
would cut my motherhood in half  
make me feel as if I had lost half of myself  
wonder how the mothers of Black men  
cullled by police or bigots  
have rebuilt their lives  
found a way to wholeness  
and service to others.

Ours were deaths  
that couldn't be helped but still  
I wouldn't wish this pain on anyone  
unless it would stop the senseless  
deliberate killing that fills our daily news.

—Estella Lauter

## Perpetuality

days beach-season warm  
wrestle into damp suit and flip-flops  
haul a towel over one shoulder  
three-block march down our street  
ends at an in-town lake  
personal summer playground

weekly lessons and daily open swim  
punctuate our calendar  
guards scan white-nosed  
    from the crimson tower  
cycle down to lead leveled classes  
minnows to musky

seaweed strands seek us  
wrap around a leg or drape  
over a head otter-slick  
emerging from a plunge  
slimy and disintegrating  
make us shriek and shiver  
as the bravest  
scoops and tosses it away

we return a little tanner  
walk slower drag sand  
on the edges of our feet and toes

return solo these days  
from the garden walk slower  
tired by the bending  
flannel shirt over one shoulder  
shoes rubber-squeak on rocks  
pause to hose off mud  
outside before hauling in  
the basket of lettuces and kale  
older leaves slimy underneath  
usher a shiver and a flash  
as I alone  
scoop and toss them away

—Maureen Adams

## Slide Rule

I'm sitting at a makeshift desk,  
small metal and plastic folding table,  
trying to calculate mileage, rest stops,  
overnights for a bus and truck troupe,  
and I ask: *How should I figure this?*  
(you would always ask me, any project,  
*what're you building?*)

So, I ask again, *How to figure this?*

And you stumbled an answer,  
you who kept your slide rule,  
could craft with tool and die maker precision,  
pull a camp trailer out of the mud  
in the Rockies, dog panting in the front seat,  
two kids squabbling in the back,  
mom gripping a paper map against  
the vast drop-off to the side of your focus.

Warm-hearted laugh, fishing, you were well  
until you weren't. Spring evening,  
the phone call: *Are you sitting down?*  
and I wasn't, and then I was,  
one flight later, sitting next to you,  
loops and turns of hospital tubes  
like so many wrong detours,  
or some color-coded GPS map in a vehicle  
passing through a major interchange.

Where did I leave the bus?

Now this isn't the order of how it happened  
but it is the way it all happened,

like putting the pier into the lake for the summer,  
section by section, you make whole as you go.

—Paulette Laufer

## Echoes

So many stories

tucked between couch cushions breathlessly holding weight

lining up beside silverware nicked from so many bites

underneath stacks of sweaters absent of cold shoulders

hidden deep within drawers resisting easy disposal

clutter clings and collects

calling me to reconsider

hopes and dreams as castaways

*I hear my brothers and sisters singing again when somewhere else was a real place*

Doors left ajar

inviting me to look once more

what has been lost

what has been gained what

should be illuminated then

left behind

*I hear my brothers and sisters singing again when somewhere else was a real place*

My short life

constricts my ability to see

now will be undone then reoccur  
the collection of complex minerals that is me  
returned to the collective

Instead I amplify the essential

send messages to the future to  
minds not yet built  
live there as thoughts  
as electrons winking on and  
winking off eternally

*I hear my brothers and sisters singing again when somewhere else was a real place*

—Debra Ahrens

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### **Dresses for Spring**

And suddenly it was Spring  
though the air was fog-breath cold  
the mud still rock hard on a wooden walk  
but hadn't mama just sewn those  
matching pink dresses—  
the ones with the stiff white aprons  
from the 1956 Simplicity pattern book.  
They were smart in sunshine yellow  
with an orange sash one year, then  
pale blue the next with a petticoat  
that stood out dancing above  
white anklets and patent leather shoes  
so elegant they said Welcome Flowers!  
And very surely it must be Spring because  
here are the new dresses pinned together  
with violets.

—Debra Monthei Manske

## **An Apple a Day**

You polished an apple, gleaming and red.  
He said there was another girl.  
A heart is like an apple.  
He said he liked to watch you walk down the hall.  
An apple is a fist of a fruit.  
He said it wasn't you.  
The tears in your eyes disbelieve him.  
The curled tongue, also, mistrusts.  
You wish you could stop yourself from crying.  
He said he was sorry.  
You stare out a blank window,  
desperate to blame someone.  
Instead of stars, you count your faults.  
You miss the transport of kissing,  
You begin at the body.  
Slow as mashed potatoes, you run at night,  
from streetlamp to streetlamp.  
You welcome gasping for breath.  
An apple bites clean.  
You teach yourself to eat the whole of it,  
seeds and all.  
He said he didn't mean for it to happen.  
Most days all you eat is an apple,  
dreaming of teeth marks.  
Your hunger is a kind of company.  
Over time, you become less.  
He said he'd see you around.  
You are hard to find,  
you take up so little space.  
One day your sister makes you laugh.  
You laugh and laugh, resetting  
all your appetites.

—Tori Grant Welhouse

As a child  
Springs and falls spelled change  
Load the car and trailer  
And drive nine hundred miles  
East to endless summers  
Or back for winter whiles.

As a wife  
Seasons came and went  
Peppered with regattas  
Some off a thousand miles  
A boat and gear in tow  
And trophies winning smiles.

Widowed now  
As the seasons change  
Both car and sailboat gone  
I'm just home on the range  
'Til Covid germs drop low  
There's nowhere safe to go.

—Thallis Hoyt Drake

## **Standing Tall**

How proud I was the day Miss Anderson had us sophomores walk diagonally across the gym stage. She critiqued our posture. And maybe our grace. It was one physical task I knew how to complete. Forever, I've looked back on that event as a keystone: the piece that offered confidence when I was 14. I've guarded that assessment and stifled every memory of slouching on the couch, scrunching in classroom chairs, gleeful jumping on twin beds with cousins.

Last year

a winter auto accident thrust my car into a spin, sent me into an arching flight over fence and barren farmer's field. With each thud I felt the cracking of vertebrae, foretelling months of recovery. My youthful mantra pales before the daily effort to stand erect, to keep on moving. Can a child sense the victory in controlling one's body and standing tall?

—June Nirschl

## The Photograph

From the sepia grained picture  
she stares at the camera, caught  
making a dirt pie, that she will taste  
if not stopped.

There are exciting opportunities  
in this alley—broken glass from beer  
and Cokacola bottles, brown, green  
and occasionally yellow or red from catsup

and mustard, but unfortunately, those always  
faded when she put them in the bucket  
next to her. Once she threw some stones  
at the tire shed in back of her and broke

the window. She had to be walked over  
to the building and tell the man she had done it  
and was sorry. She really wasn't sorry, she liked  
the sound the tinkling made. She liked glass.

In her pie, she is studding the mud with stones  
instead of glass; glass is saved for gluing  
onto a plate that grandmother had given her  
making a wonderful picture of colors.

Little does she know she is practicing  
the mosaic of her life to come, some mud, some  
blood, some bright yellow sun. All different  
shapes and colors, fitted together into a woman.

—Jackie Langetieg

## Emptying Home

Going to the house  
elicits weighty emotions  
I must return to breath

Shadows of old frames  
hooks deep like slivers, survive  
on the dusty walls

Note the pencil marks  
ascending the pantry door  
measuring my growth

Fingers touch worn spines  
stuffed with treasured recipes  
boxed up for Goodwill

A sibling arrives  
unsentimental and keen  
to quickly fill trash

Under kitchen sink  
antiquated oil can hides  
holding precious drops

Tea bag dangles, steeps  
languidly, as homesickness  
seeps through barren rooms

Finish what's begun  
probing treasures lost and found  
hug memories close

—Sharon Daly

## After Birth

My belly bulging under one absently-placed hand, I would lie  
on the couch in my underwear eating cookie dough  
from the plastic-wrapped roll, watching reruns  
of Maury Povich and Law & Order, dozing, sleeping whale  
on a quiet current. At times, I cleaned – everything.  
I knew in my bones that you had to come home  
to a shower stall gleaming, shower rod absent of a dust.  
All was instinct.

I brought you home that first day  
in a green Winnie-the-Pooh sleeper,  
tiny bib tucked under your pink-brown chin  
still raw with birthing.

I was grateful I didn't have to drive, your godmother  
towed us home in her lumbering white SUV, and I felt safer  
for it's high-seated view, you already stowed in  
in a zippered snow-suit, buckled just tight enough,  
alongside all the patient belonging bags and I don't recall  
what else, except that someone – I don't know who –  
had sent flowers. It wasn't your father.

I brought you in to my apartment, turned on the lights,  
and spoke aloud to the dim living room,  
“Welcome home, kiddo.”

Your godmother unloaded all the flotsam from the hospital  
balloons, clothes, diapers, papers with phone numbers and appointments.  
She kissed me on the cheek, then you,  
congratulating me again. Then left.

I placed you in the frilly white bassinet. You fussed.  
I placed you in the bouncy chair. You squirmed.  
I placed you back in your car seat.  
You settled and fell asleep.

Unsure if you were ready to be home either.  
Before you were there, it was just me.

— R.B. Simon

## Dresses for Spring

And suddenly it was Spring  
though the air was fog-breath cold  
the mud still rock-hard on a wooden walk  
but hadn't mama just sewn those  
matching pink dresses—  
the ones with the stiff white aprons  
from the 1956 Simplicity pattern book?  
They were smart in sunshine yellow  
with an orange sash one year then  
pale blue the next with a petticoat  
that stood out dancing above  
white anklets and white gloves  
so elegant they said Welcome Flowers!  
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