

The 2River View

21.2 (Winter 2017)



new poems by Lee Robison, Ayla Fudala
Paulette Guerin, Kathryn Jacobs, Babo Kamel
Mary Kasimor, Mercedes Lawry, David Murchison
Mae Remme, Jeanne Wagner, William Walsh

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Contents

Lee Robison
Rue Day

Ayla Fudala
Invocation
The Stranger

Paulette Guerin
Bathsheba
3:22 a.m.

Kathryn Jacobs
The Badlands
Knock Knock

Babo Kamel
Not Knowing He's Dead
What Began with Chagal



Mary Kasimor

ix

xiii

Mercedes Lawry

Low Maintenance

Muscle Memory

David Murchison

Mama Is Coming Home

What He Doesn't Know

Mae Remme

The Brighter the Light, the Darker

I Avoid the Homeless

Jeanne Wagner

Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Songbook

Unreal City

William Walsh

Good Vibrations, Villa Park, 1975

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Lee Robison

Rue Day

Because I have nothing better to do this winter afternoon
and the gray is more than empty trees and sunlessness,
and because the blood bright stab of the woodpecker's crown
is so quick and sure in my crag-limbed crab apple tree—
which I have not axed as useless because for two weeks in May
this tangle pulses with yellow scent and bees' buzz—

because I watch her jab the soft fruit I've left—
not for her or any other thing but only because
crab apples are sour, small, and tedious,

but in the highest emptiness, grim poverty
of my winter branches, a bird has found
reason to thrust the bright red revel of her head.

Ayla Fudala

Invocation

I make up songs for my bones
They sound like sleigh bells

I call my tongue a pistol
And blow back my head

My lips shred
Into petals. I drink
A whole gallon of gasoline

You taste like pitch pine
And grit between my teeth like sand.

I tear at your name,
but it won't budge.

I bless myself—
up, down, below.

The line of crows keeps shouting.
My cheeks are filled with your teeth.

I carve you out of stone
And close your eyes with sea shells.

Ayla Fudala

The Stranger

My mother died today
Or yesterday, I can't remember
A milkweed husk, floating
And now her house is filled with mice
Furring her piano keys like soft mold
Lining the breezeway with gray
Like a gently breathing carpet
Crushed beneath my naked feet
And all the ticking clocks
Have become owls, which swivel their heads
To tell you the hour
And hoot twelve times at midnight.

Paulette Guerin

Bathsheba

Above the kitchen smells
and soiled clothes, she climbed
toward the patch of blue,
the rungs fitting neatly

into the arch of each foot.
This was one ritual
for which she needed no prayer,
lowering herself into reflected sky.

The wind caught the curtain circling the tub.
She looked toward the cedars
darkening the hillside, their shadows
lengthening like spilled wine.

Paulette Guerin

3:22 a.m.

A man yells he's Christ risen
from the dead. He's pacing the block
for an angel who's late.

"Easter's not for another week," my husband says,
as if the man were a confused actor
in a passion play. When I wake again,

the air is clear of saviors,
the pre-dawn dark content
to let the blind lead the blind.

Kathryn Jacobs

The Badlands

A sandy, perforated, bowl-shaped land
ringed round with drop-cake mountains. Oh, and grass
in isolated short-cropped nubbly stands
mowed by enthusiastic prairie dogs
who pop out of the punctures, eying us.

Perched upright with tyrannosaurus hands,
the only edible that isn't grass
eyes all potential predators, and flags
us (Polyphemus-eyed) when we come near.
We never even see them disappear;
the prairie just erases them: here, gone—

And we're gone too, as quickly as our cars
can leave behind the pale-pink mountains where
the shimmer-light can blind you. Its like Mars,
a place to stop and gawk at, full of pits
that whisper "this is life" until you're scared
they might be right, and we're the counterfeits—

and we deny that, loudly: drive along
the scenic overlooks, then flee. Meanwhile
the well-adjusted natives nibble their
discouraged-looking strands and watch us, miles
of shiny tourists getting out of there,

afraid we'll start dissolving—

Kathryn Jacobs

Knock Knock

There is no Dan here; just a puppy dog
who says he's hungry (poor sad puppy). If
it makes her happy she can call him Dan.
But all of us—whoever she calls Dan—
we call our mother "Thomas."

Yes, we know
she doesn't like it. But she calls us "Dan;"
which one's supposed to answer? There are times
that paralyzes us—

so there's no Dan.
But yesterday there was a lego-snake
who zig-zagged back and forth that felt like Dan,
and sometimes when he's feeling extra big
he says he's "Kathryn," which is fun because
of course his sister hates that.

Mostly though
Dan is a word that other people use
when they want answers, and there is no Dan,
so no one has to answer—

Babo Kamel

Not knowing he's dead

he keeps dreaming life
around him. The lovers next door still
sigh through tangles of stars
and the stun of dawn.

The milkman awakens from his past
delivers milk like morning news in bottles
cream rising to the top reminds him of headlines
of one war ending and another about to begin.

In the schoolyard, down the street, children
chase each other into their futures
shriek stories that escape meaning
and break against the sky.

After last night's rain, autumn leaves
fall into red and yellow abandonments
collaging on the ground, those random footprints
leading there, and there and there.

Evening and the dream tires of itself
rolls over, decides what color to follow.
The man calls to the dream as if it were a lost dog
leans against grief's shoulder with an empty red leash.

Babo Kamel

What began with Chagall

They were out of place, this explosion of roses in the swirl of
blue town
The neighbors awoke not to the gentle sun
but to the grin of crimson.

The roses were all wrong, blooms as huge as impossible promises
but they were loud and brash and totally in love
with themselves.

Folks on one side of the street kept their distance
gathered blue paint in the fields. Those on the other side
knelt before the roses, learning the language.

On Tuesday, the roses blast open
a shrapnel of petals landed on roofs and roads.
Landed on the faces of the town folks.

At first the children ran around trying to catch the petals on their
tongues
Church bells were silenced, suffocating in petals.

By Wednesday, some neighbors were begging for blue
to pull out the red thorns from their skin.

Mary Kasimor

ix

because the wired
asylum
of my love
is
intellectual
because I bake small
cakes
made
of cardamom
the brain feels
the taste
a folk tale found
in
a dumpster
reveals her tongue
she sings
like
a teal soprano
The tongue absorbing
love
an after
longing
of
a lemon
purchased in
bleached darkness

Mary Kasimor

xiii

there was this situation about power
the commodity was blood
trading veins hollowed
us out
eating the scabs

cut rate
the diamonds drew blood
dominating our punctured diameters

we sat in the snow
weakened as we leaked out
like bleach water

we were the bombs downgraded to gun power
we were the victims incinerating our bones

crawled out
of our orifices
leaked into the sea
fish bled sea water
an immense ending says we are blood
coagulating with nature

coagulating the blood of martyrs
in deep freeze sitting out in the snow

Mercedes Lawry

Low Maintenance

The loose step at the bottom
has rotted through, saturated
with winter rains. Now propped
on bricks, wedged into dirt,
not worth repair because
the whole damn porch has gone
to hell and I'm taking the long view
on total collapse. The house
is a bucket of wounds and ruin.
I'm gambling on which of us goes first.
But the tulips are bold this year,
all scarlet stripes and blood reds.
And the pear tree still fills
with milky blooms even though
I hacked the branches that were reaching
like tentacles toward the wires,
averting one more domestic disaster
that could have spelled the end,
and given the high sign to the wrecking ball.

Mercedes Lawry

Muscle Memory

Wasn't the cool shell of my belly
a place of sweet repose? Did I dream that?
Wasn't there tenderness in the way our feet
barely touched in sleep?
Time turns odd, stretching like elastic
only to snap back, quick, with a sting.
I don't know if I'm waiting for dusk
or slipping into the seams of the hours.
I hold fast to the harbor we once made,
muscle and bone entwined, breath
rivering our skin. This remains,
in the strange ways grief grows old:
I felt safe and tethered to the world.

David Murchison

Mama Is Coming Home

The pinion over there survived last year's wildfire. The other trees over there burned. They looked like me when I am pissed off and pulling my red hair, and they looked like the cherry on my love's joint right now, inhaling, exhaling, flicking ash into his cupped palm. My love's name is Joseph. He is smiling, staring at the sand beneath our feet in the arroyo right now. I stare at him and squeeze my hands until the knuckles whiten.

My love Joseph is sheriff of this godforsaken town we live in, and I hate to see him high.

"Joseph," I say. "Please don't do it anymore."

And he listens and looks at me, eyes flashing like a lightning bug as he reaches into his pocket for the diamond ring I know he stole from the pawn shop at gun point.

"Mary," he says. "Marry me you bitch."

Oh, how I do love a romantic man with a good vocabulary. I smile and can't help but say, "Joseph, darling, I do."

He only stares at me like a fiery brand ready for action. He inhales, puffing, hugging the joint with his lips, and now rubbing his thumb in his palm, he takes the ash and wipes a cross on my forehead, then he spits the joint into the dry dead brush right here by our feet to start a wildfire like he did last year. The fire that the pinion over there survived.

"Joseph," I say. "Say a prayer. We might not live another day, but don't you worry, mama is coming home."

David Murchison

What He Doesn't Know

Every morning my husband looks towards the sky from
His knees while I shuffle my tarot cards with my cup of
Coffee, crossbones and angels, every morning, my husband
Prays every morning and I look at the future with x-ray vision,
Flashlights and scented candles, he says he loves me every
Morning, my husband does, a lock and a skeleton key, but I am
Always the one that lifts the crystal ball, tick tock, always—
The basketball sized crystal ball my husband gave me for
Christmas after delivering his midnight mass,
Vinegar on vanilla ice cream—
I always squeeze the crystal ball as hard as I can,
Two folded hands, vices of faith, I always squeeze until it fits
In my palm, track marks, life lines, the crystal ball
Becomes the size of a marble, steering wheels, the marble,
A prayer, that weighs 72.789 pounds, landing gears, the 72.789
Pound marble my husband always carries into the laundry
Room, thank you, to be placed in the washing machine
a daily polish, always helping me, loving me, carrying the 72.789
Pound marble softly, distantly, fearfully, like a lie
My husband carries the marble into the laundry room
Where the Shroud of Turin spreads, covering the ironing board
Waiting to wrap the marble and be placed in the washing machine—
Change sounds like shattering glass:
For the first time
The marble rolls off
And lands on the floor, exploding, thousands
Of shards become rose petals, black and white,
Pieces of faith

Mae Remme

The Brighter the Light, the Darker

I am beautiful, though not in the way you say,
but in darkness and a light you've never had.
Push these words between your hands:

I will never be the woman of your dreams.

I am the woman at the small of your back, the delicate
curve that keeps you crawling, that tight
hard place you've never tried to flex.

I can bend to break it all, but won't

because you are scared: of stained sheets,
of punching cramps, of used tampons.
My skin is cruel where it pulls—an angry

scarlet grin frames the crescent of my hip.

Stretch marks whiten into ruts
and take blame for the hatred. Scars.
From growing, from cutting

a map of myself into myself, coral

reefs, bars of blood, cracked ladder rungs.
Now rest the doubt inside.
Nothing is extinguished.

Burn it all. I'll keep coming back.

Mae Remme

I Avoid the Homeless

and the good-
looking brothers of exes
and coworkers.

I want
an obsession deep enough
to dip the moon.

I want to slip my bucket into a well,
come up with a swarm of bees
and drink from the vibrating sting

until my throat throws a new voice,
all honey and fire and smoke
so thick you'd think it was the good shit.

I want to return to my other self,
break the backs of my hands, to beat
her into a glittering happiness.

Jeanne Wagner

Unreal City

for my mother

San Francisco

A dream-city. The right place,
seeing her own face
in a nightscape's window.
A skyscraper's view of the rarified air.
The wide desk and swivel chair
of success.
Grey lapels and phones ringing
like prayers to God.

Sacramento

A house that was both her home
and later, yes,
a series of unappeasable
rooms.
The table set with kitschy red napkins
and placemats,
where she always felt like a guest.
Every conversation,
a scene staged without a part
for her to play.

Afternoons she'd drive downtown
in her Nixon-cloth-coat
and high-heel shoes, a pretty
new hat,
though it was summer and 100 degrees.
I used to work in the City,
she'd say to the clerk,
who'd smile,
thinking This is a city too.

Jeanne Wagner

Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Songbook

One theory has it that song
was the beginning
of speech,
and I'd like to believe it,
because the first time I listened to Ella
I was thirteen.
I could hear my brother
in the next room
making the sounds of pain
and thwarted longing
mixed together,
just like Ella singing the words
of Cole,
and I knew
it was the cry the body makes
trying to free itself
from that dumb-show of joy
and loss
we called the soul.

William Walsh

Good Vibrations: Villa Park, 1975

She was the kind of girl you only read about
or dreamed of in a song—I don't know where
but she sends me there summed up my feelings
for Cathy Bertellotti, and because she loved The Beach Boys,
I bought *Endless Summer* at Sam Nash,
trudging home in a slosh of snow,
my black boots iced over and heavy.

If any girl was perfect, it was her, and if she had only known
our connection, she might have fallen in love
with me. Somehow,
The Beach Boys brought her closer,
the stadium wind whipping around her brown hair,
eyes so sparkling crisp,
it was like I could see into the future.

I was in love with her
that first winter, and she was in love
with my older brother,
who liked her hip-hugger bell-bottoms
snuggling the bow of her hips,
and as the weather warmed to spring,
his arm wrapped around her waist, fingers sliding
through her belt loop, locking on.

In the street,
someone fouled off a baseball at first dusk, bouncing
off a work truck, into a side yard
where my brother and Cathy sat in the bushes, making out
against the cool bricks.
I stared at her unfaithfulness, angry
that she would do this to me when what I wanted was her
to watch me become a great baseball star.

A few weeks later, Cathy moved on
to another boy. My brother
and I started a rock band.

William Walsh

There will always be a heartbreak song
pounding in my head,
a tune on some California beach
I've never been to: blonde surfers, bikinis
and towels spread open,
Coke bottles being popped
and guzzled down a burning throat,
where a dog can run wildly in the surf,
and kids will scream in the crashing waves.

Up and down the shore,
toes will wiggle in the sand
and feet will slowly tap the beat
from a transistor radio. Some boys will play *Frisbee*,
some will toss a football, and there will be a girl—
there's always a girl lying under an umbrella,
like Cathy, beautiful and oiled, Ray-Bans hiding her eyes
as she follows the boys covertly,
completely ignoring them.

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Contributors

Ayla Fudala graduated in May 2016 from the University of Pennsylvania with majors in Environmental Studies and English. She has taught creative writing, worked at Penn's Kelly Writers House, and edited for *Symbiosis Magazine*.

Paulette Guerin is building a tiny cabin in Arkansa and blogging about it at paulettguerinbane.wordpress.com. Her poetry has appeared in *Glassworks*, *Main Street Rag*, *Stonecoast Review*, and elsewhere. Her chapbook is *Polishing Silver*.

Kathryn Jacobs is editor of *The Road Not Taken* and a professor at Texas A & M—Commerce. *Wedge Elephant* was published last year by Karen Kelsay Press. Other poems have appeared in *Measure*, *Mezzo Cammin*, and elsewhere.

Babo Kamel is a winner of *Lilith Magazine's* Charlotte Newberger Poetry Prize. Her poems have appeared in *Alligator Juniper*, *The Greensboro Review*, *Juniper*, and *Rust + Moth*, and



other poems are forthcoming in *Painted Pride Quarterly*.

Mary Kasimor has work in *Big Bridge*, *Glasgow Review of Books*, *Nerve Lantern*, *3 AM*, *Touch the Donkey*, *Yew Journal*, and *Otoliths*. Her recent poetry collections are *The Landfill Dancers* (BlazeVox Books 2014) and *Saint Pink* (Moria Books 2015).

Mercedes Lawry has published poetry in such journals as *Natural Bridge*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry*, and *Prairie Schooner*. She has also published two chapbooks, most recently *Happy Darkness*, short fiction, essays, and stories and poems for children.

David Murchison has an MFA in Creative Writing from The University of Arizona and an MA in Counseling Psychology from St. Mary's College of California. He now teaches creative writing to at-risk youths, juvenile delinquents, and adult inmates.

Mae Remme earned her MFA from the University of Alaska--Anchorage in 2015. Her work has recently appeared in *Tethered by Letters* and *Word Riot*. She lives at the end of the Sterling Highway with her friends and family in Alaska.

Lee Robison lives west of Paradise, Montana, with his wife and cat. His poems have appeared in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, *Owen Rister Review*, *Plains Poetry Journal*, and *San Fernando Poetry Review*.

Jeanne Wagner is the winner of the 2016 Sow's Ear Chapbook Prize. Other poems appear in *Alaska Quarterly*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Hayden's Ferry*, *Shenandoah*, and *Southern Review*. She is on the editorial board of the *California Quarterly*.

William Walsh teaches in the MFA program at Reinhardt University. His most recent collection of poems is *Lost in the White Ruins*. His work has appeared in *AWP Chronicle*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *North American Review*, and elsewhere.

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About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry and art, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series. 2River is also the home of Muddy Bank, the 2River blog.

Richard Long
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