

# The 2River View

24.3 (Spring 2020)



new poems by

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Bruce Alford

## Homeless (excerpt from *Devotional*)

i

I open the door. *Help me.* Poor words. A woman asks for water. Because of her importunate look, I give her as much as she needs. I will not put out the outcast. I will not shut the door. She is worth more than ten thousand sparrows.

Yes, even when I was poor, I gave to the poor. Even when I was ill, I cared for the sick—even when I was ick of love, with patience, I knelt and prayed.

ii

**The earth is the Lord's and all its furniture**

The homeless woman comes to my door and asks for a glass of water. My greatest weakness lies in pity.

But I understand. Behold, I consecrate and dedicate my will to her will; I let her in. And she drops into a chair. Spider veins abuse her legs, and I am walking here with water. Now, I give her the glass.

Glance at her clothes. Use has beaten them bare.

There are threads of meaning and potential here that we can't quite understand.

Bruce Alford

iii

*Help me.* I have given too much. Too late, I try to conceal myself and wait for her to leave.

*Help me to my feet.* She takes my hand and carefully rises from the chair. I think, I think and reach down and wait. The frail body shakes.

Too often, wretchedness goes unnoticed. Beauty is eldom seen in pity. Beauty is seldom enough.

Christ beautifully humbled himself to the point of death on a cross.

iv

To escape the crushing crowd, she comes to the well.

But, no matter where you go or what you do, you can't outrun your thoughts.

Look what I found, she cries then bends and picks a penny from the carpet of our apartment.

(You could say that she is gone.)  
Call her the daughter of King Saul.

The madness between the two comes from the Lord my god look at her spotted, ropy hands; the eyelid entombed in its hood or those deep lines around her mouth, her marionette's jaw.

*Bruce Alford*

v

When the homeless woman came to my apartment  
I was tired and needed rest

The woman without a house stands in my doorway  
and imagines herself inside. Ripe carpet fills the air  
I am living in a tomb, but to her, this is something  
good.

To see it all-together, is there a greater wound?

I have furrows of intellectuality, folds between the  
eyes and loosening jowls. I need some heavy help  
with my self-esteem and slow belief; I don't feel old  
but I have a human face. Permit me to imitate the  
drink that she longs for.

Carry me away.

*Josette Akresh-Gonzales*

## **My Son Distrusts People Who Are Happy All the Time**

what did people do before sponges / my son asks  
were their dishes even clean? / what did they do / for  
creation myths?

historians will find our merry objects  
formed a plastic layer / disposable / we throw away

everything / reddit says they used rags / empty flour sacks /  
in the Reckless Decade of the late 19th century / they  
reused scraps

of clothing / stiff horsehair brushes / even sand  
now the Laminate / the Anthropocene / an era floating atop

they used a tub for scrubbing / a bowl for rinsing / I explain  
to my son / who has a general distrust of mirth / another  
word for God

is my stubbornly optimistic method / of blowing the  
contents of my nose  
into a plain white hanky / I throw in the wash / over and over

## **Oceans are warming at the same rate as if five Hiroshima bombs were dropped in every second**

I was once floating in a bag of waters.

My mother takes out her breast  
and nurses my brother, slaps my sister,  
comes home from work  
slumped at the table where we've pushed all our  
overcooked broccoli

*Josette Akresh-Gonzales*

on top of the plate heaped with chicken,  
potatoes, her own portion of trees.

"What do I look like,  
your garbage can?" she says.

"I already ate a whole bag of chips  
at the office. I already ate—" she says,  
forking cold meat into her mouth,  
"—the waiting room was filled.

I had the woman with the ingrown toenail  
who needed antibiotics, the man  
with the alcohol problem and high  
blood pressure—"

I'm recalling this because my teenage son too  
once floated in a sack of fluid,  
though I hate to remind him,  
the coral is bleaching more every year.

"We could fly to Mars," says my son,  
"create an atmosphere  
by melting Mars's ice caps  
by dropping millions of Hiroshimas."

In a century or two the radiation will dissipate  
as it's doing at Chernobyl, where now vodka sellers  
hawk Atomik, say it's safe to drink.

My son wants to do that, to believe  
in "Planet B," in Elon Musk—  
oxygen above water—  
a kingdom of potatoes.

*Matthew Freeman*

## Beautiful, Finally

Tonight, as my heart  
may or may not be failing me,  
as the wind is blowing  
my papers all over the place,  
I know  
I have stayed true  
to my desire.

I can't tell anymore  
whether schizophrenia causes pain  
or pain causes schizophrenia  
and now it doesn't matter.  
The only thing that matters  
is what word I use  
and the medical discourse  
that aims to erase it.

It could have been my dad yelling  
or my mother's innuendo  
or my reading of the Old Testament  
that made me think  
my old buddy Red was mad at me.  
The miracle is that I do not care.

It's funny to get off the elevator  
and slightly turn my head  
and see  
that someone's already  
pushing the close door button.

*Matthew Freeman*

## Parkview Place Eclogue

Cursed from the start, I signed  
the papers at Parkview Place  
and took my seat in the smoking area  
among the damaged.

A well-dressed and good-looking newscaster  
I'd gone to high school with  
came up and started questioning me.

"What happened to you? Are you on medicine?"

"Sure, I take a lot of meds."

"What do you take them for?"

"Well, I've got schizophrenia."

"I've never known you to act schizophrenic."

"That's because I take the meds, dude."

I never really found out why he was  
there. And when I told my nurse  
about the conversation she said I ought  
never tell anyone about my diagnosis.  
And soon I got cheerful. I'm constantly aware  
and there's an anhedonia and everyday stress  
that no one sees but I think I'm doing good work.  
Just yesterday at Wendy's  
a girl in the back whispered my name.

Abriana Jetté

## Fury

I was being killed. Murderous mothers  
flapped their wings. To feel how they suffer

I sang along. Half sleep. A precarious situation,  
yet I accepted their invitation for lamentations.

Warbled on. Lingered. Disappeared. My spear  
my dimmed conscience. My vision, Lear

like, a fool for casual inaccuracy,  
thinking of daughters and mad literality.

We swung up against sinning more sinned  
than sin; meaning: leave no trace of the feminine.

When it was over, I licked my fingers. Figured  
I'd devour whatever notes of bitter-

ness remained. Lustful, loveless, shit out of luck,  
three dream sisters whispered: *destruct, destruct.*

*Abriana Jetté*

## Persephone, Refrain

It's not as easy as just deciding to leave  
and leaving. Consider the people involved  
who love the life they live. Including me.  
Whatever existed before dissolves  
when we're together. Including me.

I'd bend over backwards and beg on my  
knees if I thought it might do something  
to change his mind. Instead I pay the price,  
play the fool. Casually slip off my ring.  
Time is my punishment, I pay its price

whenever oxygen escapes the leaves.  
I could have learned to love the life we lived.  
Time and time again they let me leave.  
What's going to happen when I no longer exist?  
Eventually, everything dissolves. Including me.

*Brady Thomas Kamphenkel*

## Crossing the Bridge

I saw someone crossing the bridge  
and worried it was you. If it were  
you would have missed us, here at our fire.

We lit it early so you could find us beneath  
our willowy smoke. The wind makes us cry  
round our fire, which is new, and needs the wind

it fears will smother it. If that was you I saw crossing  
the bridge, your eyes unseeing above that deep drop,  
you have missed us: you have gone too far.

*Brady Thomas Kamphenkel*

## Two Forms in Love

The blue snow catches  
The falling orange light which had  
Been hopeless.

The blue catches fire thus  
And the orange is quenched  
And takes a steady shape.

In time, the light will admit  
It is not  
Really orange.

And the snow  
Will let the steady blue shape it'd taken  
Fall away.

It will be a close night in spring. By then  
They will have both already vanished  
Each stepping carefully into the other.

*Tanner Lee*

## **New Geography of Faith**

These are the years of thy will be done. I pray and listen  
and won't stop listening. Outside Salt Lake, peaks reach

towards God and nestle us like open-grazing hens,  
giving us rules and a place to climb, one limb

in front of another, as if carpeted walls  
and massed produced pulpits were

places of my understanding, as if they didn't sprout  
from a fault line and ripple the gloss

we no longer see through. My knees are pressed  
against the ceiling, Father,

we disagree about ownership.  
Though the peaks hear our hymns,

we are shielded by smoke, and we prepare  
our gas lamps for a new geography of faith,

where parents don't fold into their newborn linens,  
where there's not much to compare yourself

except the coming and going, and moments  
of realization between vast, compassionate silence.

*Tanner Lee*

## The Devil Will Keep You From Freezing

You'll never see him coming. He says forget everything about being alive. There is more to beauty than erasure.

He tells you in two years your faith will wake up blind and remove its face. Both eyes will be exposed

like late blooms, and each pink hand plucked and savored. In the twilight he will sear your skin until every smile

is shadowed in shame. He will drag your polished shoes to the stairway. You will promise him in rooms

of gold and velvet. When you see others, approach them. Welcome your death now.

*Tatiana Retivov*

## **Jailbait**

Even I was  
someone's  
jailbait  
once upon  
a time sweet  
sixteen and  
the Beech  
Forest Trail  
full of bloom,  
a case of serendi-  
pity when  
in the glen  
I stumbled  
upon Danny,  
a flute playing  
minstrel & 32  
years old.

Along the coves  
of Provincetown  
there were many  
stoned hippies &  
guys in drag &  
what not. But what  
I remember best  
was the rock candy  
& the way it rhymed  
in my mouth with  
the pebbles on  
Herring Cove  
Beach under  
my tender butt.

*Tatiana Retivov*

## Sea Foam

I have watched the sea  
foam at the mouth  
as it reticulates my psyche.

Who would have thought  
that I would lament  
its transient activity.

I who have harbored  
the lost and the weary  
at some dock of the bay

in the New World of which  
I have grown somewhat  
disdainful if not disappointed.

Nevertheless the sea  
beckons me with its  
polluted foam at the rim

of waves forever recalling  
some coastal scene  
soliloquized by would be

Lake poets hungry for salt.  
I am not one of them.  
For the New World

is all ocean and lacking  
in sea. Despite its being  
from sea to shining sea.

*Samn Stockwell*

## **But order nonetheless**

I boarded the subway to the heat rush, the smell rush, my hair blown back—seats alight with crushed candy and popcorn, a magazine in half, and the sprawl of assorted legs, highly decorated, some, in patterned tights with leopards running up the thighs. And a bench hunched over the glow of a phone—surely everyone thinks they are umbilical cords to the life above where someone is recognized as the familiar animal of a pizza stand, the animal of a family.

I sit in the coffee shop and read the news of the citizens and notice the coats padding the back of the seats. Ignorance is biting at my calves and I don't want the sky to crush my sleepy head. I think I can put my gloves and hat aside and yet not lose them – everyone goes on if they can, even if they lose the parts that were meaning.

What will people think of me if they do? How many pairs of socks, how many shirts have I buttoned on to me? Such birds and waterfalls as I needed to tunnel to another self—I once piled stones into a staircase in a clump of wet ground. I dragged and tamped them into a series of steps—and above my head it went and I coaxed some of the branches out of the way and axed others. This is true. With no greater faith than my own woods, I hewed a place for me.

*Samn Stockwell*

## On writing

You can write a note to a creature sleeping under your bed, you can write a note to ice cream, to bracelets and anything jangling from you. You can straighten the line of your cardigan if you wear your cardigan to match the glints of your earrings. You can, more plainly, think of your ears as glints, subterranean glints and interior music of their own, and you can wash and wash the table you write on, until it's the hue of almonds and that plain for you.

*Teresa Sutton*

## **Burning Times**

Mother, if you saw yourself reflected  
in the mirror of this poem's inky half-tints,  
those blues and purples of ghostly nights,

would you burn it alive too? Would you  
recite the names listed on the wall  
of shame, the mothers and their mothers,

threads broken and knotted back together,  
the tincture of certainty that they can  
trace an arc of self-disgust far back

by following weary spliced cords  
to the garden and the first mother,  
the mother of all mothers, her daughter

and all the daughters that scrawled  
their mother's names in books trying  
to redraft contours, to shift outcomes

and lessen the mythic significance of fire's  
legacy, its living remnants, embers that beg  
to stay hidden in the name of bearing witness.

*Teresa Sutton*

## Last Night I Read That Darkness Can Be Undone

by simply jumping off the ledge of your reflection  
into a still lake or even a puddle.

When you hear a dog barking somewhere outside,  
run to the streakless window, look down the road

in this quaint old town where you've resided  
half asleep trying to learn who you are without him

or her or the crows that once filled your yard  
or the rocking chairs that faced the moon.

Use the scissors of your fingers to remove the top  
of your head and bid the updraft to unsnarl the tangles

of nightfall that you have allowed to creep  
around your ankles and neck.

*John Whalen*

## The Absinthe Academy Bar and Grill

After Verlaine's arrest, I could have left town,  
I just couldn't have gone anywhere.  
When I drank beer, I lived in a dark damp house  
Under the bar stools. Other folks—drinkers all, fellow  
thieves,  
Concrete poets—with the same leather coat I favored  
Lived there too.  
But when I drank absinthe in the heat of your anger—  
You wanted to shoot me?  
The one who pulled you into the fresh air?  
Shoot me?—  
When I drank absinthe even tall ceilings crowded me,  
And later the hangover mornings came on all sudden.  
I woke up on the bus to Thompson Falls.  
I woke up anywhere.  
And there my head was: a galvanized steel blob  
Banging around in shards of light.

*John Whalen*

## The Umbrella Thief

André-Joseph Salis de Saglia was a famously gay, absinthe-drinking friend of Verlaine known for stealing umbrellas. Decades later, he was the subject of a Picasso painting.

Preparing late breakfast for his father,  
The Umbrella Thief contemplated rain.  
Rain, he figured, was dozens of wet rags  
Snapping at the top of one's bald head.

In black rain littered with golf umbrellas,  
If someone approached you with an honest  
Plan, then the wind might smell clean  
But would be shot through with chiding hail.

His father shouted that he liked oatmeal.  
The Umbrella Thief was serving omelets.  
Do you want some tea, he asked gently.  
His father said coffee. I always want coffee

And who are you and where's Mother?  
The Umbrella Thief couldn't remember everything either.  
That dark Burberry on the coat tree,  
He'd stolen it from someone. Who?

*The 2River View*, 24.3 (Spring 2020)

## Contributors

Bruce Alford teaches poetry at Louisiana State University. His debut collection, *Terminal Switching*, was published in 2007 by Elk River Review Press.

Josette Akresh-Gonzales was a finalist in the 2017 Split Lip Chapbook Contest. Her poems are in *Breakwater*, *Pank*, *The Pinch*, and elsewhere. She lives in the Boston area and bikes to work at a nonprofit medical publisher.

Matthew Freeman holds an MFA from the University of Missouri—St Louis. Coffeetown Press will soon be publishing his latest book *Ideas of Reference at Jesuit Hall*. He is also a songwriter.

Abriana Jetté is an editor and educator, with research interests in creative writing studies and poetics. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Harpur Palate*, *The Moth*, *Poetry New Zealand*, and *The Seneca Review*.



Brady Thomas Kamphenkel lives in Duluth, Minnesota, where he teaches at The College of St. Scholastica and Lake Superior College. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Crab Fat*, *The Freshwater Review*, *SLANT*, and elsewhere. His MFA is from the Stonecoast in Maine.

Tanner Lee lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His poems appear in *The Cardiff Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *Entropy*, *Hobart*, *Weber: The Contemporary West*, and *West Trade Review*. You can find him on twitter @heyttannerlee

Tatiana Retivov was born in New York to Russian émigré parents. She has lived for over 25 years in Ukraine, where she engages in literary translation and creative writing.

Samn Stockwell has published in *Agni*, *New Yorker*, and *Ploughshares*, among others. Her two books, *Theater of Animals* and *Recital*, won the National Poetry Series and the Editor's Prize at Elixir, respectively.

Teresa Sutton lives in Patterson, New York. A retired English teacher and retired adjunct professor, she has three published chapbooks. Her third, *Breaking Newton's Laws*, won first place in the 2017 Encircle Publications Chapbook Competition.

John Whalen is the author of *Caliban* (Northwest Emerging Poets Series, Lost Horse Press) and *Above the Pear Trees*, which won the 2014 Floating Bridge Press chapbook contest. His work has appeared at here in *2River* and in *CutBank*, *EPOCH*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Verse Daily*, and *VQR*.

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## About the Artist

Megan Duncanson, who finds inspiration in nature and everyday subjects, takes normal, common objects and transforms them into a captivating artwork. Described as contemporary eclectic, she experiments in a wide range of art styles and subjects.

## 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  
2River

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