



The **2R**iver **V**iew

8.4 (Summer 2004)

new poems by



Aurora Blue © 2004 by Christina Carroll

Michael Brosnan, Rosemarie Crisafi, Judy Kronenfeld, Patrick
Loafman, Joseph Massey, Frances McConnel, Shawn McLain,
William Reichard, Amie Sharp, T. L. Stokes

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The Thirteenth Line

It's marvelous the way it takes shape,
the glorious structure of all we believe we believe.

Us, scribbling our merry way along,
pen to paper, tongue to teeth, heart to the empty sky.

We poke around for a foothold,
for a place to start, and then we're off:

one uttered dream strung to another,
thin-scripted threads of new reality stretching out.

And at the end of it all is the simplest of marks.
A period. A dot. A small stab at the distant dark.

A little sphere spinning like the last planet
at the edge of a vast nothingness,

beyond which we are ready to go.

End of the Road

The house is on fire,
though they can't find flames or smoke,
only heat and the snap of wood.

In the yard, the setter yips and spins
and cowers
behind the shield of children.

Firemen hurry in and hurry out,
bearing photos, widgets, worn shoes,
vases of wilted flower arrangements.

I know the chief; he's the one
turning on the hose, squeezing the nozzle.
Steam rises in quick, hissy clouds.

You say you never imagined things
would get this way, as water soaks
the walls soft as flesh,

as windows begin to slither
over swollen ledges.
But things get any which way.

Consider that we already have three children
and a dog, and what were the odds?
Consider that we live in something

called a cul-de-sac, and that up above us,
night and day, meteors tumble,
attuned to some different sense of wonder.

Eggshells

I climbed as a woodpecker beat dead oak.
Iced needles cracked. Boots pounded a steel bridge.
Frost burdened branches of young ash trees broke,
Snapped, amid the pitch pines along Millbrook Ridge.
Wallkill River stirred. Hudson Highlands slept.
I knelt under a stone face of great height.
While I hesitated, wintergreen crept
In a cathedral of crags and moonlight.
A map pointed to heaven where black wings
Fled fractured eggshells. A mustached mate soared,
Over a sky lake, fed by mountain springs.
Across the frozen valley morning poured.
Legs shook, then stiffened, atop the watch site
As a hawk circled high above in flight.

A New World

A wave.a puff of air.a wet girl
Soapy from bathwater
Rushed past the mirror. A belt unbuckled,
A slap, signs to go to ground.
To curl and cover, become unborn.
Standing, you would be blown away.
Daylight curved
As the massive wall advanced,
Shutters flew open,
Tires ruptured.
Hubcaps blew in the driveway.
A teakettle screamed.
Wires kinked; circuits hissed behind sheetrock.
Dark spots burned into the vitreous humor.
Plums pitted in the hollows of eyes.
Counter clicked rapidly.
On the spool, film uncoiled, colors fled
Tape reeled. In this movie,
She lay under the earth as it changed.
She watched herself as it died.
The yellow bathroom glowed.
Luminous tiles dissolved into prisms
Through which to see a new world.

On her insensible face, he planted his roses.
Soft halos blushed, encircled deeper organs,
Bound by outer rings of jade.
Outmost green enclosed to shield them from harm.
A corolla loosened. Burgundy burst into small leaves.
Crushed, buds abandoned blooms.
Petals fell. A ghost rose.

Dissolution Nightmare

In the dream I look on
as industrious workers occupy
my home, severed
from the mainland by an amazing
wave

I turn and turn on the spit
of the sea, splayed
on the glassy underside
of waves

They pluck off
my fingers to eat,
to write; those are the shells
of my ears they hold
to their own

and break and spill
and am erased
and break and spill
and am erased

They crack my bivalved brain,
slide the sweet meats
whole down their throats,
they suck out
the marrow and read
my cast bones

and am dragged out—
a rent net—
to float, still in the body
of this death

Son

Awakened, as if by his
eerie dream, I stood at his door
in the milk-blue dawn
before he left home—
his phonograph stuck
on two chill notes.
Dials glowed green
as phosphorescent fish;
the mute t.v. blinked and gulped.
Wading through water, I steered past
his moored hulk, lifted
the needle, grasped
his flung arm. Then I swam him back
to the surface, and he let me
save him, one
last time.

Bungee Jump

When he was twenty, he bragged about it.
At forty, he called it the stupid thing he did
for his nineteenth birthday.

By sixty, it became mystical,
something like doves flying
through fog, like rivers
or women.

For decades, he hung over that chasm,
his childhood buddies cheered above,
a river's hips curved below, a chord
stretching all the way to the bridge,

gasping as if his lungs
have never tasted the icy sting
of oxygen.

Mbira

Amid a coughing intersection
of goats and diesel, where barefooted
women balance baskets on heads,
weaving their way through squatting vendors,

a diminutive man plucks an instrument,
his thumbs move like water, the tune rolls
gentle waves, and there is a sudden gathering
of finches that have grown silent,

and the girl in the sky,
pretending she is nothing
more than clouds,
dances.

Broken Villanelle

O the ache—the light
 where your face
in memory waits.

 A song for what
cannot be named
 became everything

your face contains.

 A song for what
cannot be named

 like light dissolves
into a blue pulse

 and soaks the page.
Your face in memory

 became everything
the page contains.

 O the ache—the page
that won't bend to song
 and shreds to memory.

Your eyes tangle
 the margins.

Side Yard

Window's white
reflection of weeds
overgrown and leaning in

late morning sun
scaled metallic
against traffic.

Weeds we leave
as our garden—
overgrown

underneath
an empty humming-
bird feeder.

Like the Weather

Love like the weather.
It drips, it soaks, it floods,
then evaporates and the sky is empty again.

So muggy you don't want to go out,
but lie on your unmade bed with the AC
chewing up the silence.

Zero visibility, fog, nothing but fog.

Such a wind that picks up any spark
and sets it rampaging.

Such a wind that impales cowhide with straws,
and lifts up houses and careens them
into the hereafter,
while you crouch in the cellar,
your bones singing like tuning forks.

An evening when the sun is a red hot clinker
on the black horizon; when sweat rises
like lava from every pore.

A below-zero morning when it seems
a new Ice Age is whitening your breaths.

What we want that we didn't want
yesterday: fresh snow,
a break in the cloud-cover,
early thaw, sunshine, sunshine, sunshine,
the end of the drought.

The first thing we have to know in the morning
and the last thing we fret about at night:
Will it or won't it, how much and when and for how long,
and how come the weatherman
got it so blasted wrong
yet again?

New Mexico, July, New Boots

I bend over to tighten the laces
of my new hiking boots, fawn gray
with lavender laces and turquoise patches
of canvas that let my feet breathe.

They are slow weights and clunky,
but they give me a solid footing.
I clump around, getting used to them,
then we start out over the hills.

The sky is blue with three small clouds,
a red-tailed hawk wheeling in high circles.
Bare ground broken by clumps of bronze grass
and cacti—runners and puffy ones like furry thumbs
that leave bare skin shot full of fiery prickles.

We're looking for rock art—petroglyphs
scratched onto the dark boulders
by natives years ago: Anazasi—an extinct tribe—
or the Pueblos. Pictures like exploding possums
signify birth. Suddenly, a sharp pain;

a two inch long cactus needle sticks out
of a turquoise patch. I have to take off my boot
to pull it out—the first of many times—
as if the land doesn't want me, me and my fancy

REI boots. Next time, it says, go barefoot
for weeks first, and practice walking on broken glass
Come like a native in moccasins
and put each foot down tenderly
in the footprint of whoever has gone before.

Shawn McLain

Father's Wood Shop

A vice grip, saw blade, T-handle wrench, flat head nails, an electric screw-driver, you gave your get-list to me, an unfurnished maker preparing

In the dim, what a sawdust-filled scene your shop was, exponential shaved mounds of wood; your work whittled down until it proved past perfection

You told me a good carpenter hides his mistakes, like that missing nail that caused a shaky shelf; the foundation, you contended, was intact

And that split plank on a stone sander was worked too far, the tree bark broken again; fashioned against the grain, failed, tossed to the scrap heap

In a corner gap, an air vent hole, a drilled-too-deep screw, a cracked pipe fitting; you put plaster or cement in the seams, where it could barely be seen

I would ask why not measure twice, cut once; you told me this was how you learned; this was how to work, to frame with human hands

That cold air I still feel, maybe from a windy-night crevasse, or an uncaulked piece of wood frame; it floats near the base of every sawdust stack you made

Shawn McLain

A Choice of Stasis

In the rural dust air I felt blood blocked, artery choked, and I stopped the chop of wood, stood silent; there was no wind sound I did not hear, no sight unseen; all was clear

In the burb gray roads I felt metal refined, calculation driven, and I drove the patched pot holes towards the highway; the sun through glass was cold inside my car, I sped
nowhere

Bamboo Chimes

Some blocks away, perhaps.
Or across the street. All of

those steps between himself
and the sound. Hollow.

Repeated. Square notes.
It had been a comfort

that whole summer,
days when he'd wished

to disappear into the trees;
wished his own bones

were hollow so he could
fly away with the birds.

To call it a ring would
not be accurate. Yet

a song. A collection of
what was cut, dried,

assembled on an orderly
branch. How far was it?

That source.
That gentle clatter.

Satsuma

On the other side of town, a woman sits
at her desk in an office that looks out
onto a park across the street. The traffic
flows heavy and silver, a dirty metallic stream.
She watches winter birds in winter trees,
bare branches flowering in small white lights
that try to mimic summer's heat.
She considers the anomaly of sunlight on
the shortest day of the year. She eats
an orange, sees everything warm
the way she remembers it when
she was a girl, running fast along
city streets, dashing through empty lots.
She considers the way we must
wait until everything freezes to find
this slight reward; the way we must eat
and eat and yet never have enough;
the way we must savor the tiny wedges,
their taste of summer from the other side
of the world. She remembers the way
the world opened up to her before
she learned what not to trust.
She knows now that small things
give pleasure: a cat napping on her lap;
a garden arranged so the rocks
form a stream of stone where
no water flows; the white silence
of the park; the breath of the house
she is building for herself; small oranges,
strangely ripe in December, how they peel
easily, then open up; the way they fit,
like a world, in the palm of your hand.

Anniversary Roses

They'll fade discordantly,
loveliness deserting them one at a time

to an afterlife of charred red.
For now each petal is affixed to its stem

by more than our passed days,
more than the weight of these years

we've stitched one to another.
Like us, they lean toward eternity,

an uncalendared horizon
disavowed but still claimed.

We know they'll have mornings
and evenings for roughly seven days,

then their frail necks will collapse
under gravity. For this instant,

they're triumphant in survival,
alive in the temporal moment,

unwittingly bending under our desire
to signify our love with their lives.

Later, we'll collect the broken
petals in a bowl, a memorial

to this day. Right now, we watch
the living roses strain below for water

and above for sunlight, and renew
our commitment with their color of blood.

Having My Way with Time

I know I shouldn't do it too often.
But sometimes I sneak over to the corner

where my hand-carved wooden clock
waits to let me prove, again,

that I can control my day's duration.
When I turn the winding key to the left

rather than the right the world is paralyzed
into numb molecules of movement.

A.M. merges with P.M.,
the world waits,

and I have time to listen
while my heart continues,

to read in unblighted silence,
or just to spend the non-hours

staring into atmosphere,
watching the rain-dropped shadows

imperceptibly widening in splotches
around the window.

Snapshot #7

One week ago he wanted to kill someone because they were locked in their hotel for two weeks and bombs kept strumming the windows. He was so sick he could barely walk for three days from the food.

He told me about the dead baby he pulled out of the dumpster in Kosovo. Twice he did this. Two dead babies because of a culture thing and he's reaching into the refuse and the stinking pieces of paper and the cold skin of the newborn like wax on his hands. I think the babies were so happy that someone cared they stay with him, in the shadow beyond his left eye. They crawl into his arms when he is sleeping. They don't mind he drinks to fall asleep to forget them.

Unhinged

The man I loved for four years is trying to forget me
enough to live in the sun. He speaks of the hawks and
the owls. It is the first time he hasn't flown to
save us. I hear him in the next room, where the sun
lives, carving off pieces of himself. I bend to pick
up one of the shavings. It is a woman's finger,
dry like an apple peeling, and the rings slip off.
They drop and never make a sound.

Contributors

Michael Brosnan is a poet and triathlete living in Exeter, New Hampshire. He works as the editor of *Independent School*, a quarterly magazine on precollegiate education, and is the author of *Against the Current* (Heinemann), a work of nonfiction on inner-city education.

Christina Carroll is a California monotype printmaker, designer and teacher. After receiving her B.A. degree in Art and Art History from Connecticut College, she continued her studies at the Boston Museum School, the Massachusetts College of Art, the DeCordova Museum School, and the Sir John Cass School of Art.

Rosemarie Crisafi lives in Wappingers Falls, New York. She works in White Plains, New York for a non-for-profit agency that serves individuals with disabilities. Poems of hers are published online at *Astropoetica*, *Experimental Poetry*, *Rock Salt Plum*, and *Tin Lustre Mobil*.

Judy Kronenfeld writes poetry, fiction and nonfiction, much of which has appeared in numerous journals. She currently has work forthcoming in *Red, White and Blues: Poets on the Promise of America* (Iowa, 2004), *Snake Nation*, *Poetry International*, and www.literarymama.com. She teaches in the Department of Creative Writing, University of California, Riverside.

Patrick Loafman spends his summer as a wildlife biologist who studies frogs, owls, salamanders, and snakes. In the winter, he writes. He has two published chapbooks—*Song of the Winter Wren* and *Desert Journal*—and is currently trying to get a collection of nature essays published.

Joseph Massey lives in Eureka, California. His work has most recently appeared in *Cranky* and *Oyster Boy Review*.

Frances Ruhlen McConnel is about to leave her post at the University of California in Riverside to write full time. She has unfinished projects to attend to in poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. Life, she says, is short.

Shawn McLain is a student of English at Southeast Missouri State University. He is heavily involved with the local writing collective, Prescription Strength Poetry. After completing his undergraduate degree, he plans to attend graduate school, and one day to teach literature to college students like himself.

William Reichard is the author of two collections of poetry: *How To* (Mid List Press, 2004) and *An Alchemy in the Bones* (New Rivers Press, 1999).

Amie Sharp lives with her husband in Riverview, Florida, where she teaches high school English. Her poems have appeared most recently in *The New Formalist* and *The Penwood Review*.



T.L. Stokes lives in a small town where the train only runs on weekends and the waterfall is constant. Her poems appear in journals such as *Circle Magazine*, *Gin Bender Review*, *Pierian Springs*, *Stirring*, and *Words on Walls*.

About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry, art, and theory, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series. Publications appear online at 2River and in print. Writers interested in contributing can read the submission guidelines at www.2River.org.

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