

Bluebird

Blue as sapphires. As Monet's blue
water lilies. Put-down-your-burdens blue.
Stay-here blue and blue clear through. Lapis blue
of the Virgin's robe, the deep sea's untrammeled blue.
Blue as my valley, my shelter, my twilight mist, my thou-shalt-
not-want. Blue perches on the garden fence, sun catches the bright bead
of its eye. Blue swoops down to the sea of lavender bee balm,
crown vetch, Black-eyed Susans. Bustling bees, bundled
in yellow sweaters, dip
their tongues into
the fringed petals
that sway with
the weight of the bees'
own bodies. I'd forgotten
beauty, its take-your-breath away, its
unexpected grace. How I'm helpless before it.
After days and days keeping the outside out, the inside in,
my heart retracted like a snail. So haggard at the heart. so care-coiled.
as Hopkins calls it. Come, sweet scent of mown grass, come, nectar
of my own sweet sweat. Come bluebird, flying now,
flown----carrying sky on your back.

– *Wendy Drexler*

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Great Meadows

I've come for the red-winged blackbirds,
their conk-la-rees and crimson, for the muskrat
nosing the edge of the marsh, wet brownness
from tapered nose to water-shine tail,
and I'm here for the burst pods of milkweed,
for the fallen tree, its upturned roots beyond my reach,
for the lichen that burgeons emerald all along
the trunk's flank, for these woods chock-full
of downed branches, broken branches entwined
with bittersweet vines, for the pursed fist
of swamp cabbage bursting through muck
and decayed leaves. This hard and ceaseless work.

– *Wendy Drexler*

-first published in *The Lily Poetry Review*

Himawari

Himawari

Turning towards the sun, a fresh day, a new start
Drying heavy dew drops from yesterdays passed
Wiping away the briny tears from a day gone-by but not forgotten
Petals bathe in light, I bask in the optimism of your rising sun

Himawari

A positive outlook, resilience for a new day
Your outstretched stalk reaches forward ,
grasping for the magnificent strength I seek
Vibrant color, light against dark, reflects my mood

Himawari

Even in death your color remains
Gnarled petals betray untold hardship
But rugged silhouettes of your strength shine on
Gold against black mirrors life's complexity

Himawari

A needed reminder to turn nourishes us both
Sunshine on a cloudy day
A welcome gift echoing my own fortunes
Thank you my sunflower friend

– *Lynette Martyn (she/her/hers)*

Identification

This morning I saw a yellow-shafted flicker
in the black ash. The blackbirds were singing
and squabbling, half-hidden in the narrow green leaves.
Then I heard a new sound, *wick, wick, wick, kwyik*,
and saw there a brownish bird, with leopard spots
and red on the nape of its neck, as if it were in gun sights,
the red reflecting up. I didn't know
what kind of bird it was, the first flicker I'd ever seen,
though the bird book called it common. Tonight,
reading Richard Nelson on Alaska,
I learned that the Koyukon people call it *tsinil*,
and think of it as a bird of great power,
protector, bringing good fortune. This morning
I saw a yellow-shafted flicker.
Am I not a lucky woman?

– *Susan Lloyd McGarry*

published in *Explorations '97*, University of Alaska, Juneau Alaska 1997

Late Bloom

Just when you think
the season's past, when the road unfurls
in a shimmer of blacktop, you spot
some sapling reaching out white stars,
wild pinwheels against green,
and realize you don't know a thing.
You don't know
what spring is, obviously,
you don't know about sun, or drought,
or storing up sweetness in your roots,
you don't know about slowness,
or how to see what you weren't
looking for. You stop the car,
stagger up to press your face
into those stars, petals streaking
your eyelids as you breathe in
dogwood and more dogwood.

– *Jessie Brown*

More Than Numbers, the Names

Remember me, speak my name ...

-Charles Wright, Homage to Paul Cezanne.

My brain drowns in disasters
afflicting our weary globe:

fires, flash floods, volcanoes,
earthquakes, drought.

On my morning walk I find
one tiny bird with a broken wing.

It sounds a desperate cry, forlorn
peeps from a patch of grass.

Powerless to repair this fragile
creature on my path, I offer a blessing

and this small gift: I name the bird
Blue Jewel. If only I could make it fly.

In multiple countries human casualties rise.
Hundreds buried or burned or washed away.

Their wings dissolve.
They all have names.

– *Shirley J. Brewer*

The Bones of the Fish

The bones of the fish lie on the shore,
cast up by an errant wave upon
the unquiet sands, to join countless
other relics of barnacle, clam, crab:
brief flickers of life forever passed.

To walk along this strand
is to wander in a graveyard:
shells, claws, drying fronds of kelp,
the ghosts of whales long past their agonies.
And sometimes, like a benediction,
the boundaries between fleeting
existence and ever-present death
dissolve and in their place a mosaic:
the submission of life to time.

The bones of the fish rest on the shore.
Webbed with sand and salt, even the head
remains, pared down to skull and teeth,
an awful visage, perhaps, yet in its way
beautiful: an unexpected grace glimpsed
in the essence of something offered up
undefended, exposed but still
claiming its own small measure of space
while above in the living air
gulls wheel and wail and sing.

– *Peaco Todd*

The Cathedral Of All Critters

The gray morning bleakness shattered by
the soprano love call of a perching hawk,
echoed by a potential mate in the distance.
The rhythmic duet of thrumming woodpeckers,
octaves changing as they flitter from branch to branch.
The explosive song of the trumpeter swan
blasting toward the sky,
notes falling like fireworks
into the lily pad laden pond.
The rustling of the leaf camouflage
unwittingly exposing squirrels, birds, and toads.
A sluggish snake seeking a single ray of sunshine.
The vapor plume of dogwood scenting the grove.
No God the father in this cathedral.
only a non-binary divine presence
keeping the critters safe and
in harmony with all of existence.

– *Marge McMillan*

Wild Turkeys, Mount Auburn

Mossed path through rhododendrons tall as trees,
and here come the hens, burnished legs slow-stepping,
eight, nine, ten copper bodies like Aladdin's lamps

bobbing, strolling between monuments,
arching from sheen to ruffle, pausing to pluck at matted grass.
I didn't expect so many. A silent stream, unhurried,

noticing me and not-noticing, stone, stone,
person, stone, under the pines. And then
the toms: green-gold, black-gold, chestnut, twice

as large, following behind. Strange black beards
sprout like fountains from their breasts. I didn't expect
this long passing, eighteen, nineteen, parting around me like a sea

while I watch beside carved marble.
Their folded wings are white slopes scribbled with dark,
runes I cannot read.

– *Jessie Brown*

Wellfleet Waldgeist

I begin each day with a forest bath,
step under a canopy of twisted
branches arched above my path,
wash my face in rivulets
of sunlight filtered through,

lose myself in the sanctuary,
the geist of Great Island,
the terpene-filled air of pitch-pine
needles and bear oak leaves rotting
among mushrooms and moss,

submerge in the mystery
of the ancient cedar swamp
by Marconi's lost signal station,
the towering farmhouse maple,
the surprising stand of birch,

inhale sulfide-rich salt marsh mist
that surrounds me as I wander
by decaying grass along the bay,
luxuriate in the beach roses
and wild grapes lining the road,

soak in the stunted sumac
and scrub pine clinging
to eroding cliffs of sand,
linger beneath low-bush
blueberries and beach plums,

exfoliate the forehead tension
of life over the bridge,
the over-caffeinated calls,
meaningless emails, years
of meetings wasted inside.

Here, I wander old trails,
immersed in the woodlands,
meditating to the sound
of the nearby waves
of flood and ebb tides.

– *Steven Rapp*