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JANICE D. SODERLING

Consumer Advice for Spring Lovers

Two years at most, true love will last.
So carpe diem, have a blast.
Roll those drumsticks, toot that fife.
First comes folly, then comes strife.
Short the spoon, but long the knife.

Before two dozen months have passed,
he won't stand calm; he'll stand tight-assed.
She'll be a carping, dour fishwife.
Two years at most.

So when you view the twain, aghast:
their fizzless beer, flags at half-mast,
recall my warnings, dire and rife;
Love in the laundromat of life
is not preshrunk or colorfast.
Two years at most.

April

purling unfurling silver
silence stroked to sound
round a giddy spring thing
incessantly whirling insistently
as the sun's red plectrum thrumming
soft as a tongue the pale bulb's
pink core or more like a melody
or chimes and bells frozen
in an eave's icicle frieze
O crystal song swirling
under snow *basso profundo*
roots to buds
bright strings for the wind to play
con amore

GAIL WHITE

On Asperity Street

My deep Southern family
all loved to eat:
Thanksgiving dinners
and barbecued wieners
and fish fries with hushpuppies
in summer's heat.
We were just middle class
but we made both ends meet
and we put on no airs
but we did have our pride,
and nothing to hide
on Asperity Street.

Our patriotism
did not need a push
below Mason-Dixon –
we voted for Nixon,
we voted for Bush
(even W. Bush).
We didn't drive Cadillacs,
didn't wear fur,
but all of us knew
who our ancestors were.
Adultery always
was very discrete
and no one was gay
(or at least didn't say)
and our drunks drank at home
on Asperity Street.

We respected ourselves
when our fortune went smash
and we looked down on people
who couldn't pay cash.

We gave up our steaks
but we still paid the rent
and the government (Yanks)
never gave us a cent.
Whatever our plight
we stood on our own feet.
We looked out for ourselves
and owed nobody thanks,
but formed into ranks
of the Christian and white,
the politically right
and the forces of light
on Asperity Street.

THOMAS SODEN

Love's Interval

Now's the time to love the present you
have lived on, bits of boyish bays and tears.
Now's the time in this our world, not new.
Old cloud-shapes overhead cause my fears
to chill my spinal liquid, stop my veins
as morning finches cease uncertainly
to sing, and camouflaged in light again
on blue electric wires, sit pleasantly.
Their tiny limbs seem immaterial.
But Angel tears can swell beyond compare
beyond the sensuous material.
Their eyes are burning. Eden's guard is there;
the body-vines, unburnt – the burning bush.
The retinue of fruit returns a blush.

MARTIN ELSTER

I May

The showoffs all delight me, while you plains
can croon till June, yet never win the day.
Proud, puffed-up songster, ferry me away;
bewitch me with the iridescent stains
that grace your plumage; tell me of the pains
and longings of your spirit, and I may
(yes, if you play your cards right) come and play.

A jig as jaunty as a jillion rains
of crystal pellets pelleting the leaves
is what I wish to watch, to catch the sun's
bold paintbrush polychrome your tufted sheaves,
and we'll canoodle if I like your breath.

If not? Then sing and sing, as springtime runs
to summer, summer fall, and fall to death.

The Rooms of Bernadette

With scratching sounds and gnawing sounds
and periodically a squeak,
commensal mammals make their rounds
to search for edibles and seek
a place to nest before the bleak
raw blizzards bluster in. They'll get
a taste of warmth within a week
inside the rooms of Bernadette.

Wise to the perils on these grounds
(traps, poison, predators), they speak
not just with voices but the nouns
and adjectives of smell. They reek
of things they've eaten, each unique,
life-or-death. A breach will let
them scurry, scamper, spring, and streak
across the bed of Bernadette.

She sleeps, as one now swiftly downs
a bit of cracker near her sleek
and lanky form. Another bounds
across a table, takes a peek
at the granola. Nervous, meek,
worldly-wise, and no one's pet,
these stealthy creatures never creak
the boards that sag like Bernadette.

A bold one scuttles past her cheek
as others in stark silhouette
come in the night to prowl and sneak
inside the dreams of Bernadette.

HEIDI MORRELL

Woman Bathing Her Feet in a Brook

after the painting by Pissarro, 1895

She comes tired to the grassy bank
and smells the reeds, the cool and dank.
A narrow stream with sparkling water.
Graceful woman, pretty daughter.

Alighting where it's not too deep,
she proffers her toe and then her feet.
No one sees her in the dappled sun
smiling while dipping, her hair silkspun.

She's spent from hours of bundling hay,
her well worn peasant's shoes nearby lay.
Later when the shire horses rest
she'll cook, and tend the family nest.

The current cools and comforts the maid,
offering solitude, respite and shade,
but when the rain comes pouring down,
no one shall hear its busy, flourishing sound.

W. F. LANTRY

Turning

It's never quite as easy as it seems:
these woodshop tools served me well a while
but now have fallen into disrepair.
A crescent wrench's jaw, frozen with rust
needs oil and persuasion. I'm aware
I should have cleaned it sooner. This whole pile
needs maintenance. I don't know where to start,

and so I straighten up. Some purpleheart
I'd half forgotten underneath roughed pine
reveals its darkened edges in the stack,
blackened, squarecornered, wreathed in a season's dust,
and as I pull, it tumbles from the rack
into my hands. I take it as a sign
to plug the lathe back in. The bandsaw needs

its blade sandpapered sharp until wood feeds
more gracefully along a penciled path.
The balanced blank just fits a six inch plate.
I match the plate to spindle, readjust
lathe speed to task, hoping the tightgrained weight
is well centered, although I know the math:
at 760 RPM wood gleams.

Shelter

Level striations of these outcrops bear
markings from other centuries, when poles
extended shelter further than the stone
could reach: the interwoven wood became
almost as one with quartz. Straight palings, grown
for this, along the stream, were set in holes
hollowed by unknown hands a thousand years

before. And still the outcropping appears
to offer a rain shadow, or to give
relief from wind, refuge from lightning when
stormclouds come from the west, and reproclaim
the weather's primacy. Swallow and wren
still build their nests beneath, half-fugitive
and half in comfort, as if it's their right

to make their homes where others hid from sight.
And if we search the ground, we'll find the trace
of other homes and lives: the arrowheads
slightly misformed, so tossed aside, the same
flakes of obsidian once held with threads
braided from reedstems or from Queen Anne's Lace,
which now reflect sunlight through evening air.

Naiad

How many hours had I spent on weeds,
eradicating runners, digging roots
and cutting seedlings down with sharpened blades,
before she saw my garden? I'd prepared
the outline of a bed the apple shades
for close inspection, trimming back rank shoots
of dwarf bamboo invading underground

and rising overnight. I even found
the source of a pond's leak and patched the crack
because it made the water level seem
unplanned, because uneven rockwork bared
hints of construction, and the outlet stream
ran shallow in its banks, and falling back
into the lower pond, while meant to give

impressions a new water nymph could live
and dance along its curves, could barely wet
her ankles as it seeped into the earth.
The cold eyes of an iron lion stared
down from the arbor's arch, judging the worth
of all my labors, making me forget
my one goal had been beauty, all its forms

collected here, before the thunderstorms
broke branches, blossoms, stems, and furrowed rows
of ornamental grasses. She arrived,
and walking down the flagstone path declared
she never knew red water lilies thrived
in garden ponds. Then, bending down she chose
one for her hair, and posed among the reeds.

MICHAEL R. BURCH

Lancelot's Last Love Letter to Guinevere

Now that the days have lengthened, I assume
the shadows also lengthen where you pause
to watch the sun and comprehend its laws,
or to shiver wanly in the deepening gloom.

But nothing in your antiquarian eyes
nor anything beyond your failing vision
reveals the night. Religion's circumcision
has left us worlds apart, but who's more wise?

I think I know you better now than then –
and love you all the more, because you are
. . . so distant. I can love you from afar,
forgiving you your flight north, far from men,

because your fear's well-founded: God, forbid,
was bound to fail you here, as all men did.

J. D. SMITH

Out of Office Reply

Between the designated dates
Your note will join its inbox-mates

In transient oblivion
(A prelude to a longer one).

For now alike and equal park,
In code and unconsulted dark:

Proposals and requests for them,
A crisis someone has to stem,

Dire pleas to sign off, get on board,
Weigh in on whose ox might be gored,

A plenitude of FYIs
And some fresh score of Please advise

Along with, when all filters fail,
A boonful, perfect stranger's mail

On how to garner instant wealth
Or boost my reproductive health

For only small considerations –
If not the day's felicitations

From one bereaved, or once high-ranking,
Who needs my help in high-stakes banking.

This prelude to a pigeon drop
And all the epistolary crop

Must wait for me to weigh their yield
And languish in the Message field.

No exclamation point or flag
Meant to impress (or some say nag)

Will move its subject up the queue
Of tasks I have not yet to do.

By now I may have earned your curse
As slacker, parasite or worse

That you cannot browbeat or prod,
An unappeased or absent god.

To clarify this vexing matter,
I'm none of these – or not the latter.
You must find someone else to flatter

Instead of this gray office drone
Whose leave, for which he'll soon atone

May not involve the poolside drink
And cruise ship berth that one might think,

But deathbed words, or if too late,
The settling of a slim estate.

On my return, I will correct
This little season of neglect

With all accustomed quality
And greater punctuality.

Until then, may you use these days
To find, in this desk-dotted maze

And chiefly in yourself, at length,
Some hitherto well-hidden strength.

When you are gone, may I return
The favor that I ask and learn

Which weights I can bear unassisted
But have in self-regard resisted

And which remain beyond my skill
And call for waiting, patient, still.

Then may I greet your work renewed
With something close to gratitude.

CONTRIBUTORS

Janice D. Soderling's poetry, fiction and translations appear in many international journals. In the past three years, she has been featured or invited reader at The Troubadour (London) for Magma Poetry, at the Rattle Reading Series and First Wednesday Formal Readings (both California) and at The Athens Center 2013 Workshop Readings led by Alicia Stallings (Greece). Rattle invited her to participate in a Transatlantic Poetry on Air production in December 2013. Janice has had a first prize story and several finalist dittos at Glimmer Train Stories and a Best-of-Volume poem at Blue Unicorn. She is assistant fiction editor for US-based Able Muse, and newly appointed poetry editor at Frostwriting, a European literary journal. Her work has been selected for American and Swedish anthologies. Janice hails from the US, but lives in Sweden.

Gail White has edited three anthologies and published three books of poetry; Easy Marks is still available from Amazon. She is widely published in journals receptive to formal poetry, including Measure, Raintown Review, First Things, and Mezzo Cammin, and in anthologies such as Villanelles and Killer Verse, both from Pocket Poets. Her latest chapbook is Sonnets in a Hostile World (White Violet Press). Gail received the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award for 2012 and again in 2013. She lives with her husband and three cats in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana.

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Heidi Morrell's poetry has been published, or is forthcoming, in Unaureon, Emerge Literary Journal, Poetry Pacific, St. James Newsletter, Jellyfish and Big River Review. Heidi also writes a bi-weekly column for examiner.com.

W. F. Lantry's poetry collections are The Structure of Desire (Little Red Tree 2012), winner of a 2013 Nautilus Award in Poetry, a chapbook, The Language of Birds (Finishing Line 2011), and a forthcoming collection, The Book of Maps. Recent honors include the National Hackney Literary Award

in Poetry, CutBank Patricia Goedicke Prize, Crucible Editors' Poetry Prize, Lindberg Foundation International Poetry for Peace Prize (Israel), and in 2012 the LaNelle Daniel and Potomac Review Prizes. His work has appeared widely in publications such as Asian Cha, Descant, Gulf Coast and Aesthetica. He is an associate fiction editor at JMWW. More at wflantry.com.

Michael R. Burch is the editor of The HyperTexts, on-line at the hypertexts.com. His poetry, essays, articles and letters have appeared in hundreds of publications which include TIME, USA Today, Writer's Digest – The Year's Best Writing, Light Quarterly, The Lyric, Measure, The Chariton Review, The New Formalist, Pennsylvania Review, The Chimaera, The Flea, Able Muse, Lucid Rhythms, Trinacria, The Neovictorian/Cochlea, The Best of the Eclectic Muse and lambs & Trochees.

J. D. Smith's third collection, *Labor Day at Venice Beach*, was published in 2012. *Notes of a Tourist on Planet Earth*, a humor collection including both poetry and prose, came out in March, 2013. He holds an M.A. from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University.