

Lance Newman

Rusted Out and Flattened Blues

Traffic slackens to a lazy ooze  
and I downshift through scraps of retread.

Every spring gets a teensy bit hotter  
but snow still caps the jersey barriers.

A poem is still just a spy hole aimed  
at a nickel glued to the sidewalk,

a pioneer schoolhouse  
where voices clatter in the ducts

and tween phantoms slither  
down the dumbwaiter shaft.

The hurdy gurdy man  
wears an electric blue suit.

Whose air is it after all  
and why did they hoist

a bright white wedge  
spangled with plastic pearls?

I rehearsed a monologue  
of fragments for just this moment,

a blazing tapestry of nonsense.  
Is a non sequitur even a thing?

Yeah. No. I'm just another fool  
on the loose, a readymade saint

with vocal fry and a fuzzy nape  
making a bid for rapture.

Text me another playlist please.

## Copies of Lies

Microbes spill and pool.  
Help can taste alkaline  
in a pandemic of wind.  
The pox deserts its host  
when blue hollows rim the eyes.

One virus gnarls chamisa  
for mechanical wasps,  
drowning local signals  
till fraud effloresces  
as tissue tailored for a grub.

If I could invent RNA  
and guide the flow of proteins  
to deposit a new world,  
I'd paint a valley of ash  
streaked with saline marshland.

Chrome plains unravel  
into vermilion hummocks  
in an evaporite haze,  
hills heavy with microbial  
crust under a rain of nuclei.

I'll sketch a study of a lake  
in the future's full glare.  
I know the end makes the whole  
but abundance might burst  
from lava and creosote.

Rivers and Mountains

*(after John Ashbery)*

Pride crept to an outcrop where  
leaves framed a singing place.

I carried a melody  
till peaceful shadows waded  
into the meadow at dawn.

A riot of code flung me  
home to map out my breakfast.

Can I trust my bugs? What if  
I mistake the quiet, torn  
at the ends, for the forest wall.

Salt away the grime of love  
and the solace of the trail.

I was deaf to the echo  
of affliction, then I wrote  
a tune that ignited a bird.

The asperities you tolled  
on the ride home floated off

into the disgraceful sea.  
What impossible ocean  
species suffers when we warm

the data? Some prison songs  
taste like weeds, like factory-

made lessons in the cloister  
of a moonless night. Nothing  
makes for a rockier start

than swooning for a downfall.  
The river was never the light.