Sand River Journal

Welcome to the Sand River Journal. Our goal is to provide a proper setting for some of the better poetry posted to the newsgroup rec.arts.poems. We aim at an objective standard, if such exists for poetry, but also strive to include diverse voices, not excluding our own work. These poems have all been previously posted to r.a.p. and appear by authors' explicit permission. They constitute copyrighted material, and we claim ownership only to any poems we have authored.

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♀ ☾ ♂

Not the worst thing

It is not the worst thing about sexual obsession
      that it heals, in time;
that the liquid muscularity of the 20s, which turns
to the fixed and arduous craving of the 30s,
      dims like the memories
that defined the scope of youthful romanticism:
the time you threw the beer bottle through the window...
      the morning you woke on an unknown floor...
            the night you lost the car.

Nor is it the worst thing to learn
that the height of inspiration will not be defined
by those mornings you stared
      across her high hard bed at dawn,
      transfixed by the rise and the fall
of the raft of blonde hair flowing
      across the watery silk of her gown:
            voracious, as if you could devour her
                  completely by watching
            and play the act
      over and over again,
pull closed the circle
      and live within the loop
            for all time.

That the standard remains solid is reassuring;
though revised from gold to silver
it is not devalued,
and it is not the worst thing that
    the currency of passion in the end
    is spent less on reminiscence and revision
than in present speculation:
    not so much expended on what might have been,
    or on the worst that could have happened;
        or as to why you lived on, with no more than
        the dim hope of your heart to heal;
or where what turn in the road might have led;
    but on how fat has she become,
        and if we met again today, would she know me,
            before I spoke?
        And did she ever get that job up on the hill?
    And does she still make that fantastic
ratatouille?

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Cave of Dreams

If fish were wishes floating on a wave
of songs from peri's throats that caught the breeze
in toothy nets they cast into the cave
of dreams, would anglers drop their lines in seas
to snare their fondest hopes? The flounders swim
in open circles through the bottom weeds;
they feed on hopes. Enchanted flounders skim
the sandy bottom; they ignore the foolish needs
of human vanity. I have no dream
of wishes granted by a flounder's tail.
I have no hope that peris' eyes will gleam
with love for me. It's just a fairytale
to lull a child to sleep, a fancy or
a dream, a veil that's fallen to the floor.

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old

she harbors a girl with crossed
eyes and a pruned face
like a shrub.
an owl in her pocket,
hardened by the discovery of darwin
can't get rid of the dark,
or the onyx eyes floating
in its milk-bottle belly.
wintry paws brush like straw
on the bed, and she comes home
only to tell me about breath
and the hollowing out of eyes.
i can see her bones through skin,
the marrow strings the form.
not a bee but a spider
who never flit but waited, and not a tongue
resurfacing to lick, but teeth
solid and stuck in gum like screws.
she is glued to herself, an overture
of pure light. beyond the sheets, she can
see the little girl, all wrapped and muffed
for cold sea days and unveiling of sun.
she can see the rope she jumped to
hide the scrubbed bile
and then again, she can wonder about heaven
like she did by the wood stove in the
parlor of her buttered mother.
no, the firing of little
bugs all around like a light source
doesn't give her more life just light
to see the web between digit.
i sit by her now making my bread
and wiggling my newness. its not nice
but i'm young and so oiled and fancy
in my walk. i hook her with my tail.
honeyed was the way she held me
and now, i am the swing.

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untitled

Walls of red logs, adze-squared,
heavily chinked in mottled yellow clay,
mantel arrayed in copper pots, pewter
plates, spoons, a green and yellow speckled
plant (what did you call it?), two navel oranges,
a leaning chessboard, ancient, *ancien regime*,
mahogany, fruitwood inlaid, with a copper
dipper hanging casually there; below
the mantel, good stonework, mortar-washed,
a delicate linen lampshade, white, in white
grape leaves and clusters; lathe-turned lamp
stand (from your shop?), rich polished rock maple;
beside it, a clock in brass and walnut, its fly
specked face roman numeraled, always at eight o'clock,
and the couch upholstered in scenes from Plutarch,
fragile to the eye, yet sturdy as are all things
here: when I see you, my friend, it is always
in this room that I see you, sitting before the
chess men, offering latakia and smoke, saying
pawn-to-king-four, even though I know
it has been open to the leaden sky now
so many years, the heavy oak floor boards
piled with fir-cones, rich in mosses,
growing morels, and only the chimney standing
among wet pine woods recalls the richness
of your pipes, your Bach, your Ruy Lopez.

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My Love is a Changeling

My love is a changeling –
All variance, progression, and transition.
Now who would dare to have her stay
In some dull, resolved and static way?
Not you nor I nor any other.
For she speaks to us as the blades of grass
While erupting through their concrete slabs
And she'll remain the same in staid
Through all her days of transience.

Scott Cudmore
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For Durnstein Ruins

From the spire to the ruins,
history faced the seasons
as the river below
crept
by
quietly
with no intentions of staying.

At the hands of time,
the horses heavy breathing
fought with the wagon wheels
for the lead role.

But now, from the ruins to the spire,
one can only imagine.

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She's Gone Again

rain turns the cement
to black shifting shadows
streetlights become
menacing eyes
searching through the fog

i walk alone
again accompanied
only by boots
crunching into ice
and a breath fog
prayer floating
into the moonless night

Jody Upshaw
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Stalin Enters the Seminary at Tiflis, 1894

Claim now the lanterned world,
your sketchpad of possibility!
the deans exhorted us that fall.
So many applications read, prayers said.
All year he'd run, stiffly, to class.

Once I saw him in his wooden shed.
For days he'd gaze at an open page
till one night facts gave in to him:
If still enough, he could detect
the resting atoms of his perfect freedom.

The earth had seemed a mystic's place,
a windy vista of statements arrayed.
Now his winter's course of blood
tapped messages no protest would touch.
In January dreams he saw faint outlines,

high weathered slopes last named by God.
Next morning he walked out to them all.
A century's ticking has settled nothing.
He took paper with him and wrote:
The Lord's torchbearers won't find me here.

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guildford ararat

cathedral court ararat
antedeluvian cycle racks
half-skeletons of whales
beached after the flood
with their last meal
of rusty bicycles
still inside them

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Nuptials

Behold the arching aftermath of passion
rushing through me like a mountain wind.

  Feel her tremble, pushing to fruition,
  draining every terror from my mind.

If anyone can gaze upon this water,
leave it undisturbed. She will be mine

  forever, and we'll both grow mad as hatters,
  drunk as children on the nuptial wine.

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Snapshots – Bedlam Boro

Grand dad's not got
Anything to do today
'Cept sit around his checker set
And wait on old Pop Lundry to come down
Off Cooper's Ridge to play.

I watched him rock
Away this morning talking
To his bird dog Bellaret.
She don't leave the front porch much, now, either
'Cept when they go out walking.

And just as dusk
Collects along the valley's rim
All the boys and young men come
To listen and be hypnotized by tales
Of how the valley is and has always been.

  "Eighty-eight years old
  And the Keenus Bridge collapsed!
  One righteous groan at Mandy Wheeler's weight
  (Mammoth Mandy's four hundred pounds of fat)
  Then rubble sixteen feet below.
  Amanda too.

You know
Her screams were heard from Willisville
To Fiddler's graveyard (fifteen miles apart).
And it took two good mules
A hard days work to pull
Her from the mud."

And he enchants them
With the miners and the whores
With the wild side of the mountain,
The ridge wise boys, the foothill clowns
And the troubadors.

"The people haven't danced in Willisville
Since Charlie Waters coughed himself
Black lung until
He died.
And he was young!

Younger than the ages of collected things....
His nickel dates rented the parlor
And his white gold watch
Doesn't wear him any longer
At the stem.
Because we hocked it!
We hocked it for the band
(The Keenus Creek Quartet)
And they played 'Barbara Allen' as we planned
And planted Charlie in the ground."

So go now,
Down from these older mountains
And listen to the valley sage
"He's a good ol' boy"
Pulling at his pipe and telling lies – counting
All the ways he didn't make it rich.

"'47 was a bitch!
I lost my cotton to the bug,
My dog to endless age
And my farm to Jimmy Lundry's poker game.
Boy – pass me that ther' jug
Yes sir – '47 was a year!"

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looking at klee

colors merging colors into mist
flowing with the water and the paint
imagined symbols – like eyes of one just kissed
rose stained-glass veiled by a poet's plaint

distant chimes of colors soft and mellow
waterfalls of music and of hues
spring concertos savoured in Grieg's hollow
ballads selvedge with a tinge of blues

a universe espousing my existence
transported from these concrete walls of flesh
through folded time and vision's persistence
into ethereal dreams and cosmic space

a half-shy smile proferred with mischief bend
a candle laughing at a furious wind

zita marie evensen
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for nicole

i want to paint my toenails funky colors like
jungle green & atomic tangerine & vivid violent
motherfucking purple

i want to eat all the green skittles out of
the bag so my tongue turns green & run around
freaking ppl. out

i want to yell sex sex sex in the middle of a
busy sidewalk just to see how ppl. would react

i want to get really drunk & barf all over the
president of the universe

i want to lick your bellybutton until you scream

dave palmer
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I'll send it to you as an earing

over here the sun goes down in saffron
skies
yes over the land
this leaves the roses & the lilacs
for the marine horizon

the ocean
in silver blues & greens
folds & unfolds the water patiently
& whenever its patience ceases
it marks (with white) the creases
as the water jumps out of its skin
& pounces seethingly

after the sunset
in the cloudless afterglow
on the cold slick wet sand
flow
the slow
glazed
lilac
tongues
watch the land dry up & forget its water
(it's the sea's caresses)
but the sea always presses its case

the crashing is constant
the crashing
the constant
wuthering
give me breath & take away my speech

this half-forever is a halfway-house
to arizona's deserts
beaches of perfect solitude
there is no perfect solitude
on this beach
only half-solitudes
cluttered with beggar birds

today i found an old shell worn down
to a smooth a piece of artwork
crisscrossed with delicate grooves
so perfectly worn flat round & slim
unshell-like & tiny with a jewel's beauty
worked by nobody

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The Goddess in Como Conservatory (After Toulouse Lautrec)

She wanted a shadow as much as a friend
yet she yanked drunkenly the thing on her leash.
Elegantly tired of the familiar faces,
she had the talent to snag men by the eyes.
Killable and toothless all soon surrendered;
whatever powers they once had soon left them.
Here was an extraordinary success,
hands and knees and other parts approaching her
from every corner in a prayer of peristalsis.
In her was a map charting decades and distances
broader than the thoroughfares of light
she delighted in. What she wanted
was a pavement to the stars of the crushed bones
of her numberless supplicants, and her worry was
that somehow all the things she dearly wanted,
were they to prove as clear as the teardrops
she'd extracted, one by one, she might get.

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Untitled

Funny somehow –
the tungsten orange lights
off brown brick walls,
the shining off melted snow,
puddles
on the pavement
as winter begins its
freeze, stops in thought,
and starts again.

Funny somehow –
how far I really am
from those I'm
really close to
classrooms in orange and brown
tears on pavement,
and winter coming on strong.

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Parenthesis of Loss

The motorcade snakes its way
through cold, near-empty streets.
Winter has marked its territory
with graffiti of gray snow.
We pass buildings that seem to
cower wasted and pathetic.
I sink deeper into
the front seat of the lead car –
the one reserved for next of kin.
My son-in-law drives, they sit in back:
my mother, talking quietly to herself,
pointing out every passing street sign,
wondering aloud how much further.
Sandy next to her thinking, perhaps, of
her father's funeral, how the year began
with her loss and ends with mine;
how, this year, our marriage has been one of
parenthetical existence, bracketed by loss.
A beige-gray sky covers us with sallow air,
dollops of black birds litter empty trees
as our small procession enters
the cemetery gates. I watch
the birds, expecting them to follow –
emissaries of death making official
my elevation from immortal youth
to mortal eldest son.

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The way of small creatures

I do not seek them yet they come
like small animals of the forest they arrive silently beside me
not touching but with the hint of their presence near me
so that when I move aside they may pass through
as is the way of small creatures
they announce their beings with a vast silence.

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rituals of dawn

It's his 80th birthday,
and Jack Lalane raves on
about the junk we put into
our bodies.
Boils, pimples, aging and death
scream down like bad health bombs
upon our foolish heads.
As he lectures he pumps
the barbell up and down
like some ancient hypnotic
device. He has wrinkles older
than I am, but his biceps
agelessly expand.

You wouldn't wake your dog up
in the morning and give him coffee,
a donut, and a cigarette,
would you? he asks, and as he stands,
sipping carrot juice in the Southern
California dawn, a verdant light pours in
through picture windows framed
in shades of palm,
and rollicking white puppies
circle him like earthbound doves.

But then the dog is back
to wake me up again,
his wet grey nose insistent,
and I knock over last night's
final glass of scotch, cursing
and he shies away, then pokes
once more with that sharp nose
as if to say get up, let me out,
make coffee, you lazy bastard,
and how about
a light?

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Renaissance

You are the rasp that rips my husk
   the seed so old and dried.

It opens as you enter in
   crest on your floodtide.

The swollen seed now sprouts and buds
   love filled and satisfied.

Alma Engels
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no license at all

A sad thing,
my pencil to this page.
I don't know why the characters are formed,
why I say clouds on the air
thin and falling.
I don't have any kind of license,
waking only to roll over in the dawn,
so dense and silent with its narrative,
bleak bleeding through the off-white drapes.

Sadder still,
the mockingbirds on power lines
singing car alarms
and refuse trucks in reverse.
They are wise but I am none the wiser.

Last night I slept with no music,
alone and fetal,
so cold, I wished I could be
a cake spatula between the mattress and box springs.
The warm kept swimming away.

There've been dreams where I felt so much
I could only stand there weeping.
This is all I've ever felt in a dream,
except the tingle of those bullets in my back
when I was killed
trying to save a girl from terrorists in the cafeteria.

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quiet intrusions

don't try to bleed me
    i've rained cherry blackbirds in the middle
    of winter and
    fought mexican pelicans on baja beaches

don't try to heal me
    i've picked orange agates off the
    windy dunes at shipwreck shores
    and drank from
    lonely distant phonecalls

don't try to feel me
    i've ridden south bend train crashes
    and soaked in savannah nights
    by flickering roadside attractions

don't try to dream me
    i've bent my frozen bones with
    strawberry flames
    and manic silly string at
    monkey moon shots and
    skeleton parades.

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balloons at dawn

they sleep silent bound and patient on the earth
huge currents stroke their brilliant flanks
rippling grace in grooming light in warm yellow air
with the handle in your fist you prod them
the air screams as flames leap to wake them
they rise from a dream of sky

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Ann Marie

divorce brought her city
maturity to dull bungalow
hell pastel suburb one
ticket town to my
high school one grade 10
seat behind my own

too big too bold to blend
with anorexia peer pressure
cooked trendy pastel girls
her hair drooped long
and greasy into smudged
black bloodshot eyes

she sold me her Beatles
Abbey Road for 5 bucks
needing money to buy
temporary escape out of
boredom but for absolutely
free she taught me to smoke

curb sitting student parking
lots of leather grimy faces
and smoke delicious and
shrouding blue grey no
pastels no halos
just cool and hot

Player's Light regulars
held between first two
fingers spread as lips
love suck cheeks sunk
the brown sweet weedy
taste deep and hold tight

my mouth my lips my
excitement too wet
i'll ruin the filter
she laughs a husky loud
raspy throat noise
keeping my attention rapt

Ann Marie got enough sold
everything worth anything
money to leave my boredom
and move back to Montreal
her largeness her loudness
never missed by the pastels

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Monkeybumber

French toast air
slides under my
bedroom door where
James has finally
escaped, giant peach
and all. I hear my father,
not a scream,
something with more
power and direction.
“Has he said Monkeybumper?”,
James asks, his sketched
features staring at
a point beyond my head,
just like I do in school.
“I’m not sure, James,
it sounded more like
Motherfucker.”
James sighs as I turn
the page, burying him
between chapters six
and seven, never
allowing him to
change the story
again.

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stare

twinkle twinkle where you are,
tincture picture, blanc et noir.

I cupped the sky
with a small-moon smile –

then the triptych of the cosmos
beamed closer – while still I gaze
through Orion’s grasp

I wander. Dawn creates these
possibilities –

to seek an answer
in the depth of milky seas.

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Ereskigal

Go, it cries, one veil each gate
and eyes are madness.

            The green of dye and gray-pall
afternoons that loom forever mornings.
The green of fall.
A travelling mouth, no muscles,
no lungs, all velvet teeth
between rocks and slowly
rising a green thief to trunks.
Yes — not the hanging southerners
but sloth and anti-equinox
a birth that kills and steals
back to the vagina-hall
and guards green cups as
innocuous velvet dragons.
            Moss, I mark.

You — twining earth in bulbous birth
(which gate? Two? Seven?)
dead limbs to sculptural tapestry
frills — a Victorian sorceress
twine turn Celtic knot.
            Now somehow you sprung
from your sapsucker life.
Death-feast on death to death-feast
on hoary dryads — hoary
wrinkled thick skin, high crowned
elephant-limbed, but alive.
            I can't wait, you say, and
eat them to frill yourself. See?
Thread for a rug. Death is Picasso.
Life is paint, silver-canned, not
swift as we, not miracle-cloud-thrall.
            Mushrooms, I mark.

And I brush my arms and brush
and brush — cobwebs, can't remove
or see.
            Something is glowing or fading
there. Windburn flecks dissolving
lips' Cupid bow. Glass savage-torch-lit —
a wild Muse with serpentine tongue
Melpomene
            I am not drunk — oh it goes
to mushrooms again and my
pubic hair curls moss —

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The Hat

Today I saw a hat
lying on the pavement
with a note attached
that read

An invisible man
stands before you,
imagine my plight
and be generous

It was raining
and feeling sorry for him
I added a coin
to the pile in his hat

while in a shop doorway
across the street
a man with no hat
looked quickly away.

J. Brookes
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mother suckles universe

mother expressed it
as food for a mouth
and the echoes gave rise
to this patchwork creature
sitting watching itself being made on TV
as the circle gets tighter
the eyes pressed against
the tube fuse with it
electrons and fluids
mingle becoming
the next creation in the next vacuum

and
mother
finds the skin left behind
and
mother
suckles universe

Ray Heinrich
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feeding time

boy at the door,
cutting your teeth on my
form, mottling up
my porch with your guilt,
carve me some pity,
you, with the belling eyes,
your bag full of sadness
weighs like an oath, forgotten
or mislaid. i'm the one that
should be sad, me,
with my made milk. the house
where my mending happens
is paved with curses, soot bones,
orchards of poems, unripe,
picked. and you, banking your
scooped out eyes against the screen,
you know the poems, the hips,
the lap and cuddly wounds.
into the street with your head.
like alice, you hoped for better.
no hearts, certainly not a queen.
instead, your jacket keeps you warm,
holds your skin in place like a
dream of uneven spaces.
i am a thigh, i am a hand held
sage. wink at me. go ahead.

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Markets

one.

two step
past mangos
tomatos, dizzy
from charcoal
and kerosene fumes

a leap of faith
lands you here
sunday morning
Maxwell Street

Chicago's gauchos
wear tall white hats
the march wind
doesn't dare steal

in the hollows
of their throats
gold crosses press
belief against skin
as they stir pots
and turn tortillas

a vendor's cry
translates - this market
Chicago
Mexico
Taiwan

the jade and flowers
we left behind resurface
on card tables - hubcaps
imposter perfumes

foreigners again
the taste of strange juice
runs down our chins
wary eyes watch us buy
a beggar's
yellow pencils
follow his gentle,
wobbly gait.

two.

she swims
face down
on asphalt
navigates refuse
and legs
her right arm
propels
left clutches
shirts, plastic wrapped
above her
the Night Market.

he spits
a wad of betel
two dictator's faces
one cherry blossom
land by her head
she does not count
the coins
or watch him lift
the shirt
carry it away
ignore the haggling
foreigners
fake Rolexes
pale hair streaked
red and green
beneath the neon.

three.

he walked the market
a hungry moon followed

stopping by a steaming cart
he perched on a three legged stool
ordered wide noodles
floating in broth
pieces of jade

the moon longed
for soup
broke her orbit

everyone fled
but the man
his face in his bowl
and a woman
her back to the sky.

her limbs break like a clay jar
where can a goddess
fallen
find soup?

in the Market
the floating
eternal market

her arms outstretched
her back to the sky.

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