

1) The Last Swim of Summer

by Faith Shearin

Our pool is still blue but a few leaves
have fallen, floating on the surface

of summer. The other swimmers
went home last week, tossed

their faded bathing suits aside,
so my daughter and I are alone

in the water which has grown colder
like a man's hand at the end of

a romance. The lifeguard is under
her umbrella but her bags are packed

for college. We are swimming against
change, remembering the endless

shores of June: the light like lemonade,
fireflies inside our cupped hands,

watermelon night. We are swimming
towards the darkness of what

is next, walking away from the sounds
of laughter and splashing, towels

wrapped around the dampness of our loss.

2) You Could Never Take a Car to Greenland by Maggie Smith

my daughter says. Unless the car could float.
Unless by car you mean boat. Unless the ocean
turned to ice and promised not to crack.
Unless Greenland floated over here,
having lifted its anchor. Unless we could row
our country there. Our whole continent
would have to come along, wouldn't it? Unless
we cut ourselves free. What kind of saw
could we use for that? What kind of oars
could deliver one country to another?
She asks, Why is Greenland called Greenland
if it's not green? Why is Iceland called
Iceland if it's greener than Greenland?
Unless it's a trick, a lie: the name Greenland
is an ad for Greenland. Who would go
promised nothing but ice? Who would cut
her home to pieces and row away for that?

3) Because the Night You Asked
by Crystal Spring Gibbins

for Josh

Because the night you asked me
the moon shined like a quarter
in the sky; because the leaves
were the color of wine at our feet;
because, like you, there was a private
sense of absence in my every day;
because in your arms my heart grows
plump as a finch; because we both
pause at the sight of heavy branches
burdened with fruit, the sound
of apples dropping to the ground;
because you hold no secrets;
because I knew what I wanted;
because we both love the snow,
the ice, the feeling of a long deadening
freeze and the mercy of a thaw;
because you gave me an empty
beach on a warm day in fall,
and a feeling that we might stay
for awhile, just the two of us,
looking out across the water,
I said yes.

4) After the Opera

by Richard Schiffman

The curtain parts one last time
and the ones who killed
and were killed,
who loved inordinately,
who went berserk, were flayed alive,
descended to Hades,
raged, wept, schemed—
victims and victimizers alike—
smile and nod and graciously bow.
So glad it's finally over,
they stride off
suddenly a bit ridiculous
in their overwrought costumes.
And the crowd—still dark,
like God beyond the footlights of the world—
rises to its feet
and roars like the sea.

5) History Lesson

by Jeff Coomer

My grandfather left school at fourteen
to work odd jobs until he was old enough
to join his Lithuanian kin chipping
anthracite out of the Pennsylvania hills.
Nine hours a day with five hundred feet
of rock over his head, then an hour's
ride home on the company bus
to a dinner of boiled cabbage and chicken.
When the second big war broke
he headed "sout," as he pronounced it,
for better work in the blast furnaces
churning out steel along the shores
of the Chesapeake. Thirty-two years
and half an index finger later he retired
to a brick rancher he built with his own hands
just outside the Baltimore city line.
The spring he got cancer and I got a BA
from a private college we stood under
a tree in his backyard while he copped
a smoke out of my grandmother's sight.
"Tell me, Pop," I said, wanting to strike up
a conversation, "how did you like
working in the mills all those years?"
He studied my neatly pressed white shirt,
took a long drag on his cigarette and spit a fleck
of tobacco near my shoes. "*Like*," he said,
"didn't have a thing to do with it."

6) The Way It Is
William Stafford

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.

7) Factory Poem
Naomi Replansky

The tool-bit cut, the metal curled,
The oil soaked through her clothing.
She made six hundred parts a day
And timed herself by breathing.

And what she made and where it went
She did not ask or wonder:
Gone to rust, or to machines
Of pleasure or of murder.

She dared not quit: she had seen those
Who fought like jackals over
The carcass of a rotting job
In cold Depression weather.

As if each payday would repay,
As if she'd live forever,
She wished away the newborn week
And wished the daylight over:

*Evening bell, you I long for
With such restless longing,
Come, straighten my shoulders
And deliver my hands.*

8) An Inheritance

by Naomi Replansky

"Five dollars, four dollars, three dollars, two,
One, and none, and what do we do?"

This is the worry that never got said
But ran so often in my mother's head

And showed so plain in my father's frown
That to us kids it drifted down.

It drifted down like soot, like snow,
In the dream-tossed Bronx, in the long ago.

I shook it off with a shake of the head.
I bounced my ball, I ate warm bread,

I skated down the steepest hill.
But I must have listened, against my will:

When the wind blows wrong, I can hear it today.
Then my mother's worry stops all play

And, as if in its rightful place,
My father's frown divides my face.

9) The Field

by Tim Nolan

Remember that meadow up above the ridge
where the dog ran around in circles
and we were tired from the climb up
and everything was tilted sideways
including the running in circles
of the ecstatic dog his bright tongue
lapping at the air and we were
leaning into the heart of the field
where no battle ever took place
where no farmer ever bothered
to turn the soil yet everything
seemed to have happened there everything
seemed to be happening at once enough
so we've never forgotten how full the field
was and how we were there too and full

10) Sincerely, the Sky
By David Hernandez

Yes, I see you down there
looking up into my vastness.

What are you hoping
to find on my vacant face,

there between the crisscross
of telephone wires?

You should know I am only
bright blue now because of physics:

molecules break and scatter
my light from the sun

more than any other color.
You know my variations

azure at noon, navy by midnight.
How often I find you

then on your patio, pajamaed
and distressed, head thrown

back so your eyes can pick apart
not the darker version of myself

but the carousel of stars.
To you I am merely background.

You barely hear my voice.
Remember I am most vibrant

when air breaks my light.
Do something with your brokenness.

11) Ozymandias

By Percy Shelley (husband of Mary Shelley)

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

12) A Psalm of Life
By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each tomorrow
Find us farther than today.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,—act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;—

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

13) Holy Sonnet 10: Death Be Not Proud
By John Donne

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

**14) Sonnet 29 (not a choice for classes that already studied this)
By William Shakespeare**

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

15) Patty's Charcoal Drive-In
By Barbara Crooker

First job. In tight black shorts
and a white bowling shirt, red lipstick
and bouncing pony tail, I present
each overflowing tray as if it were a banquet.
I'm sixteen and college-bound,
this job's temporary as the summer sun,
but right now, it's the boundaries of my life.
After the first few nights of mixed orders
and missing cars, the work goes easily.
I take out the silver trays and hook them to the windows,
inhale the mingled smells of seared meat patties,
salty ketchup, rich sweet malteds.
The lure of grease drifts through the thick night air.
And it's always summer at Patty's Charcoal Drive-in—
carloads of blonde-and-tan girls
pull up next to red convertibles,
boys in black tee shirts and slick hair.
Everyone knows what they want.
And I wait on them, hoping for tips,
loose pieces of silver
flung carelessly as the stars.
Doo-wop music streams from the jukebox
and each night repeats itself,
faithful as a steady date.
Towards 10 P.M., traffic dwindles.
We police the lot, pick up wrappers.
The dark pours down, sticky as Coke,
but the light from the kitchen
gleams like a beacon.
A breeze comes up, chasing papers
in the far corners of the darkened lot,
as if suddenly a cold wind had started to blow
straight at me from the future—
I read that in a Doris Lessing book—
but right now, purse fat with tips
the moon sitting like a cheeseburger on a flat black grill,
this is enough.
Your order please.

16) 21

By Patrick Roche

21. My father is run over by a car.
He is passed out in the road with a blood alcohol content 4 times the legal limit.
I do not cry.
Four months later,
The nurses lose his pulse, and I wonder whose life flashed before his eyes.
Rewinding VHS tapes
Old home videos
20.
19. I haven't brought a friend home in four years.
18. My mother sips the word "divorce".
Her mouth curls at the taste like it burns going down.
17. I start doing homework at Starbucks.
I have more meaningful conversations with the barista
Than with my family
16. I wait for Christmas Eve.
My brother and I usually exchange gifts to one another early
This year, he and my father exchange blows.
My mother doesn't go to mass.
15. I come up with the theory that my father started drinking again
Because maybe he found out I'm gay.
Like if he could make everything else blurry,
Maybe somehow I'd look straight.
15. My mother cleans up his vomit in the middle of the night
And cooks breakfast in the morning like she hasn't lost her appetite.
15. I blame myself.
15. My brother blames everyone else.
15. My mother blames the dog.
15. Super Bowl Sunday
My father bursts through the door like an avalanche
Picking up speed and debris as he falls
Banisters, coffee tables, picture frames
Tumbling, stumbling.
I find his AA chip on the kitchen counter.
14. My father's been sober for 10,
Maybe 11, years?
I just know
We don't even think about it anymore.
13.
12.
11. Mom tells me Daddy's "meetings" are for AA.
She asks if I know what that means.
I don't.

I nod anyway.

10. My parents never drink wine at family gatherings.

All my other aunts and uncles do.

I get distracted by the TV and forget to ask why.

9.

8.

7.

6. I want to be Spider-Man.

Or my dad.

They're kinda the same.

5.

4.

3. I have a nightmare

The recurring one about Ursula from The Little Mermaid

So I get up

I waddle toward Mommy and Daddy's room,

Blankie in hand,

I pause.

Daddy's standing in his underwear

Silhouetted by refrigerator light.

He raises a bottle

To his lips.

2.

1.

0. When my mother was pregnant with me,

I wonder if she hoped,

As so many mothers do,

That her baby boy would grow up to be

Just like

His father.

17) Paper Dolls

By Sierra DeMulder

We are taught
from the moment we leave our pink nurseries
we are collapsible paper dolls:
light to hold, easier to crumple.
That as women, our worth lives secretly
wrapped in lace and cotton panties,
our fragility armored in pepper spray and mace.
They say one in three women will be raped
or sexually abused in their lifetime.
I am one of three daughters.
Imagine each victim is an acrobat.
Her sanity, a balancing act.
Our response is the unfailing safety net.
We never expect to see her across the wire.
You weren't just violated, we tell her,
you are an empty museum, a gutted monument
to what used to hold so much worth.
With best intentions we tell her to reclaim it,
put a price tag on her rape and own it.
Don't stand too tall, don't act too strong.
We will name you *denial*.
Come back when you are ready to crumble
like your bones are made of chalk.
You can only laugh cutely or cry beautifully,
so cry beautifully.
We will catch you.
We are calling it theft,
as if he could pluck open your ribs like cello strings,
pocket your breasts, steal what makes your heart flutter
and tack its wings to his wall.
Some days you will feel dirty.
Some weeks you'll remember how hard it is to breathe in public,
but know this:
the person who did this to you is broken. Not you.
The person who did this to you is out there,
choking on the glass of his chest.
It is a windshield
and his heartbeat is a baseball bat:

regret this, regret this.
Nothing was stolen from you.

Your body is not a hand-me-down.
There is nothing that sits inside you holding your worth,
no locket that can be seen or touched,
snatched from your stomach to be left on concrete.
I know it's hard to feel perfect
when you can't tell an Adam's apple from a fist.
Some ashtray of a man picked you to play his Eden
but I will not watch you collapse.

18) Wild Geese
By Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

19) The Fairy Reel
By Neil Gaiman

If I were young as once I was,
and dreams and death more distant then,
I wouldn't split my soul in two,
and keep half in the world of men,
So half of me would stay at home,
and strive for Faërie in vain,
While all the while my soul would stroll
up narrow path, down crooked lane,
And there would meet a fairy lass
and smile and bow with kisses three,
She'd pluck wild eagles from the air
and nail me to a lightning tree
And if my heart would run from her
or flee from her, be gone from her,
She'd wrap it in a nest of stars
and then she'd take it on with her
Until one day she'd tire of it,
all bored with it and done with it.
She'd leave it by a burning brook,
and off brown boys would run with it.
They'd take it and have fun with it
and stretch it long and cruel and thin,
They'd slice it into four and then
they'd string with it a violin.
And every day and every night
they'd play upon my heart a song
So plaintive and so wild and strange
that all who heard it danced along
And sang and whirled and sank and trod
and skipped and slipped and reeled and rolled
Until, with eyes as bright as coals,
they'd crumble into wheels of gold
But I am young no longer now,
for sixty years my heart's been gone
To play its dreadful music there,
beyond the valley of the sun.
I watch with envious eyes and mind,
the single-souled, who dare not feel
The wind that blows beyond the moon,
who do not hear the Fairy Reel.
If you don't hear the Fairy Reel,
they will not pause to steal your breath.
When I was young I was a fool.
So wrap me up in dreams and death.

20) Eating Poetry
By Mark Strand

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.
There is no happiness like mine.
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.
Her eyes are sad
and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.
The light is dim.
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,
their blond legs burn like brush.
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

She does not understand.
When I get on my knees and lick her hand,
she screams.

I am a new man.
I snarl at her and bark.
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.

21) Things Get Rearranged

by Huang Lihai

The world changes subtly as it goes around.
The morning coffee aroma feels like the glow from a honeycomb,
while outside the window the olive grove still soaks in the twilight mist.
Tiny footsteps follow faint sounds to distant places,
but the fisherman has returned and is sitting in the courtyard
watching a bird foraging in the trees.
He still dreams of sending letters home.
The sea forgets and the glacier calves icebergs,
that's how all things under the sun
get rearranged.

22) Essential Matters

[by Li Li](#)

Let me count a few things that I can't do without.
In the past there were letters, so envelopes and post offices were essential.
Then, there must be doves, a cool breeze, reveries,
and a backdrop of dusk on my way to the post office.
A place to say farewell was essential when it's time to leave home;
there was a ticket in my hand, him at the windy train station,
tears in our eyes, and the satisfaction
running down my body as I turned around.
Reaching middle-age, children nearby and healthy parents are essential,
so are the lovely words on the pages I turn,
and the scents of the fruits that he brought to the room.
Finally, the peach flowers that bloom overnight,
if you smell the sweet-scented ghosts under the trees,
please know they are my family who left this world too early.

23) Autumn in New York
By Eileen Myles

It's something like returning to
sanity but returning
to something I have
never known like
a passionate leaf
turning green
August almost gone
"--that's my name,
don't wear it out."
As if I doffed
my hat & found
a head of
had an idea
that was always
mine
but just came
home, the balloons
are going by so
fast. I lean on
buttons accidentally
jam the works
of what works
when I simply
am this
green.

24) so you want to be a writer?

By Charles Bukowski

if it doesn't come bursting out of you
in spite of everything,
don't do it.
unless it comes unmasked out of your
heart and your mind and your mouth
and your gut,
don't do it.
if you have to sit for hours
staring at your computer screen
or hunched over your
typewriter
searching for words,
don't do it.
if you're doing it for money or
fame,
don't do it.
if you're doing it because you want
women in your bed,
don't do it.
if you have to sit there and
rewrite it again and again,
don't do it.
if it's hard work just thinking about doing it,
don't do it.
if you're trying to write like somebody
else,
forget about it.

if you have to wait for it to roar out of
you,
then wait patiently.
if it never does roar out of you,
do something else.

if you first have to read it to your wife
or your girlfriend or your boyfriend
or your parents or to anybody at all,
you're not ready.

don't be like so many writers,
don't be like so many thousands of
people who call themselves writers,
don't be dull and boring and
pretentious, don't be consumed with self-
love.
the libraries of the world have
yawned themselves to
sleep
over your kind.
don't add to that.
don't do it.
unless it comes out of
your soul like a rocket,
unless being still would
drive you to madness or
suicide or murder,
don't do it.
unless the sun inside you is
burning your gut,
don't do it.

when it is truly time,
and if you have been chosen,
it will do it by
itself and it will keep on doing it
until you die or it dies in you.

there is no other way.

and there never was.

25) sea

by TomPickard

walking up John Street
thinking of you

I saw a slash of sea
between houses

and felt — as always,
no matter mood,
its or mine —

as though
it was the source
of language

and language
the source of itself

26) Words are Birds

BY FRANCISCO X. ALARCÓN

words
are birds
that arrive
with books
and spring

they
love
clouds
the wind
and trees

some words
are messengers
that come
from far away
from distant lands

for them
there are
no borders
only stars
moon and sun

some words
are familiar
like canaries
others are exotic
like the quetzal bird

some can stand
the cold
others migrate
with the sun
to the south

some words
die
caged—
they're difficult
to translate

and others
build nests
have chicks
warm them
feed them

teach them
how to fly
and one day
they go away
in flocks

the letters
on this page
are the prints
they leave
by the sea

27) Transition

By Amanda Johnston

for Ruby & Ruby

this room holds	the only world you know
a rocking chair	where your mother held
a hospital blanket	softly in her arms a prayer
eager to swaddle	to lift up quietly
your grandmother	kissing your lips
who waited	and watched you sleep
long enough	as air filled and left
to speak your name	her name in your lungs
and carry it back	like a promise balloon
to the other side	never to burst

28) About Face

By Michael Gizzi

No sooner am I out the door than I want to be home reading.

It was written on high I'd have thoughts in my head but no words to express them.

Eight hours ago my face was a full-grown narcissus. I cut off my nose to identify myself, strung all the hands I ever held around my neck and expected them to do their job.

I must spend a night under the enormous rock I associate with childhood.

It's not going to happen.

I love being busted in the mirror.

Then someone opens an eye in my head. Murmur of subtitles.

29) The Rose That Grew From Concrete

-Tupac Shakur

Did you hear about the rose that grew
from a crack in the concrete?
Proving nature's law is wrong it
learned to walk with out having feet.
Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams,
it learned to breathe fresh air.
Long live the rose that grew from concrete
when no one else ever cared.

30) Poem About Your Laugh

By Susan Glickman

When you laugh it is all the unsynchronized clocks
in the watchmaker's shop
striking their dissident hours.

It is six blind kittens having the nipples plucked
from their mouths.

It is the ecstatic susurrus of prayer wheels.

When you laugh innumerable
pine trees shed their needles at once on one side
of the forest, indefinably altering the ecosystem.

A thousand miles away
two sharks lose their taste for blood,
mate, start a new species.

When you laugh your mouth
is the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky
and I can curl up there among the bats
intercepting their sonar.

Oh, your mouth is a diver's bell;
it takes me down untold fathoms.

And when you laugh, old dogs limp
to new patches of sunlight
which they bury for later, knowing something
about need.

31) The Obligation to Be Happy
BY LINDA PASTAN

It is more onerous
than the rites of beauty
or housework, harder than love.
But you expect it of me casually,
the way you expect the sun
to come up, not in spite of rain
or clouds but because of them.

And so I smile, as if my own fidelity
to sadness were a hidden vice—
that downward tug on my mouth,
my old suspicion that health
and love are brief irrelevancies,
no more than laughter in the warm dark
strangled at dawn.

Happiness. I try to hoist it
on my narrow shoulders again—
a knapsack heavy with gold coins.
I stumble around the house,
bump into things.
Only Midas himself
would understand.

32) Shoulders

Naomi Shihab Nye, 1952

A man crosses the street in rain,
stepping gently, looking two times north and south,
because his son is asleep on his shoulder.

No car must splash him.
No car drive too near to his shadow.

This man carries the world's most sensitive cargo
but he's not marked.
Nowhere does his jacket say FRAGILE,
HANDLE WITH CARE.

His ear fills up with breathing.
He hears the hum of a boy's dream
deep inside him.

We're not going to be able
to live in this world
if we're not willing to do what he's doing
with one another.

The road will only be wide.
The rain will never stop falling.

33) Good Bones
BY MAGGIE SMITH

Life is short, though I keep this from my children.
Life is short, and I've shortened mine
in a thousand delicious, ill-advised ways,
a thousand deliciously ill-advised ways
I'll keep from my children. The world is at least
fifty percent terrible, and that's a conservative
estimate, though I keep this from my children.
For every bird there is a stone thrown at a bird.
For every loved child, a child broken, bagged,
sunk in a lake. Life is short and the world
is at least half terrible, and for every kind
stranger, there is one who would break you,
though I keep this from my children. I am trying
to sell them the world. Any decent realtor,
walking you through a real shithole, chirps on
about good bones: This place could be beautiful,
right? You could make this place beautiful.

34) After the Opera
by Richard Schiffman

The curtain parts one last time
and the ones who killed
and were killed,
who loved inordinately,
who went berserk, were flayed alive,
descended to Hades,
raged, wept, schemed—
victims and victimizers alike—
smile and nod and graciously bow.
So glad it's finally over,
they stride off
suddenly a bit ridiculous
in their overwrought costumes.
And the crowd—still dark,
like God beyond the footlights of the world—
rises to its feet
and roars like the sea.

35) Talking About the Day
by Jim Daniels

Each night after reading three books to my two children—
we each picked one—to unwind them into dreamland,
I'd turn off the light and sit between their beds
in the wide junk-shop rocker I'd reupholstered blue,
still feeling the close-reading warmth of their bodies beside me,
and ask them to talk about the day—*we did this*,
we did that, sometimes leading somewhere, sometimes
not, but always ending up at the happy ending of *now*.
Now, in still darkness, listening to their breath slow and ease
into sleep's regular rhythm.

Grown now, you might've guessed.

The past tense solid, unyielding, against the acidic drip
of recent years. But how it calmed us then, rewinding
the gentle loop, and in the trusting darkness, pressing *play*.

36) My Cousin, Milton
by Terri Kirby Erickson

My cousin, Milton, worked for a cable company.
The boy I knew when we were children

had fists that were often clenched, his face set like
an old man whose life had been so hard,

it hardened him. But the man's hands opened to let
more of the world in. He sent the funniest

cards to family and friends at Christmas, laid down
cable so others could connect. Yet, he lived

alone, kept to himself much of the time, so when
his sister found his body, he'd been gone

a good while. He died young at fifty-seven, without
fuss or bother. No one sitting by the bedside

or feeding him soup. He just laid himself down like
a trunk line and let the signal pass through.

37) "Some Like Poetry"
by Wislawa Szymborska

Some -
thus not all. Not even the majority of all but the minority.
Not counting schools, where one has to,
and the poets themselves,
there might be two people per thousand.

Like -
but one also likes chicken soup with noodles,
one likes compliments and the color blue,
one likes an old scarf,
one likes having the upper hand,
one likes stroking a dog.

Poetry -
but what is poetry.
Many shaky answers
have been given to this question.
But I don't know and don't know and hold on to it
like to a sustaining railing.

38) "Ode to My Socks"
By Pablo Naruda

Maru Mori brought me
a pair
of socks
which she knitted herself
with her shepherd's hands,
two socks as soft
as rabbits.
I slipped my feet
into them
as though into
two
cases
knitted
with threads of
twilight
and goatskin.
Violent socks,
my feet were
two fish made
of wool,
two long sharks
sea-blue, shot
through
by one golden thread,
two immense blackbirds,
two cannons:
my feet
were honored
in this way
by
these
heavenly
socks.
They were
so handsome
for the first time
my feet seemed to me
unacceptable
like two decrepit
firemen, firemen
unworthy
of that woven
fire,

of those glowing
socks.
Nevertheless
I resisted
the sharp temptation
to save them somewhere
as schoolboys
keep
fireflies,
as learned men
collect
sacred texts,
I resisted
the mad impulse
to put them
into a golden
cage
and each day give them
birdseed
and pieces of pink melon.
Like explorers
in the jungle who hand
over the very rare
green deer
to the spit
and eat it
with remorse,
I stretched out
my feet
and pulled on
the magnificent
socks
and then my shoes.
The moral
of my ode is this:
beauty is twice
beauty
and what is good is doubly
good
when it is a matter of two socks
made of wool
in winter.

**39) “The Silver Thread”
by Afaa Michael Weaver**

The fern gathers where the water seldom goes
unless the storms swell this world of wise choices,
the loud trickle of clear tongues of the stream
licking the edges of rock, while up ahead a curve
hides tomorrow from our crystal ball, the thing
we are afraid to admit we have, the guarantee
we hide from faith. In the woods our dog is lost
from time to time, until suddenly we hear her paws
inside winter’s death becoming the yearly promise
of new undergrowth, her careless paws that beg
each day for the next bowl of treats, true faith
in what love yields. The rain stops not long after
it threatens to soak us with cold and chills, the trees
open to the gradual break of blue inside the gray,
turning the clouds naked and white under the sun,
the stream disappears under a bridge made by men
so trucks can crawl back and forth over this road
of dirt with its one row of grass, where our tongues
make a silver thread finding its way past the fear.

40) “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”