

The Road Not Taken: a Journal of Formal Poetry Spring, 2010

- **Glorious Spring**

Lads and lassies frolic in the fields alongside the newborn lambs.

Spring has sprung! Yes, I know it's a horrible cliché, but I still have to use it each spring.

I've hung a bird feeder on the back deck and have been enjoying my feathered visitors on a daily basis. The squirrels tend to hang around the front of the house, and so far, there have been no problems with them raiding the birdseed.

We have an excellent selection of new poems for your enjoyment this season, from five new poets and one previously published here.

I have opened this edition with Alfred, Lord Tennyson and one of his best known works, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. Yes, I know it's not exactly an early spring love sonnet, but hey, I happen to like it. And besides, it's excellent poetry.

Update: Since I wrote the above, we have added three more poets to this issue. Please enjoy!

- **[Alfred, Lord Tennyson \(August 6, 1809 October 6, 1892\)](#)**

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Alfred Tennyson, 1st Baron Tennyson, FRS (August 6, 1809 October 6, 1892), much better known as "Alfred, Lord Tennyson," was Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom during much of Queen Victoria's reign and remains one of the most popular poets in the English language.

Tennyson excelled at penning short lyrics, "In the valley of Caunteretz", "Break, Break, Break", "The Charge of the Light Brigade", "Tears, Idle Tears" and "Crossing the Bar". Much of his verse was based on classical mythological themes, such as Ulysses Tennyson also wrote some notable blank verse including *Idylls of the King*, *Ulysses*, and *Tithonus*. His use of blank verse, rare in his day, may be related to his complete tone deafness which made it hard for him to follow the conventional rhythms of the poetry of his day. During his career, Tennyson attempted drama, but his plays enjoyed little success.

Read more at [Wikipedia](#).

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The Charge of the Light Brigade
by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

I.

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
“Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!” he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

II.

“Forward, the Light Brigade!”
Was there a man dismay’d?
Not tho’ the soldier knew
Some one had blunder’d:
Their’s not to make reply,
Their’s not to reason why,
Their’s but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

III.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley’d and thunder’d;
Storm’d at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

IV.

Flash’d all their sabres bare,
Flash’d as they turn’d in air

Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke
Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.

V.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

VI.

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!

- Now let's wander far afield as we peruse the poetry of our recent contributors.
- [Lark Beltran](#)

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Im from California but have lived for over half my life in Lima, Peru, along with my Peruvian husband, as an ESL teacher. Over the past several years my poetry has appeared in a number of online and print journals, including *Able Muse*, *Strange Horizons*, *Penwood Review* and *Bolts of Silk*.

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Aging distances the mind
by Lark Beltran

Aging distances the mind
from spellbound sensesfog and flame.
Their latitudes are left behind;
aging distances the mind.
Worldliness and calm, combined,
muffle the frenzy of the game.
Aging distances the mind
from spellbound sensesfog and flame.

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Be Somewhat Choosy
by Lark Beltran

Be somewhat choosy what you call a child.
A want of patience is a common thing,
but words, magnetic, wreak their reckoning:
a pall which leaves self-confidence defiled
in later years. Incredible, a phrase,
an epithet, so cavalierly tossed
you'd think its influence would soon be lost ...
but no, it smolders long, and comes ablaze
in times of apathy or sadness. I
remember well a quick parental scorn
(making me wish that I could be reborn)
in times of learning-stress. I used to cry.
But still, I called my son what Dad called me;
it left a mark on his proficiency.

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Boondocks
by Lark Beltran

En route to elsewhere, glamor draws the eye,
beyond car windows; fleeing past the train -
a landscape moored beneath a richer sky.

Such vistas, through imaginations eye,
adventure and serenity contain.
En route to elsewhere, glamor draws the eye.

When travelling, I often wonder why
the sweetest bits untrodden must remain -
a landscape moored beneath a richer sky.

Embellished in imaginations eye,
it simulates a not-quite-earthly plane.
En route to elsewhere, glamor draws the eye.

Adventure and serenity slip by,
forever taunt, alongside this domain -
a landscape moored beneath a richer sky.

Then give me boondocks - may they never die
nor wither to expansion-greeds disdain.
En route to elsewhere, glamor draws the eye,
a landscape moored beneath a richer sky.

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Cauldrom of Earthly Mysteries **by Lark Beltran**

Paintings in caves, Greek temples, arcane scrawls
on shipwrecked coins, amphorae placed in tombs,
dead languages on excavated walls,
mosaic portraits in Pompeiian rooms,
Celtic stone-circles, Inca bastions, gold
figurines and century-scuffed beads,
monk-copied manuscripts, their borders bold
with passions rainbow - all expound the deeds
of our late peers who lashed against the bar
of times oblivion. Within these frames
affixed by choice of soul, how frail we are
at matters mercy, peddling our include "name.php";s,
a sea of actors constantly withdrawn
like bubble-sculptures, while our art lives on.

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Primeval Nostalgia **by Lark Beltran**

Millenia have marked the human scene,
but millions of years the planets face.
What wonders flourished in the Eocene?

What bestiary roamed its savage space?
Here was the thrust of rare bromeliad
and there the flash of sunset-colored wings,
in vistas newly rinsed and rainbow-clad.
What trills and lifebeats, roars and rumblings
frequented nightscapes under a spray of stars
fiery as the tip of fairy-wand!
Clean amplitude - the bounty that was ours -
has dwindled, like a lake to murky pond.
Pity the lost lands charred and felled and tamed,
the host of species vanished and uninclude "name.php";d.

- [Catherine McGuire](#)

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Besides appearing here previously, Catherine McGuire has been widely published over the past two decades, including *The Lyric*, *New Verse News*, *The Smoking Poet*, *Poetry In Motion*, and *Main Street Rag*. She has published a chapbook, *Joy Into Stillness: Seasons of Lake Quinault*, and is assistant director at CALYX Press.

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Morning Ritual on Canyon Road
by Catherine McGuire

Suburban used car lots: block-on-block
of flapping pennants; flattened, asphalt ground.
Staggered herds of polychromed peacocks
awaiting riders silently surround
the dealer men, in worsted suits and gray
Wall Street haircuts (polished shoes). With fists
of balloonsdour circus vendorsthey
waft their lures toward passing motorists:
Mooring candy-colored bobs to cars;
unlikely union (linked perhaps by lust
engendered in our depths by rich bazaars,
carnal cravings undeterred by rust).

Resigned to pimping metal for their bread,
the dealers loft inflated hopes on thread.

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Harvest Rondeau
by Catherine McGuire

These harvest fruits are in the pot:
peachy jam, tomatoes, hot
pepper salsa, pickled beans
taking up the Fall routine:
preserve a summer. Apricot

wine let nothing rot,
though spurned by shoppers, who will not
chop or stir; and distain to glean
these harvest fruits.

Our “flash society” forgot
where food comes from it’s not
from shrink wrap! The more we lean
on factory farms and fields unseen
the less transforming will be what
we get from harvest fruits.

- **John Van Doren**

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My include "name.php"; is John Van Doren. I live in New York City. I was a teacher and editor for most of my working life. I've been writing poems, some of which have been published (I have not often tried), for 30 years. Among the magazines where they have appeared are *Prophetic Voices*, *Tapestries*, *Jewish Currents*, *The Lyric*, *Kentucky Poetry Review*, *The Willow Review*, *Comberland Poetry Review*, *Gryphon*, and *Iambs and Trochees*. Poems will appear shortly in *lucid rhythms*, *Chaamera*, *Able Muse*, and *The Road Not Taken: a Journal of Formal Poetry*.

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Heaven’s Harvest
by John Van Doren

The woods across the stream let in
a light reflected by their turning leaves,
gold now in mid-October, the many sheaves
that stand for heaven’s harvest, tall
against the sky. Their fate is burial,
though, not storage—food only worms can win.

I walked about among the trees,
looking upwards through the branches widening
like fans as thin as paper, vanes drifting
weightless to the ground. A few
sailed off, leaving a sadness. I knew
i couldn't stop them, was only one who sees.

Who would be fool, be lovesick, trying
to hold a thing that can't be held? Yet still
I wish old poet, that gold could stay. And Will
might tempt me, if it could. But there,
it needn't. For memory has care,
and words, upturned, against this autumn dying.

- **Rhonda Johnson**

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I have a Masters degree in English from the California State University, Los Angeles where I taught basic writing in the Teaching Associate program and was vice president of the Creative Writing Club. I won the Henri Coulette Memorial Poetry Award a university based award of the Academy of American Poets.

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The Dash
by Rhonda Johnson

On rolling hills inside an iron fence
That gives a sense of closure to the lives
Now lived and settled all the nevers sealed
In stone. Apostrophes for people that

Meant something, gave a lot and suffered all
A crinkled rose, its petals blown by wind
Its stem a root now deep in earth, in stone
Which beaten by the rain and wind retains

Its dates of birth and death a finished chord
These numbers frame a dash now worn but clear
And thick with love adorned by unseen acts
The roses tell the story of a life

A stranger calculates the stone etched years
The dash between is dear to fallen tears

- **Richard Peake**

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A native of Tidewater Virginia, Richard (Dick) Peake has become a Texas resident since retirement from the University of Virginia's College at Wise. He began writing poetry while an undergraduate, won the Mary Cummings Eudy poetry award, published poems in and became poetry editor of *The University of Virginia Magazine*. He published poems in *Impetus* alongside John Ciardi and Hollis Summers as well as in *The Georgia Review* and many small journals. Collections of his poetry have appeared in *Wings Across* and *Poems for Terence* published by Vision Press, which also included poems of his in *A Gathering at the Forks A*. He published further poetry in *Birds and Other Beasts* in 2007. During 2008 and 2009 he won a number of awards from the Gulf Coast Poets and The Poetry Society of Texas and his poems were published in *Sol Magazine*, *Jimsonweed*, and *Shine Journal* and nominated for the Pushcart Prize. In 2010 his poems have appeared in *Avocet*, *Asinine Poetry*, *Jimsonweed*, *The Book of the Year PST*, *Raven Images*, *The Road Not Taken*, and elsewhere.

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**In Defense of Milton
by Richard Peake**

Too ready to proclaim woes of marriage,
feminists say Milton hated women
because his Eve prompted mankind's sin
though he obviously was uxorious,
never gave up seeking feminine charms,
married three wives and wrote radical tracts
proclaiming meeting of minds is needed
for happy unions, arguing for divorce
when minds unsuited join in wedlock
not words against women but mismatches
made in some place not heaven, by mischance.
Mary, his first wife, from Cavalier folk
who frowned on Puritans, poisoned her
against Milton, though he protected them,
provided for them without hint of thanks.
Small wonder, then, the poet created
his Eve in Mary's likeness, willful, smart,
so tempting Adam could not refuse her

(fondly overcome by his female's charm)
any more than Milton could forget Mary.
The poet describes his next wife as a saint
loved and loving. His third surely loved him,
he her. She cared for him in his blindness.
Remember Adam and Eve hand in hand,
sad, chastened, departing from Paradise,
loving, enduring punishment together.
Adam and Milton were not misogynists.

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Southern Voice
by Richard Peake

The poet Frost says ovenbirds tell us
what we should make of diminished things,
and that is true for those of us who trust
the teacher, teacher, teacher call that rings
the northern woods, but southern ovenbirds
give a different call. Their teach, teach, teach
presents a more strident voice that's heard
when summer brings to southern forests' heat
the ovenbirds demanding we pass their
lessons on. Those ovenbirds have taught me
in cathedral wooded haunts, their secret lair,
the patience to seek out a singer free
to walk the leafy floor that hides his form
from stalkers that his ringing song transforms.

We hike up flowered slopes of mountaintops,
halting along the way for bird and bloom;
the familiar call of teach, teach, teach stops
our hike. Alert, we peer into the gloom
of forest floor until a vireo's
querulous sneer distracts our fickle ears,
and we gaze up to search the limbs, too slow,
it flies from branch above and disappears
we marked him, though, blue-headed vireo
back to Appalachia another year
from balmy winter suns in Mexico
where he hunts bugs with avian shears.
Stumbling over wake robins and yellow
Slippers, we hunt him with binoc'lar spears.

once we have found that worm-eating bird,
our thoughts turn back to the other singer,
the feathered seer whose strident call we heard
before our gaze strayed from Jack and ginger
blooms to seek vireo. Bird song teaches man
the woodland lessons of the ovenbirds
that their ringing teach, teach, teach demands
of those who learn their woodland lesson plan:
the beauty that the natural world displays
to those who seek the singer's secret way
and learn the patience to sit and let him sing;
to lead them to the forest's ageless play.
the ovenbird makes solid tree trunks ring.

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Viewing Neandertals **by Richard Peake**

Observe, look at that low-browed skull.
The artist has made the dull being
live again though it's just a hull
of the pulsing, feeling, living thing.

That low forehead concealed cunning
enough to survive the ice age
by living in caves and hunting
wooly rhinoceri with courage.

We will not fade away quietly
like Neandertals. More theatrical,
we'll have a big blast, noisily
leave museums nothing at all.

- **C.J. Clayton-Dippolito**

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I am an MFA student at Kent State University with stories and poetry published in *Ruminate*, *Rubbertop Review*, *Gloom Cupboard* and forthcoming in *The Penguin Review*. I have just received an honorable mention in the Association of Writers and Writing Programs Intro Journals Contest.

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Turtle in Drought
by C.J. Clayton-Dippolito

When drought begins to leech the waters dry,
the painted turtles march in thirsted hordes.
To ponds and creeks and bogs with deeper pools,
they creep and slink in search of sodden quench.
It pains to watch the turtles as they go
on inching forth like pilgrims off to pray.
Their Mecca , Lourdes , their Ganges nothing more
than rank ditches and scummy culvert drains.
Most all the other creatures burrow fast
from sear of summer scorch and blistered skins.
They tunnel cool graves, escape the staring
summer's eye 'til it drops its dim-waned lamp.
Yet turtle trudges forth despite the yoke.
He'll crawl a mile or so before he quits,
succumbs to the anguished despair and the
brutal promises of liquid mirage.
A sweltered stranded victim on the dune,
he conjures wishing wells that seem to grow
two feet and arms that sprout out from the sides.
Oasis picks her bricks up like a skirt,
and tiptoes back, laughing until she's hoarse.

- [Michael Ferris](#)

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Michael Ferris was born in Los Angeles. His first true love was JS Bach; since then he's had reckless affairs with, among others, Blaise Pascal, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Robert Frost. He studied nothing of commercial value at Dartmouth and Yale. He started writing in 1993, and has kept at it as he dropped in and out of Wall Street. Mammon is a clumsy and boorish lover, so he cheats on him continuously with a stable of novelists, philosophers, and poets, little caring if they still draw breath. He lives in Kingston, NY.

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The Modern Game
by Michael Ferris

(with a handshake for R.F.)

Open-stanza groundies
and indiscriminate lines;
the rules are faint suggestions —
no umpires, faults, or fines.

The deuce with counting bounces,
and stressing over feet!
You lob up some emotion,
and they're out of their seat

applauding at your genius.
That's how to rock the joint —
technique is musty old-school,
and form is not the point.

Just serve it hard, then harder;
slam and raise a racket;
howl to prove your passion
and show how you can hack it.

Your play lacks rhyme or reason?
No need to get upset;
every shot goes over
since we took down the net.

Advantage to the people!
The power of the frame
makes everyone a winner —
that's the modern game.

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Old Milton
by Michael Ferris

Rereading Milton, there's a lot
we moderns smile at in his thought:
nobody anymore adheres
to Ptolemy's ten concentric spheres;
we can't suppress a laugh when told
that Earth hangs from a chain of gold,
a bauble on a Christmas tree —
what a cute cosmology;
that Heaven's skirmishes unfold
just like in Albion of old

(the action, though, is pretty good,
like something out of Hollywood:
Rambo say, or Richard III —
quite studly of the Eternal Word!)

All-too-human; nevertheless,
in time we'll see the seriousness
in Milton's project – to boldly try
a universal alibi.

For whether men were made by God
or crawled up out of some steaming bog,
the problem is as old and new
as Abel and Job, and me and you:
if God exists, and God is good,
how is suffering understood?
He may not leave us satisfied,
but Milton (via Anselm) tried.

Yes, much of Milton does seem quaint,
and we can laugh until we hurt –
then we should feel a little pained
we mocked old Milton, unconstrained
to find a better answer first.

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Black Rat Snake
by Michael Ferris

He too has to eat, I suppose.
Or she? I can't really tell
without forcing a moment too close
what ages of instinct repel.

Experience, too, truth be told:
I'm no fledgling in love's swoons and aches,
and nothing makes my blood run cold
like the wiles (and pudenda) of snakes.

But live and let live's what I say;
let God judge the heart in each breast –
except when He's prone to delay
and that heart covets my phoebes' nest.

The snake tipped the lash of my eye
as he slid up a section of fence
like a sinuous coquetry,
a proposition of carnal intent.

Then he flexed and he stretched out his back,
like a vine up the wall of the shed —
as if he had tendrils — and tacked,
til he landed the roof with his head.

Precarious under the eave
the moss-crib of hatchlings stood.
Could even a Tennyson leave
to fate – or to faith – such a brood?

I arrested the snake with a stick,
and I set him, as it were, to flight;
for field mice I gave him his pick,
all the toads he could woo every night.

And I cast round the foot of the fence
a medicine such as should fix
a prurient snake: nylon nets
like a web that invites, then constricts.

And I prayed — an unwonted lust —
for the succoring limbs of the trees;
and the snake preyed as his nature must,
for a taste of the least of these.

- [Mark Blaeuer](#)

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I've pasted one poem below for *The Road Not Taken*. This poem was written during the time my wife and I owned a cabin in north Arkansas. We had to sell that house for a down payment on the one we have now, which isn't as rustic but has just as much timbered acreage to walk in. I live in southwest Arkansas and have had my poems published in journals such as *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Paintbrush*, *Barefoot Muse*, and many others.

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Single Pen
by Mark Blaeuer

Varnished inside the cabin, these pine logs
chant in the umber dialect of sky
at sunset over Shiloh Mountain; of fog
enveloping Lost Peak, suffusing Dry
Fork hollow with air-water at sunrise.
Each adze mark is a genuine effect
rough hewn, no modules for the builder's clan.
Spirits molder in their resinous eyes,
knots and pegs where branches have been hacked
away, blunt vestiges of rural men.

I'm unrelated, shadow on the tongue,
here to bow to a ready-made rainbow.
Who's lonely? Not some bluffer dangling
his feet in heaven, happy as Thoreau
atop Fair Haven Hill. An emerald
glow hints of earth. On weekends of escape
to quiet reparation, I hike down
to Thomas Creek with dogs who come when called,
obedient to joy. The proper shape
and heft of solitude are, at last, won.

First, realtors earn a commission. In
law, deeds convey land; human acts redeem
the ownership. I rake leaves, and gray stone
foundations iterate to me their dream
of eaves and shingles, walls and furniture.
I rest inside with coffee, marmalade
on toast. Then I'm out to split hickory
and oak for an investiture of fire
in blood and domicile. An ideal trade:
to pay too much, a pittance, and go free.

- [Mark J. Mitchell](#)

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I studied writing and medieval literature at the University of California at Santa Cruz with Raymond Carver, George Hitchcock, Barbara Hull and Robert M. Durling. My work has appeared in many magazines, including *kayak*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Black Bough*, *Santa Barbara Review*, *Pearl*, *Runes* and *Poem*. It has also appeared in the anthologies *Line*

Drives (Southern Illinois University Press), *Hunger* (Enough Puddinghouse Press) and *Zeus Seduces the Wicked Stepmother in the Saloon of the Gingerbread House* (Winterhawk Press). My chapbook, *Three Visitors* won the 2010 Negative Capability Press International Chapbook competition and will be published later this year.

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Fado
by Mark J. Mitchell

Her voice is bleeding in an unknown tongue,
The sorrow is ripe, rich enough to touch.
A flower broken early, broken young.

Her song wraps its tune around you. It's sung
Tenderly, the guitars don't count as much
As her voice that bleeds in a different tongue.

It's as if those words, unknown, caught and clung
To your body, like some tropical vine that clutched
You. The broken flower brushing your young

Flesh. Your mouth tastes it as it gently numbs
All your senses. You lean on her song like a crutch
This voice that's bleeding in that foreign tongue.

This record is scratched. The needle is stung
From the grooves. Vinyl's delicate, it's such
A broken flower, lost when you were young

And stupid. But the song, so sadly sung,
Strokes hidden nerves that no one's ever touched
That bleeding voice, this subtle tongue
Her flower breaks early and she broke young.

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Rondeau On Yellow Paper
by Mark J. Mitchell

Like a trap, cruel yet benign,
With its wicked mouth, velvet lines,
Morning startles you out of bed
With just the lightest kiss of dread
Leftover. You pull your face in line,

Scan your wrecked sheets. Nothing reminds
You of that cold dream left behind
When the sun brushed your aching head.
But some relic lurks, a word unsaid,
Like a trap

Coiled tightly in your brain, designed
By your failures, a self-planted mine.
Get yourself dressed. It's in your head,
That's all. Face this slow day instead
Of night. Watch it passing like time
Like a trap.

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Sunday Afternoon, 3:15, Torrance, 1966
by Mark J. Mitchell

She wipes her palms on her skirt, brushes away
A lone gray hair, smiles and opens the door
To nothing. Empty air. She would have sworn
She heard a ring. Palms bend by the freeway
Under a spring breeze. She shakes her head and sighs,
Almost turns inside, looks down and her eyes
Light on a box at her toes. Square, unwrapped.
No one in sight, it couldn't be a trap.

What a silly thought. She passes her damp palm
Across her brow, picks up the package, calms
Her brief flutter, retreats into her house
With no thought but the stain on her blouse.

Silent, in the dark heart of that plain box
Are letters mailed years ago to a boy,
And photos of her under palms, some toy
He won for her. Only the clash of clocks
Parted them. Some nights she recalls his palms
Sliding along her hips and down, her qualms
And her assent. Not today, as she rolls
Dough for a crust. Whatever the box holds

It's meant for someone else. She lets her mind
Empty, pushing wood across flour. Her time
Is different now. She dusts her cool palms,
Pats the board. She won't look. This is her balm.

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Tenebrae
by **Mark J. Mitchell**

“The voices of the Benedictines are massive, impersonal.”

—*Kenneth Rexroth*

“Wednesday in Holy Week, 1940”

They sing the darkness. Cold tones, old as stone,
Intoning dead syllables that no one speaks.
An old record that my father once owned.
I'm listening halfway through Holy Week.
It is, my mind knows, an archaic rite,
Mothballed by a dead pope when I was born.
It feels right, apt on this cool graying night
While rags of my deserted faith flap, torn,
Around my guilt-fed soul. A candle glows
I may light some more to brighten my doubts,
Because this is the rite of shadows.
Once I was taught just what it was about.
The record ends and there's nothing done.
I extinguish the candles, one by one.