

THE WEDDING OF AFTERNOON AND EVE

The land of Afternoon and Eve, the king
and queen of thunderstorms, lies just below
a place called Frigid with a Chance of Snow.
These modest folks are odd in just one thing:
their actions make the thunder in the spring
and summer months. Miss Evie couldn't know
that her fiance's wedding band would go
on rolling when she dropped it, hurrying
to push it on his finger, or that they
would have to chase it from the castle to
the trees, or that the havoc would incite
such thunder that for months, we'd smile and say
that Afternoon's petite new missus blew
up storms all day and, so we've heard, all night.

—M. D. LANGSTON

MANNA

A baby bird fell from the sky.
A cat said: "Look at that. Oh my!
It's true I've done my best, O Lord.
Still, thank You for Your prompt reward."

We're pleased to see our world a place
where we've been singled out for grace.

—BRUCE BENNETT

MAGGIE

I asked her, "Do you love me at all?"
She turned her head and stared at the wall.
I said, "Come then, we'll go and play."
She cast me a glance and walked away.

It was finally time to eat.
I laid the table, but I was beat;
If you keep a cat you really must not
Ask, "What does the wall have that I haven't got?"

—DAVID W. GRIFFIN

NATURE STUDY

The mole's frenzies
are so small
no one hears him. None at all.
What he knows
of strang and durm
is barely noticed by a worm.
The world's insensate.
No one stares,
since moles are not as big as bears.
It all seems sad
that cries and fuss
perish if anonymous.

—JAY JOHNSON

“HOW NOW! A RAT?”
Hamlet, Act III, Scene iv

Young Abelard, fat laboratory rat,
smashed all experimental expectations,
learned colors, sounds and shapes, pressed levers that
provided gourmet food and sweet libations.
He learned the lever marked with XXX
would earn him time with rat-babe Heloise.
He soon grew bored with food and drink and sex,
thought writing poetry might help him ease
his distraught mind. Whatever it might cost.
he swore he'd prove an ordinary rat
could out-write Shakespeare, Dickinson, and Frost.
He learned the alphabet in no time flat.
The keyboard proved, for Abelard, no sweat.
He slimmed down as he leapt across the keys.
His rat tail worked the mouse, his dexterous set
of paws punched out a poem sure to please
the most fastidious editor. He'd win
a Pulitzer, he thought; but heartache lurked.
Those “Thank you, but . . .” type notices poured in.
He'd send new poems out, but nothing worked.

You see, the rat wrote formal poetry.
Petrarchan sonnets, villanelles, and odes

Pindaric, ghazals, rondelays, rubai,
he tried them all, tried many other modes.
His cage was littered with rejection slips.
His muse deserted him, and, even worse,
he started smoking pot, took acid trips.
On one such trip he tried to write free verse.
It made no sense to him, no rhyme or meter,
but still he sent it out, by force of habit.
He sent his trainer out to get a liter
of vintage Ratschild Chateauneuf-du-Pape. It
brought a six-week high. A note came saying “Cheers!
That poem you sent us really was a corker.
We're pleased to tell you it will soon appear
next to a cat cartoon in The New Yorker.”

So if New Yorker poetry puzzles you
and makes you ask “Just what the hell is that?”
Those words that seem misplaced, obscure, askew,
might come from Abelard, a spaced-out rat.

—ARNIE JOHANSON

A RURAL FABLE

Old Henry Grady drove on through the light
 on Main Street whether it was green or red.
 Hell, he'd been here before it was, he said,
 so what gave that contraption any right
 to tell him when to go and when to stop?
 The locals learned to watch for Henry's truck,
 to yield the right of way and wish him luck
 with loggers, tourists, and the county cop.
 Just once a week he came to town to get
 his mail and buy tobacco (RFD?
 a New Deal plot you'd just as likely see
 Old Henry smoke a store-bought cigarette).
 The townsfolk cursed him loudly when he crossed
 in front of them without a sideways look,
 but quietly admired the way he took
 as his by right the liberty they'd lost.
 They saw it coming, though, before it came.
 A semi sent old Henry to his reward.
 No matter how it's resisted or ignored,
 the future's coming at us just the same.

—RICHARD WAKEFIELD

STOPPED BY DAYLIGHT SAVING
ON AN APRIL MORNING

(with a very sleepy nod to Robert Frost)

What hour this is I think I know,
 yet yonder clock won't have it so.
 It rouses me from cozy bed,
 insisting I rise NOW and go.

I find it drear to go unfed
 and so befuddled in the head.
 I'm launched too soon into my day,
 unslept, unwashed, untoileted.

When early birdbrains worm their way
 into my dreams each April, they
 like Joshua adjust the sun
 to light the night for golfers' play.

So now High Noon occurs at one
 with all my errands yet unrun,
 and months till daylight saving's done,
 and months till daylight saving's done.

—JOYCE LA MERS

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