



passenger

2017 POETRY CONTEST

I am optimistic in the long run. A great man once said that the true symbol of the United States is not the bald eagle. It is the pendulum.

RUTH BADER GINSBURG

passager

2017 POETRY CONTEST

ANCIENT MARINERS

On the vast sky of you
I have always seen constellations.
Early on, freckles arched
over your deltoid like Orion,
and on your thigh the Seven Sisters
sang your praises.

I have since navigated by you,
though you told me
once you found me
as in the Song of Songs
fair as the moon, clear as the sun,
and plotted your course accordingly.

It was auspicious
how I called you Puppy
and you called me Pixie
long before we knew that
Puppis is the stern of *Argo* and
Pyxis is the compass,

before we understood
how dead reckoning works,
how necessary a sextant
on the black tide.

I am discovering new constellations,
christening your clusters of solar lentigines,
your ephelides gone nova:

Bursa Major on your shoulder,
Patella (found only on old star charts)
over your meniscus surgery scar.

However many nights we have still,
and my eye yet clear,
I will steer toward you, your white hair
shining like Polaris,
until we come to morning.

Dawn Apelian

TROUBLE DON' LAST

Inside the little house, no money for gas
heat, the shrieking wind rattled
doors and tried to bluster
through any crack of hope.

A streetlight lit a baroque of paisley
ice left by Jack the Hoarfrost on the front
window, an invitation to dream
tales of magic in the semi-dark room.

Big brother, little brother, on each side,
baby sister in Mama's lap huddled together.
Iron, toaster, and tiny heater defrosted
feet and bodies bundled under molehills

of woolen blankets, covers, coats
and warmth wrapped in Mama's stories exhaled
on the wintery landscape of her breath.
She lifted her hands before a light bulb;

A bird silhouette frolicked on the wall. Baby
Girl asked, *Are we poor, Mama? Ah no, child.*
She pulled the children closer. *Cold ain't nothing;*
all you got to do is rub two things together –
hand to heart, pen to paper, rhythm to blues.

Mary Stone Hanley

ARS LUNATICA

Art thou pale for weariness . . . ? – SHELLEY
Is the moon tired? she looks so pale – ROSSETTI
It'll be the moon and you, you and the moon.
You wear a neck tie so I'll know you – GROUCHO

Let's leave the moon
 alone, shall we, a year at least, a moon-
 atorium, and the same for stars snakes
 horses all insects unrequited lovers
 birds and please god cats, any animal really,
 a poetic animal rescue league,
 as well as everything liquid
 from vodka to the waves
 of the Aegean or Virginia Woolf, just leave
 them alone! Forget capitalized Time
 for a while, and imagine everything – the landfill
 of your desk drawer, the crumbling
 city streets and civil rights, your flourishing
 debt, the long list of friends
 you don't see, the crop
 of public liars seeking office,
 even your portly splay-footed neighbor
 stoically enduring his chemo, silent hero
 of the Bronx – imagine everything
 is permanent, an end to impermanence haha,
 and above all an end to poems
 that gaze at the moon or the greying lint
 of their own navels like this one.

THE PIES

He and his wooden leg
limped to the kitchen
and inspected the oven.

“Bring me this pie,”
he ordered his wife
and she did – with ice cream
and cheese on the side.

A wag, he clacked his false
teeth at table.

Sickened one day,
he took to his bed.
The pies bubbled
and cooled on the cloth;
gravely, they waited
but he nor his leg –
neither came.

“Bring him,” the pies piped.
“He can’t come,” she whined.
“Then give him this message,”
they said and thrust
a dry crust in her hands.
She clumped the stairs.
“They want you,” she whispered.
“No more pies,” he whimpered.

She clumped the stairs.
“He ain’t hungry,” she told them.
“He ain’t hungry,” they mimicked
and showed their sharp teeth
for pies can be cruel when provoked.

“We’ll peel him,” they prattled.
“We’ll cook him,” they chorused
and clattered up the stairs to his room
but found him dead
as the day before yesterday,
so they went to the window
and by two fluttered off
like great butterflies
that fly south for the winter.

Leg in a corner,
teeth in a jar
and the pies,
the pies are no more.

Jim Taylor

From the Cover Artist

I started reading the issue one afternoon while my newly adopted twin toddlers were taking a nap. In poem after poem, I traveled through everything and anything; railroads, blueberries, love, hatred, abandonment, childhood, war, politics, disappointment, the ocean, home, losses, family, and all of a sudden I realized this is just LIFE, our lives a book of poems! We are in this together and we go through it all. My – for lack of a better word – tough life played before me like a fast forward movie: war, immigration, loss, cancer and much more, and it seemed suddenly beautiful. I looked around my house at objects that were important to me and took pictures – one of my paintings, one of my glass pomegranates, my keyboard, a page from Hafiz’s book of poems, a *New Yorker* magazine cover, Kendra’s mom’s decorative pillow, a detail of one of my Persian carpets, my precious turquoise bowl from Saralyn; and random things – *Time Magazine’s Game of Thrones* cover, a *Poets & Writers* cover from last January, my latest *Passager* cover, and the afternoon sun through a high glass window, and of course my precious twins. And then I looked at my pictures through a kaleidoscope and everything looked so beautiful and fragile, disappearing though that tiny little object! Like life itself!

PANTEA AMIN TOFANGCHI



passager

**2017 Passager Poet:
Harry Bauld**

Pamela R. Anderson, Dawn Apelian, John Barrale, Marge Barrett,
Terry Hall Bodine, Kathryn Bold, Patricia Bollin, Andrew Brown, John Carter,
Sherri Felt Dratfield, Art Elser, D.G. Geis, Gene James Gilbert, John Glowney,
Mac Greene, Dori Hale, Mary Stone Hanley, Kathleen Hellen, Manuel Igrejas,
Leatha Kendrick, Susan Kress, Steve Lautermilch, Michele Leavitt,
Richard Levine, Dennis H. Lee, Clif Mason, Rosie McMahan, Colin McKim,
T.P. Murphy, Jim Nawrocki, Valerie Neal, Paul Nelson, Gwynn O'Gara,
Sophia Rivkin, Sam Schmidt, Myra Shapiro, Jim Smith, Maryhelen Snyder,
Jack Stewart, Jim Taylor, Adrienne Unger, Elizabeth Vrenios, Alice Weiss,
Kory Wells, James Wyshynski