

RIVALRY

What is more fragile than the skin
on which we mark nascent things.

What is less distinct than the pass
between medium and message.

The first time I traced
lines I could not loan to ink

it was on the back of one
who read them backwards

from within her mind, reversing live
as she rode the fit of my hip

to a mountain each of us had read about
but found ourselves surprised to find

as suddenly as the sounds
we didn't realize we were letting

until they came back from the walls.

NEGATIVE SPACE

There was no mother after.

There were no walls.

There was no warmth.

What space matches?

In the morning the sun was dull
and no enclosure reminded those bones
they connected somewhere below.

Eyes opened to perceive light.

A whiteness perceptible in the field
the field a place where many things

did not unfold over time,
where there came room
to perceive the visual, emotional contours

of nothing lengthening,
continuing, repeating itself as robotically
as a copying machine forgotten by someone

the individual copies emptying
into a room otherwise empty of movement.

SILVER-BACKED GLASS

Once I imagined
if I considered the material itself

I might sense my way
into an understanding of reflection,

of that which secures
the questioning. I became dizzy

in the way one does
looking up or spinning before what spins,

a processor caught, a stargazer,
a person drunk on their own sudden feeling

of belonging or connectedness
to the greater cosmic order and disorder

of things recognizable and not.
I trusted, as many do, the transportation

of my ponderance through
examination into sense, as I trusted

silver-backed-glass to return
a likeness reversed. I traveled that trust

as light travels, passes between
the fibers of the page, allowing perception,

permitting focus, providing
opportunity to read that mind passing.

Still I cannot promise
any private notebook's as coherent

as that unselfconscious glance,
the kind that doesn't register until

someone else calls attention
to it, declaring in that moment

you look more beautiful than you
ever have in your entire life, to that point.

AT TWENTY

I turned to another and for the first time used
the word someday to mean a day

that will be instead of no day. The sentence
in which I used it contained a wish that

we might in the future take in an animal
that would walk through the halls of our future house

and into a year that was too far future to know
where we would find ourselves speaking

of all the days at once while the animal gathered
in its mouth its line and brought it forward

to remind us of the time. I heard the sentence end
and come back to me before I realized

I was speaking it. I still hear it coming back—
at nearly forty the person I spoke it to

texts from across the country to say our dog
is pacing nightly again, getting up

in the middle of the night to walk a loop around
the first floor of the house, slipping

on his arthritic ankles and turned-out front paws
as he walks himself somewhere over

and over. She sleeps with him, her partner
with the cats, or rather she wakes with him,

she follows him mentally as he clicks around
in circles. Yesterday, he mistook her arm

for a nearby toy and bit, and kept biting,
until it came into focus that he was mistaken.

We guess at a tumor as his behaviors
are now often unpredictable, except for the circling,

which comes and goes, but which goes when it goes
sometimes all night, many nights in a row,

as though he is driven to finish his walking,
even if it is that time that his people must sleep.

JINX

I think of memory and notation
almost as siblings,

one's value simultaneous
with the vulnerabilities of the other.

I know sisters who laugh at the same
begrudging one another

their overlap—the older
a little more hardened, the younger

more in need of gentle hands
when her words suggest an echo

of what the person closest
to her origins is saying.

CLEARLY

Send snow.

That which has a design,

brings its design to us

for notice.

Which publishes, publishes, publishes

in the space that has cleared.

Which takes publishing for law

and follows the law down.

It might blow a bit but it is lawful.

Things come infinitely, clearly.

What we need could take up

the entire world we move through

too were we schooled.

We tip our glance or turn

to sleeve. Vapor

around the nucleus.

Don't breathe too hard.

We need sleep.

Endings so we take.

When the teacher speaks to the student,

there must be metaphors paced in the language

the student understands. Begin gently,

snow reminds us.

Publish, publish, publish.

It gets mundane.

Give me pictures.

I don't dream much, but some days.

How many metaphors must there be

before we can know the first thing certainly?

Give me warmth, later, to melt it for myself,

to melt what I know for myself.

RAE GOUIRAND

Rae Gouirand's first collection of poetry, *Open Winter*, was the winner of the Bellday Prize, an Independent Publisher Book Award, and the Eric Hoffer Book Award, and a finalist for the Montaigne Medal, Audre Lorde Award, and California Book Award for poetry. Her work has appeared most recently in *American Poetry Review*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Crazyhorse*, *diode*, *VOLT*, *The Rumpus*, *FANZINE*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Barrow Street*, a Distinguished Poet feature for *The Inflectionist Review*, and the anthology *Please Excuse This Poem: 100 Poets for the Next Generation*. She has founded numerous longrunning workshops in poetry and prose in northern California and online, and serves as a lecturer in the Department of English at UC-Davis. She is currently at work on her third collection of poems and a work of nonfiction. For more, see <allonehum.wordpress.com>.