Rhyme On

2016

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On The Osa

1st Place
Anne Whitehouse
New York, NY

I

Into the forest, we follow a river
up to a waterfall. Slowly twirling,
green and yellow, leaves fall
in the heavy air, and from on high
a toucan trills, thrilling us.
Perched on a dead branch,
backlit by the sky, the bird in profile.

Spider monkeys noisily eating
berries by the handful,
dropping refuse on the ground,
scattering, chattering—
and everywhere the emphasis on color—
a lizard called *silvana* with a stripe
of neon green down its back,
river crayfish with claws of deep blue,
but surely there is nothing bluer
than the blue Morphos butterflies
seeking refuge in the cool shade
that hovers above the river,
their fluttering wings like scraps of pure sky.

II

After noon, stillness shimmers.
Brilliantly colored Scarlet Macaws
fly up and down in pairs,
tracing vees side by side,
long feathery tails curving gracefully.
Like the heat, their harsh cries
are an assault.

In the shadows of the lagoon
hides the Kingfisher.
Black and scarlet, Cherrie Tanagers
flit in the jacaranda.

Rocky ledges and loose stones
magnify the echo of the crashing surf.
I float in the warm waters of the Golfo Dulce
where the tide ripples onto a beach,
almost asleep, as in a bath.
Dreaming of ice,
waiting for nightfall,
I run across the burning sand.

III

I am thinking of a lost woman,
bare-footed, in her orange caftan,
younger than I but no longer young,
and the connection we shared,
a recognition that was not quite friendship.

Foreigner to this tropical coast,
in flight from her previous life—
Listen to the rain, she sings,
change your mind and dreams.
Eat saucy things with your fingers,
share star fruit and sacred space.

I was born in New York
and grew up all over the world,
inflicted with a permanent sense
of wanderlust. In my city nights,
I shut down bars at the open mike.
Now I wake with howler monkeys
and go to sleep when darkness falls.

From her list of rhymeless words
that have crept into her songs:
Wolf, wasp, almond, rhythm,

Silver, angel, walrus, month,
purple, orange, bulb, music,
false husband.

Steak and Chips

2nd Place

Laura Taylor
Merseyside, UK

We went out of season, so it was cheap.
I wanted to explore the caves
where, I'd heard, people actually lived.
Imagine, living in caves.

I wanted to hire a car, drive the length of the island,
touch each tip of it with my Northern English fingers
and taste Balearic boundaries;
take home a token pebble
to remember ephemeral freedoms.

I wanted every dish on the beach-front menu,
sea-fresh everything, new each night.
He had steak and chips, whinged about
the *stench* of my Mussels Marinara,
my steaming pot of aromatic heaven,
tongue in rapture, drenched in butter,
mopped and messy,
happy.

He had steak and chips
every night,
refused to drive,
touch different tips or click-clack freedom
two weeks later with a pebble on a desk.

Imagine,
steak and chips,
every night.
Imagine,
living in caves.

The Gardener

3rd Place
Chloe Hor Yin Yee
Perak, Malaysia

The first thing I felt was your sweet caress.
Your fingernails were caked with wet earth
while you held my imminent intricacies
in a protective grasp before I knew their worth.

I wanted to do for you
what mushrooms did for downpours.
Flourish in gratitude of a sojourn,
be a promulgation of open doors.

Ever so gradually with every passing year,
I noticed how the world below receded.
You too, grew smaller with every day,
but prouder of how rarely I conceded.

Your eyes, I remember, were as green as me.
I held my arms wide and shielded you,
knowing how you enjoyed cowering,
hiding your existence from those you knew.

Once upon a harrowing summer day,
you looked at me like I had won.

You stood there, watering can in hand,
as I shriveled up in the midday sun.

Honorable Mentions

Road Sign Romance

Honorable Mention
Christy M. Thomas
Herndon, VA

Pedestrian Crossing
Men Working
Rest Area
Roads Meet

Soft Shoulders
Yield
Merge
Enter

Construction Ahead
Bump
Children Playing
HOV
School Crossing

Oversize Load
Caution Wide Load
Wide Turns

Curves Ahead
Speed Pass
Proceed at Your Own Risk
Unmarked Pavement
Rough Road
Blasting Zone
Watch for Falling Rock

Begin Work Zone
Road under Construction
Bridges Ice before Roadway
Bridge Out
Road Narrows
Restricted Area Keep Out

Stop
No Re-entry

End Construction
Divided Highway
Exit

One Lane Road Ahead

By Heart

Honorable Mention
Mary Soon Lee
Pittsburgh, PA

I pressed the first one into me
for the woman who gave me
one thousand, one hundred and sixty-six pages
of poetry when I was seven:
Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare--
none of whom I cared for then--
but in those pages no talking-down,
no platitudes for children,
instead an austere mystery
that pulled me deeper
until I found stepping stones
across the cold water:
here: Kipling; there: Masefield,
and then the nineteen broad stone steps
that led me to the tower
of the Lady of Shalott
in which I stayed
until I knew each word
by heart.

Counting

Honorable Mention
Stephanie Malley
Trafford, PA

For years
I lived in a Mother Goose daze
buckling shoes shutting doors
picking up and laying straight
with singsong regularity.

Gradually
the rhyme changed—
one two they put on their own shoes
three four they shut the front door—
and suddenly they're off
to Grandmother's house in a
fairy tale forest where wolves roam.
At least the plots are familiar
and they can't stray too far from the path.

Soon
they will write their own stories
with characters I don't know
and endings I can't predict.
I count while I can *nine ten*
knowing my mother hen days
are numbered.

Daybreak

Honorable Mention
Victoria Otto Franzese
New York, NY

the sun is

UP

and
so are you
two

pitter-patter go your feet
as you jitterbug down the hall
and bounce into the big bed
hoping for a cuddle

mom says bobby-kenny-or-whoever-you-are just let me
sleep
but tries to make room
under the comforter
for two squirming bodies

dad s t r e t c h e s o u t (with eyes closed)
and now there are
knees
and
elbows
every
which
way

cozy cozy cozy cozy
but this king-sized bed
seems never
big enough
for four

Fisherman's Folly

Honorable Mention
Carlisle Hill
Brighton, IL

Oh misty waters, and sapphire skies,
Can you tell me where my love lies?
Have I lost him to your depths?
Many nights for him I've wept.
Upon your breath I taste his tears,
Into my heart your voice strikes fear.
I walk your shores for him each night,
And pray that he returns come light.
Yet everyday is much the same,
I still remain with none to blame.
I've seen your wrath within the tide,
Crashing waves and deep dark eyes.
I pray you let me take his place,
And I shall leave without a trace.
I only ask for one last day,
And I shall remain as the face of the waves.

Held in Amber

Honorable Mention
N. Barry Carver
Reston, VA

Into my utter darkness
Wafted a waterfall of fireflies
Wandering sparks
of stone striking steel

How had I been so blind?

Upon my drought of silence
A sprinkling of distant tinkling
Swelled richly into
A delicate duet deluge

And finally I could hear.

All at once
A taste I couldn't describe or forget
A touch synapsing sensations
Left long-ago for dead
A breath of freshness that proved
I'd been underwater far too long

All of that and more.

From this moment
I live in gratitude
For the one and only time
Your lips touched mine.

I am held in amber
While mundanity speeds past
Dreaming in satisfaction
Of our only kiss

…so far.

Hope Eternal

Honorable Mention
Kelley Delano
Miramichi, NB

Spring, you fickle mistress!
Promising lovely dreams and returning harsh realities;
Playing with our emotions, our expectations.
Providing warm thoughts and tenderness,
You sing your siren's song, leading us,
Lulling us into a false sense of security,
Only to deny it all without a moment's notice.

Cruel heart, to toy with our affections so!
Do we not pine for your return?
For those fleeting moments
When you at last decide to reveal your lovely face?
Do we not revere and worship you,
As if our very existence relies on
That first glimpse of your vibrant beauty?

Mild to malevolent, sympathetic to spiteful,
You know of no loyalty.
Dancing in front of us, teasing, tempting;
Then slipping away in a blink,
Leaving us only cold disappointment
And the struggle to find patience
Until your faithless heart decides to show itself once more.

Is it the game you seek?
The thrill of being desired so much,
Yet keeping yourself aloof and apart?
Does it feed your coquettish spirit
To know of this power you possess?
Or is it that you truly are indifferent,
Holding neither love nor loathe for the beings that seek you out?

And yet, for all your mercurial moods,

We cannot help ourselves
For we are hopelessly lost to you.
Unable to exit your heartless game
Bound by life's promise and perpetuation
And waiting, always waiting
For you to welcome us into your warm embrace once more.

Life begins

Honorable Mention
T. K. Varenko
Kharkov, Ukraine

Life begins at the gleam in his eyes
When he tells you he loves you and cares;
Life begins when you quit being wise
When you follow your life up the stairs;

Life begins when the work of your life
Starts to bring the result you've desired;
Life begins when a challenging strife
To achieve something new is inspired…

Life begins at a different age,
And can offer a lot of beginnings.
Life begins when you write a new page
In your life book with multiple meanings.

Life begins at the break of the dawn
When you hopefully look into distance;
Life begins at a beautiful song
That your heart sings to you with persistence.

Life begins at your dream coming true
Or expecting your plans implemented;
Life begins when you feel it anew
Having done something good, unexpected.

Life begins on the threshold of death
When you see you have been an achiever.
Life won't end till its ultimate breath
If you are diagnosed with life fever.

Life is a Boat

Honorable Mention
Sujoy Bhattacharya
Maharashtra, India

I bleed and bleed and bleed !
Thirsty Earth drinks my blood .
Licks with the fang of an adder .
My bloodless body – an effigy
Sauntering jelly - man all directions .
A mob of skeletons encircled me –
Starving hunger sliced remnants of my
flesh - blood- less , palate- less mortal food .
Running wind stopped for a while abrupt
to witness the strange one- act play .
The sky descended to applause – downing
ovation with rain – drinks after sumptuous feast .
I lost my identity – my existence obliterated soon .
In an apologetic dancing posture they volatiled !
The capsized boat reached abysmal bottom
As identify – less as I am now – nobody !
Current of life , showed me threshold of hades !
Cotton – seed explosion, aerial floating coziness .
Digging up the debris of dwindled life – throb ,
I took incorporeal ablution retain my mortality .

Lines on Route 10

Honorable Mention
Floyd Cheung
Florence, MA

double-yellow lines only as strong
as the minds driving on either side
we treat as if magical || thin glyphs of warding
separating us on our 40-mph paths

broken lines upon which some teens lie
lengthwise to test nerves and scare drivers
possess no magic - - - just stitches of promise
on the asphalt seam between hell and here

My Bedroom Window

Honorable Mention
Jana Abou Shakra
Mount Lebanon, Lebanon

My bedroom window had the best view
From this window I could see the road
Cars' headlights flashed on my ceiling
From this window I saw the trees and birds and butterflies
From my window I saw rain drops trickling down
and heard the symphony of the wind
I saw stars glimmering every night
And sometimes a shooting star passed and I wished I was with you
From this window I watched you enjoy your dark morning coffee
I also saw you turn the lights on at 8 pm every night
I watched you gaze at the sky at dawn, praising the heavenly sight
I waited by the window everyday watching you ride your rusty car
to work
I always wanted to tear that window down and jump to you
I always wished that I was standing by your window
not mine
Next to you
Listening to your favorite songs and dance,
while someone else would watch from my window
You probably never noticed my window
Or me..
You didn't know that I, from across the street,
enjoyed your daily routine as much as you did,
and made it a part of mine

My bedroom window had the best view
And all I saw from it was you
You were all my stars, my waning moon, my raindrops
You brought harmony to nature's wild symphony
You were the song that made me enjoy the night
And you also were kissing someone else that night
And now as I recall the past and reflect way back
I know you are the reason my window is painted black

October Birthday

Honorable Mention
Bruce Goldberg
Carlisle, MA

In the break of early light,
it is the rime of numbed years
I seem to shake free.
My hands, warm woolen gloves
clenched in the child's ever morning,
I watch how the endless sea
spins my three brothers
back and forth around the tide,
over the crackling black breakwater
to the lighthouse end;
and my mother arranging
the wistful wasting
flowers of her years,
the smell of plum and pear
and apple, and all the
berries of bushes dying in
the rainy chill of the October wind.

And it was my birthday song
sung by the leaves,
sung in the falling fading color
of the round white sun,
as true to boy as man,
time sweeping quick
kisses on my cheek,
its breath blown warm
and orange as an Autumn pumpkin.
It was my birthday that October
when all the years collapsed
and dove into the frozen water
like birds to the nesting womb.
And on my seventy-fifth birthday,
I shook off the cold and gritty sand,
the clung seaweed at my feet,

and heard in the narrowing night
my father speak the words of the dead
in a dream so real I could touch
the sound of heaven.

Of Weeds and Men

Honorable Mention
Robert Gene Stoner, Jr.
Holiday, FL

Nothing more than a random seed
an abstract orb
nondescript
yet singular
taken to air in passing breeze
to drift in aimless path obscure.

Quest
the embrace of fertile soil
a meritless traveler in a boundless land
once cradled in favorable stay
the gift of life will be provided
the miracle of germination.

Without pretence or malice nature's offer
seed coat opens
a single root tentatively reaches
to embrace of fields fertile soil
nature's open offer
opportunity to all.

Sun shines
rain falls
promise of life in equal balance
a single tendril rises skyward in hope
timid new leaves bud
in the plan of life and diversity.

Foundation established the newcomer thrives
tender leaves are shed
followed by growth to purpose
enhancing colors appear on the fledgling sprout
soul desire to live in peace and harmony.

In nature's course
a bud of bloom comes forth
sun's calling rays urge the blooms opening
standing in resilient bloom
nature's grand plan has been served.

A creation stands in full grace
strong independent
fulfilling the need
created to the design perceived by its creator
in singular beauty.

Is this creation exceptional due to beauty
above all others
of greater value in nature's design and purpose
to what standard of selection the rule
where in nature's plan are aesthetics a right to live
what in nature defines the grace of bloom from weed.

Nature holds no scale of judgment
beauty is only a tool of process in motion
every participant is of equal value in the plan
be it drab or beautiful
all are welcome.

Red blooms among blue
the simple weed thrives beside delicate clover
thorns adorn the richest rose
all are embraced in the grand scheme of life
equally.

yet mankind
turns from nature's purpose
discriminates in diverse rule
to defile a race of choice to extermination
persecute dissimilar ideology among its fertile fields
encourage and promote isolation of societies.

Such a small world

nothing more than a random seed
an abstract orb
nondescript
yet singular
humanity embroiled in selective genocide
mankind's judgment imposed
who is weed
who is bloom.

On the Porch

Honorable Mention
Terence Kuch
Springfield, VA

I

Nineteen forty-four again, September
shade on fly-screened porch;
dust from disking tractors drifts
through crumpled driveway weeds.

On the porch our old swing creaks;
outside, red-eyed chickens hunt for seed;
toward the river road, a leafless elm;
far away, high clouds.

Every Daily News brings maps
where tanks the scale-size of dumb
demolished towns line up in rows
white for us black for them

and try to stare each other down
as tank gears whine and steel cleats
measure out demolished streets.
But here, it is another 'forty-four,

late summer on the porch again;
the News blows away across the road.
Red-eyed chickens peck
at seeds; a fly lands on the screen

and scrapes two legs against a third.
Its creaking chains rusted red,
our swing slides back in its uneasy frame,
floorboards almost in pitch.

II

Why did we come to this place and time of War?
You ask me to remember how it is to be the view
and touch of mind in this small place and time,
crisp river tossing in its banks
and cutting slowly at the river road or I ask you,
no matter. Late summer heat on driveway weeds;
and far away, dark clouds rise high
above the dumb demolished towns.

On the porch our tumbled words collide.
We talk and cry and gasp for breath;
chickens look up annoyed
and flies scared quiet clutch the screen.

How delicious it was to be mind's view
and touch when we were nineteen
forty-four! that even now we make
our words tell us things to know again.

III

On the farm outside the town
the elms are burned to death;
on the road outside the town
the soldiers burn to death.

A chicken wanders off to look
for seed another place and time;
the fly takes up its mindful flight again.
The other ways to be, you

say to me or I to you, that we have been
and will be yet again will have their
time and place as much as flies
and rusting chains and seed,

the daily news of War and burning
tanks and shapes of shadows on a map—
but to this porch we came again,

to nineteen forty-four, September.

Far away, high clouds.

Overflight

Honorable Mention
Rachael Pettus
Kato Paphos, Cyprus

When I'm working in my field

And a 'Hind' flies overhead

I don't have to run for cover;

I don't have to think 'I'm dead!'

For the pilots they are our guys –

That's their base, just down the road.

And the gunners don't have rockets

That they're itching to unload.

But in some benighted countries

When a gunship clatters by

Then the farmer in the field

Wonders if he's going to die.

For he well knows how a rocket

Can destroy a home and hearth

And he's sometimes buried children

Who were caught up in its path.

When the gunship clatters over,

Terror makes the eyes flare wide,

For there's no safe place to run to,

There is nowhere left to hide.

The roar of close explosions,

And the acrid tang of smoke,

The crash of falling masonry,

The cries of injured folk.

Makes the farmer hunker closer

To the cold, unyielding ground

While his eardrums ache to bursting

And the shrapnel whistles round.

I've never had a helicopter

Hunting me or mine

And years have passed since I last heard

A rocket's screeching whine.

But I still feel pinned and helpless

When a 'Hind' roars overhead,

'Til it wheels and soars off gracefully

Above the peaceful Med.

Pink Balloons

Honorable Mention
Laura Mathurin
Aldie, VA

Glass doors glide open, sun streams in, reflecting off the taut, round sides

Of bobbing pink balloons tied to her wheelchair,

Her soft, maternal smile melts down onto the swaddled new person in her arms.

My own hands clench the cold vase of stark, white flowers,

Their sharp, acrid perfume mixes with the scent of latex gloves and disinfectant.

She and I are alike-- our wombs so newly emptied of the lives our bodies started.

She sustained hers for nine months,

I barely made it to six.

You came too soon and small into this world.

Expelled from me, wrenched from me, while I cried out to doctors and nurses and God,

Why?…why?

Sympathetic eyes over masked faces buzz around me, unable to answer,

But they gave me a tidy row of stitches, and the consolation, "*You'll hardly see a scar*"…

Along with a flimsy piece of plastic that now encircles my wrist: my key to accessing you

Here in your first nursery, a Secret Garden of sickly babies.

I come here to see you tethered to tubes and wires,

A tiny, shriveled, terrifying version of the daughter I envisioned meeting.

I view you in a glass box, your weak shape blurred by

My own shameful reflection, taunting and tormenting me,

Look at what your body did…Look at the job it couldn't complete.

I long to stroke your frail, translucent skin, but I'm afraid

The blinking monitors will blare their disapproval,

They scream constantly in this place, summoning the nurses to your body's struggles:

She's forgotten how to breathe again

Her heart is unsure how to keep beating

My body should be breathing and beating for you, but instead you're on your own.

So am I.

The flowers arrived soon after you did.

I imagine the senders' hesitancy; I pity them for having to decide:

Flowers or Balloons?

How to celebrate a life that could at any moment end?

How to congratulate and sympathize? Rejoice birth that reeks of uncertainty and loss?

Flowers or Balloons?

I clutch the flowers now in my hands as I watch the new mother leave,

Madonna and Infant cradled in a healthy halo of fat, pink balloons.

I've been told it's time I must leave too,

Incision healing. Okay. Blood pressure. Okay. Hydration level. Okay. Okay. Okay.

Do they not see? The brokenness inside me?

How I've forgotten how to breathe. How my heart is unsure how to beat.

There are no monitors attached to me, no alarms to sound out,

No way to alert the world of how far from Okay I am.

I leave the hospital, not nuzzling your soft form in my arms,

But clinging to a heavy vase of pale flowers,

Vulnerable, fragile things

Plucked prematurely from the nourishing earth,

Artificially kept alive in a sterile, glass container

Beautiful and wretched and perfect for a Wake.

I never wanted flowers on your birth day.

I wanted pink balloons.

Seagull

Honorable Mention
Peter Garland
Oakland, CA

The A-Gull is a good gull,
The B-Gull is a dog,
The C-gull is a common gull,
The D-Gull is French.

The E-Gull is a high gull,
The Fee-Gull goes to court,
The Gee-Gull pulls a wagon,
The He-Gull lifts weights with a snort.

The I-Gull helps the eye-dull,
The J-Gull is blue,
The K-Gull sells cosmetics,
The Lei-Gull is kind of cute.

Springtime brings the May Gull,
The Nay-Gull runs and hides,
The O-Gull is a gullible gull,
The P-Gull comes in pods.

The Q-Gull is found in Pool Halls,
The Ray-Gull comes from the sun,
The See-Gull sells sweets in shopping malls,
The Tea-Gull comes with a bun.

The U-Gull is underwater,
The V-Gull flies in a Vee,
The Wee-Gull is very tiny,
The X-Gull a Navy plane.

The Y-Gull is Christian,
The Z-Gull is found only in Zanzibar, if there!

If you think I've told you too much,

About gulls, from A-to-Zee,
I can only fold my wings, my dear,
And say, "I plead gull-tee!"

Snooze Button Depression

Honorable Mention
Yusra Amjad
Lahore, Pakistan

Sometimes i think
if i get 8 hours tonight
i will be okay

Sometimes i think
if i wake up early tomorrow
i will be okay

Sometimes i think
if i gain 5 pounds
i will be okay.

sometimes i think
if I save this sum of money
i will be okay

sometimes i think if i
have hot water and warm room
i will be okay.

sometimes i think
as soon as I finish this assignment
I will be okay

sometimes i think
if i make my mother tea
i will be okay

sometimes i think if
i crack my knuckles
on a man's jaw
i will be okay

swipe left for snooze

swipe left for snooze
swipe left for snooze
i am late

for linguistic psychology
i am late for form submission
i am late for spring cleaning
i am late for summer itself
i am late to adulthood
stuck in adolescence traffic

i am late

for my own breakdown

i tell it
please start without me

Summer

Honorable Mention
Ebony Stewart
Humble, TX

It is the year 1996.
It is summer.
It is hot.
The smell of sweat and crazy is everywhere.
It is a month after I became woman and pomegranate silo.
Two days before I will wad another pair of beaded panties to the bottom of the wastebasket.
Ruined.
Again.
I am all mouth, breasts, and booty.
Endangered.
Boys and men alike grab their dicks when they see me.
This is not the way you were meant to be noticed.
They say things.
They stare too long, make you draw into yourself.
Forget they were born between a woman's legs,
That I am the crown that makes them king.

It is June.
It is sticky.
It is humid.
The wind has forgotten about us.
It is the kind of day your father curses the sun as soon as it hits his skin.
Your mother's grocery list, address book, and whole hand becomes a fan.
It is the kind of day you do not want to be punished or made to stay outside.
Heated bodies just want to be cool.
Children only go indoors when their thirsty.

It is the first time I will be licked.
The first time I will be groped and experience my own thieving.
The first time I will shout out of my skin.

The first time a boy will mistake my body for bed.
I remember.

He is the first boy I will escape who wants me so bad he uses his teeth to kiss.
The first boy I will wipe my wet face on.
The first boy I will use my knee against.
He is the first boy I will hurt away.
It is the hardest I will ever run home.
The hardest thump my heart will ever beat.

It is the first time I will learn:
To shower thoughts.
To wash the fingerprints away.
To rub so hard I about bleed.
To fester. To remember. To want to forget.
To call me fault. To know I should've known better.
To whisper apology to myself and passing women.
To want for the Universe to bring all my stolen pieces back to me.

Still waiting.

I have outlasted even myself.
This will happen again.
Little girl.
She is becoming woman.
And the summer has just begun.

The Call to Peace

Honorable Mention
Sharon Mills Wozniak
Haymarket, VA

The wheel goes round and round.
Creep, sit, wait.
Chug, thug, hate
While clogging road in inches measures slowly circulating wheels.

Hummm, roar, back for more,
Engines winding to a place
That's hostile, most unkind.
Is this the end of all we know as humankind?

Yet, somewhere else,
Now could there be,
A smarter land
For you and me?

Where wheel goes round and round,
Slower cause it's bigger round,
Clop, clop Clydesdale 'stead of
Roar, roar, grind of humankind.

Whinny, swish and swish of tails,
There's broaching countryside;
Green and lush with hills enough.
Tis not the sound of pavement pie,
Divided as the cars go by,
Piercing peace that's ebbing by.
Way out of sight thee knows not nigh
Rejuvenating plentitudes of blissful, calming peace.

Amish backward? Nay, but forward,
Leaving lanes of lovely longing levitating high,
As sweetest air and birds declare
A thankful one is passing by.

Leaving land and understands
This twas not made by human hands
To slice and dice a paradise
That's everywhere that someone cares.

So, count your money, divvy up
Be developer or Yuppie yup.
What will it buy as cars go by,
A multistoried condo high?

Above it all, as curtains draw,
The life is tech and wreck and maul.
When those do wear till nothing's there,
What's left outside but genocide?
You decide!

To a Child at Enlightenment

Honorable Mention
J. C. Elkin
Annapolis, MD

What I recall about that fourth
Is not fireworks, but fireflies, before.

At dusk, the bushes teemed with light,
neon points in random flight.

I placed one in your tiny hand and
your face beamed, *I understand.*

Twenty-three

Honorable Mention
Jessica Liou
Dulles, VA

Twenty-one
Spent that summer across
the **ocean**
Twenty-three
Favorite *number*
throughout childhood
Twenty-two
Last time I saw you
Breathing,
…I gasped for air.
Twenty-three
Another year older -
Without you
In this w o r l d
Twenty-one
I ate **my** favorite dish not knowing
it would be the L A S T
Time
Twenty-two
Mom, your c o l d hands
I touched;
Then I *slept,*
But **you** never woke

You Uncomfortable Living Thing

Honorable Mention
Harmony Button
Salt Lake City, UT

Greetings, meat puppets! Greetings, perfect
souls. Welcome, nostril breathers, flesh
wearers, those who swallow air and dust,
those who swallow water, those who swallow
most desires like the good boys that they are.
Are you someone who hears through channels
in the skull, sees through face-holes,
sweats through permeable membranes
of the skin? Do you make word-things in
the hollow of your mouth-place, hoping
they might be opened by some other, swallowed
whole inside some fellow listeners' ear or mouth
or some more heart-bound cavity?
Hello, fellow toes, fellow tongues, fellow thumbs.
Hello, fellow nervous speakers, chap-lipped
kissers, restless sleepers, side curlers, arm tossers, suckers
of dreams in the night. I'm calling you, you
uncomfortable living thing. I'm calling all of you
who chafe and decompose. Welcome, compost
creatures. Welcome all you teeth-gnashing, food-eating,
refuse-eliminating miracles. Welcome. Well,
come.