Notes On Contributors

Paula Smith: Esta persona, aunque no existe, sigue insistiendo que viene del Perú y que algún día las llamas conquistarán al mundo.

Sue Rubin: That was supposed to be sarcastic.
or I sit in the grass counting dog hairs on my shirt.

Rosalie Matchett: "I love the first movement of a snow storm over the fields, especially when there has not been much previous snow, at least not enough to break down the weeds. The discovery that comes at last: that the self, which seemed so marvellous and inexhaustible, was really desolate and barren; so I suppose that is why I love the snow, this morning, after working without result all night."

Theodore Roethke

John Hilliard: Writes music in HU-5.

John Jackson: "Armed workers are practical men and not sentimental intellectuals." V.I. Lenin

Liz Holmes: "Poems are always better than a bloody turkey foot in the mail box. Few would disagree." Jim Harrison

David Perk: "...Charlie Starkweather, who Skelton remembered as a kind of anachronistic dry-gulch artist running through the west; who got wired to a Nebraska utility outlet in a metal chair by officials of the republic." McGuane

Barb Reed: "I don't want silences as a rule. What I want is the alternative of a silent mind." H. Prather

Eric Schneider: Look over your shoulder suspiciously some night, and you'll see me looking suspiciously over my shoulder.

Amanda Holmes: "You will find that making bad poems actually gives more pleasure than reading even the most beautiful ones."

Herman Hesse

Sally Alatalo: "Now the elephant realizes that its only course is to run amuck--yes, just to run amuck! Goddam everything!"

Russell Edson

Beth Wolfson: Going away

I am supposed to go today,
but I won't, I'll go tomorrow.
You'll see me playing a flute made of a fly's bone,
my flag will be a spider's web.
my drum the egg of an ant,
and my cap, my cap, will be a humming bird's nest.

Translated by Mark Strand from the book "18 Poems from the Quechua"
Two more shots. A pause. Then the short guard reappears a bit hastily, looking over his shoulder. The Killer charges into view around the opposite corner. The guard fires his gun in a frenzy. The Killer falls. The short guard walks over to him.

Short: Funny. Not a wound on him.

Andre (picking up the Killer's gun): He must have slipped!

Short: Andre!

The short guard runs around the corner of the shack. Andre follows. Almost immediately they reappear; the short guard runs inside and slams the door.

Andre: Open the door!

Short: Now Andre, what about the bear?

Andre: What about leaving me in the cold with this madman?

Short swings the door open. A volley. A cloud of smoke. All shots miss. He slams the door shut.

Andre: I hope I'm not boring you!

Short swings open the door again. Another volley. Dense smoke. No hits. The door slams shut. Lights out.
The noise ceases.

Killer: Looking for meat sauce.

The Killer's efforts in the dark are quite plain now.

Short: Who did hire you then?

I don't remember, but I know that I don't remember it being you.

Work-a-day man indeed.

Killer: He steps into the light, reloading his gun.

Short: I tell you, there isn't any.

The Killer yanks open the door, gun in hand. Both parties fire their weapons. Noise. Violence. The Killer falls back, the door slams shut.

Short: Hey, what are you doing in there?

Killer: Looking for meat sauce.

He steps into the light, reloading his gun.

Short: I tell you, there isn't any.

The Killer yanks open the door, gun in hand. Both parties fire their weapons. Noise. Violence. The Killer falls back, the door slams shut.

Short: You missed~

Killer: You missed too.

Short: No. I didn't; I got you.

Killer: Nonsense, I ducked.

Short: You're lying.

The Killer opens the door and springs out again. The guard, taken by surprise, runs around the corner of the shack. The Killer begins to follow, then reverses and runs around the opposite corner. Both vanish. A pause. Then: two shots, almost on top of each other.

Short: You missed!

Killer: You missed too.

Short: No. I didn't; I got you.

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The Killer opens the door and springs out again. The guard, taken by surprise, runs around the corner of the shack. The Killer begins to follow, then reverses and runs around the opposite corner. Both vanish. A pause. Then: two shots, almost on top of each other.

Short: Missed!

Killer: Missed!
breath. Andre just stood on the table laughing. He thought it was immensely funny. And he was always looking at his damn cards. Every time I turned around, there he was with his cards, staring at them, rearranging them.

Killer: How many cards?
Short: Three red, two blue...

The Killer has stepped back out of the light. He is doing something that involves the moving of furniture, the opening of drawers.

Short: ...He would just sit there with them! And when I would go to bed, there he would be, in the dark!, rearranging them: slap slap slap, all night! He would never show them to me, never! It was madden-ing!

Killer: Didn't you ever do anything to him?
Short: No! That was the injustice of it. But then it occurred to me that I should add excitement to Andre's life, the excitement he himself was looking for and was unable to find.

Killer: And what was that?
Short: I decided to hire someone to kill him. But not an expert killer, I couldn't afford that. Merely a hired killer, a work-a-day man who would not do his job so well that it would only take a moment. I wanted Andre to be amused for a fair amount of time.

Killer: That was good of you. Who was this man? Anyone I know?
Short: You, stupid:

Killer: Nonsense. I don't remember your hiring me at all.
POEM FOR A MORNING VIRUS

Sally Alatalo

I
Breakfast: orange juice.

II
Dear Anne: This morning has been spent running and vomiting.

III
A poem: Walking on the Side of the Road So My Parents Won't Feed Me Chicken Soup

THE CHILD'S BATTLE CRY: No. They wouldn't understand me refusing aspirin, Nyquil so I am out in zero weather fighting my stomach.

A poem inside a poem: Drinking Pepto Bismol

The stomach says, "Do something quick." I rip open the seal on the bottle and pour thick pink inside me. Don't you think lava on rainclouds would only agitate a storm? I hope my parents don't find the empty bottle in the garbage."

I'm running on a gravel road. Medicine doesn't agree with me and leaves. I take a handful of snow from the roadside. Swallowing it erases the bitter taste from my mouth.

Short: Wait! Stop!

The Killer comes around the other side of the shack and races inside, the guard at his heels. The Killer slams the door shut and locks it. The guard pounds on it with his fist.

Short: See here! Come out! See here! Open up!

Killer: There's nothing like that in here.

The guard steps back to get a good look at things. He is agitated.

Short: My God! Look at Andre! You've killed him!

Killer: Nonsense. He slipped.

Short: Look at this wound in his chest! He's covered with blood!

Killer: I don't see any wound.

Short: It's a bullet wound, that's obvious.

Killer: He must have fallen on a bullet when he slipped.

Short: You've killed him.

Killer: I disagree completely.

Short: He was my best friend!

Killer: Oh? Then what was he doing locked out in the cold? You must not have liked him very much.

Short: Of course I liked him. Its just that we were bored. I locked him out because he would leave the door open. But he was always the meaner one. He would play tricks on me, like the time he put a bear in the closet.

Killer: A bear in the closet?

Short: Yes, he lured it in with honey. And when I went to get a broom, it tried to kill me. It chased me all over the room, knocking over chairs, filling the air with foul bear
Killer: Nothing comes to mind. Is there another way out besides the front door?

Short: I don't know. That is, I can't remember.

Killer: I understand.

He is back to the front door. He sits on the front step and lights a cigarette.

Short: What are you doing?

Killer: Smoking a cigarette. Would you like one?

Short: No, thank you.

The Killer smokes.

Killer: You know what I'm thinking? What I'd really like right now is some meat sauce. Like spaghetti meat sauce. Also a potato and some salad.

Short: There's nothing like that in here.

Killer: That's too bad. I really enjoy meat sauce. With pepper.

Short: You shouldn't have shot Andre.

Killer: Don't be silly. He slipped. Open the door so that I can bring him in.

Short: No.

Killer: Then come see for yourself.

Short: Okay.

The door opens, and he steps out. He has a gun, a rifle in fact. He shows it to the Killer, who reacts promptly: he leaps up and dashes around the corner of the shack. The guard assumes a hot pursuit. Both vanish in the dark.

Sally Alatalo

WALK

A girl walks in coldness past men in parked cars to the river to pick dried seeds of velvet-leaved mullein

A man told her once that the leaves crushed and put in the river would stun fish

You could pick them up with your hands.

She draws fingers along the stock drops seeds in her pocket

By now her hand is red and numb.

Wetness becomes ice on her face in minus ten degree weather

She lies in the snow leaning on a tree

On the ground are the seeds split from her pocket

"Poor fish," she says.

from a half-sleep
Eric Schneider

Untitled

No one knows what happened

conclusions and problems combining there

the dry night grasping my ground and me looking forward imagining now

and now sure I saw then the cold universe take me in

hug me and say welcome say welcome

Killer fires. Andre falls.

Short: Andre? Andre?

Killer: Your friend slipped.

Short: Slipped? What? Who is that?

Killer: He slipped. Open the door so that I can bring him in.

Short: That wasn't a slip, that was a gunshot!

Killer: Don't be silly. It was not. Your friend slipped on the ice. He's fallen and knocked himself unconscious. Open the door.

Short: Andre? Andre?

Sighing, the Killer empties his gun at the door. He blows a hole in it, but it will not yield. The short guard is clearly agitated.

Killer: Listen; be reasonable and open the door.

Short: No.

The Killer walks the perimeters of the shack. Short listens to him carefully through the wall.

Short: What are you doing? Who are you?

Killer: A simple working man, asking to be let in.

Short: Why do you want to kill me?

Killer: I was hired to kill you.

Short: Who hired you?

Killer: I don't know. I can't remember. I was just hired.

Short: You can't remember at all?
Andre: And when he leaves, I will have some peace and quiet.
The door slams shut.
Andre: Hey!
Short: Ha!
Andre: Let me in! Here, what do you think you're doing?
Open up!
Short: No.
Andre: Come on, it's freezing out here. There's ice on the
ground. Open up!
Killer: Aren't you a guard?
Andre sees the Killer for the first time.
Andre: You! You must be the killer!
Killer: Me?
Andre: He's in there, but he won't open up!
Killer: Cigarette?
Andre: Why not?
Killer draws a gun from his jacket. It goes off: a miss.
Killer: See here, stand still.
Another miss.
Andre: Hey! Here! I hired you!
Short: Andre? What's all that noise? Andre?
Paula Smith

DAYLIGHT

Inside the bed
a sack of wool-warmed skin,
a heap of twisted bones,
something unfurls my eyelids
and rolls the eye outward.
A morning of watery daylight
and the clicking of cheap clocks
pulls at the corners
of my mouth and prods the tongue
to move inside, tasting the sour cotton
of stale leftover dreams.

David Perk

THE OUTPOST

The stage is generally dark. Near the center stands the door of the outpost. This door is the only set. Before it is a fairly well-lighted area; behind it, only a small amount of light. To either side, and behind, are the imaginary corners. As the play begins, two men are on the inner side of the door. They are border guards. One man is short; the other, Andre. Andre, bored, steps outside leaving the door open behind him.

Andre: What a monotone existence! This landscape of dull laundry, the incessant tedium of this outpost. Border guard indeed! A border so dull, so depressing as to be fatal to any who cross it.

The Killer enters. He stands near the corner of the shack. Andre does not see him.

Short: Close the door.

Andre: And the most dull of companions.

Short: Close the door.

Andre: Whose whine fills the air with grease.

Short: What?

Andre: But not for long.


Andre: Not long. When he gets here, things will liven up.

Short: Close the door!
Amanda Holmes

A DOOR IS FOR SWINGING
From a photograph by Ken Josephson

A small boy hanging by a doorknob
is the only thing in the room.

He swings towards a dark room
remembering winter nights alone
in the house. Wolves came
from the mountains to kill the pigs
huddled and screaming in the pen
beside the barn. Car lights
reflecting off snow
sent them running into the darkness
of pines. But now it is summer. In the field
where his father is baling hay,
he hears the slow whining of tractors.

When he closes the door
it is lunchtime. He brings cold lemonade
to the men leaning against trees
and rides on the haywagon
for the rest of the afternoon.
Eric Schneider

DELIVERY

Bendon stopped the engine, sighing, then turned to check the rear of his truck. His bag of letters for the apartment complex and one large box remained. Swinging the bag of letters over his shoulder, he read the address of the box and decided to deliver it last, before he left the apartments. He hadn't delivered a box that big for a while. He would have to deliver it personally. He slid back the truck door with two hands and jumped to the ground, grunting as he struck it. Unsteadily, he started for the first building.

All day rain had threatened and the whole world readied for it. The apartments seemed to crowd together while the wind spread grey over them. But rain had not fallen. Bendon checked his watch. It was four-thirty—almost time to quit. After the apartment rounds, he could go home and watch some TV before dinner. Hopefully, it wouldn't rain. The Elks Club was holding the annual end-of-summer picnic tonight. His wife, her hair mysteriously much more blonde than yesterday, had awakened this morning and after looking out the window, had told him to forget about the picnic as she began to pull hair curlers off. He had groaned, pulling his small body in to roll over and bury his smooth face in the pillow.

"Maybe it will hold," he mumbled.

"It's going to rain," his wife said decisively, flipping off another curler.

He walked past the playground by the sewer ditch. Even though it was still warm and dry, nobody swung on the swings or climbed the monkey bars. If I were a kid, Brendon thought, I would be out here even if it were raining. But it was the end of summer, and kids were probably preparing for school.

Cars started driving in. People coming home from work parked their cars in the black-topped lot at the heart of the whole complex. The grey clouds darkened, and the duplicated buildings seemed to pull closer.

Elizabeth Holmes

BIRD SANCTUARY

Perched in the center of four screened walls the red tailed-hawk curls her talons on frosted wire and beats the snow with her wings.

She does not see the jackrabbit outside her cage pawing the earth for bracken fern. She sees only black rats thickly scented by the man who placed them there yesterday noon. Dead in corners, their forelegs stretch taut on frozen ground.

Again tonight I imagine scaling that cage a mask on my face the wire cutters cold and tight in my grip.
He entered the first building, stopping at the familiar silver rectangle of mailboxes. Opening the first mailbox, he ran his hand through the letters in his bag, reassured. He sorted through them, dropping the appropriate letters in their appropriate boxes. All the letters fit in perfectly somewhere. He began to feel better. It probably wouldn’t rain, and there would be a picnic. He would finish delivering the letters; then he could leave after delivering the box. Suddenly he stopped sorting letters. He realized that the address on the box was that of a man he knew—a man he’d argued with in the Elks Bar last Saturday night. He grew anxious, wondering how he would deliver the box. Maybe the man wouldn’t remember him.

A door opened upstairs, setting Bendon back to work, but no one came down. He only heard, through the closed hall door upstairs, a woman screaming over a loud television, “And you stay out there, until you learn to grow up!” The door slammed, muting the TV still on behind it. A dog downstairs barked once, then yipped as if it had been hit. Bendon shut the last box, looking up the stairs. A small face peered through the door. It was a child and he might have been crying. Bendon stepped out the door to the next building, wondering what the little boy had done to make his mother so angry. Outside, it was still dry. He would really put it to his wife when he got home. He thought of the picnics he’d gone to as a kid. He only remembered one being rained out, and that was a family reunion he wouldn’t have liked anyway.

Someone had cleaned the mailboxes in the next building. The silver reflections they threw warmed Bendon. It made him happy that someone took the time to care like that. But as he started pulling letters from his bag, the front door flew open violently. Mrs. Grutter from the first building plodded in wearing a large bathrobe and slippers that were splitting at the seams.

"Mr. Bendon," she said, pushing a letter toward his face. "You delivered this wrong. It’s for my sister."

"But your sister lives next door to you," Bendon said, putting out his hand to take the letter.

"You know I ain’t speaking to her." Mrs. Grutter was almost shouting.
"I'm sorry, Bendon said, looking at the carpet and pulling
the letter from her hand.

"Good!" Mrs. Grutter turned and left.

Now Bendon would have to go back to the first building before
he could finish the remaining four. Things seemed slow today.
He felt tired. Going back to the first building, Bendon thought
of the box again. Maybe it was just the weather.

Bendon had finished delivering letters to the buildings. Water
began sprinkling from the sky, as he walked back to his truck. He
unlocked the door and slid it open, pulling himself in. He was
ready to go home, but the box was still there, waiting to be
delivered. He struggled to shut the door and fell back in his seat.

Fat drops splattered across the windshield, blurring every-
thing. There goes the picnic, he thought, spreading his arms over
the steering wheel and slumping on it. He wished hard that it
would stop. He shook his head. Every year, it was clear for the
Elks Picnic. Now, his wife was right about forgetting it. He was
about to start the truck to go home when he remembered the box
again.

"Damn the..." He paused, and a dull ring came from the truck.
"Box," he finished weakly. The shouting made him feel worse.
There would be no picnic. Rain fell.

Bendon thought of the argument with the man whose box he would
have to deliver soon. The man was bartender at the Elks Bar. He
was large and seemed to radiate power like a bulldozer. Bendon
had finished two beers and wanted another, but the bartender wouldn't
stop for him. He continued to serve other customers.

After a while, Bendon became angry with the bartender and said
loudly, "I want a beer."

"You'll have to wait," the man said, going to another customer.
there is this dance
the mime is the embrace
where between the notes and the song
between the fall and the rise
between the fiction and the lies
there is the night
the soliloquy an animal joy
the tense muscle of quiet
courted in all our dark rooms.
sweet steps
sweet steps...

"I was here before he was," Bendon insisted.
The man ignored him.

"I want to be served now," Bendon said louder. Nobody else in the bar seemed to hear him except the bartender who turned from his customer and said, "This isn't the welfare line."

Bendon was shocked. "I'm not on welfare. I'm a mailman," he said.

The bartender simply turned back to his other customer.

"I demand to be served!" Bendon shouted, immediately closing his mouth and shrinking back at hearing his own voice.

"I might have you thrown out of here," the man said calmly across the room.

"I'm a member of this."

"That means nothing."

Bendon wanted terribly to reply, but could think of nothing to say. The customer at the end was laughing with the bartender and Bendon thought he heard the people in the booths laughing too. At home he found that his wife was still out with her friends, so he dropped into bed. The man still angered him, and he tried to think of a reply he could've used. Bedtime was a good time to sort things out. He calmed down and fell asleep.

The sweet odor of wet grass cut through the greasy engine smell of the truck, bringing him back. That's what I wanted to smell at the picnic, he thought, shaking his head again. The rain slacked gradually until it was only a fine mist coming down. Everyone remained grey.

Bendon picked up the big box, groaning as he opened the door with one hand and started for the building where the man lived. People in raincoats were dashing through puddles from their cars to their buildings. Bendon walked over the sidewalk instead of wet grass. In his mind, he ran over what would happen if the man recognized him.
"You?" the man would say. "What do you want now?"

Maybe he could just set the box there, say "Mail service," and quickly exit. Maybe he could apologize...but no. He was right. The man knew nothing. In fact, he would show the man how important mailmen were. He had a reply. The man would get no mail if it weren't for him. He reached the building and went in, up the stairs. Stepping through the hall door into the warm hall, he studied the four doors. The heavy box had changed from a flat grey to a rich brown. Finding the right room number, Bendon set the box by the door. He knocked, his heart pounding, and his hands beginning to shake, but all was silent except for a TV behind another doorway. Knocking again, he arranged words to tell the old man how important mail was. After a third knock, he grew anxious. Nothing happened. He decided his fourth time would be final. Then the door across the hall opened and the boy Bendon had first seen here stuck his head through.

"Are you looking for that man?" the boy asked. He had tear stains over his cheeks but seemed to have forgotten about the hallway incident.

"Yes," Bendon said, "Do you know where he is?"

"He went to heaven," the boy said bluntly.

Bendon didn't believe it and turned back to the door, knocking again.

"He won't answer, Mr. Mailman." There was a silent pause. "He died."

Bendon turned back to the boy. "Are you sure?"

The boy nodded his head solemnly. Then the boy's mother came to the door, pulling the boy back into the apartment. "Movers came to take his stuff away this morning," she said, chewing hard on her gum. Bendon stood absolutely still. The mother disappeared and the door closed. Bendon stood in the hall for a long time, staring at the man's door. How could that man die? Bendon did not want to leave, but finally he picked up the box and returned outside to the truck. There, he took out a pen and scribbled "return to sender" on the box. Painfully, he put an X through
Rosalie Matchett

LOON

This morning ice lies on rocks near shore; the sky is gray and heavy like the cliffs wrapped around the island. Near Alexander Point a Loon hunts.

I stand behind gray rocks watching him move like water, sleek and black. His dark voice wails like a woman's.

He stays in the bay all afternoon, smoothing feathers searching for fish. I move closer to shore. He swims near the island, where I see the white legs. Against waves the Loon rises and sings, his stomach, white ice on rocks. Thinking fast rivers, water sprawled between stones, I step into the lake.

the man's address. Glancing at his watch, he saw that he was fifteen minutes overtime. But now he wasn't in much of a hurry.

Through the windshield, he noticed the sun skipping from behind heavy storm clouds. Letting his hand fall from the ignition key, he watched the sun slide in and out of clouds until they parted in a patch of blue. All was wet and regaining color. Maybe there'll be a picnic, he thought. But that man had died. His hand was resting on the box, and he jerked it up, rubbing it on his pants. Maybe he would stay home tonight. But he wanted to go to the picnic.

"Damn!" He struck the box with his fist. It didn't move at all. He stared at the box as if it were a large insect. He had to get rid of it, send it away to where it came from. He grabbed the ignition key and revved the truck. Then he drove out of the complex on to the highway toward town.
After taking a shower
I stare in the mirror,
admiring my flat stomach
pulled tight at my waist.

Skin lotioned soft,
I button a silk blouse
advertised in Vogue and roll
nylons to muslin skirt
zipped at the small of my back.

In class I slant
my mouth closed in a smile
and open the text, careful
not to hide my breasts.
Sue Rubin

A GIRL

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"I'm sorry, Bendon said, looking at the carpet and pulling the letter from her hand.

"Good!" Mrs. Grutter turned and left.

Now Bendon would have to go back to the first building before he could finish the remaining four. Things seemed slow today. He felt tired. Going back to the first building, Bendon thought of the box again. Maybe it was just the weather.

Bendon had finished delivering letters to the buildings. Water began sprinkling from the sky, as he walked back to his truck. He unlocked the door and slid it open, pulling himself in. He was ready to go home, but the box was still there, waiting to be delivered. He struggled to shut the door and fell back in his seat.

Fat drops splattered across the windshield, blurring everything. There goes the picnic, he thought, spreading his arm over the steering wheel and slumping on it. He wished hard that it would stop. He shook his head. Every year, it was clear for the Elks Picnic. Now, his wife was right about forgetting it. He was about to start the truck to go home when he remembered the box again.

"Damn the..." He paused, and a dull ring came from the truck. "Box," he finished weakly. The shouting made him feel worse. There would be no picnic. Rain fell.

Bendon thought of the argument with the man whose box he would have to deliver soon. The man was bartender at the Elks Bar. He was large and seemed to radiate power like a bulldozer. Bendon had finished two beers and wanted another, but the bartender wouldn't stop for him. He continued to serve other customers.

After a while, Bendon became angry with the bartender and said loudly, "I want a beer."

"You'll have to wait," the man said, going to another customer.

THE PAINTER ASSESSES HIS WORK

"A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line."

--Joseph Conrad

He loves painting women. Dancers. Not daring to touch flesh to flesh he touches paint to flesh reaching out with something softer than his hands: a tuft of camel hair. It makes the dancers smile or frown. He finds this way less embarrassing. The approach is sound

At dance classes his crayon and newsprint moves with them hundreds of times like a camera, recording muscle and leotard, hair drawn up in buns and intentional movement.

When he sleeps he draws himself and moves with them, finding his crayon lines brown, not the pink/red of flushed faces with white knobs of sweat.
He entered the first building, stopping at the familiar silver rectangle of mailboxes. Opening the first mailbox, he ran his hand through the letters in his bag, reassured. He sorted through them, dropping the appropriate letters in their appropriate boxes. All the letters fit in perfectly somewhere. He began to feel better. It probably wouldn't rain, and there would be a picnic. He would finish delivering the letters; then he could leave after delivering the box. Suddenly he stopped sorting letters. He realized that the address on the box was that of a man he knew—a man he'd argued with in the Elks Bar last Saturday night. He grew anxious, wondering how he would deliver the box. Maybe the man wouldn't remember him.

A door opened upstairs, setting Bendon back to work, but no one came down. He only heard, through the closed hall door upstairs, a woman screaming over a loud television, "And you stay out there, until you learn to grow up!" The door slammed, muting the TV still on behind it. A dog downstairs barked once, then yipped as if it had been hit. Bendon shut the last box, looking up the stairs. A small face peered through the door. It was a child and he might have been crying. Bendon stepped out the door to the next building, wondering what the little boy had done to make his mother so angry. Outside, it was still dry. He would really put it to his wife when he got home. He thought of the picnics he'd gone to as a kid. He only remembered one being rained out, and that was a family reunion he wouldn't have liked anyway.

Someone had cleaned the mailboxes in the next building. The silver reflections they threw warmed Bendon. It made him happy that someone took the time to care like that. But as he started pulling letters from his bag, the front door flew open violently. Mrs. Grutter from the first building plodded in wearing a large bathrobe and slippers that were splitting at the seams.

"Mr. Bendon," she said, pushing a letter toward his face. "You delivered this wrong. It's for my sister."

"But your sister lives next door to you," Bendon said, putting out his hand to take the letter.

"You know I ain't speaking to her." Mrs. Grutter was almost shouting.
Bendon stopped the engine, sighing, then turned to check the rear of his truck. His bag of letters for the apartment complex and one large box remained. Swinging the bag of letters over his shoulder, he read the address of the box and decided to deliver it last, before he left the apartments. He hadn't delivered a box that big for a while. He would have to deliver it personally. He slid back the truck door with two hands and jumped to the ground, grunting as he struck it. Unsteadily, he started for the first building.

All day rain had threatened and the whole world readied for it. The apartments seemed to crowd together while the wind spread grey over them. But rain had not fallen. Bendon checked his watch. It was four-thirty--almost time to quit. After the apartment rounds, he could go home and watch some TV before dinner. Hopefully, it wouldn't rain. The Elks Club was holding the annual end-of-summer picnic tonight. His wife, her hair mysteriously much more blonde than yesterday, had awaken this morning and after looking out the window, had told him to forget about the picnic as she began to pull hair curlers off. He had groaned, pulling his small body in to roll over and bury his smooth face in the pillow.

"Maybe it will hold," he mumbled.

"It's going to rain," his wife said decisively, flipping off another curler.

He walked past the playground by the sewer ditch. Even though it was still warm and dry, nobody swung on the swings or climbed the monkey bars. If I were a kid, Brendon thought, I would be out here even if it were raining. But it was the end of summer, and kids were probably preparing for school.

Cars started driving in. People coming home from work parked their cars in the black-topped lot at the heart of the whole complex. The grey clouds darkened, and the duplicated buildings seemed to pull closer.

Elizabeth Holmes

BIRD SANCTUARY

Perched in the center of four screened walls the red tailed-hawk curls her talons on frosted wire and beats the snow with her wings.

She does not see the jackrabbit outside her cage pawing the earth for bracken fern. She sees only black rats thickly scented by the man who placed them there yesterday noon. Dead in corners, their forelegs stretch taut on frozen ground.

Again tonight I imagine scaling that cage a mask on my face the wire cutters cold and tight in my grip.
Amanda Holmes

A DOOR IS FOR SWINGING
From a photograph by Ken Josephson

A small boy hanging by a doorknob
is the only thing in the room.

He swings towards a dark room
remembering winter nights alone
in the house. Wolves came
from the mountains to kill the pigs
huddled and screaming in the pen
beside the barn. Car lights
reflecting off snow
sent them running into the darkness
of pines. But now it is summer. In the field
where his father is baling hay,
he hears the slow whining of tractors.

When he closes the door
it is lunchtime. He brings cold lemonade
to the men leaning against trees
and rides on the haywagon
for the rest of the afternoon.
Paula Smith

DAYLIGHT

Inside the bed
a sack of wool-warmed skin,
a heap of twisted bones,
something unfurls my eyelids
and rolls the eye outward.
A morning of watery daylight
and the clicking of cheap clocks
pulls at the corners
of my mouth and prods the tongue
to move inside, tasting the sour cotton
of stale leftover dreams.

David Perk

THE OUTPOST

The stage is generally dark. Near the center stands the door of the outpost. This door is the only set. Before it is a fairly well-lighted area; behind it, only a small amount of light. To either side, and behind, are the imaginary corners.

As the play begins, two men are on the inner side of the door. They are border guards. One man is short; the other, Andre. Andre, bored, steps outside leaving the door open behind him.

Andre: What a monotone existence! This landscape of dull laundry, the incessant tedium of this outpost. Border guard indeed! A border so dull, so depressing as to be fatal to any who cross it.

The Killer enters. He stands near the corner of the shack. Andre does not see him.

Short: Close the door.

Andre: And the most dull of companions.

Short: Close the door.

Andre: Whose whine fills the air with grease.

Short: What?

Andre: But not for long.

Short: What? I don’t know. Close the door.

Andre: Not long. When he gets here, things will liven up!

Short: Close the door!
Andre: And when he leaves, I will have some peace and quiet.
The door slams shut.

Andre: Hey!
Short: Ha!
Andre: Let me in! Here, what do you think you're doing? Open up!
Short: No.
Andre: Come on, it's freezing out here. There's ice on the ground. Open up!
Killer: Aren't you a guard?
Andre sees the Killer for the first time.
Andre: You! You must be the killer!
Killer: Me?
Andre: He's in there, but he won't open up!
Killer: Cigarette?
Andre: Why not?

Killer draws a gun from his jacket. It goes off: a miss.
Killer: See here, stand still.
Another miss.
Andre: Hey! Here! I hired you!
Short: Andre? What's all that noise? Andre?
Eric Schneider

Untitled

No one knows what happened.

conclusions and problems combining there

the dry night
grasping my ground and me
looking forward imagining now

and now sure
I saw
then the cold
universe take me in

hug me and
say welcome say welcome

Killer fires. Andre falls.

Short: Andre? Andre?

Killer: Your friend slipped.

Short: Slipped? What? Who is that?

Killer: He slipped. Open the door so that I can bring him in.

Short: That wasn't a slip, that was a gunshot!

Killer: Don't be silly. It was not. Your friend slipped on the ice. He's fallen and knocked himself unconscious. Open the door.

Short: Andre? Andre?

Sighing, the Killer empties his gun at the door. He blows a hole in it, but it will not yield. The short guard is clearly agitated.

Killer: Listen; be reasonable and open the door.

Short: No.

The Killer walks the perimeters of the shack. Short listens to him carefully through the wall.

Short: What are you doing? Who are you?

Killer: A simple working man, asking to be let in.

Short: Why do you want to kill me?

Killer: I was hired to kill you.

Short: Who hired you?

Killer: I don't know. I can't remember. I was just hired.

Short: You can't remember at all?
Killer: Nothing comes to mind. Is there another way out besides the front door?

Short: I don't know. That is, I can't remember.

Killer: I understand.

He is back to the front door. He sits on the front step and lights a cigarette.

Short: What are you doing?

Killer: Smoking a cigarette. Would you like one?

Short: No, thank you.

The Killer smokes.

Killer: You know what I'm thinking? What I'd really like right now is some meat sauce. Like spaghetti meat sauce. Also a potato and some salad.

Short: There's nothing like that in here.

Killer: That's too bad. I really enjoy meat sauce. With pepper.

Short: You shouldn't have shot Andre.

Killer: Don't be silly. He slipped. Open the door so that I can bring him in.

Short: No.

Killer: Then come see for yourself.

Short: Okay.

The door opens, and he steps out. He has a gun, a rifle in fact. He shows it to the Killer, who reacts promptly: he leaps up and dashes around the corner of the shack. The guard assumes a hot pursuit. Both vanish in the dark.

Sally Alatalo

WALK

A girl walks in coldness past men in parked cars to the river to pick dried seeds of velvet-leaved mullein

A man told her once that the leaves crushed and put in the river would stun fish

You could pick them up with your hands.

She draws fingers along the stock drops seeds in her pocket By now her hand is red and numb.

Wetness becomes ice on her face in minus ten degree weather She lies in the snow leaning on a tree

On the ground are the seeds split from her pocket "Poor fish," she says. from a half-sleep
Sally Alatalo

POEM FOR A MORNING VIRUS

I
Breakfast: orange juice.

II
Dear Anne: This morning has been spent running and vomiting.

III
A poem: Walking on the Side of the Road So My Parents Won't Feed Me Chicken Soup

THE CHILD'S BATTLE CRY: No. They wouldn't understand me refusing aspirin, Nyquil so I am out in zero weather fighting my stomach.

A poem inside a poem: Drinking Pepto Bismol

The stomach says, "Do something quick."
I rip open the seal on the bottle and pour thick pink inside me.

Don't you think lava on rainclouds would only agitate a storm?

I hope my parents don't find the empty bottle in the garbage.--

END OF POEM INSIDE A POEM

I'm running on a gravel road. Medicine doesn't agree with me and leaves. I take a handful of snow from the roadside. Swallowing it erases the bitter taste from my mouth.

Short: Wait! Stop!
The Killer comes around the other side of the shack and races inside, the guard at his heels. The Killer slams the door shut and locks it. The guard pounds on it with his fist.

Short: See here! Come out! See here! Open up!
The guard steps back to get a good look at things. He is agitated.

Short: My God! Look at Andre! You've killed him!

Killer: Nonsense. He slipped.

Short: Look at this wound in his chest! He's covered with blood!

Killer: I don't see any wound.

Short: It's a bullet wound, that's obvious.

Killer: He must have fallen on a bullet when he slipped.

Short: You've killed him.

Killer: I disagree completely.

Short: He was my best friend!

Killer: Oh? Then what was he doing locked out in the cold? You must not have liked him very much.

Short: Of course I liked him. Its just that we were bored. I locked him out because he would leave the door open. But he was always the meaner one. He would play tricks on me, like the time he put a bear in the closet.

Killer: A bear in the closet?

Short: Yes, he lured it in with honey. And when I went to get a broom, it tried to kill me. It chased me all over the room, knocking over chairs, filling the air with foul bear
breath. Andre just stood on the table laughing. He thought it was immensely funny. And he was always looking at his damn cards. Every time I turned around, there he was with his cards, staring at them, rearranging them.

Killer: How many cards?
Short: Three red, two blue...

The Killer has stepped back out of the light. He is doing something that involves the moving of furniture, the opening of drawers.

Short: ...He would just sit there with them! And when I would go to bed, there he would be, in the dark!, rearranging them: slap slap slap, all night! He would never show them to me, never! It was maddening!

Killer: Didn't you ever do anything to him?
Short: No! That was the injustice of it. But then it occurred to me that I should add excitement to Andre's life, the excitement he himself was looking for and was unable to find.

Killer: And what was that?
Short: I decided to hire someone to kill him. But not an expert killer, I couldn't afford that. Merely a hired killer, a work-a-day man who would not do his job so well that it would only take a moment. I wanted Andre to be amused for a fair amount of time.

Killer: That was good of you. Who was this man? Anyone I know?
Short: You, stupid:

Killer: Nonsense. I don't remember your hiring me at all.
The noise ceases.

Killer: Looking for meat sauce.

The Killer's efforts in the dark are quite plain now.

Short: Who did hire you then?

I don't remember, but I know that I don't remember it being you.

Work-a-day man indeed.

Killer: He steps into the light, reloading his gun.

I tell you, there isn't any.

The Killer yanks open the door, gun in hand. Both parties fire their weapons. Noise. Violence. The Killer falls back, the door slams shut.

Hey, what are you doing in there?

The noise ceases.

Killer: Looking for meat sauce.

He steps into the light, reloading his gun.

I tell you, there isn't any.

The Killer yanks open the door, gun in hand. Both parties fire their weapons. Noise. Violence. The Killer falls back, the door slams shut.

You missed!

Killer: You missed too.

No, I didn't; I got you.

Nonsense, I ducked.

You're lying.

The Killer opens the door and springs out again. The guard, taken by surprise, runs around the corner of the shack. The Killer begins to follow, then reverses and runs around the opposite corner. Both vanish. A pause. Then: two shots, almost on top of each other.

You missed!

Killer: Missed!
Two more shots. A pause. Then the short guard reappears a bit hastily, looking over his shoulder. The Killer charges into view around the opposite corner. The guard fires his gun in a frenzy. The Killer falls. The short guard walks over to him.

Short: Funny. Not a wound on him.

Andre (picking up the Killer's gun): He must have slipped!

Short: Andre!

The short guard runs around the corner of the shack. Andre follows. Almost immediately they reappear; the short guard runs inside and slams the door.

Andre: Open the door!

Short: Now Andre, what about the bear?

Andre: What about leaving me in the cold with this madman?

Short swings the door open. A volley. A cloud of smoke. All shots miss. He slams the door shut.

Andre: I hope I'm not boring you!

Short swings open the door again. Another volley. Dense smoke. No hits. The door slams shut. Lights out.
Notes On Contributors

Paula Smith: Esta persona, aunque no existe, sigue insistiendo que viene del Perú y que algún día las llamas conquistarán al mundo.

Sue Rubin: That was supposed to be sarcastic.

or

I sit in the grass counting dog hairs on my shirt.

Rosalie Matchett: "I love the first movement of a snow storm over the fields, especially when there has not been much previous snow, at least not enough to break down the weeds. The discovery that comes at last: that the self, which seemed so marvellous and inexhaustible, was really desolate and barren; so I suppose that is why I love the snow, this morning, after working without result all night."

Theodore Roethke

John Hilliard: Writes music in HU-5.

John Jackson: "Armed workers are practical men and not sentimental intellectuals."

V.I. Lenin

Liz Holmes: "Poems are always better than a bloody turkey foot in the mail box. Few would disagree."

Jim Harrison

David Perk: "...Charlie Starkweather, who Skelton remembered as a kind of anachronistic dry-gulch artist running through the west; who got wired to a Nebraska utilitarian outlet in a metal chair by officials of the republic."

McGuane

Barb Reed: "I don't want silences as a rule. What I want is the alternative of a silent mind."

H. Prather

Eric Schneider: Look over your shoulder suspiciously some night, and you'll see me looking suspiciously over my shoulder.

Amanda Holmes: "You will find that making bad poems actually gives more pleasure than reading even the most beautiful ones."

Herman Hesse

Sally Alatalo: "Now the elephant realizes that its only course is to run amuck--yes, just to run amuck! Goddamn everything!"

Russell Edson

Beth Wolfson: Going away

I am supposed to go today, but I won't, I'll go tomorrow. You'll see me playing a flute made of a fly's bone, my flag will be a spider's web. my drum the egg of an ant, and my cap, my cap, will be a humming bird's nest.

Translated by Mark Strand from the book "18 Poems from the Quechua"