

#####

*The Poetry Porch presents*  
**the sonnet scroll xxii**

Copyright © 2022 by Joyce Wilson

#####

**David Landon:**

**In an Autumn Wood**

**Saturday Afternoon Music**

**The Universe on Hold**

**To His Wife of Sixty Years**

**Portrait of an Old Man, by Memling**

**All Those Books**

**One More Oak**

*Was This a Silly Thing To Do?*

**Jean L. Kreiling: Memory of an Upside-Down Nephew**

**David P. Miller: On Receiving My Second Non-Cancer  
Biopsy Result**

**Maria Ceferatti: Receptacle**

**Polly Brown: Armistice Day with the Dissenters**

**Denise Provost:**

**Late-Season Windfall**

**Prospectus**

**Saturday Song**

**Shaune Bornholdt:**

**The City's April 2020, Seen from August**

**Anniversary**

**The Attempt**

**James B. Nicola:**

**A Singular Search**

**Wander Lust**

**Sheila Murphy:**

***Shall I compare you to a summer's day?***

**A Long Way from County Kerry**

#####

**In an Autumn Wood**

**By David Landon**

“Ruin hath taught me thus  
to ruminare” —Shakespeare, Sonnet 64

Indulge me if I speak of mystery,  
of beauty, slow and sculptural demise,  
invisible escape of being. Yes,  
I'm standing here beside a ruined oak.

‘Dead’ isn't the word. Let's try ‘spectacular’:  
uprooted, intricately fractured wreck,  
antlered with limbs of splintered bone,  
now weathered silver in the late day sun.

I came looking for evidence, of what  
I'm not quite sure, some knowledge in the swirl  
of wind and light and leaves. Instead I'm here,

admiring mossy crevices, and gnarls,

intent on what I cannot see: escape  
of beauty's oak tree secret into earth.

### **Saturday Afternoon Music** **By David Landon**

*The Balcony Cafe: New York's Metropolitan Museum*

“Scatter my ashes now,” he softly shouts,  
sipping, and listening to Rachmaninoff,  
the suite for two extremely grand pianos,  
and four extravagantly brilliant hands,

his gesture, too, extravagant, as he,  
in solitary celebration, sits,  
feeling his residue of soul release  
in loose, exhilarate arpeggios,

a prelude, surely, to the ultimate—  
these notes, these secret possibilities  
of wood and steel, so deftly hammered out  
by fingers fluent as the speed of thought—

the latent oscillations of the self,  
loosed into being in the heavenly air.

### **The Universe on Hold** **By David Landon**

The universe is huge, and here I am,  
walking around on miniature feet,  
not much of anything in all of this,  
not even on this stretch of earth, this field.

Yet here I am, paused now, and looking up,  
more than amazed at what I know to be  
—my sixth-grade science book—a chunk of rock  
somehow suspended there: the death-cold moon.

I have to say it seems—in spite of all  
we know of cosmic accident and flux—

she's meant—yes, “she”— to be there, beautiful—  
no other word—in all that empty blue,

and it's no accident, taking my walk,  
I need to pause, look up, cry out, “Hey, Moon.”

**To His Wife of Sixty Years**  
**By David Landon**

You know this but I can't help say it, “here,”  
thanks to some whimsey of the cosmos, here,  
as if awake, and knowing that there's time,  
the planet underfoot, our toes, our heads,  
our autonomic systems somewhat go,  
and trying, sort of, to take care of stuff,  
because we seem—and maybe we still do—  
to care, which keeps us busy even if  
I'm not quite sure just what we're up to here,  
breathing and calling, crying, speaking words,  
like path, and world, and home, and song, and drum,  
and yet I know I love to say your name,  
and hold your hand, and whisper funny things,  
in heaven that we're here—a little longer here.

**Portrait of an Old Man, by Memling**  
**By David Landon**

*European Galleries, New York's Metropolitan Museum*

I come here often, stand here wondering  
just what this old man knows, his face  
revealed against a night of background dark,  
and brought to presence in an amber glow,  
the source—his secret knowledge?—mysterious,  
hands also lit, clasped softly in repose.

Or maybe he's forgotten what he knew,  
his knowledge music now, enlightenment,  
gently unraveling his neural snarls  
and loosening the corners of his lips.  
Although the paint is thickly cracked, he's there,  
about to smile; his music brings him through.

A gift! If we wait quietly with him,  
we may begin to hear the music too.

### **All Those Books** **By David Landon**

A little girl, the daughter of a friend,  
once asked, "Why do you have so many books?"  
"I like to read," I said, but in my head  
was thinking, "Sometimes I wonder why myself."  
"Have you read all of them?" she asked. "Not yet.  
I will someday." "You might not live that long."  
"You mean I'm getting old?" "You're pretty old."  
"I might not read them all, but that's okay.  
And when I take a nap, there on my couch,  
they whisper to me." "That's sort of scary. What  
do your books say?" "They tell me how to live."  
"You don't know how to live? That's kind of dumb  
for someone old as you. Who will you give  
your books to when you're dead? Can I have some?"

### **One More Oak** **By David Landon**

No oak is like another, yet they're oaks.  
"Yes, there's an oak," we say, "another one,  
and there." Most thrive, eventually die,  
like us, subject to what contrives our ends.

Then there's that feeling that we sometimes get,  
that in the final summing up, we'll count  
for nothing, ours not names to reckon with,  
as if we each were only "one more oak."

Which means it's time to visit some of them,  
take time to wonder at the special way  
each has of being grounded there. O yes!  
the impulse is, and O, and O, and yes!

Almost as if we've found, deep down within,

the special presence of our secret oak.

***Was This a Silly Thing To Do?***  
**By David Landon**

Sometimes, it seems, the world lacks mystery,  
and yet, today, I'm out here in the rain,  
and walking in November in the woods  
under the ragged leaves, and all at once,  
as if compelled, I stop and look, and there—  
ten feet away, across a brook, intent,  
as if she'd never seen my like before—  
a deer is wondering just what I am.  
Now here we are, the two of us, my spine  
aligning with her nose. We're dripping wet,  
and wondering what this is all about,  
when I, impulsively, lift up my arms,  
palms out, as if to celebrate our world.  
She doesn't flinch. We listen to the brook.

*Copyright © 2022 by David Landon.*

#####

**Memory of an Upside-Down Nephew**  
**By Jean L. Kreiling**

*for Alex*

When he was three years old, or maybe four,  
he was amazed I could stand on my head.  
(My grasp of grownup dignity was poor.)  
*How did you do that? Show me how!* he pled.  
And so I held his ankles: his bare toes  
reached almost to my waistline, and the trill  
of his triumphant, helpless giggling rose  
to ears and memory that hold it still.  
My sister's boy, only on loan to me,  
he learned more useful tricks as decades passed.

I seldom see him now—geography  
divides us—but the bonds between us last.  
Though he’s now six feet tall, his voice grown deep,  
those upside-down giggles are mine to keep.

Copyright © 2022 by Jean L. Kreiling

#####

**On Receiving My Second Non-Cancer Biopsy Result**  
**By David P. Miller**

The old-time acronyms, they ain’t what they used to be.  
I remember when a three-letter formula from my youth  
tokened Public Service Announcement, with all its bland  
good-citizenship. If I were a different man, I’d thrive  
on its mutation to Professional Sports Authenticator.  
But I’m not that man and the innocent alphabeticals  
speak Prostate-Specific Antigen right to my face.

Whatever’s going on in that obscure nook  
of my sunken anatomy, for a second time  
“elevated and rising PSA level” didn’t whisper  
about the thing with pincers. And what that means  
is my gratitude for this tall rattan-backed chair.  
A place to cradle my light head after I set down  
the phone, after my cheerful urologist signs off.

*Copyright © 2022 by David P. Miller.*

#####

**Receptacle**  
**By Maria Ceferatti**

Spew your sour in the sewer  
Dump your dead dreams with the slops  
Scrape the sludge of your persona

In the jar under the sink  
Stuff your grief disguised as anger  
In the garburator's mouth  
Shred your sighs into the dumpster  
With your filthy, frayed façade  
When your burnt-out love goes rotten  
And your rancid words hang thick  
Mark my footprints, sure and firm  
As I make my clean escape  
No longer your receptacle  
I've learned to hold my own

*Copyright © 2022 by Maria Ceferatti.*

#####

**Armistice Day with the Dissenters**  
**By Polly Brown**

*for Sev Bruyn*

*War is a racket conducted for the benefit of the very few  
at the expense of the very many.*  
—Major General Smedley D. Butler

At the rag-tag end of the swaggering parade,  
carrying flags that name you Veterans for Peace,  
you gather in a courtyard, stand in the power  
of a circle. We applaud your miniature marching  
band (clarinet, tuba, sax, a tambourine)  
while a gentleman old enough for our fathers' war  
dances, waving his arms as if conducting.  
Though a well-coached crowd in the next block jeers—  
though the few who profit feed war's rising flames—  
"Young we were, and used," your brave survivors say.  
"The wars that lamed our bodies, broke our hearts:  
worse than useless, harm with no good to show."  
May terrible truths told straight inspire hope.  
Late light in all our eyes, we stand together.

*Copyright © 2022 by Polly Brown.*



#####

## **Late-Season Windfall**

**By Denise Provost**

*Be sure to wash those apples carefully,*  
she said, though pressing fruits from the same crop  
into unpasteurized cider. Still we  
picked up as many as our arms could hold,  
ate lots of them right off the ground. Why stop  
so deep in gluttony? Should we be felled,  
the deed's been done, and by bacteria  
we've heedlessly consumed. Oh, apple-greed  
in autumn! As the fading light shows well  
these laden branches will soon stand empty.

But before the next bite, I hesitate —  
surprisingly, you nod: *go on and eat.*  
You know the apples we already ate  
will have by now predetermined our fate.

## **Prospectus**

**By Denise Provost**

*Past performance does not indicate  
the future performance of the mutual fund . . .  
which carries unknown risks and uncertainties.*

Why do we humans ever love?  
How can we bring ourselves to dare  
a transaction which defies proof;  
unknown, the interest it will bear  
on investment. Uncertainty  
attends love, as its course unfolds.  
Will it gain value? Will we see  
its worth decrease? (Better buy gold  
to provide some modest safety  
from life's reversals?) For, it seems,

there's nothing durable in dreams —  
love's risk of loss is guaranteed.

**Saturday Song**  
**By Denise Provost**

I set intention, then I practiced it:  
reduce my want, cultivate contentment.  
My discipline held until later on —  
strolling down the street, I felt my heart stop  
to see a couple clasped in an embrace  
as still as stone, as sculpture. Then I craved  
your arms around me, although I have not  
had that experience before.

I thought  
of one chill morning, when we two strolled in  
together, faces wreathed in silly grins,  
glowing like twentysomethings fresh from bed,  
when, as it turned out, all we'd done instead  
was meet, dressed for the rain, to take a walk  
and entertain each other with our talk.

*Copyright © 2022 by Denise Provost.*

#####

**The City's April 2020, Seen from August**  
**By Shaune Bornholdt**

At our mountain cabin, on our porch,  
in this sweet lull I'm separate, too, from scenes  
I didn't photograph that day. My phone  
shows bluestone paths and formal hedges, peacocks  
poised and strolling, cherry blossoms (fallen  
now), magnolias, a clear blue sky pierced  
by campanili. Safe, I scroll through beauty.  
Masked then, I'd passed the hospital, the white  
sepulchral trucks, and walked to St. John's Close,  
the garden refuge holding the Cathedral.  
It all seems long ago. We're *here*—I buckle,

I clutch my arms and sob, then stop, ashamed.  
How can I cry? None of my loved ones have died.  
Those blossoms in my phone—what right have I?

**Anniversary**  
**By Shaune Bornholdt**

Their thirty-fifth. They finally took that trip  
across the country, calling it a trial  
for further ventures—The Taj Mahal, a dip  
in—oh, the Adriatic, say. Denial  
of an essential lack made all their schemes  
hatched in their budget rental car seem part  
of new-found intimacy. A Bible theme  
park, Motel Six, Route 80 roadside art.  
Complacent carping, false starts, gaps, and pauses.  
Their talk had all run out, by Illinois.  
They dredged up topics—old affairs, the causes  
of their problems with the kids, her meager joy  
in bed. They found the words that hurt, or lie.  
They poked at their sad love. They had to try.

**The Attempt**  
**By Shaune Bornholdt**

*See; not a hair is, not an eyelash, not the least lash lost...*  
—Gerard Manley Hopkins

Great living oak, your branches split, crown whirled,  
Erector-set spewed, sprawled, trunk torn, hard-hurled  
Car's metal mangled, dead-on smash, sparked wood,  
No brakes, no bag, no belt, no life, no good,  
Leaves galvanized, cells spiked, the girl un-girled:  
Full throttle, pedal down, her flower unfurled,  
Intent as shrapnel pollinating death  
Into life's tree—Oh!—hold her, give her breath,  
Be green, begreen in cradle's gentle strength,  
Refresh, renurture her, go any length,  
Relimb, relieve, re-live, be fast, be fast,

Act now, make time reverse, and die uncast,  
Reveal to her, her worth. Tear down the rack.  
Put forth your branches. Stop her. Hold her back.

*Copyright © 2022 by Shaune Bornholdt.*

#####

### **A Singular Search**

**By James B. Nicola**

I'm looking for the all-in soul-mate, see,  
not simply chemical and physical  
explosive combinations. Lechery  
is human, sure, but not enough for me.

And still today, I'd really rather fall  
too hard, no hope of reciprocity,  
than go through all the motions, unmoved. Call  
me single, sure, but do not grieve because  
of my dry search. Because the search goes on.

The all that I esteem, however, does  
not seem to be what others dwell upon.

Well, sometimes: in the halls of poetry.

The perfect one for me, then, might just be  
not any soul that is, but one who was.

### **Wander Lust**

**By James B. Nicola**

If flesh, the physical, is mostly water,  
what chains are there? No, the mortal prison  
is like the sea in its bed, which has risen  
since time began, as dreams and hope and thought

rise into vapor, to return as rains  
and cleanse the air, restore a turbid sea.  
Not that seas need replenishing. But we  
do, lest our seas evaporate to plains

millennia from now. Imagination,  
the desire to combine and realize,  
cannot be shackled, but will bubble, rise,  
and go as breath and words escape from skin—

as you're escaping, even as you share  
this poem, think these thoughts, inspire this air.

*Copyright © 2022 by James B. Nicola.*

#####

***Shall I compare you to a summer's day?***

**By Sheila Murphy**

After reading William Shakespeare, Sonnet 18

No—winter's bare withered branches would really  
mirror a look more true for elderly spouses  
who've loved each other *ad infinitum*—nearly  
six decades already—though one espouses  
jazz, while the other leans toward classical.  
To her, opera sounds screechy; to him it's sublime.  
She's often chatty, but he's enigmatical.  
She loves to shop; he'll always decline.  
He *would prefer not to*—like Bartleby—  
sign on for that party, play, or event.  
But together, with family, or friends (not in quantity),

they tune in to each other—one hundred percent.  
Yes— *summer's lease hath all too short a date*—  
blessed be sixty years they celebrate.

**A Long Way from County Kerry**  
**By Sheila Murphy**

*Children should be seen and never heard*—  
that imprinted lesson echoing, until  
questions unwanted, never even aired,  
raise memories refusing to lie still.

Irish mothers buried harsh truths, fled  
from doctors, offered prayer for tragedies.  
My mother sang and smiled and blurred  
the dark that lurked behind soft melodies:

*America, I've raised my boy to be a soldier*—  
despite the scars of Pop's war-wounded soul.  
*Ireland must be heaven*—though her own mother  
had fled, so young, from Kenmare's Paupers' Row.

A daughter who refused to face those words  
frees a mother's songs, still overheard.

*Copyright © 2022 by Sheila Murphy.*

#####