

A few comments from Jane Hall
Judge, Judd's Hill Poetry Contest:

There are some memorable lines amongst the 2011 submissions: "clinging in the twisting maze; didn't mean to make a sociological observation; goblets of our minds; press lips then glasses; membrane sheer as voile; a strategy; a landscape and wanted to touch it?; swagger like drunken grape vines; spits and grumbles and roars; drink for celebrations of Life and Death; burbing up a taste of fois gras; my arbor of promising grapes; head atop her like a cork that wouldn't fit"; forming a group poem in itself. It's an honor and joy to read such a lively collection.

The 2011 Judd's Hill Poetry Contest winning poem, an accomplished "As it begins" by Daniel Burstein, works beautifully on several levels. The subject is a mountain hike at dawn, and ends with the view of a vineyard below. As seen from above (on the page) the poem first comes alive with a kind of ragged bird flock formation, words drifting across the page in "V" shape. Entering at "Up" the eyes track each word, breaking at "above" ending with "womb", with pauses taken as if to catch the breath at the end of each word along the steep terrain. It also can be read from bottom to top, making another interesting poem. Read aloud, the focus changes, word-steps shaping the mountain climb to finally view the valley below, and (re)capturing for the reader an elusive (but triumphant) moment of awe.

As it begins

by

Daniel Burstein

Up

steep

terrain

we

ran

to

see

day's

first

light

break

above

sinuous

rows

of

liquid

art

still

encapsulated

in

its

purple

womb

A Perfect Pairing

by Carey Blakely

A clean pop—
The need for air
Scurrying about
To set out
Blue cheese,
Crisp crackers
Arrayed on a
Porcelain platter
Alongside
Glistening grapes.

Light a candle,
Which sizzles
To shine.
Pour the cabernet
Into a decanter:
Red chasing red
Around glass walls
With a slosh
And swirl.
Inhale earthen aromas—
Cedar and violets,
The memory of oak.

When he arrives,
They press lips,
And then glasses,
Together.
Breathe in the wine,
Breathe out the day.
A perfect pairing.

Invoking the Muse
by David Holper

**There's some comfort in knowing
It's not you**

**That the terrible poem you wrote today
Isn't so much your utter lack of talent or your inability to transcend the
ordinary**

**That whatever failure you're having
In invoking Calliope, or Melpomene, or whatever her name is**

**In hooking into her hide
In downloading some brilliant vision**

**Making the very air itself shine with your words
Is really just a bad poetry day for us all**

**Isn't there comfort in this particular misery:
Everyone everywhere—even those whose names you know too well--
stumbling on form**

**Losing their conceit, their voices, like yours
Equally dead and empty and flat**

**Yes, it's better to recognize this
And better still if we imagine**

**That she's on vacation somewhere wonderful
Say, Provence, just after a late lunch, leaning back in her chair**

**Sipping something deliciously red
While burping up a taste of fois gras**

**The afternoon inching along toward evening
And imagine too, just now as the sky purples**

**She looks up, thinking not at all of you
Rather, she notices the sky stitched together with**

**Constellations whose light is arriving
Long after the forms themselves have expired.**

Gold in the Grapevines

by Patricia Wellington-Jones

Wild mustard,

clear and shouting yellow,

as sharp to the eye as its

leaves are to the tongue.

Under gnarled ancient vines

the blanket of gold

shivers in an early spring breeze

flung from hills dark blue and

heavy over the greening valley floor.

We sniff the season's beginning,

taste the harvest in

the goblets of our minds.

The Table

by Kerry Trautman

There was a table,
in the small bright dining room of a small bright house,
where she placed a box of crackers—

exotic crackers from a discount bin at the discount store,
crackers with foreign writing and a photograph of
the crackers' hope to be topped with
caviar, minced onion, and full moons of boiled egg.

Instead someone else brought two cans of sardines
for the crackers, for the table.

And someone brought three waxy green apples
crisp enough the knife needed leaning on,
slamming down to the board, the table shuddering.

And someone brought red wine—
no matter it was cheap and caustic, there was plenty.

And they all brought poems to scribble,
story-tell, and dismiss in their brilliance.

Sometimes in her dreams she's eating crackers at that table.
The zinfandel swallows her tongue.
She brushes crumbs from her lip, her lap,
falling gently to the floor.

WHY GRAPERANCHERS RISE EARLIER THAN MOST

by Rudy Mancini

Jolted at 3AM by the frost alarm.

Pulling on cold clothes.

Startled dogs sniff suspiciously at a moist March morning.

Plodding along rows of noble vines, the wind-machine looms like a Buddha against the black sky

It spits and grumbles and roars the blades in a blurred, blue, circle.

The valley floor trembles as lighted smudge-pots spew sooty-smoke, then swirl on an updraft.

Faded memories of an airfield in England.

Planes warming up, then waddle in line like obedient birds, bellies heavy with eggs of death.

Icicled canes thawing at peaceful dawn.

The vines are wet and warm again.

Napa Hwy 128; The Sonnet of Wine Country

by Jake Hajer

Charcoal satin shadows
languish across the most
important curves. Carmel
leaves tumble-smudge
the road. -as last night's ashes,
careless in the time running out.
There are no shoulders.

Vines weave the supine
mounts- It all looms
clinging in the twisting
maze that'd make a dead
sailor sea sick in green
love and wine
drinkers of us all.

The Dance of the Redwoods

by Helga E Schauer

It's a hot summer evening.

The garden thermometer pronounces 90 degrees.

Sitting in the shade, I relax over a glass of Sonoma wine.

Suddenly, I feel a breeze, and as I look beyond my arbor of promising grapes, the Redwoods begin a slow and calculated dance.

A sign that life is good;

that it's time to take control of the sky, and the joy that is living, for as long as fate will allow.

Gentle forces of creation have made this day.

What could be more special?

Wine Connoisseurs

by Sandra Branum

Dad kept a gallon under the sink
"For snake bites!" he always said.

But we knew better – Sis and I
because
we tasted it one day
and realized
it was too foul to ever keep snakes away.

We swore that day never to imbibe
this awful tasting brew.

But in time matured like fine wine and thus
became its connoisseurs!

Bad Dolcetta

by Jeff Morgan

Her kiss was so utterly corrosive
the whitish green mass on my battery
quaked at the mere mention of her first name.
Her unwashed feet that splashed into the sink
an old apostle would have recoiled from
as if an asp were nipping at his hands.
Her clothes hung on her as on a hanger
and hid her thin body that had a head
atop her like a cork that wouldn't fit.
When we swirled in a dance, her spindly legs
would entangle, failing to support her
as she fell to the floor as broken glass.
She had a tepid personality,
one which kept her from catching attention
even as she lay bleeding on the floor.
The guests guessed that nothing mattered with her,
so they continued their conversation
on how lovely my lover looked tonight.

Saturday Morning, Along Redmond Ridge Drive

by Denise Calvetti Michaels

At first I think only of my eldest daughter, pregnant, in her
third trimester
with identical twin girls.

The effort of speech when I ask her what she needs – how
she refuses
my suggestion of the futon I wish

my son-in-law would drag
to the first-floor spare bedroom so she can avoid stairs.

The shortness of breath I've noticed since January after
monthly
sonograms, womb photos of Baby A and Baby B, taken

to check the integrity of the chorion membrane – wisp-like,
I imagine, before Google™ search, sheer as voile.

It separates the fetuses in their shared placenta, awake,
kicking, to the Bach Suite for cello on the Honda CRV

radio when we leave the cul de sac to run errands and do not

acknowledge the Cooper's Hawk affixed to the asphalt, stuck
feathers—*animate*,

in traffic's swoosh. And *warmth*, when I go back, like figs
spoiling,
or grappa dregs in goatskin

we drank by the river to remember—*why this*—fallen fruit
when I turn to the brambles with the bird of prey I must
redeem—wine gourds

slung against your summer chest—*you*, shirtless and tan,
corporeal,
the body's trustworthy shape—