

by Laura Apol

1.

You are named for the man
who told you stories
of the vineyards of his youth

when you, too, were learning
the ways of love. There was the sun.
There was the light.

There were the vines and grapes,
the thick spread of honey
across breasts, belly and thighs,

and the gift of pleasure
a man can give and taste
in a woman's skin.

It was a fine-grained photo
of his life, oceans ago—
your grandfather creating with words

the land he had left and the man
he had been, carrying love
on his tongue for the rest of his years.

2.

We will know it together, someday—
that Adriatic light, the lush vines
covering the hillsides of Abruzzo,

and the hum of bees
threaded through the sweet smell
of ripening grapes.

And when at last
we lie down in that vineyard,
the hushed echo of grapes alive in the air,

I will call you by the name
you and he share—the name of a man
who passed on

the pleasures of skin and tongue,
the sweetness of light,
and the warm honeyed taste of Teramo.

3.

Say this is the place, these
the hillsides your grandfather
wandered, the thick vines he loved.

Picture his stained fingers
handling these curling tendrils,
these blossoms and shoots.

By night we taste the fruit,
breathe in its color, roll its velvet
names on our tongues:

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo,
Pepe Trebbiano, vintage Aurora—
the complex palate

of a wine-maker's dream. By day, too,
we sample the vines, live into the story
you learned long ago:

clay lime soil at my back, Gran Sasso peaks
and thunder in the distance—
the sky opening as I unlock your name.

And so we are soaked by Abruzzi rain,
here in the vineyards that speak to you
of home, and passion quickening

across continents and time.
Say this is the sweetness
your young grandfather tasted—

you, the future
he pressed himself toward.

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Comments by Judge Jane Hall

In her winning poem "The Vineyards of Teramo," Laura Apol celebrates a beloved ancestor, one discovered in a fine-grained photo, memorializing him in an album of twenty stanzas. She brings Franco to life in wine and words, drawing from a complex and sensual palate of sun, light, "vines and grapes," honey, "taste in a woman's skin."

We view his vineyard in "Adriatic light... covering the hillsides of Abruzzo." "By night we taste the fruit, breathe in its color, roll its velvet names on our tongues." Apol asks us to taste the velvet names, savoring them for ourselves, "*Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Pepe Trebbiano, vintage Aurora.*"

With Franco's story, we are reminded of others who tell stories of their youth, of "the man he had been, carrying love on his tongue for the rest of his years." For her lucky readers, Apol has made both a lush and intimately graceful poem.

Meteorite Wine
by Dennis Trujillo

*-- A vintner in Chile is making wine with a 4.5 billion
year old meteorite in the bottom of the fermentation barrel.
The Drinks Business, 1/12/2012*

*

Let's all say thank you to the ancient traveler
From the asteroid belt, stone flag of creation,
Which fell like a flaming bird
Into the Atacama Desert and now emits

Splinters of the cosmos into meteorite wine.
Come, toast with tinkling glasses high
And let the primordial dust collect
Like halos in our blood. Listen closely—

Humming of angels in every glass.
Taste the fiery kiss of eternity
With each sip. Can't you see? It's God's
Signature witnessed before only fleetingly

As thunder in the desert, a baby's laugh,
Red splash of two cardinals on a frozen
Clothesline. Secrets of the planets, sun,
And life—all bottled now in meteorite wine.

Drinking Wine with my Cat
by Tom McFadden

Around the corner he chanced to walk one day,
unsurely entering the back yard,
where I sat in a fold-up chair,
searching for a poem's theme:
he, a hobo--
yes, a gentleman of the road.
Seeing me, he abruptly stopped, but stayed,
gigantic shoulders flexing as if to keep him frozen
between the lonely realm of the dispossessed
and a warmer vision of place.
Over the days, he reappeared—
chancing more steps toward affinity.

Now, I lower vision to the massive, tan oval on my lap,
at last come to live with us.
I ponder the lugubrious singularity of his biography.
Who possibly could have abandoned him?
How shocking must it have felt
to abruptly be rendered alone?
What had he been forced to eat to survive,
and how often had he not found water?
How large and ferocious had been the animals
he'd been forced to fight?
Just how savage had the shadows been?

I subtly glance toward scars on his face,
empathizing with dark suppositions.

Yet, when Big Boy briefly repostures to feel the full dance
of one hand's slow tickle through the fur,
I remember that his nightmares lived are over--
and the visit of worries drifts away.
I slowly regrasp a small glass in the other hand,
lifting it closer to my eyes
to watch the beauty of sunlight pass through
little waves of liquid red.
And here we two dwell in a poetry chair.
We sit under the travel of clouds.
We feel the welcome of a breeze.
We smile at the sky.
And, although here we sit in a poetry chair,
we will let this day void itself of greater quest.
We will lean back, into a themeless day,
and we will just leave it at that--
he to feel safe in the posturing
and I to drink wine with my cat.

NO JAM TODAY

by Cristina Ferrari-Logan

On the kitchen table__
A huge basket of ripe French plums.
Two paring knives.
A scarred copper colander.
A vintage Pyrex measuring cup
with barely legible red markings.
A 5 lb. sack of C&H granulated sugar.

Over on the vintage WOLF stove__
A great kettle full of water
holding eight Mason jars
awaiting their sterile fate.
Standing nearby
on the crackled yellow plaid linoleum__
A dented, rusty pail.

Hate to tell you, Aunt Ol,
but your helpers have escaped,
last seen heading for the hills
with current issues of "O", "Cosmo", "People",
and three diet Cokes.

Uncle Lou knows.
He smiles and says
they're out behind the barn,
reading between the vines.

**On a Tuesday Evening
that just happens to be National Wine Day**

by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

Again I sip the syrah,
all smoky and black cherryish
and try not to wish
it were sauvignon blanc
all pucker and grass.
But no. Each sip suggests
dark violet. Black hue.
And each sip I think,
well, it's nice, but
oh for a hint of grapefruit,
nettle, passion fruit.
But the syrah is like
a lover who stands
in the center of the room
and slowly unzips his pants,
then waits. He knows
that thirst is a fact.
He's ready now, but
the rising heat doesn't
bother him at all.
He is not in any hurry.

High on Table Mountain

Friends Meet after 37 years

By Elizabeth Weir

We sip Oyster Bay sauvignon blanc
and our palates become terraced vineyards,
sun-drenched and rain-washed,
bee hum and tendril climb.

Aged roots draw up lost youth
from the dry gravel of years—

wind-swished hair in an open TR 5,
pine-warm picnics high on Table Mountain,
tender English skins blister,
then burnish brown beneath Africa's sun,

us, nursing the sick, off-duty flirting,
satin nights, hot with possibility,
our eyes, soft with knowledge,
hips locked to Simon and Garfunkel.

“To then,” toasts David. Six stemmed glasses
clink, and Helios arcs his fiery chariot
across the absent years, leans down,
ripples fingertips through molten time.

California vintage

by Megan Stolz

When I close my eyes
I taste the memory of vineyards
the fog the soil the sun
that I too have ripened under

but this bottle has aged
longer and knows the earth
more intimately, has matured
in the same place as its birth
and whispers to me
truths I do not care to know

To Know You, To Know Me

by Antonia Gentile

Everywhere I found myself, you were there too
Under a different name, you mysterious you
In Napa you were Zin, in Puglia Primitivo
With friends in Beaujolais, the Loire or Escondido
Your beauty brought the house down
Do you remember *Bacchus* and such fun!
You also tested Truth, by use of your serum
Your story has been brewing
Fermenting, I should say
Much like us fragile humans
Better with age, gracefully grey
From vine to checkered table
Your journey rings familiar
Grapes of innocence, grapes of wrath
Such emotional storms in this life
But finally, Wisdom to be had.
So when I toast with you, I toast me too
Because I know we are one and the same.
Making it together, all through the days.

I am Zinfandel Velvet

by Marianne Lyon

I am Zinfandel velvet
blood red of autumn orange
entombed in glass
a world inside a world
shape shifter
voluptuous in crystal
hips aswirl like a dervish
I devoutly meander
trickle and tease

when I squint back to summer vine
my skin still on
I hear coyotes' bantering echo
smell sidewinders
rustle in vibrant mustard
remember wild dance
with mischievous wind

I am ancient habitat of metaphors
nocturnal part of mind
a circle of voices cast
a menagerie to describe me
some say I whisper pepper
exude bristly blackberries
when I meet thirsty tongues
they cock an eyebrow and say
ciao
another splash
bravo

I am a baroque fugue
play a language of
ruby stained glass
abandon earthen bouquet
slithering pomegranate seeds
a relationship forms from
repetitive slurps and sips
boundaries blur
a jingle of midnight
they dawdle then unravel home
invincible
fragile
I am marrow memory
remnants moored
in lonely bottom of kissed goblet

His Cellar

by Marianne Lyon

I walk at dusk
grapevines heavy
light plays like a stream
of shimmering ripples
a graceful scent
of ripe fruit whispers me
down to Grandpa's cellar
whimsical place
tenderly he tends
barrels damp with juice
cauldrons of nectar immortal

I see his swagger to spigot
am drawn too
like a moth to ardent flame
wine trickles into glass jug
a gritty smell wafts out
inhales me into childhood familiar—
grandma's stewed prunes
earth puddled with evening rain

mom's blackberry cobbler
burnt sugar sweet

I walk at dusk
grapevines wait for the knife
the stomp, the ferment
what I would give for a moment
down in his sanctuary
friends and family
giggling jokes
my innocent heart knowing
sure meaning of ruckus din—
a fugue of sips
laughter, gossip
to scramble down
rickety steps
leap deep
into that pungent memory
intoxicated

Deep Roots

by David Olsen

Here in the Minervois of Occitan
I prune the gnarled vines of Carignan,
weave twining leaves along the wires.

When summer sun sweetens purple fruit
and pregnant grapes swell with juice,
I hear the music of the wine to come.

At harvest time, I finger every branch
with a lover's touch, and free
the tender song within each bunch.

How does this
arid limestone soil
yield such sweetness?

My vines survive the drought with roots
that lance the bitter centuries and reach
the deepest reservoir of Cathar blood.

A Sip of Wine

by Judith R. Robinson

In the quiet of a leafy afternoon
Alone in a spare room a man sits.
He is bespeckled, bearded and thin.
Motes swirl and glitter in a ray of sunlight
Streaming through the dusty window before him.
What does he do but stare?
Does he still wait for me?
It doesn't matter what he wears
Or if he cries. I'll find him there.
He might or might not
Have something to say.
I shall offer him a chilled sip
of liquid from a green-skinned grape,
Something savage, sauvignon,
something wild and white.
It will speak to him of the best
Days of summertimes past.
He may come to love me again.

Found Champagne Poem in an Unclaimed Wisconsin Corner

By Cynthia Gallaher

51-degree Champagne at the 42nd parallel,
you pull a magnum from the plastic pail ice bucket.

foil and cage tossed aside,
to grasp the cork between thumb and forefinger,

then turn the bottle.
Pop. Sizzle. Stars.

liquid plays flute
as I pour blanc de noirs for both of us,

seated in our
folding chairs.

shall we toast?
to what, today?

Napoleon Bonaparte said of Champagne,
“In victory, one deserves it.

In defeat, one needs it.”
though it’s a day of neither defeat nor victory.

but part of some other scaffolded demolition or
yet ungrouted building block

toward something
we yet don’t understand.

the Champagne happily chips away
at it a little

the way its grapes chip
at chalky hillsides northeast of Paris for nourishment,

to later be crushed
and create bottlesfull fermented and aged.

yes, I found this poem
like we found this special bottle

marked down in the corner bin
of the dusty liquor store.

and now at our card table outdoors
we breathe hillside air

and swallow tiny bubbles
of carbon dioxide.

am I, like you say, this half-hour’s mermaid of the Extra Brut ether,
or you, my midnight prince of prestige cuvee,

or merely both as simple as this Tuesday sparrow-song night,
yet still savvy enough to quote Dorothy Parker?

“Three be the things I shall never attain:
envy, content and sufficient Champagne.”

99 Cent Wine

by Rick McKenzie

It was the summer of 99 cent wine in a district
Dangling between skid-row and Bohemia.
The market on the corner must have hijacked a truck
Cause they had Portuguese Rose, light, not sweet, for 99 cents.
We drank it ice cold. It was the late 70’s. Pop music was fun.
There were hostages. There was Stag-flation. Factories closed.
But, there was 99 cent wine at the Land of Foods market.
And what did we know? It was fantastic summer,
So we strutted like gazelles in shabby finery.
We were something, let me tell you, and we knew it.
Every little thing we did was something else
To put into our self-promotion, thoughtlessly, blameless.

We were, after all, innocents with the most tenuous notions
And an ounce, maybe two, of experience. It would be years
Before anything we talked about would start to make some sense.
Who needed sense? It was deliriously lively
In the summer of 99 cent wine in that moribund city.
Several complete casts of characters swirled through
The never-ending sit-com soap-opera music-video life
We all kept churning out. We were better looking then,
And full of that ridiculous magic we were lucky to be full of,
And so lucky, now days, to have left so far behind.

WINE & WILD MUSHROOMS

by Kathleen Gunton

While hunting wild mushrooms
With Leshik I look forward
To a special meal we'd prepare.
He said, it takes years to
Learn what will kill you.
We hike up a shaded hill
Where oak & pine infuse the air.

Wild mushrooms, should be soaked.
Experienced collectors
pursue firm mushroom caps.
And basic cooking, he said
Calls for a low fire—
But with red wine
You can turn up the heat.

FROM SAND TO WINE

by Brenda Bradley

The pale green sagebrush
dances across the lonely land
blown by the hot wind
in its regular southern trek

The desert did not know
what was coming
what the future purpose was
what unlimited potential meant

Almost every mountain
almost all land surrounding the rivers
are covered in healthy vines
so full of promise.

We are grateful to sun and water
and the hands that tend the vines
through generations that follow
the path from sand to wine

Our love of the desert
our love for the desert
grows as the vines grow
wine makes our lives richer.

Route 89 to Tuscany
by Melissa Hamilton

“Our freedom is but a light that breaks through from another world.”—Nikolai Gumilev (Russian Poet)

Once, everything seemed possible
Tuscany’s golden fields
lemon grass and orange peel,
grapes spilling into vats-
fear of thirst, kept at bay.

But when the Earth tilts,
only the brave hang on.

Green locust came,
then heat
and hail.
Paradise crushed
to impossible
silence.

In winter
after all,
signs snaking
up Route 89
sparkling vineyards
a distant dream.

Snow fluttered,
yet deep underground
the banquet awaits
here, we never go hungry
or thirst for kindness—
grapes sowed
still roll to wine
with lemon grass
and orange peel.

Tuscany is here,
closer than we thought,
just waiting for the light.

Inebriation
by Mary Langer Thompson

She left me
In the liquid warehouse
To find the one true wine.
She traveled the concrete paths,

the aisles towering
with breakable glass and wooden barrels.

When I found her,
she was slumped on the hard, gray floor
by her basket, loaded with bottles.

She was muttering:
“Middle Sister, take a Stag Leap.
Unharness the Wild Horse in Castle Rock,
Geyser Peak, or Oyster Bay.
My Black Stallion wears Nine Hats on Chalk Hill,
has a Yellow Tail and goes Barefoot.”

“Have you been drinking?” I asked.

“I’m a Smoking Loon who’s only begun
to sample the delectable labels,”
she said, and continued rambling:

“The Naked Grape met Seven Deadly Zins
on his Stomping Ground.
One sin, er zin, involved a Menage á Trois,
even though he loved a certain Lady La Femme.”

Grapes in the Graveyard
by Mary Langer Thompson

Rows of stakes, rows of engraved stones,
vineyard for sacramental wine.
Graveyard grapes alongside the bones.

Marble mixed with merlot atones,
empty earth chalice near a vine.
Rows of stakes, rows of engraved stones

From a statued saint, whispered moans,
longing for a life-leaking sign.
Graveyard grapes alongside the bones.

On some of the tombs, lines from poems.
Come live with me and with me dine!
Rows of stakes, rows of engraved stones.

There are new, expensive plot zones,
for those who dance, not yet supine.
Graveyard grapes alongside the bones.

By sepulchers a spirit roams.
Life and death she seeks to align.
Rows of stakes, rows of engraved stones.
Graveyard grapes alongside the bones.

A Toast to Fellow Writers

by Mary Langer Thompson

I'll fill your glass,
you fill mine
with words well-aged
rich, sublime.

Or, from the pen
of a present-day sage,
we'll pour them young, dry,
let them rage!

Consider creative juices
of exotic and local vines.
We'll choose them carefully,
so beauty or truth shines.

But remember,
serve with flair,
and we will toast those
Alphabeticalblends
that embody
our vocations,
our avocations,
our lives.