

Ten Poems

by Susanna King

The Artist

The artist is like water:
Clear, colorless, formless.
She has poured herself
Into her work.
“Look through me,” she says,
“And see what I have made.”



photo by Sharon Pittaway

Unimproved Lot

Find beauty in a dead oak tree

Drowning in kudzu.

Find beauty in a lopsided longleaf pine

And the squirrel nest in its broken branches.

Find beauty in dusty red soil

Scattered with pine cones.

Find beauty in blackbirds' overlapping cries

And cicadas' grinding whirrs.

Find beauty in shimmering, humid heat

On a cloudless summer afternoon.

Find beauty in places called empty,

Abandoned, ignored, unimproved.



photo by Susanna King

Pool Ladies

They are floral,
Long-stemmed scented blooms
Arranged and on display,
Each gorgeous blossom
Complementing her neighbors.
They make a pretty picture,
As little bees and butterflies
Flit among them.
To pick one would
Ruin the balance
Of the arrangement.
Rather, stand back
And take it in,
The whole blooming tableau.

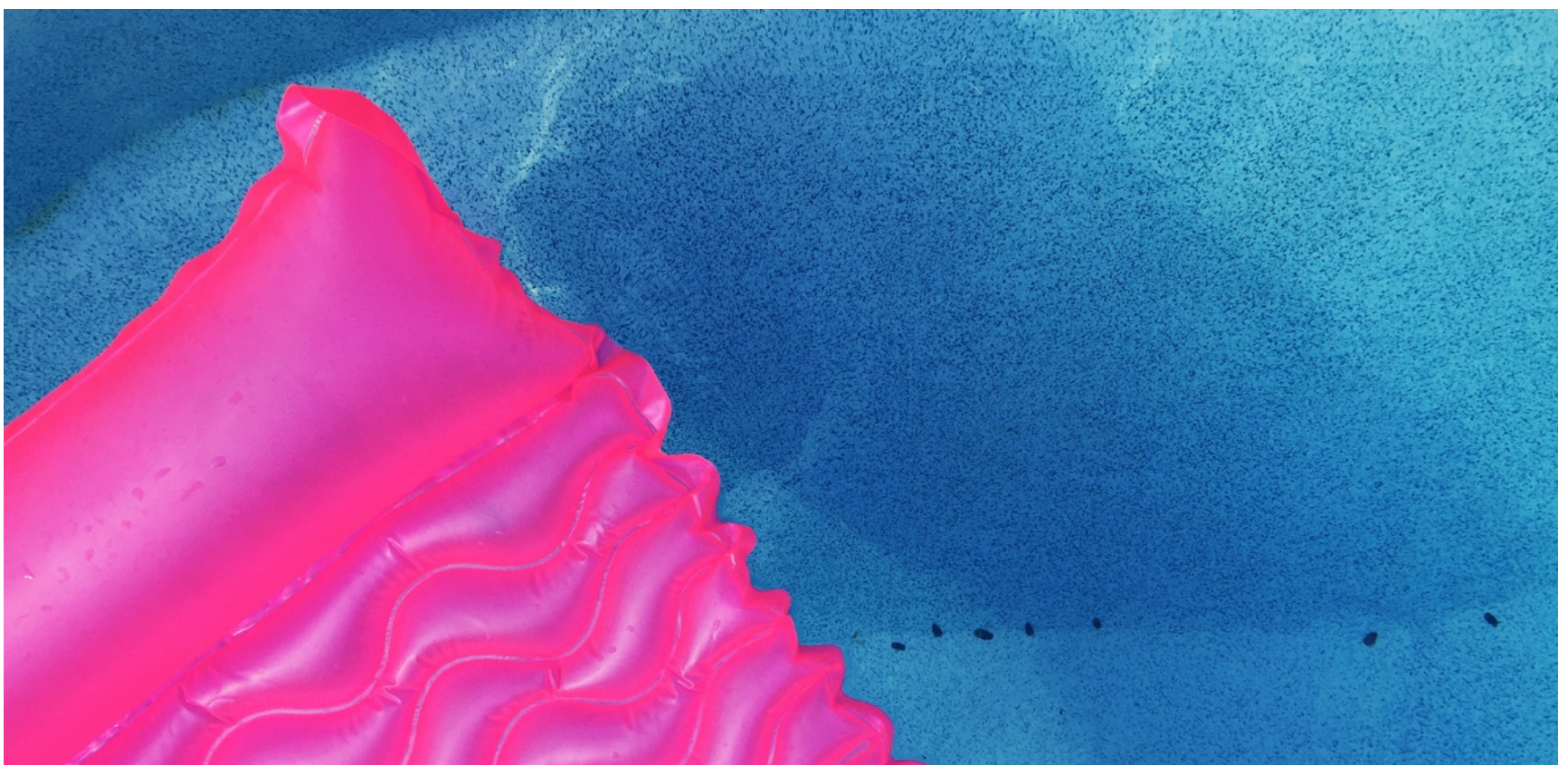


photo by Timothy Meinberg

Wrong Day

I think I grabbed the wrong day
When I woke up this morning.
This day seems stale
And the flavor is off.
Maybe I picked up
A generic by mistake –
A bland, one-size-fits-all kind of day –
Instead of my usual brand.
Or maybe this day
Sat on the shelf too long
And spoiled.
Maybe the ingredients
Weren't mixed just right.
Or maybe
My tastes have changed
And my typical day
Doesn't fill me up
Like it used to.
Tomorrow,
I'm going to choose more carefully,
Maybe mix it up a little.
Tomorrow, I'm going to get
A new day.



photo by Jules Clancy

Respite

We drink wine and whiskey
While the world falls apart.
Despair is parked outside;
Anger left by the door
Like a wet umbrella.
Here in the Kingdom of Cheddar and Brie
Contentment reigns -
Nine o'clock and all's well.
We tell old stories,
Sing old songs,
Drink old scotch,
And share memories,
And memories of memories.
Tomorrow's news
Will put new wrinkles on my face.
But tonight,
I drive home in silence
With cheese in my stomach
And music in my head
To sleep in quiet peace.



photo by Sérgio Alves Santos

Dirty Feet

This morning,
I went to church
With dirty feet,
Adorned with the grass
And dirt I walked through
To get there.



photo by Susanna King

Pockets

Someone sewed the pockets shut
On my new pair of pants.
I suppose this was done
To make the wearer look sleeker,
Slimmer, less rumpled and frumpy.
But there's no point,
My trying to look sleek,
As I schlep up stairs
Wielding two bags, a lunchbox
And a coffee mug.
I'm going to get rumpled
From kneeling and squatting,
Tending to the needs of boys and dogs.
Thanks, but no thanks.
I'd rather have pockets
For keys and phone,
Gum and found pennies.
I vanquish pride with a pair of scissors:
Two snips, open wide.
Practicality wins the day.



photo by Frank Flores

The End of the Day

By the end of the day,
My eyes are smeary,
Slatternly,
Sloughing off
Their layer of pretense.
Too tired to maintain
The mask of wakeful youth,
I let it fall and crumble.
I wash my face,
Anoint my eyes my cheeks my brow
With Oil of Optimism.
Perhaps in the morning
All things will look better.



photo illustration by Susanna King

Shoot

You were your mother's last effort,
Sustaining life when she faced death.
Your mother was old,
Old and strong and beautiful.
I wish you could have seen her
In her springtime glory
Before that winter day
When ice came raining down.
Her branches bent and broke,
But I think she could have
Remained and recovered
As her sisters did
(Look! You can see them now
Flanking that empty spot.)
If it weren't for the patch
Of bad ground where she stood.
The earth around your mother
Was too weak to hold her up.
Her roots lost their grip, and she fell.
She fell, but did not die, not yet.
When she saw death coming,
Your mother sent up shoots
Sprouting by the dozens.
Most were little things,
Hardly more than weeds.
But you were her best effort.
She reached out and placed you

Distant, far away from
The bad ground that sealed her fate.
She passed on to you
Her strength and tenacity.
I saw her in you from the beginning,
And let you grow where you sprang up,
Wild at first, spindly and untamed.
I hoped you might grow into
My memory of your mother's beauty.
So I trimmed your branches
And shaped you with care.
No longer just a shoot,
You've become a tree,
One which I hope will grow tall
And spread its branches wide
And bloom in springtime to remind me
That even death is not the end.



photo by Susanna King

New Year

The kitchen smells of fish
And tomato and marjoram.
In my mouth, I can taste
The last of the dry champagne.
From outside, I hear the
Muffled booms and cracks
Of neighbors' fireworks.
It is a night of revelry
Still ongoing.
In a matter of seconds,
An entire year slipped away.
I fall asleep tonight
In a brand-new world,
Its future still
Unspoiled by reality.



photo by Josh Boot