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POETRY OF VANESSA KITTLE

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Gray Cataract Sky

It's the day in July
when you can no longer
remember what it was like
to be cold anymore.
You've slipped
into a warm pool.
Your dripping veins
have turned into
a red tide anemone.

Armies of landscapers
block traffic to mow
a lawn so green, it proclaims,
"Our lives are better
than your lives."

You fly into a fury
in your car seat --
slamdancing
with your steering wheel.
You are 18 forever
because you stopped
studying senior year
and never could start back
even though your calculus
teacher warned you
that would happen.

And above, the gray eye's
sight is clouded by visions
of bug orgies in the grass.
It gives you hope that no one
has seen your pitiful tantrum.

You turn the air up
so that you can breathe
and dry off before putting
on the appropriate deceit
to face the other moms.
Because you know your true face

will be too terrifying.

Seen at Dawn

The night is written
in erasable ink --
with one of those pens
you had when you were a kid.
Just a swipe
and you no longer exist.

You're driving home
after another date --
another person who will not call
and who you don't want to call
except for the principle.

You enjoy sex with men,
but the actual man
is like playing tennis
against the bricks
on the side of your old high school.
There's just no getting through.

So you think of them
as a dick and a wallet.
And the only thing you
really care about
as you drive between
the trees is that there is
a warm place you can sleep,
with walls to keep out
the darkness, and a light
you can turn on to put a face
to the meaningless scribbles.

The Usual Sort of Emperor

He threatens to kill
my 12-month-old cat
if I don't stay the night
(Neither of us are kittens).

I grab her and run
for my broken-down
yellow station wagon,
with all of my dingy
clothes already
thrown inside.
Their colors are muted.
They are old.
Packed in trash bags.
But they are mine.

My engine screams.
It's a guinea pig
being chased by a dog.

He says I'll be back by midnight --
that I have no place to go.
But I drive anyway.

All I can see is the little bit
of road lit by my headlights.
I'm not going anywhere
in particular, but maybe
setting out was the important part.

A Month for the Creationists

Rude August does
not know when
to leave the party.
A stagnant barn
filled with corpses
and the smell of wet
mules preaches its manifesto.

I picture myself floating
pale and still
in a deep ocean trench
with those luminous fish,
and those other fish
with needle teeth,
who walk on the bottom
on their long tripod legs:
ugly dead-ends
of evolution.

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Vanessa Kittle is an English composition professor. A former chef and lawyer, she now cooks and argues for fun. She published two collections of poetry in 2006: a chapbook called *Apart* and a full-length book called *Surviving the Days of the Empire*, both with The March Street Press. Her work has recently been in *The New Renaissance*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *Limestone*, *Ibbetson Street*, and *Porcupine Literary Arts*. Kittle also is the editor of *Abramelin*, the *Journal of Poetry and Magick*.