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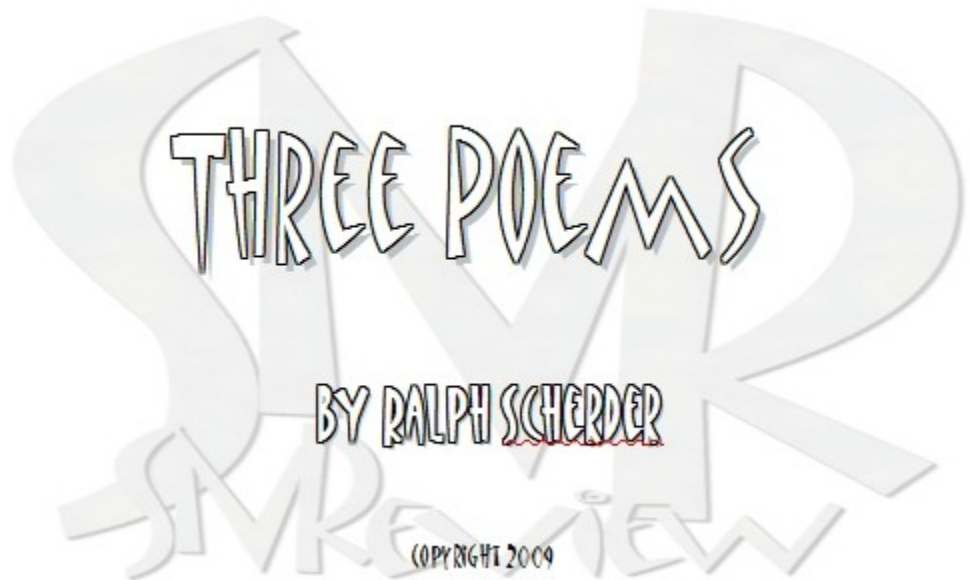
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### **The Window Cleaner**

Thirty stories above the pavement,  
he watched himself in the windows all day.  
Dirty or clean made no difference –  
he was ugly.

He took me up with him once.  
"Life is balance," he said.  
"You learn quickly what life means up here."

His forearms were huge from wiping  
glass eight hours and replacing panes.  
He lost himself in motions and thought –  
the air was thin and light  
and perfect for thinking.  
He said he sometimes zoned out completely  
until he only heard birds chirping on the ledges  
and the mysterious hum of cars  
on the streets below.

I replaced him three months later –  
the world was ugly, and the wind caught him.

He was beautiful, I hear –  
cleansing air beneath outstretched wings.  
Air that lifted and made him  
look like he was soaring  
even as he fell...

Thirty stories – that's a long way down,  
a long time to think.

**Rocks**

At six years old I followed you  
along stream banks tossing rocks  
into pools you'd already fished – sometimes  
I used the rocks to build pyramids,  
miniature temples on the shore  
where little souls came to pray.  
On my hands and knees in the sand, I peeked  
into the gaps between the rocks.  
I don't know what I saw in there – maybe it was  
the smell of rocks I'd dredged up from the stream bottom  
that interested me. Sometimes I turned them over  
and found insects and mayfly nymphs  
clinging to the slick surfaces and the smell of mud,  
the smell of ancient basements, perhaps the kinds of places  
where I hid my fears of you, too proud  
to let you know I did fear you  
when you kicked the rocks apart, said,  
“What the hell are you building?” And you  
gave me your creel of trout to carry instead –  
as if that alone proved your love for me.  
When I lagged behind you said, “Keep up,  
you're slowing me down.”  
So I kept up – and despite everything, even then,  
you knew I'd follow you anywhere.

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### **The Sandals**

Brown leather sandals  
on the edge of a slow-swirling pool  
where feathers of tame ducks  
turn like white sailboats.  
The sandals still show the outlines  
of her toes, perfect as two feet  
standing on the sandy shore.  
She wades softly, her dress  
hiked up, so I can see  
the feathers clinging  
to her wet legs.

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**Ralph Scherder** began writing at the age of 13 in an attempt to impress young women. Well, it didn't work out as planned, but he kept writing anyway. Since then his fiction and poetry have appeared in numerous magazines, and his first book, *The Taxidermist's Son*, was released in October 2005 by Rock Spring Press. He lives and writes in Herman, PA.