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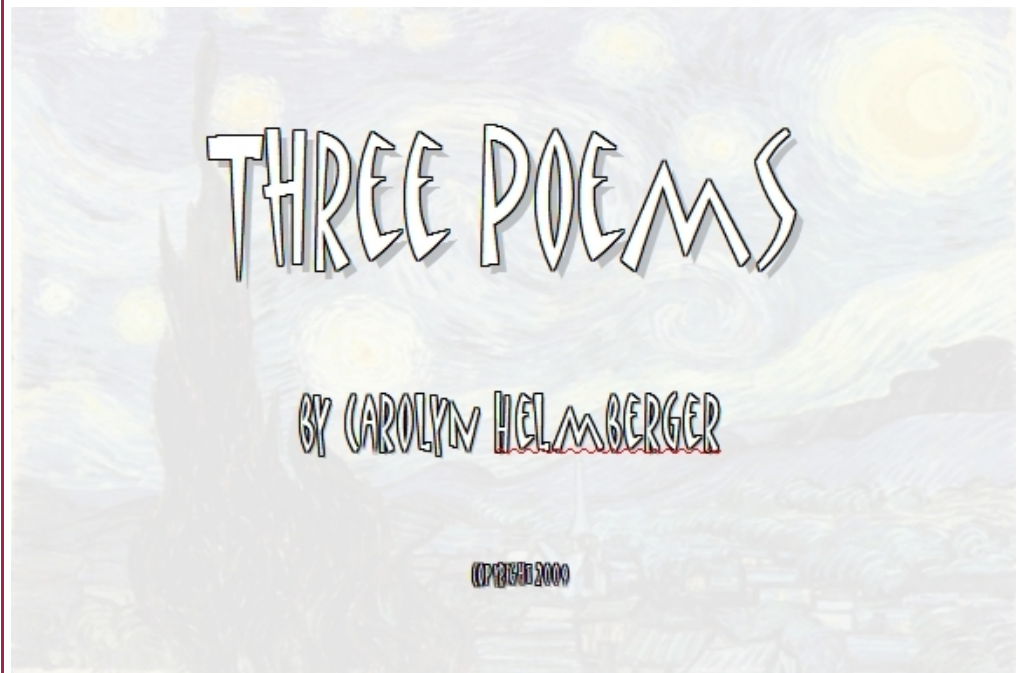
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Harry

He doesn't use
a walker like so many
of them here.
Harry is one I've never
sussed out. He stands
in front of the fireplace
in July to warm his hands.
He sings Silent Night in April.
His nose, a throw back
to W.C. Fields, the Rosacea
pummeled onto his face.
*I visited the moon three times,
dry as this desk-counter.
I suppose they get rain
from time to time...
I like to visit places,
and think about my time there.*
He pushes the elevator button
and dawdles off in the other direction
before the bell dings.

Feeding the Meter

I flash around
on down town cobblestone
in a wine-colored
velour skirt, slit
up to my thigh. My white
leg flips with each swish.
I'm late to feed the meter
when I see a woman hobbling
along the sidewalk.

Like a rat in an oil slick
her hair sticks to her head.
Cigarette yellow face,
her wrinkles are those of an elder
of some Native American tribe.
It's at least ninety degrees,
and she's cloaked in a fleece
hooded sweatshirt
and polyester pants.

The men in the welding shop
have their door open.
They call her Crusty Crotch
because she's peed her pants
so many times. I hear them
taunt her as she shuffles by
searching for pennies
and avoiding eyes. She picks
up a cigarette butt, it's still
burning and she sucks out
the last few drags.
Suits and sideburns pass
by in fast-forward. She remains
with her button stuck on slow motion.

Darkness Arrives Early to Dinner

these days. We don't have much
to say to each other
and there is a quiet humming
between our words.
It's the sort of noise
you can almost see.

Darkness invades my home.
He sneaks into all of the corners,
leaves smudgy fingerprints
on the walls and mirrors.
He blows the dust bunnies
around the oak floor,
puts his muddy shoes

on my coffee table
and stretches out
on my couch, while I peel
carrots. I curse with every
scalp. I toss limp
and lifeless vegetables
into boiling water
and glare at Darkness
through the door.

He eats the soup I spoon
out to him, but complains

he's burned his tongue.
Too many peppers, he snarks.
It gives him gas. He belches
before retiring to the LazyBoy
to fall asleep with the drone
of reporters, leaving me
to clean up again tonight.

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Carolyn Helmberger is a native of Omaha, Nebraska where she received her BA in English at Creighton University. She received her MFA in poetry in the University of Nebraska in 2008. She has been published in print in such journals as *The Connecticut River Review*, *Cooweescoowee*, *Argestes*, *Free Lunch*, *Plain Songs* and online in *The Pedestal*, *Language and Culture.net*, and *Bring the Ink*.