

LIFE AS *IT*



# LIFE AS *IT*

Poems

Daneen Wardrop



THE ASHLAND POETRY PRESS

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-0-912592-90-9

LCCN: 2016951828

Cover art: Mary Bauermeister, *Four Cubed Variations*, 1968, mixed media lens box, 11"x11"x7" courtesy of the artist and The Pavel Zoubok Gallery.

Cover design: Nicholas Fedorchak

Author photo: Patricia Pettinga

## Acknowledgments & Notes

For including the poems that have become this volume I am immensely grateful to the editors and staffs of the following publications:

*AGNI, Barrow Street, Blackbird, Blue Mesa Review, Denver Quarterly, Ecotone, FIELD, Pinstripe Fedora, Poetry in Michigan / Michigan in Poetry, The Seattle Review, The Southern Review, Sycamore Review*

I am indebted to David St. John for selecting this manuscript. I'm thankful for the inspiration and camaraderie provided by Nancy Eimers, Bill Olsen, Lesley Amolsch, Katherine Joslin, Tom Bailey, Hedy Habra, the Kalamazoo Cousin moms and daughters, the breakfast group, the Friends group, my colleagues, and my loving family.



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I.

UNNUMBERED



## Track

Heated and flushed after a vision, St. Teresa asked a sister nun if she would cut her hair. When cut, Teresa's hair let off such lush fragrance the sister cherished it for relic, kept the sweet hank to track inspiration. Paul McCartney was inspired by Roy Orbison's "Pretty Woman," guitar riffing in the grooves of "Day Tripper." Listen: they circle each other, *the kind I'd like to meet*, and the thing that *took me so long*. Feel it in the sweat, mid-song, thrown off a Beatle head. *I order you not to think such nonsense*, St. Teresa told the sister, and *throw that thing out with the trash*. Or open the song to find a place so precisely contoured you can walk through it only with syncopated stride.

## A Race

My daughter LiLi and her friend have collected slugs to set up a race in the driveway. We may want to ask questions that are about bright, lapsing ribbons instead of last things. When still a teenager, St. Teresa, seriously ill, fell into a coma and woke three days later during her own funeral rites, wax already poured to seal her eyes, family wringing memory as their tears dampened her face. I'm startled in moments of darkest July to find I'm held to the world by the ravel of a guitar riff, trill of a cardinal. Teresa gave the slip to the under life, came back on a thread. Some minutes ago the girls abandoned the race, now slid to silver by fraction, by fraction, gaining the shade.

## Third

In the Arctic, explorers sometimes feel there is one person more than the headcount. My good friend, decades ago, wandering rainbows, wondered, Where's the other one of us?—and he knew there was one who stayed there just to the side of our prismic eyes. I only know about Arctic explorers from Eliot's waste: *Who is the third who walks always beside you?* Snow falls on the third person. Star-confetti. In the front yard, there's a three-day-old snowwoman doing her melted yoga. Hold: tree-pose, warrior pose, down-dog. The snow in her blurs, less and less her, almost headless now.

## Life as *It*

They say Buddha called many animals to him but not the cat. Surely the story is lax on this one. Surely no one was watching on this one. After looking a while at an upward spill of incense smoke the cat disappeared along a mouse-flicking path. Some Buddhists say it's important for the breath to wander in the belly. When I see a palette's paint wet and deep with colors I want to kiss it. How complex what passes for ready. The breath can do what it wants. Dragons roast meatloaves with their breaths, oxen hump in the fields, snakes unfinish circles. The cat walks through grassblades strumming.



## At a Time

LiLi says she can tell the notes in her stomach when she plays flute, feel the melody from inside. St. Teresa claimed at first she could see God's face only feature by feature because seeing the whole at once would undo her. "You play flute," Li tells me, "and you *want* to play flute." Mostly she wants to fit the silver pieces—they're real silver—together, while her pet slug, Eliza, lounges in an open sour cream carton in the deck's shade. I could take seeing one feature at a time. Teresa said her bones disjoined. I want to see a creature through grains of the earth. A slug, it turns out, has a cute profile, various to the horns' extrusions and retractions.

## Pick

LiLi and her babysitter saw a turtle laying eggs in a light rain and held their umbrella over her. Sun would have dripped through the wet as the turtle went about her work, tranced, not needing the umbrella. Today, at the sale table, I pick up a book on Zen. Next week they will revisit the turtle birthsite, babies hatched and gone, bring me back an abandoned curl of shell, part malleable, part hardened to brisk, and I'll keep it for treasure. I open the half-off book and land on a chapter, "Have No Preferences." I close the book and leave it—alas, my preference. There's a short half-shelf life for the thing that might half-happen to you. Those turtles know what to do. I wish I was gentler.

## Unnumbered

In some states of ecstasy, Teresa found she was both a *me* and a *her* together in the same rough dress, the same smooth hour. She heard birdcall clear and cut as silhouette. Our good friends found a saint buried in their lawn, hauled her out, dirt crusted in wooden eye cavities and ear hollows. The wooden gown swelled with a faint color, rose paint in the swaths. These are other people's lives, I may be intruding into their stories but love the blur, like Teresa's hearing later in life: *the rushing of unnumbered birds.*

## Untitled

As LiLi falls asleep I sit crosslegged at her bed's end, sink into the unknowing that mixes around the edges of finger knuckle, belly crux, shoulder trajectory. From Suzhou, China, city of gardens, I have carried her on my back, brought her to this evening and what it evens out, like the city of Suzhou floats on the Yangtze. Whatever unknowing invites, whatever it keeps at bay, sees through me, lavender to lavender, I fold, transparent, into it. Dusk may trim dolls to look like cups, may sit down next to me, launch a new moon like a leveling bubble. Though she may turn the unloosed body into yawn, I fold. Though she may swim the width of the trundle bed into the unknowing, I fold. into the. unknowing I. fold into.

## Forehead

So I can lean my forehead against St. Teresa's and feel her thought coming to rhythm. Some facts you can't come back from: a spider has 48 knees. In a subtropical place during a storm once, I watched a fist-sized spider struggle and mince along a strand from the house to the woods. Of the pelting rain, the strand was firmer colored. I don't think it was a matter of belief. The place was my parents'. Teresa's hand the gestures, the supernumerary things rain can count on. Her head would close over mine and I would spin.