January

*By Dennise Gackstetter*

Standing on the gravel

eyes lifted to the cold dark sky

I see Jupiter, Venus, Saturn and the moon

aligned like good friends with a purpose.

I stand there

with my frayed confidence

weary and worn from too many days.

Even the moon grows thinner each month

until ultimately it disappears

a delicate smile lingering only as a memory.

Then from the darkness

it appears again

slim and bright

above the morning horizon.

It Has Come to This

               *By Dennise Gackstetter*

It has come to this. I’m sitting

in a doublewide rocker

alone. Cars pass.

Clouds gather and grow,

their shadows shroud the

mountains’ shoulders.

Aspens blaze golden

in the cold turn of the season

as they have for centuries

when the days’ light wanes

and the nights wax long.

Each one an exact descendant

of those that came before:

roots, rhizomes, trunks,

branches, leaves.

Small shivering hearts

lift on each breath of breeze.

Long crinkled ribbons

of light lay across the grass.

The yard stretches to reach

the circle of horizon.

Minutes became moments

that somehow, grew into this day.

Beyond this, stars wait.

I’m no longer sure

what should come next

or how or why.

Does it really matter?

Heart wounds, body scars,

mended flesh and tended love.

I am here and I am breathing.

Small triumphs enough.

Night birds sing. Their wings

caress the evening air.

Out in the darkness

small points of light appear.

At the Threshold

               *By Dennise Gackstetter*

This morning I am tired.

I am tired of the effort to wake up

with enthusiasm,

to shore up the weight of the to do list

with productive energy,

to complete small tasks,

to find satisfaction in crossing off, and then

to sit with coffee contented.

This morning I am tired.

I am wearied by the effort to live

with calmness

to answer never ending emails

with politeness

to sit in meetings maintaining interest

to nod in agreement at decisions, and then

to return to my office informed.

This morning I am tired.

I am spent by the effort to care

with compassion

to hear the news of wild fires, tornados, floods

with ease

to expand my heart wider

to hold thousands of deaths and lost children, and then

to water the wilting flowers resigned.

This morning I am tired.

I am exhausted by the effort to open the door

with anticipation

to appreciate another day of this world

with gratitude

to observe the long shafts of sunlight

to delight in the first stirrings of birdsong, and then

to lift up my weighted heart.

This morning I am too tired.

I am standing at the edge of despair

with knowing, it is necessary

to surrender this body, this heart

without shame or guilt

to a refuge of silence and rest

to turn away from the moment, and then

to tell the world, “Not just now, not quite yet”.

***Dennise Gackstetter*** has lived a very migratory life. Her wanderings have taken her many places across the country and around the world. She is a ceramic artist whose sculptural work explores

the stories she finds hidden in the folds of everyday life. It is in these same ordinary moments and places which she discovers the poems she writes. Dennise is a Principal Lecturer in the Department of Art & Design at Utah State University.