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Lawrence Applebaum: *Morganna*

KELLY EVERDING

PUPPET CORRUPTER

He puts his hand up there and wiggles it around.
His mustaches pull on either side of his mouth

and his black hair, heavy with pomade, raises a wave.
If you happen to sit next to him at a bar, he'd touch

the cloth of your shirt, fiddle with the knit,
the ribbed polyester. Your shirt would tremble

independently from your body,
the buttons flash with fear, the seams unravel,

the breast pocket a silently screaming maw.
“Is there a god, well I cannot say,” says the puppet corrupter,

fingering a thread until it cries.
Puppets lie crumpled around his feet, arms flung out,

heads strangely deflated. He chooses one,
a faded child, and fills it with his hand.

It is easy to see a life there, some hope or marvel
perceived in a plastic eye. A scene plays out to its

inevitable conclusion; the child covers its face.
The child tries to stop the hand from leaving,

but the play is over and his hand withdraws.
The puppet corrupter holds his head, thinking of another day.

CONTINUED

Once, the puppet corrupter performed with bare hands.
He wore black clothes and blacked his face so only his hands
glowed in the spotlight. He enacted wars, evoked countless
characters with slight shifts of his fingers.

In the audience, everyone's eyes were bleeding.

KELLY EVERDING

PRESENT DAY (FIRST TORMENT)

Some Medusa doom hooks my heart as I sit nights,
sizing up the day. Doorknobs fail to turn
and locks release their hold on things.
Larks distract the sky from blue; the window
ruins them as they slash the atmosphere.

Soon, I move as blood moves through a corridor
and out a given fissure. A woman, one I met in sleep,
crumbles before me on the street.
I walk my lobster on a sky-blue string,
past indiscriminate centuries and tumultuous flowers,

ignoring the silent, burning people in parks.
The last sun's light burns brightest, wick's end.
Beneath this life's a lucid rain, a brief blur,
time's scramble of the obvious that delays
the inevitable puncture. A man cries on a bench.

His words slip and pitch toward me,
great hulking forms let loose.

And now the order of things shifts, and now they do.

KELLY EVERDING

PRESENT DAY (THIRD TORMENT)

Where you are crimes cast tangential slopes,
touching briefly a life made of stolen memory.
You hold a tangible object now in your hands.
Say shell, house, box, skull, hole,
and none correct. Unable to surrender
to the next moment, you dwell in this one.
You realize you lived here all along.

Sun smears sky, erases the malaise
yesterday spread, that obstinate dust.
There's nothing superfluous about the way
the day arranges itself. Each minute plunges
head-long into meals and meetings. Unrelenting
pale-violet iris tongues lap the pavement.

Male and female clocks mark each street corner
like unfinished idols, insinuate direction
with pendulous umbrellas, packages, suitcases.
You end up under a light bulb with others
gesticulating the difference between themselves.
You burst in on families feasting on routine.

The sky darkens. You sense the failure.
Mechanical Prometheus flickers beneath the surface.
The sun's live wire hovers on the horizon,
quivers and collapses under the weight of names
I impose, you out there finishing what you've begun,
the cleaning, burying, the placing and positioning,

done. There's nothing to see here. You can go home
to those familiar things building up their resistance to you.

KELLY EVERDING

PRESENT DAY (FIFTH TORMENT)

A boy clings to a moment
like a rag to a twig. Perhaps he never existed and stays
forgotten as each harangue of the familiar disperses;
the town diminishes amid waving arms, birds, empty porches.

Desire folds in on itself.
Children recede into rooms faint with music.
The crushing of a bug elicits mild terror,
and the shell cracks open to nothing recognizable.
Note the puppet fleeing from the brother's death,
hands clapped to its head in mock despair.

I pry this display from my eyes as night
dissolves and aspects of the infinite filter
through holes left unattended by security guards.
The world might erupt into flames and restore
the pale dimensions sprung like petals, one by one,
but dreams carefully murder each reality
and carry our bewildered faces from sleep.

A man in brown trousers radiates a terrible siren,
and the park arranges a simulacrum of his past.
A windless symphony wipes over everything.
The hardened trees and stale pond hang vaguely in the distance
as if the milkman delivered the wrong morning.
The boy dashes into a field, never to be seen as he is
in his entirety, fragments tearing from his elbows and heels.

He penetrates the future, lungs bursting,
the expansion of field destroying forever the present day.

KELLY EVERDING

BREACH

In the park, I thought of the irretrievable day,
the gathering moments wasted
while the sun moved in the sky.
I watched people circle, insensate to the slackening light.

Like an animal uncertain how to please humans,
I attempted to leave, but the path returned me repeatedly, unharmed to
the same place.
Players in a field devolved into dogs,
their hair describing fluid arcs and snarls.
A caged couple senselessly cudgeled a ball,
beating it back and forth like parents.

I lay down on a nearby bench.
A crowd assembled, speaking an incoherent language.
A small boy made elliptical movements
before my upturned face, a strange alphabet

spelling out the moment the sun slowed.
This one and this one, he motioned urgently
while his mother touched his golden hair.
Birds scattered—

the park was beyond my influence.
A pigeon traced one long, gray parabola
which delineated the boy's passage into an old man.
The mother's skeleton stood graven in space above me;
her son placed his cool hand on my head.

I understood then why the park caved in at the edges.
In this reverse cemetery life curled backwards,
the prehensile tail tucked at the crotch,
gills gasping.

I stood on my feet, breathed in
the weakened air, the shackled air.
I looked around at the strangers' faces, the ponds, the grass and geese,
the bending trees, the pathways and flowers.
I was written on every surface by an unknown hand.

The sun reciprocated with opacity—
the sun the molten
center of earth and we,
inhabitants of an inner crust,
gazing down the bellows,
flecks of the kiln's flame stirring like stars.

KELLY EVERDING

ODE TO DIFFICULTY

Heaven's graph ignites with equations,
multiples of seven spiraling outward,

quantum filaments that map the elegant
sliding into difficulty,

where the movement is the thing,
the infinite elapsing moment

into observation.

Hence, *figure b* can never represent the fruit fly's

immortality, and the illustrations
in the dictionary, useless.

Thought incarcerates
the fauna and avifauna, the foliage and flowerage

with words and numbers. The resulting inertia
will herald an apocalypse of the mind,

an evolution of synaptic thunder
in which thought will mirror a continual apostatic

epiphany, saint-hair on end, electrified
by the warm mechanics of organs cleansing and refining

blood and air. Memory will be ubiquitous:
ancient gestures, a ministry of birds,

stone spires, repeating trees,
an embryo of smoke.

In the halls of museums, within the dioramas of history,
cavemen will awaken and breathe a subatomic wind.



Spiel: *Options*

THOMAS RECHTIN

THE ORGASM OF HEALING

When The Hulk eyes
himself in the water,
and that drop of sweat
falls, rippling his image

as the look on his face
moves you
to imagine

the stream of green urine
as he relieves himself

but he's only recovering
from the bites of Great Dogs,
animal versions
of Him.

THOMAS RECHTIN

THINGS TO DO WITH A RED ROSE

Bury it in snow like the carnation in an anthologized story
Light its head on fire and pretend you are roasting a marshmallow
Eat it petal-by-petal until you uncover the bee
Pierce the surface of your thumb on its lone thorn and submit the
 blood for a cholesterol test
Dip the stem-end in red paint and, on the nearest white wall, paint
 yourself a rose
Remove all of its leaves and blush in vicarious embarrassment
Set your alarm to fifteen minutes before the sun rises, have your fame,
 then raise your rose like a baton and conduct the birds
Holding the rose in your right hand, pretend you have a fallen leaf in
 your left
In a blender, combine milk, ice, sugar and the rose, and compose
 yourself a 50's song
Drink the rainwater collected in its vaginal folds after a superior storm
Tear it free from the reckless bush and immediately, in the interest of
 science, position it upside down
Wait two weeks as its color fades into volcanic night
Dust the bookshelves with its plucked-and-painted feathers, and then
 cry "Heavens!"
Dislodge one petal and, staring firmly at yourself in the bathroom
 mirror, rub each of your fingers with its rubbery texture
Remember its acrid taste years later as you board a train to Indiana,
 Pennsylvania
Leap off the train as it begins to roll, having "forgotten" the rose on
 the roof of your car
Dip the head of the rose in green paint and, on the same white wall,
 paint yourself a destination
Wait for the fire truck to arrive and then throw the rose out the
 window, following it down till it bounces lightly off the sky

THOMAS RECHTIN

THE PAINTER

1.

He waited until the painting
fell off the wall. Then
he gathered the broken glass
and painted each shard
a different color.

2.

If the nail was bent
he would have to wait again.
If the hammer was missing
he would have to find
the rock imprinted
with the word, *Poetry*
and test the walls.

3.

By moving over an inch
he would ignore one hole
and make another,
he realized. Like
the mirror his parents
hung over a door
that eclipsed his own drawings.

CONTINUED

4.

Thank god, he thought.
On the floor
before the re-hung
painting, he has arranged
the glass like a puzzle
only your feet
can figure out.
But the effect will only work
if you're barefoot.

5.

That's where the red
comes in. The woman's dress
isn't white: it's empty.
Forget the sky around her.
Forget she was ever even
behind glass. Imagine
the floor is the wall
and step.

BABOON CHERUBS

The scantron universities
have crumbled

into nitrogen studies
and ethnically correct

crackhalls, ballrooms inside
the murdered,

Cold War parties
and Syrian cafes hidden under the skyline,

star-spangled cellular
noise, parables of flesh

between the improvised people.
Today Charlie Manson

has something away toward
the witchcraft mountains

commanding us to shave
our cactus tile,

send god deep into
jade-smoking closets

with recordings of baboon
cherubs chewing

guitars and turntables
along the banks of Himalayan rivers.

CONTINUED

Torn curtain sky, that billboard
over America

tells us to drink urine
and seltzer, live

like kerosene and tadpole radios
until the postcard classes

invent some future map
some garden tangle leaving

the stone-sobbing metropolis
(some way to bring gypsymoth tragedy

to the countries forming between
porn sites—

Look at the partially
snake-painted

students long enough
and their tattoos begin

to slither and spit.
Ask the Village Voice

she-males how much
to fondle

your hydrofluorocarbons.
Sell your story for a dollar.

Sell your story for a dollar.
Eat whatever's eroding on your flesh.

Throw away your body
at the gym

for either a compliment
or a half-inch backhoe

plowing your shadow
into piles that don't fall.

Everything, everything is loud
and good for us,

say the lithium people
with their lithium hands

painted to the sides
of their heads

louder and closer
than before,

trawling the river
for wounds

and forcing each laceration
into sex and soft labor,

people squeezing
blood from the sides

of tenements who've
already

given up, fallen
as they are

to humiliation,
weak music that stops

the world even as it's
breaking.



Doug Dorph: *Angel*

KEN MEISEL

WOMAN STANDING ON A STEP

Something happened on the
steps going up to where I am
writing this entry. A lady whose
face was twisted into a smile
changed into an orchid bruise.
This has happened before.
It happened after she took
the first beating from the man
who's face I'll never get to see.
She whispered, *we've just made love*.
And so when the sun hit her
face, she changed into a bruise.
Part of the sky above us looks
like a bunch of orchids breaking
apart, which resembles her face.
It always happens when we pause
on the steps and look behind us
at the sun setting over the sky-
line of the city. When we look,
our faces change from human
beings to bruises. We rise right up,
lift our ears to birds, we listen.
Some of us stand with our arms
pasted to sides like we are dumb-
struck by a promise that didn't
hold, or maybe it did, and now
there is just this sky on orange fire.
And our faces are broken apart.
And this is because the dusk,
splitting the sky to oranges over
a city where the people and the

CONTINUED

birds co-mingle, is more about
what God is trying to do with
transcendence. God's interested
in the way light changes the face
when we break our hearts over
something we're trying to love,
like the sun, setting over a city,
or something we're trying to escape,
like the sun, setting over a city.
Either way, it resembles living.
And besides, the birds singing
at the vespers are just lost angels.
If this sounds trite, so what.
All birds hear other birds,
and so we aren't any different.
I feel a droning bird above me.
She's suffering in the cornice.
It's because the sun, setting
over the old Strohs Brewery,
resembles the town square of Hell.
The towers are tips of orange flames,
which is a terrifying thing to see
from a rooftop of a bloated
old building in Detroit City,
when you don't want to *be* here,
and you're just an angel far away
from home, or you're just a kid,
learning what kind of gloom
is carried inside the setting sun.
The whole neighborhood is
glowing with orange flames.
My face is discolored with bruising.
And that's because there is this
issue of what I'll do with what
I'm seeing. The face always changes
when you *feel* Heaven or Hell.
Especially after sex or a beating.
Both bring the light of transcendence.
If transcendence falls somewhere

between good love and a beating,
I can take this as existential fact,
just like this lady's doing right now.
I think I can eat my dinner
as I'd planned to, despite myself.
All the doves and pigeons sit
in rows on a telephone wire,
weeping over the edge of the day.
The one I hear is crying so hard
I can feel the heart in her chest
plundering through its cavity.
Its blood is turning from red
to purple to orange, which is
the way we accept the hurt in us.
It's like all our inner organs burn
when we take God's experiment
of a fire pit deep into our guts,
and we accept that Hell is just
another version of what happens
when we take our fingers to the
end of something with a fire tip.
God doesn't give a grade for this.
All we get for it is what we'd wanted.
When we accept Heaven, our
blood turns into lapis lazuli blue.
Heaven is what happens to us
when we twist our bruises into orchids,
and suddenly our heart breaks
into two identical laughing selves,
and we lay together in a bed
watching re-runs of Gunsmoke.
Can you imagine what God does
with this kind of information?
All God cares about is the way
we change from form to form.
You can't blame that on Genesis.
All birds who cry at this hour
resemble a naked boys choir.
The setting sun beats the clouds

CONTINUED

and burns their backsides black.
This bird is leaking her song.
She's just another pigeon extending
the song of the vocal chords
as we watch the sunset together.
I'm standing at the window.
I can see the woman who's face
is a bruised orchid pausing at
the step line. She's like me.
She's not going to weep this time.
She's not even going to laugh,
nor stroke her arms to silence,
nor wish upon a rising star.
She's just letting the birds above
her carry out her tune of passion
to its dutiful, if inevitable end.
If this is just the beginning
of a beautiful transcendence
where she's cut in two by the
sunset, and made over,
her face rendered red to blue,
or if she's destroyed by the tips
of a sunset turning her face
to gray ash, all the birds I love
will keep on singing anyway.

SCOTT MULRANE

SNOW MAY LAST FOR DAYS OR YEARS OR LONGER

A woman blows on splinters of coal
she saved for years to some day heat
some thin soup to see her through.
She had placed the splinters as cups are placed
in ceremonies of tea, lighted them much
as pilgrims light candles
in chapels where prayers are known to be heard.

In a downhill city in a distant world,
with nothing left except everything tossed away,
a man is freezing his hands on the woman's fire.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Eleven Sisters*

GERMAN FUNG

ELEVEN CITIES FOR THE DRIFTING NORTH

(fortune cookie)

The poem inside reminds you
the food really did come from China,

and the electricity also, “a family of rice
holding hands under the ocean”

(manhattan)

Flight patterns of pigeons leading away the city.
I paint each window to cover up the things I’ve said in my life.

(heavy metal)

It is so quiet I can hear teenagers growing in the forest.

(pyramid scheme)

My one friend won’t betray Sprint for WorldCom
no matter how many shadows I offer.

CONTINUED

(long distance call)

Montana bison
crossing

the cold mountains of dial tone.

(suburbia)

The snow begins at my window,
lifts the neighborhood sleep away to the passing moon.

(tower video)

A salesgirl takes off her clothes.

Ghost World. Risky Business.
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

The Men Who Failed The Hollywood Underground.

The men who failed the rain drifting in
from the real parts of Los Angeles.

After closing: a ritual circle of musk oxen.

(east third street)

Each person during the Tenants' Meeting
holds forth in his own language.

The cockroaches, the oldest settlers, keep arriving because of our
silence.

(the bowery)

Shane, one of the men who holds open
the door to the ATM, eats all his pennies.
“The fingerprints are what’s kept me alive,” he says.

(urban appalachia)

I fell asleep to the wind blowing through my television,
six young trees drowning in the East River.

(maine road trip)

1.

Growing up, the children track themselves
far into their beds, where night no longer
needs to be taken out of a box and nailed together.

2.

In Millinocket, the women look at me
like a map of the Canadian winter.

The men regard me as if I were still years away.
The emptiness of all literature.

GERMAN FUNG

THE HERMIT KINGDOM

we pray the starving who are still
far from becoming wind will not pick up our scent.

we want mornings without fear
of the coming light,

without having only bones to eat.

we want succor between silhouettes,
picnics on the banks of the strangled river,

trips to the museum with nothing
in it but a family of four hired to keep their eyes
focused on the exhibits of bare walls and corners.

we want expeditions to the park
where weeds gasp under the groping radiation,

and to ride the Ferris wheel that never turns.

we want enough food to sleep safely
and for the ice wind to stop
scraping away our hands
and the paintings of where we lived.

we want the satellites to stay in the sky
at night because they are the only
lights, the only signs of warmth anywhere.

we want to share our days and our interpretation
of days and the black market photos
of our president nursing his hermit genitalia.

we want a Chinese soldier, someone
to grasp for to hold onto over our texts

about the abomination of the individual

while windflower shadows pick us off
one at a time starting

from the solitary light bulb burning
for ten minutes among the cave towers
at the edge of our city

where the ground's been turned away
and we can no longer find our tunnels

and where we hear rats ticking and scratching
through the bowels of the frozen sky.



Thomas Kearnes: *Someone Enters My Reflection*

JASON WESCO

KENTUCKY BOTTOMS

Name the town. Give
it a river. Or two
that bend

together. And tracks
the length of it,
busy from

trains. Streets with trees
all out of leaves.
Sheds down

alleys that lean. A few
sidewalks cracked
open with

weeds. Porches with
paint bent in peels.
Some strays

getting familiar over
a stopped sewer
grate.

A lady with a limp
clipping wash
on the line.

Two men in suspenders
blowing smoke at
each other.

CONTINUED

Add an elevator, rusted,
and emptied
of grain.

Work in some pigeons
to dot roofs
and fences.

Finish with
weather.

SIMON PERCHIK



As if this tie could slow your fall
—full blown and yet each sleeve
expects the helpless rollover and flames

though your heart knows so little
about how chancy it is to breathe
spewing smoke no longer sea-blue

or dry—all that's left in this shirt
is the surrounding valley
that carries you down—you need more sky

and side to side stretching out
for a rickety bridge—you jump holding on
to a single knot huddled in fog and off course.

ANNE HEIDE

15 OCTOBER AURELIA OF STRASBOURG

because she steps
into this in backwards

where and the other end of her leg
clinging what kind of animal
underneath my house
bringing its head against my floor

she will rest here
in open legs and
strained necks her
burrowing down
into my arm you see

moves not in pages not leaves
what animal under my floor
and should its shuffling gait

while she is only just put to bed

ANNE HEIDE

17 OCTOBER SERAFINO OF MONTEGRANARO

this remnant of the stable

wool in hand torn
at the running away
of that sheep

underneath every foot
and the long row of thickening
nostrils
patches grips & falls

I breathe this because
I have no other landing

sweeter mucous
coated hay floors

and all that thickly smells
and bringing bears
like the too thin foal
still breathing, still.

MARINA RUBIN

DANIEL GANIN

He was 29 and diagnosed with schizophrenia
because he frequently saw Karlsson*
standing in his closet among pants and sweaters,
and he was never a fat slob with a propeller
but a masculine husky man, a Ninja Karlsson,
or because he simply left the stage
and went to Rockport, the most logical of cities,
with a duvet and books of Baudelaire, Rimbaud,
lived in a niche inside one of the rocks on the water

He was imaginative, the way
he slept in a freezing air-conditioned room
because he was training for the winter.
Whenever he passed a homeless man
he wished him good luck finding that perfect job.
Often he tried to walk leg in leg with businessmen,
with women who squeezed their Vittons and ran.
At the dance club he took a slice of bread and wiped
his face with it in an easy precise manner of a napkin
leaving his cheeks covered with crumbs

He used to tremble like an autumn leaf,
afraid that special forces had been long on his tail
and now had captured his father, tortured him,
or his cigarettes were sending out signals to the
local police, he switched from Marlboros to Pall Malls.
He could laugh, a loud frightening laugh
in the middle of the night while staring into
other planets, like Mrs. Rochester in Jane Eyre,
that longhaired creature in a white nightgown,
who lived in the attic, laughed, set fires.

When I left him alone
I worried that his pills had run out,
he was collapsing into madness, spiraling into insanity,
but instead I came home to a man in a white shirt
who made me tea, lit my cigarette, laid me on the bed,
and when I asked if he was collapsing into insanity,
he answered whether wanting a woman
looked like an act of collapsing into insanity,
whether love and desire were madness

We went to an art opening once,
he pressed his ear to the canvas to see
if he could hear the horse inside the brush,
while others walked long narrow spaces
saluting each other, clinking glasses, this world,
this perfectly sane world with words that hide
absolute nothingness, this fear of spiked silence,
what was it worth, this bag of flies,
this space of falseness called normal?

I watched the space between his eyes
searching for the third eye,
as we ate dinner at the anyway café
where he kept smiling to himself
and when I asked him what was so funny
he said he was just thinking how
when he was a boy a bull picked him up
and threw him on the ground hurting his back,
and now he was smiling because
the bull was most likely dead
and he was alive.

Karlsson* - children's book character from
"Karlsson-on-the-Roof " by Astrid Lindgren

MARINA RUBIN

GIBRALTAR

from spain to morocco
past the rock of gibraltar
in the month of ramadan
the hungry dog cried on the deck,
the old man prayed without his shoes,
the ship sailed on auto-pilot,
the cockpit was empty,
we could have taken
this ship anywhere,
proclaim our demands
to the government,
get our way

but our way
was to morocco,
to medinas, mosques, jellabas,
dirham at the market,
tajine for dinner

morocco
which in slang
russian means
a lot of hassle

the W
appearing
every 2-3 inches
in slanted writings

the sun
behind the rock
that looks like
an elbow of a lover
when it bends

REVOLUTIONARY

Mandy sat hunched over a cup of chocolate her father had prepared, to drive off the chill because things are almost never what they appear to be. My new roommate glared at my stuffed animal collection. I was no closer to resolution than I had been this morning.

The misery swoons over damp tropical rain forests and dry northern plains. The eggs are carried great distances and hatch quickly. The larvae feed on undergraduate textbooks and inspirational gift cards. They infect tree boles containing fresh rainwater. It takes almost no warmth at all to hatch them.

Billy the Roommate's heart jumped the domestic tracks and came to rest in a primeval swamp.

"You used to carry your life around like a bomb?" said Mandy. "What happened?"

She was speaking to the window behind Billy's shoulder. So Billy answered.

"I went off," said Billy.

"It's not funny," continued Billy after an appropriate silence, "I left pieces of me in innocent bystanders."

"Have you ever knelt around a ten-foot circle? Have you ever really questioned your relationship to primitive ritual?" queried Mandy.

"In one record year, nearly two hundred children under age twelve were arrested for drunken driving in one part of the country alone," said Billy.

Mandy and I continued watching while Billy poked holes in his sister's bathing cap. He continued slurping Mandy's hot chocolate. Then he looked up at us looking at him and said, "While this is true, it is not too soon to start revitalizing our taste buds. Because I was once a God, I know how to savor a moment."

We called this movement "Machinery." We had seen it before. We

CONTINUED

ate Brazil nuts and planned a strategy. We expected resistance. We were in agreement and we were not about to give in.

We were diligent. We were young. We were about to become statistics.

Almost no warmth at all.

Sixty-three stuffed animals. That was when I was counting them.

JESSICA HARMAN

CLEAR

Tensions between ochre and opal are worked
out here; the charm cascades, fades, darkens with ink
black space in the mind that fuses twilight to
sparrow song lit low,

glow—the city turns to a magenta
aria, the winter flowers go fuchsia
with fire; that is what poems do. Mire of adjective,
clause that

expands to fill the entire memory
of north; adverbs float on descriptions of cold
distance; that was how I wrote about childhood,
when I was trying

to figure out the Earth's tilt, and wilting red
flowers among moss, how we were left out here
with nothing but the way we could describe this
reflected, blighted

cloud, tapered by oncoming winter. Put verbs
to periwinkle, chide the wild birches
with nouns of paper, let ink ripple with how
we walk along the edges of clear water.



Connie Chiera: Gangbang: *Death and the Dragonfly*

STEPHANIE DICKINSON

FIRST LOVE WEST SIDE HIGHWAY

TAXI

The taxi raced, skimming over the West Side Highway, away from all the sidewalks Danielle trudged earlier, all the Walks and Don't Walks. Millions of lit windows had turned themselves off, letting the warehouses of grimy brick and scarecrow water towers do the peering down. Her feet burned. Earlier she'd pitched forward onto the cobblestones, the heel of her silver shoe caught in a crack. She didn't know why birds kept quiet at night or maybe they sang, but she couldn't find them with her ears. She loved birds. Then she wondered where the stars were, because they'd disappeared. They hated the city. Asleep, did stars and birds close their eyes? Curl their toes around a branch? Stars burn. Birds sing through rain and thunder and at night they sleep. Who keeps the lookout? They must travel together. They don't break off from the rest.

The cabbie picked them up separately, maybe he shouldn't have stopped for the brawny man carrying a gym bag, but then the petite black girl in white mini skirt who must be his girlfriend made it all right. "Cold enough back there?" he asked through a slit in the Plexiglas. And then the taxi entered the Holland Tunnel where the river was on top of them and all the currents and silky filth forced back by tiles like the ones in the girl's locker room of Danielle's private high school. Gray and pink tiles that she liked to rub her toes against after a shower with a towel around her. The good feeling of a good run and those tiles neat and pressed against each other.

"See, I told you everything was going to be okay," Hawkins said, the guy who used to be a bouncer at Crobar then at Clubland, keeping to his side of the taxi's back seat. His face shone with dimples and his warm eyes seemed to drink in all the night's trouble. But it was his soft voice that convinced her to get into the taxi with him. His niceness. She'd been lucky, all that fear and then it had worked out.

“Danielle, that’s a pretty name,” he said. “Like a greyhound pure bred racer.”

“How did you know I’m a runner?” she asked.

He grinned. “I was meant to rescue you.”

Maybe someone should have rescued Hawkins when he and his mother lived in motels along Hwy. 42 right outside Zebulon, North Carolina. He flashed on his mother’s boyfriend all those long years ago, his square head buried in the pillowcase’s smiling violets, his jeans rumpled on the rug, Hawkins fishing in the pockets for coins. His mother on her belly, an arm thrown out, little pieces of lint caught in her hair, a balled up silver gum wrapper. Hawkins hid the coins under a piece of rug where the tacks came up, and the next day he snuck to the convenience store, pointing to the red hots and bubble gum. “A nickel a piece,” the cashier said. He opened his palm, looked at the quarters, no nickels. He left the store, empty-handed. He was one dumb kid.

Leaving New York City just as the sun began to seep into the sky, Hawkins watched light break over the interstate. He wondered if the girl’s eyes ached from the dump of mascara on her lashes. She had one of those upturned noses like some of the light-skins did. A plaza of tollbooths appeared. They were going to the motel where he lived with his girlfriend Tabitha. It was where his car would be parked if he’d had one. The Hudson seemed to follow them; most of the river swimmable except around the sewage plants. Water that wouldn’t catch fire like inland rivers. They called Hawkins’ girlfriend with Danielle’s cell phone. “Tabitha, I’m bringing a lost girl with me. We’re going to drive her home.” He’d had to hang up when Tabitha started crying that they didn’t have a car and what was going on. Hawkins wasn’t thinking more than two to three steps ahead.

“You’re a greyhound pure bred,” he repeated, after finishing the call. He’d been a runner too, although none of his sprints were for extracurricular activity.

Danielle liked being compared to the second fastest animal on the planet. Her right foot throbbed from her earlier fall on the cobblestones, when she noticed the strap of her silver shoe had snapped. Her right foot was unlucky: it had been born as a club foot, which they’d operated on. Her dad still talked about how spunky Danielle was, a baby with a cast on her foot almost as big as she. Instead of crying for her bottle, she’d bang the crib with her cast. Her feet turned out pretty, but she took extra care when she drank because

then she went up on her tiptoes and took tiny steps. Track was supposed to have cured her of that.

“Which side?” the cab driver asked. “Right or left.” He’d taken the exit that curly Q’d off the interstate and hit his turn blinker when Hawkins told him to take a right. The neon’s fading orange announced WEEHAWKEN INN.

“Right,” Hawkins said, wondering if she might get skittish once she saw the motel.

They got out of the taxi and the sticky reek of urine struck her nostrils; there were glistening puddles in the parking lot, but Hawkins smiled and she could see dimples and wasn’t it time she saw how other people lived who didn’t have dads who worked for the Securities & Exchange Commission. She thought she heard a bird underneath the splash of traffic. A really big one. Like those doctor birds and Lizard-cuckoos at the bird garden in Jamaica where her dad took her after the divorce. Maybe it was one of those birds beating its wings so fast.

“I’m not going to be living at this motel much longer,” Hawkins said, trying not to but seeing the motel through the girl’s eyes anyway. “My lady and I are waiting to hear on a mortgage application. We’ve been looking at houses in your neck of the woods.”

Danielle nodded. In her neck of the woods all the houses were basically empty during the daylight hours of the week. Her father was an attorney and worked as a fraud examiner, busy these days after the Enron collapse, all those imaginary offshore subsidiaries and holding companies that didn’t exist. Employees whose lifetime savings were lost. And sometimes her father didn’t exist beyond a wave when he headed out for his hour and fifteen minute commute to Trenton, and a “Luv ya bunches,” on the cell phone. Eighty hour work weeks. Before her parents separated and later divorced they loved to read mysteries, especially in series: a veterinarian detective whose cats solved murders, an ancient one-eared Laotian detective, and black, blind, female, transsexual, and born again Christian detectives. They loved dead bodies. They didn’t like to drive into the city because why be reminded of what they’d left behind. And all the shipwrecked people still there. The failures, while they were successes. It wasn’t the color line they broke through, but the money line. Class. Beyond her parents and grandparents, Danielle didn’t know much about her forebears, only that they came from Trinidad to New York City. She was Caribbean-

American, part of the African Diaspora, her ingredients included European and Indian like Heinz 57 and pasteurized milk all blended together until you didn't know if it came from cows or melted crayons.

CLUBLAND

It was still Monday, a few minutes before midnight in Manhattan near West 14th Street. Celestial and Danielle went around another block in the red Dodge that belonged to Celestial's mom. A van pulled out of a parking spot and they zipped in. Perfect. Not far from Clubland. They sat in the car. Earlier they'd eaten at a Thai restaurant. They had to make sure they weren't wearing any food. Celestial twisted the rearview to apply mascara and Danielle smeared on strawberry lip gloss. It felt like a race, getting the starting blocks in place, buttering on heat salve, wrapping your ankles. Most of Danielle's friends were runners while Celestial had been a glam girl, a cheerleader, not an athlete.

"Do you think I should take my bag in?" Danielle's tote overflowed.

"You won't be able to dance with it," Celestial advised. "I'll carry my purse. You paid for dinner. I'll put drinks on my VISA."

"Do you think they'll card us?"

"Listen, we're eighteen and allowed in to dance."

The heat came at them from all sides, a humid ninety degree brownish fog that sucked away their breath. Celestial was dressed in a black stretch top with an oval cut out of its middle so her belly button could stare out. The stretch top snapped between her legs and doubled as panties. Danielle wore a white mini, a black halter, a wide silver belt that her cell phone attached to.

Celestial lit a cigarette and they walked down the street. "How do I look?" she asked, exhaling a string of smoke. "Yummy?"

Yes, yummy like a papaya salad with cherry tomatoes.

Outside Clubland there were lines of glittering girls in one-shoulder beaded tops, in Hong Kong bustiers. Wrap-dress girls. Like those Chinese prisoners executed for stealing chickens, sold as cadavers, cut open and filled with plastine. The sight of all the ladies made Danielle ache for her ex-boyfriend. *Jon, I love you still.* Jon's

parents owned markets in River Vale, in Closter, in New Brunswick. Upscale food, lots of organics. He had a playboy's handsome face, those kinds of special looks. Black hair, large intelligent dark eyes. His half smile could melt the cools of a hundred girls. Danielle was pretty, but not beautiful, or maybe you would call her long neck and face with almond-shaped eyes quite lovely. *I would tear the skin off my fingers; I would give you the tip of my index. One toe.*



Hawkins was watching Danielle and her friend as he moved toward the waitress who was trying to do a hundred things at once. He gave Irena a nod, his get me a seltzer water with two limes nod. First she waited on the girls, bending over their table in her fishnet dress to slap down napkins. She didn't card the girls, who had to be underage, anyone could see that. Yeah, he snickered to himself, he liked the petite one with the high riding behind. Supposedly on the lookout for trouble, he mainly checked out the ladies, perfumed into goddesses. Those two he hadn't seen before. The girls were dark meat, but they'd been groomed and might as well have been white. Look, but don't touch, low rent mother.

He'd spent a good part of his existence just looking at stuff, and he'd learned a bunch from what his eyes told him. Hawkins liked to study cockroaches during those years of staying in budget motels, his bed made up in the tub while on the other side of the bathroom door his mother tended to business. She'd put out black plastic roach traps all around the commode and under the sink and he'd see the big bugs stagger away, flip onto their backs, their whiskery legs peddling in the air. When Hawkins finally couldn't stand it, he'd flip them onto their stomachs and they'd crawl away, but you could tell the poison had got to them, they were wounded. He threw out the traps once and his mother's boyfriend Clovis gave him a beating. "That's not blood, Hawkins," Clovis said, between smacks. "That's a new shade of lipstick for sissies." Fuck, Clovis. Hawkins fed lots of bugs five star meals. Sticky fruit they liked. He'd seen a cockroach wrap itself feelers and all around a bit of raspberry like it was making love to the fruit, curling around and sucking it deeper.

The girls ordered strawberry daiquiris. Hawkins watched them settle into the air-conditioning. The dancing was far away across rings of tables

and terraces. Irene brought the strawberry daiquiris on a silver tray with juicy strawberries on each rim. Danielle smeared her fingerprints onto the ice goblet. Hawkins liked the one in that white denim skirt sucking on her strawberry same as that cockroach, her lips like feelers doing the love making. Wouldn't he like those lips on him? The other girl had a light brown weave and tossed it around her shoulders.

He checked out the posse of girls in cobweb dresses and rhinestone shoes drifting off the elevator. There was a short guy in white jeans and black leather mid-calf coat with them. He waved his arms in front of him. "Come on, girls. They'll have to clear the VIP section for us. None of those people are on my list."

In the roped off VIP section, you could see that there was more than one Very Important Person, like expensive cars you rented for weddings to take you from there to here. Here was the heart of Clubland. Red stitched leather chair, swivel cushions. Tart cherry walls with mirrors not really mirrors, but fish sequins of glitz.

Hawkins had to clear the section.

†

"Ever have a chocolate martini, Danielle?" Celestial had been dancing and her partner treated them. "Come on, have a chocolate martini with me. We'll split it."

The chocolate martinis came in triangle glasses with a stir stick of cinnamon.

Two guys came over. The drinks changed to pineapple shooters.

"Girlfriend, don't worry," Celestial said. "We'll get a coffee before we drive home."

Danielle wanted another shooter, and then to go dance with those guys in cut away shirts. A pineapple shooter. "What's in that?" she'd asked, even her voice syrupy. Absolut vodka, muddled pineapple, absolut kulant. It tasted so good. She wanted to sip it, but bottoms up. DJ Big Vinod was spinning. Mos Def and Bizzy Bone. The drinks kept coming and Danielle was anxious about her tote bag in the car. Not to worry, Celestial had her credit cards. She'd be glad to pay for Danielle's drinks, but look: some Santa Claus had already taken care of everything.

Danielle sipped a blue drink. It looked cool—a miniature swimming hole but tasted hot. Like blue licorice. It hadn't been there

in her hand and then it was. *One finger I'd give for you Jon.*

It was the length of her face and slanty eyes that made Jon see Danielle as exotic, not like her suburban sisters, all her friends, the ones she spoke to on her cell phone. The silver bracelet on the knuckles of his wrist, how she liked to watch it move against those bones. All the languages he knew: English, Spanish, Hindu, Bengali, from working in his parent's store. They were of the mercantile caste. The second or third highest caste after the Brahmin. But Danielle soon came to realize over there was also over here. Did he remember the afternoons in August, in the hottest part of the summer when she was sixteen and he seventeen? Or the following spring when she liked putting her mouth there tasting his cinnamon? *You smell. It smells like cinnamon too.* He laughed and asked if she was comparing him to the dried bark of the laurel tree.

They were back to daiquiris. Neither girl was counting. Or they were starting all over again.

Danielle knew that sometimes when she wasn't totally aware of herself she got up on her tiptoes and walked. Her dad thought it was endearing and adorable, his little girl who grew but not as tall as her brother and sister and tried to catch up. *Do I look yummy? Yummy enough to take your love in my tummy? A hot girl likes sucking and swallowing. Likes it like peanut butter plum sauce slathered on a spring roll.*

TOW ZONE

Danielle and Celestial left the club. One of the bouncers, the nice one who'd checked their IDs on the way in, escorted them out. "Take care, ladies," he said. They tried walking a straight line outside, but they weaved across the street. Now it was Tuesday morning, 2:00 a.m. The buildings that a few hours earlier twinkled with nightlife and excitement were blacking out. Near the entrance to the City Bank ATM machine, a woman with strips of garbage bag wrapped around her ankles held out her arm as if clutching a microphone.

Danielle had her cell phone that could do almost anything, but it couldn't slide into the ATM machine and get money.

Celestial tried to slip her Chase card in the door to the ATM. The red light stayed illuminated. "Come on green. Green, you ass."

The homeless woman shuffled toward them. "Ladies, I'm talking to

you. A man isn't going to save you. That almighty man is going to land you in Hell. For eternity. Do you know how long eternity is? If you ground down every building in this city and a pigeon flew each pebble to the moon and came back for the next, ladies, it's longer than that."

The sky between buildings was the color of pebbles, a lighter shade than the behemoth buildings that seemed to walk with them. Old sweatshops with their locked windows straggling after. At last they were standing in the empty slot where they left the red Dodge earlier.

"Is that where we parked?" Celestial hiccupped. "Mom will kill me if we lose her car."

The no standing sign stared at them from its pole. That couldn't have been there before. Maybe they'd miscalculated, parking on the next block. But then they hadn't and after walking in circles, Danielle called 911 and was transferred to the Tow Pound.

"Twelfth Avenue and 32nd Street," the dispatcher said.

"Eleven blocks, think you can make it?" Danielle asked Celestial. She had fewer of the pineapple shooters inside her body and knew she could.

"Lead the way," Celestial slurred.

They headed toward the Hudson River back to the Meat Packing District where earlier they'd eaten. It wasn't the same. All the closed stores watching them stagger by. The French Cleaners, Leather and Fur Experts. The heat hardly parted to let them pass before it moved against them.

Jon loved the heat although in each of his parent's markets ice cold air conditioning blasted along with the Indian pop songs that Danielle grew to appreciate, the one note over and over with trills. Like yellow curry, the sweat of it simmering down an esophagus. And since all the girls flirted with Jonathan, she never really knew why he chose her. They couldn't date in the open. Not in front of his parents. After graduation from high school he enrolled at Rutgers, and his mother had gone to India and engaged him to a diamond merchant's daughter, rich and beautiful. Danielle heard from his friends at the market that she was very nice. A virgin. That Jonathan said, "She's great."

"Shit, Danielle. Oh, shit shit," Celestial moaned, facing the building, wishing for a crack, somewhere to hide herself. Not shit. But vomit. Her Thai meal splattered on the sidewalk and on her stretchy shirt with the open belly hole. Danielle swayed and the lights on the street split apart, so much jittered in her eyes, but the liquor kept her wide awake.

Someone was following them, someone barefoot and fat and fanning himself with a beautiful violet fan. At first Danielle thought he might be a woman, but under the streetlight she saw it was a man with long grey hair. Behind the man with the violet fan about half a block back strolled Hawkins.

He figured he'd see where the girls were going, if they needed help getting home. They lurched from right to left, the girl in the white mini tiptoeing. Maybe a part of him was feeling protective, the way he wished someone had felt about his younger self. It still made him sick to his stomach when he thought of his mother taking off with her square-headed boyfriend Clovis, leaving Hawkins behind in the Dutch Windmill Motel, ten years old and totally alone except for TV and the remains of an everything pizza. He listened to the ghosts of their old fights. "Fix your hair," Clovis shouting. "Ivonne, fix it." His mother snorting, "You're not going to be sleeping in my hair, baby." Clovis lighting a match. All the years he lived in foster homes, he remembered the scrape of match over the strip of grist. Hawkins wiggling the knob, the door popping loose and him running alongside the highway and into the ditch where his friends the frogs and toads lived. He huddled down, letting the cold mud squish between his toes. *Wish I could croak, wish I could just be a toad.*

When the man with the fan turned up another street, it was just Hawkins and the girls. They out walked Lenscrafters, and Chipotle Mexican Grill. They passed Sin Sin Happy Hour, Salvation Army, La Nueva Rampa Restaurant. Gatorade bottles and orange juice cartons and cigarette butts.

IMPOUND

Part of the sidewalk was closed. Blasting instructions, the sign said. Three short whistles meant the blast was one minute away. Dynamiting out the roots of old buildings. The Impound was a long lot with chain link fence around it. Two tow trucks entered with their catch.

"Shit shit shit." Celestial staggered against the chain link. A No Standing Zone. When they parked the red Dodge they honestly thought that sign meant no teens or gangs hanging out.

The uniformed men inside the Impound glanced up, and then really stared.

“Get it together,” Danielle nudged Celestial.

They walked deeper into the office where it was too bright, like walking into a lit refrigerator. Celestial fumbled her purse but Danielle opened it for her. Soon she’d have her tote, her cards, and the keys to her car, cash. She’d have her life back. Her father wouldn’t have to know. Danielle’s father voted for Ralph Nader in the last election although he knew he was only throwing his vote away. Letting George W. Bush back in the White House. He had to vote his conscience. Both parties were bought men and women. The day after the election America would wake up. But now it was years after the election and you still couldn’t tell if America was asleep or awake. You couldn’t tell if the city employees were awake or asleep either. Were the motor vehicle police officers in their blue shirts and decal patches on their shoulders all alike?

“We’re here to pick up a car,” Danielle said.

“Is that so?” a tow pound officer said, lifting his red face and dark eyebrows. Three long wrinkles stretched over his forehead.

Danielle rubbed her temples, feeling groggy. A headache was beginning in her forehead and left eye.

“A red Dodge,” Celestial piped up, pushing herself against the mesh. “My mom’s car.”

The impound officer lifted the three wrinkles. “Do you have the registration papers?”

“They’re in the car. As soon as you bring it around you’ll have ‘em,” Celestial slurred, beginning to sway, her fingers tightening around Danielle’s arm.

A light was shining in the red-faced man’s dark eyes. “We can’t bring the car around if you don’t have that registration.” Two other impound officers had gotten up from their chairs and stood behind the red-faced officer.

“Come on,” Celestial said, hitting the counter with her bracelet. “How are we going to get home?”

“Are you ladies intoxicated?”

Celestial dropped her purse and Danielle scooped it up. Tears budded in Celestial’s eyes. “It’s my car.” Nothing would be worse than getting a citation for public intoxication.

A sign read Traffic Department Tow Pound. Fine to release \$150. Money orders, cash, on-site ATM.

“You can’t operate a motor vehicle if you’re intoxicated, ladies.”

“May I *just* get my purse out of the car? Please it’s got my credit cards and house keys in it,” Danielle asked, her hands shaking, the headache streaking from her nose to her eyes.

“Let’s see ID.”

Danielle pushed Celestial’s license into the slot.

“That’s her. Who are you?”

Celestial gave a hand wave. “Let’s go outside,” she slurred clutching her mouth.

The impound man called EMS when Celestial fell down. She kept falling deeper into the puddles of saran wrap and Gatorade bottles, her shirt with the belly hole more open, as if she wanted to crawl back into her navel. Her light brown woven hair spread around her on the ground like it was trying to run away. Her pony print purse went flying.

The white shirted EMS guys left the red siren circling and bleeping, as they rolled out the stretcher and lifted Celestial. “Okay, what’s in her?” the EMS man snapped. He chewed gum so hard it made his ears bounce up and down. They strapped Celestial to the stretcher. The impound guys with their clipboards surrounded the gurney.

“Any drugs in her?”

The real police were coming and Danielle knew it. “No drugs.”

“You want your friend to die?”

Danielle’s hands trembled, her knees knocked. “Please,” she said. “I told you the truth.”

Two drunken Jersey girls, two liars.

They’d arrest her for underage drinking and put her name in the police blotter. What would her father say? “You know how to hurt a man. I have government clearance. Don’t do this, Danielle.” Since the divorce when her mother dumped her father for another man, she tried making it up to him by being a good daughter. Once Danielle went to the River Rove bank where her mother worked. She followed a shapely brown woman in a red suit walking hand in hand with a tall white man upstairs to Customer Accounts. There on the low tables magazines rested, one called *Sail*, white sails bending into the blue seas, cloudless skies. Then the couple turned. It was her mother and the new husband. Danielle’s mother used to oversee the cashiers on their high stools, how cool and disembodied they looked, dispensing cash. More asleep people.

They had Celestial between them, loading her into the ambulance, the EMS guys looking nothing like skinny Nicolas Cage in *Bring Out the Dead*. They were burly and their faces well-fed. But the movie had it right about all the junk food. She could see all the Big Gulp cups, Ritz crackers, wrappers from double-stuffed Oreos on the floor in the back of the ambulance. While they were all gathered around the moaning girl, Danielle simply walked away and no one stopped her.

"I'm in love," her mother had said to Danielle's father. "You're in love?" he repeated. Danielle listened from the stairs. Even now thinking of those words the daiquiri grew thick in her throat like a cut so rich and bloody she couldn't swallow. "Who is he?" her father asked. After a pause her mother answered, "A man I work with. He took me from the side. I wasn't expecting it." It was how her mother slipped away from her marriage and family. When no one was looking she went.

Danielle's whole body trembled now and her heart raced. The street grew dirtier as she hurried and the moon a huge blob of hot lard, an ice cream scoop of lard, a bushel basket of sheep fleece. Did she think she could run to New Jersey? Tattoo parlors. Liquor stores. Everything 99 cents. Ricky's Unlimited Jeans. At the Don't Walk a man sat on a fire hydrant and poured what looked like beer from a water bottle onto his toothbrush. He brushed his teeth, and then spat. Warehouse mouths where earlier the cows twirled on hooks, where the fat hit the cobblestones and wormed its way into crevices.

There were buildings on either side; grates pulled down, Kerry/Edwards stickers, I Love New York.

WEST SIDE HIGHWAY

Hawkins hailed a cab, an off-duty cab, sometimes those were the best kind. He explained to himself about this girl, that he was watching out for her. A rich spoiled girl for sure. The highway that had crumbled more than once formed a line between the Hudson River and the interior of Manhattan. The girl probably didn't know how she had managed to stumble here where cars flashed around her, making splashing sounds like fleeing water. They'd recently renamed it Joe DiMaggio Highway. There was New Jersey, the Garden State across the river.

Night after night he sat on his stool drinking his seltzer with two limes, watching the chicks and young bucks get high. High was like

bringing in the pit-bulls that you'd kept in a bathroom without water, all that musky yeasty smell, lifting a leg, sniffing. All fidgeting because last call was like death, last call without hooking up. Desperation.

Hawkins had the taxi slow down, pulling over almost onto the shoulder. "Hey, you look lost. Let me help you," he kept saying. "I saw you at Clubland."

She sighed, her whole body like she might cry, so relieved. But she wasn't sure, couldn't look. *Let me help you.* She picked up the pace.

"Wait up," he called out, but another swarm of cars pierced his voice. Maybe she'd start running soon, only how would she know where to go. Her hands shook, vehicles honked in her face. "Miss, please. This isn't any place for a young lady. Don't be afraid, I want to help you. You look like you can use some."

She started to run, felt her feet up on tiptoes. Danielle didn't want to be the one who looked like they needed help. Ever since Jonathan's grandmother grew sicker in her bedroom on the first floor with the Hospice aide there and not there, Danielle thought she might have the fortitude for nursing. The aide couldn't be there all the time and neither could Jon's parents with all the markets to work. And Danielle didn't mind really. Hospice showed her how to bedpan the old woman without hurting her, how to lift her haunches and lower her onto the stainless steel pan, and then leave the room to give the patient privacy or staying and giving encouragement.

The taxi kept following her. "Miss, I'm in training for the Marathon," the man called out, "and you look like you're a runner who is lost." That stopped her. The Marathon. He was in training. A runner would want to help her, a fellow athlete.

More of the two hundred miles an hour cars speeded past.

In the taxi Hawkins introduced himself. He hadn't asked, but she told him her name. Danielle. He'd seen her earlier. Did she remember the bouncer at Clubland? Sure, she nodded, she remembered him, but he looked different out here. More like the stone sky.

He felt like he'd just won a prize, this beautiful greyhound crossing her legs in the backseat of a taxi flagged down by him. You bet she never had to kill brown lice, but Hawkins knew how you had to get them on the flat of your fingernail before you could pop them, his younger self laughed at how brown lice jumped from child to child at the foster home, how they bed down in your privates and eyebrows.

It was a hot fast ride. Ruts and potholes didn't bother the tires. You could see the ditches on either side, the telephone poles leaning in the water. Hawkins told her he lived with his girlfriend just across the river in New Jersey. That's where his car was. "My lady's name is Tabitha. Like that baby witch. Remember that old TV show *Bewitched*? They show re-runs on TV Land." Tabitha might not like it, but she was going to have to vacate the room for a few hours. But Danielle didn't know *Bewitched*. "Are you sure you don't belong to that Greyhound bus?" Hawkins gently teased. "I didn't know if I could catch up to you. You're sleek and fast."

He patted her hand, felt her trembling. She was safe and right there practically bolted onto the back of the front seat was the Passenger's Bill of Rights, along with a telephone number to call in the event the cab driver violated one of them. When Hawkins talked he could see her trying to listen, but totally uninterested, trying to stifle a yawn. This silky fine light-skinned girl from River Vale wouldn't give him a second look in her world, but she'd done messed up and was in his world now. "I know the by-ways of this highway," he bragged, like he owned it all: the bicycle paths and granite block paving, the original cobblestone highway.

He had such a low voice like that soft spoken actor. Danielle's mind kept drifting. Why hadn't Jon even emailed to say sorry? Maybe that's why she couldn't get over him. The injustice of it when she had even fallen in love with his grandma whose face showed all the hard work done in that hotter country. "Saffron is used to color rice yellow," she told Danielle. Grandma sat in the kitchen in her emerald green sari while Danielle chopped and stirred. *Was I hot enough, Jon? Saffron, the most expensive spice of all.* They needed a girl to come in during the day to help prepare the grandma's meals. The old woman knew English mixed with Hindu. She taught Danielle how to prepare Indian foods. Masala dabba, the spice box. Seven tiny spoons like for a doll, seven compartments, seven spices, like crushed powdered jewels.

The meter made a whirring sound. They stopped almost in the middle of the lot. Hawkins slid his money clip from his back pocket, peeled off a five from a thin bill roll. "I'm light, man. It's been that kind of night. I'll send my roommate down to pay you the rest of the fare."

WEEHAWKEN MOTEL

Everything was silt-covered, especially the glass door—a grit of black exhaust. Hawkins held it open for her and she followed him inside the lobby. Two dusty couches faced a TV on wheels, the kind rolled into junior high classrooms to watch breaking news, usually a disaster. Only on this screen the Shopper's Channel disgorged its riches: a garnet ring mounted and turning, pivoting to show itself from all sides, then a sapphire, one naked girl after another touching herself.

The hallway smelled of mildew. Hawkins knocked; the door had scratch marks keyed into the beige paint. "Yeah?" a girl asked through the chain-lock.

"What's up freckle face cartoon girl?"

"Hawkins," she hissed.

The chain lock slid off and Hawkins and Danielle stepped into the room. A bed bumped against a dresser loaded with microwave and TV and CD player and quarts of Coke and beer.

"Tabitha, this is Danielle. Now go pay the cab," he ordered the white girl.

Tabitha stared at Danielle with blue worried eyes. She stuck a cigarette in her mouth and lit it. Danielle was sure she'd never seen hair like hers. An ash blond so oily it looked almost wet. Little motel shampoo samples sat near the sink. Five or six of them that Danielle glimpsed because there was no door to the bathroom. Tabitha opened her eyes wider. They passed each other, close enough for Danielle to take in all her odors, mint and cigarettes and a rough muskiness. Her hair was a grease pit, but her skin was a luxuriousness like the white calf interior of her dad's Jaguar. What were those blue peepers trying to signal?

Danielle turned to follow the girl.

"Not so fast, greyhound." Hawkins reached for her hand. "Tabitha keeps promising to stop smoking. She's always putting on the nicotine patch and taking it off. See over there?" He pointed to a pile of discarded patches curled like silver seashells. "Relax. Have a seat."

"But aren't you going to take me home?"

"You bet," he said, heading into the bathroom.

Danielle walked deeper into the room that smelled of sweat and semen. That must be what that milky saltiness was, a thickness saturating

every air molecule. She almost gagged, and then she did, coughing into her cupped hands. No, she couldn't stay. It was a mistake getting into the cab, and once she was in the cab, her next mistake was getting out of it. A night of mistakes. When Hawkins came out smoke curled from his lips. "These funny cigarettes don't count." He stubbed out the joint on the dresser, separating the coal with his long index finger from the rest of the roach, leaving the ember to burn out like the pink eye of a chameleon.

She wiped her hands on her skirt, tried to breathe through her mouth not her nose.

"How about a dance?" He hit the radio button on the CD player and out jumped the rhymes of Notorious G. Then Hawkins rested a hand on either side of her waist where the halter separated from her mini. Danielle stepped back, hitting the edge of the bed.

"Aren't we going soon?" she said, shivering.

"You bet. All the way to River Vale." He dropped his hands. "Hungry? Looks like Tabitha ordered takeout Chinese."

White take-out bags sat in the room's one chair.

"No thank you," she said. How could anyone eat in this air? She had to get out of this room. She'd stand in the lobby and wait for first light.

"No *thank you*," he repeated, lifting one carton after another from the paper bags, and easing his bottom onto the dresser. Hawkins jacked up the radio volume. "Dance for me."

Her feet were sinking into carpet and taking the rest of her body with it. She swayed, swinging her arms, but inside she wasn't dancing, inside she felt hollow because no one in the whole world besides Hawkins and Tabitha knew she was in this room. *Really did you think this ride would be free from a perfect stranger? Even if River Vale is only sixteen miles.* She watched him dig into those take out containers. Baby shrimp and blue-veined prawns squirmed over the plastic fork, the cold noodles. Danielle's head swam. She tried holding her breath against the smell. *The room stinks, Danielle. Are you afraid if you say the room reeks even in your mind he'll call you uncool. A black racist is meaner than a white one. Sheltered Jersey girl. Burb chick.*

A drop of soy sauce clung to his chin—one brown tear. "You're a beautiful lady," he said after he finished eating. "I'm not sure you're a greyhound. Nah, you're no dog, but maybe you're a raven. A beautiful black scavenger. I've never seen anyone with your face. You're a goddess."

Smile, the ad said. You are in Andalucía, in a horse drawn

carriage. You're the girl with blazing white teeth in a white sun dress leaning over the carriage rail, your smile so wide, and a much older black man holding the reins, steering the horse, the freshly painted yellow wheels. Andalucía, this summer, next summer, a promise.

There was still food in his mouth when he asked, "Now tell me the truth. What were you really doing on West Side Highway dressed like that?"

"Like what?" *Be quiet*, said her mind. *Be quiet*.

"Like a working girl," he said, flatly. His glassy brown eyes reminded her of goggles with mirrors.

His arms went around her and kissing her neck, using lips and teeth like he was chewing. She pulled away, backing into the dresser, spilling a carton of fried rice. The blue prawns squished under her silver shoes.

"Don't," she said, trembling.

"This is my house and I'm the only one who uses that word. *Don't* is my word. Now kiss me nice because your life might depend on it."

Hawkins stood above her slowly shaking his head. Then he lifted her halter, reached for one of those goldfish containers. She felt the bean sprouts and water chestnuts and snow peas on her skin even before she saw Hawkins dump them over her chest. When he looked up he was again that nice soft spoken actor, smiling his dimples.

He took Danielle's hand, he began to rock her in a slow dance, and she felt his groin against her skirt. When you said what he'd said, when you made a threat, you felt yourself expand, get big, everything obeyed, even the radio played the songs that flashed through your head. When you told someone they could lose their life if they didn't act right, you were king, the keeper of all the cash transactions, the eater of shells, lobster, crawfish, all the stink stuff.

"I bet you don't wear a bra, not even one of those strapless." Hawkins pulled her top up. "Your tits look like baby corn." He kissed them, his lips greasy with Chef's Special Sauce. He sucked her nipple like a baby trying to drink milk. Her breast looked funny being stretched, like elastic. He nibbled on her, licking and smacking like her grandfather did the bones of pork chops. He bit her flesh that ten hours earlier she'd showered and lotioned and perfumed. On the bed in her room were the runner-up choices of what to wear: an open backed midnight blue dress with a string across the wingbones, a front knot apricot halter dress, a mesh tutu skirt. She'd chosen the white studded mini.

Hawkins wouldn't hurt her if she stood still, if she kept perfectly

quiet. She wondered if she would ever see Jon again. Was he married yet? His parents knew her as Danielle who was so good with grandma. They never knew her as Danielle whom their son was making love to. It was spring, the beginning of melt. Jonathan gave her a capsule of brown mescaline. They didn't know about that either. A body high. The Bangladeshi guys who worked had lots of things, had connections to Afghani hash. The pill tasted like cocoa and after she took it the rain started to fall. The new rain was long and hung in the air. Jonathan piggybacked her to a picnic table. They kissed. "This isn't fair," he said. Danielle touched the rain on his face; there were sparkling pieces of it. Blue and pink and white like Chicklets gum. She opened her legs. The rain was so beautiful. It blessed them. Rain was caught on the branches above like warm icicles; the drops took so long falling. Then the rain was hot and full of the spices Indian families cooked with. Rain turned into mustard seeds. Mango powder. Mint. That was March. If she had gotten a baby from him, it would have been born in November. "You didn't bleed," Jon said. She pulled her jeans up, "I really am a virgin." Danielle had taken her own virginity with a Tampax. Celestial gave it to her to wear so they could go swimming. It wouldn't go in, so she pushed. Each time it wouldn't go in she pushed harder, until her eyes teared and she made it go in.

She must have fallen because he was putting his arms around her, lifting her. He helped her stand up until both of them wavered in the mirror. "See what a nice couple we make. We look like a wedding couple." Hawkins smiled like that actor, and there Danielle was with rice in her hair, General Chow's special sauce on her breasts. Not big enough. She'd asked for implants for her next birthday. Her father said, "We'll see."

NO MAN'S LAND

The lard moon must have slid down into the river. It could have been worse she told herself after Hawkin's girlfriend Tabitha put her in a cab. The driver kept peering into the mirror, dying to ask what happened. She imagined Hawkins dragging her into a laundry bag, emptying the motel towels, the panties, and stuffing her in. You wouldn't want to look at a dead girl because the second the breath goes she's no longer sexy, no longer a hot hooker body. No breath, no

air, strangled, things broken in her head, forcing her eyeballs out.

She imagined him washing her body with ammonia to rid it of DNA traces, cutting her fingernails with the cuticle clippers. Then using her cell phone to call his mother who lived in Co-op City, Danielle's caller ID living after her.

The Hudson River. Maybe he would have carried her to the river. Danielle had done a paper on things that lived beneath and above the George Washington Bridge. You had to feel pity for the plants, for the things of Earth that had to share air and water with human beings. You had to love the Lined Seahorse, those little seahorses that swam upright, their tails clinging to the underwater grasses, clinging to each other when they mated. And on the cliff-like girders of the bridge lived the Peregrine Falcons. In the laundry bag she might have felt like the seahorse upright and clinging to life. Danielle could see clearly from here, better than ever. Like the falcon.

Then she remembered being in the cab with Hawkins. "You know there's a Passenger's Bill of Rights," he said.

"Come on," Danielle said, laughing.

He'd almost hooked her with that one, "Yeah, posted right there on the back of the seat where you can read it. You can read, sweetie, right?"

"Sure, can you?"

"Right there with the emergency number. Any funny stuff, you can call."

He'd flagged down an off-duty cab. They were always ready to squeeze one more fare out. He'd talked stronger than this whisper of a girl with her smooth legs and arms into a taxi with him. A purebred. A silver beige girl. He'd make her see after midnight and before dawn, when basically people like Hawkins were the only ones out and the drunken kids who broke off from the pack. Alone ones. The cab flew over West Side Highway, passing honking cars and early delivery trucks. What had that sign said so long ago in the parking space when Celestial and Danielle pulled in? No Standing Except Trucks Making Deliveries. That was what the sign had said. The most important of her life and she'd hardly glanced.



Guy R. Beining: *4 part symphony*

LAWRENCE APPLEBAUM

RATIONS

I keep cans of soup
in the back of my bookcase
a sixty five year tin filled
with marzipan my grandfather
traveled with from Vienna.
It sits like an uncle.
On the sides are pictures of Mozart
wearing a red jacket.
I open it once every five years.
Each piece, wrapped in foil
and a round portrait with white wig.
It has outlived my grandfather and my mother
along with the saltines in the fallout
shelter in the basement on Ryelander Avenue.
On my thirtieth birthday,
I opened a piece of marzipan.
I removed the man in the ruffled shirt and
silver foil wrapping.
The chocolate was chalky, it had lost its music
little worm-like bugs danced,
and like the Nazis, they were everywhere.



Guy R. Beining: *Parts Reversed*

KENNETH FROST

DESERTED AUTUMN

Where empty rooms
search for survivors
in a cracked window,
how could he hear
the leaves crumble
in their deserted veins?

The red, purple and gold
diseased splendors
shake their chronometers.
Voices rattle the tin
cups of the leaves,
memories

begging for blood.
A phalanx
of blanched draculas
surges forward
to the dead drum
in a dog's throat.

JILL HOFFMAN

LOVE POEM

In my stories before the bell
the I think Japanese man who claims the seat
by inserting his briefcase in an almost sexual
way, then squeezing in, takes out his long blue
cigarettes (it is obscene that they are not joints),
taps on the packet, lights one, then
gets out his disgusting brush. His hair is braided
in spidery chains leaving bald stretches.
At this I rise, and he says, "Look
lady, there is shit on your dress. See."
Standing till 59th Street I had looked down
on the eyelids (faint blue), the spidery lashes
of eyes protuberant like mine. No chin.
The face ending in the bottom lip. Red stockings,
white slacks with cummerbund, red blouse, black
skin. This thin girl in her pert Christmas way
before the door could close
had a cop knocking at the window at his braided head
and the man out on the platform at the end of a long nightstick.
So I come to you—but Yvrose is like a red rose
in a white eyelet blouse, cheeks incarnadine, the roster
aglow with Daffodil, Altagracia, Daisy Rivera, Maria deJesus.

JILL HOFFMAN

SORROW

It is a bitter cup
but we drink it gladly
in our penitential
rags
that we never change
for company.
And yet the light
comes in in a way
we like
and just the unfractured
mind
with its dish of words
can get up when it wants to
and dance.

MATTHEW KEUTER

THE SADDEST POSSIBLE LIFE
OF FRANCISCO AVILLO

The delicate hoary reach of the moon
beneath the pier

finds
where starfish hold a man

to teeth,
whose name

is Francisco Avillo.

Who
wrote of my suicide

into the field
of jellyfish

*Dear primo gringo
all you wanted*

*was to become an
electric dartboard &*

*fuck the darkest ones in
Tijuana, & there*

nursed me in a bathtub of
the Playa Negra Motel

in a combination of
baking soda

& his uncle's & your brother's
urines.

Since you died
like any other Mexican

taking the siren
by the mane

drowning her to you
tell me dear Franny

why all I remember of
Mexico city

is *scratcha scratcha*
rubba

where you wrote all night
in pencil

on the walls &
in the morning,

as desperate as a bull in its blood is
furious with red,

you set blue fire
to the dining room carpet

leaving it for me
to drag under the shower,

CONTINUED

staining your cheap bathroom paper
a toothy yellow,

before begging a trip to
the coast. How

from a window of
the Mission Lighthouse

I watched the coral peninsula
light the way

behind you
to

undress
beneath the red moon

& enter the sea.

O,
F.

were you queer & I less provincial,
had the buttons of a yellow blouse

not fallen to the floor,
we might have been old poets together

However,
alone,

you are like a litter of cats
tied at the tail

set on fire in a hay loft.
Your thinning hair

blown to ash in
the blue wind,

your lips melting
a smile.

I dream the same dream
several times

each year
of

Pincoya
who

fills her
lullabies

with sex,
whose hair is alive

with sea anemones,
whose imagination

is like that of
a prison break,

between her teeth
escapes

the sound of
ground wasps

as she rides
shirtless

CONTINUED

into my dream
upon

the back of
Caballo Marino—

yards of
braided kelp

shatter sunlight &
conches

against
the cliffs.

Reckless as a
cowgirl

in the Hitchcock Circus
she

swings beneath
& clings

like death's hag
to

the underbelly
of

the demon steed,
which

turns like
an otter

with a clam on
its chest,

opens the
howling

Bruja,
clawing, seizing

beneath
a surging heart.

This kind of
sex

produces
tremendous amounts

of heat &
in the reflection of the glassing sand

I see more clearly,
not the seahorse,

but you,
Franscisco

who the siren whips
into a frenzy,

rides to hell,
plunging

finally into the cloud black
sea.

Gulls diving
into,

CONTINUED

like snakes,
the hole

where you vanished:
An eye,

a knuckle, chum bits surface.
Two ratbirds

snap between them
the sun

in the bright
yellow

swatch of cloth
you carry

always
in your breast pocket,

right of a
lusting heart

RORY JOHNSON

ALL THE MALE POETS HAVE BEEN CASTRATED BY LYN LIFSHIN

I remember gutting Xerox poetry with my girlfriend
Crouched in shadows surrounding us like iguanas
and diamond-backed beetles.
She only slept with poets and rockstars;
She loved their trite melancholia, loved visiting
Their museums of Chicago ruins where
Baby-oiled tarantulas gyrated to the pulse
of Haitian drum music.
She told me about her lesbian experiences with lyn lifshin
The summer she went to Yaddo,
And how lyn loved her poems but never got her published,
Never even called her again.
And one night while the moon floated gently to rest
In a chateau of clouds over Lake Michigan,
We followed a gang of Hispanic boys
Spraypainting graffiti on declining snow brothels
And she swore she'd seen the ghosts of Hemingway
and Kerouac in those gutted rooms,
Described them as bodies of spidery mist
Dressed in three flannel shirts murmuring passages from Isaiah.
I wish I could've translated her madness
While she stood there wearing a cape of red neon
From the whorish corner bar
Quoting from one of her Buddhist poems
(the ones lifshin was so taken by, wished she had written)
Telling me how permanence is an illusion
Like orchids dreaming under bandages of ice,
Or Marilyn Monroe still giggling and voluptuous
Inside the cocktail dungeons of Hollywood's carrion palace.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Unmasked*

LOUIS E. BOURGEOIS

SHOOTING HEROIN ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN

One grows tired of killing snakes, gutting lizards, crushing spiders. My furniture is full of death; there are bones in the walls. They don't speak nearly enough. The carpet is an ocean where I am lost all the time. Outside the window, blue dust stirs in the wind. Further, the wild screams of children eat up the air.

I confuse myself sometimes with the guitar, a Tupperware bowl, the toilet and a clay jar. I pick myself off the coffee table, examining the thing that I am; a fork, a plate, a cobalt blue candle. My eyes are annihilation, my toaster tells me so. One shouldn't eat toasters, but I have eaten mine.

The fish in the aquarium are dead and have been for a long time. I've watched them float for days. In the yard, the voices keep ringing in the tall grass—earth angels keep repeating a name. They are sad; time has done them in too. What are roots that never clutch? The trees are too full of spirits—they are too lucid to think about.

Down the street near the marsh industrial machines fill up the landscape. I go there and feel ageless—my arms and legs are spread out on the horizon, where the wild geese migrate in V formation, frightening me with their large wings. All birds are people—you see yourself trapped in their faces—the thought of a cormorant can kill you.

Where I am, no one has ever existed. This world has never existed—no one has touched the green grass, no one has seen the crystal streets—machines are your only friends—all men are robots who throw off their disguises from time to time and disappear forever where nothing is everlasting: the birds are heavy in the sky—all things fill you with fear and make you sad—you hear the echo of the sky and stars haunting the blood.

DAN RAPHAEL

NATO REPORT

Malta is the lowest spender on coronary health 'coz they live so close
to the sea, how could they get congestive, how could their blood get thick
with the songs of fish in their ears? other people call this wind,
inland people take pills, more pills the further you get from the sea.
you never hear of people dying in iowa or kansas 'coz they die so silently,
as if their life had been eroding since birth,
unless they'd been to the oceans or the mountains.
mountains make the heart a curled handkerchief of borderless energy,
as the eyes are the window to the heart, mountains make the eyes so wide
the heart is flooded with the light of the world, the light of the sun.
our human lights are poor imitations, votive candles, or outright mockery
getting closer to darkness and vacuum with every exponential rise in wattage.
the difference between a candle and the sun
is all you need to know about math and physics,
when you snuff the flame between finger & thumb, when the world
becomes invisible 'cause all you could see was the sun but all you loved
was the stars you couldnt see this deep in the city —
the universe inside the brain, the solar system of neurons, some thought
so far away we'll get there sooner by going in the opposite direction

then the sun overwhelms the cloud cover and wakes my eyes,
like going from a crystal radio to full digital spectrum:
colors are numbers, music is waves, locations are voices in consciousness
i am where im from, where ive been, when im away, where goes the dust
my vision wont stay corrected.
the city will never be my solar system: I woke here suddenly
and have to wait decades before I can go back to sleep.
the sun is knocking on every door on that side of my face,
canvassing, spamming, blanketing,
why can't I find the station, the file won't download,
a question of bandwidth, clarity, encryption

only when you're hearing all channels at once
does the message fall together in cold white syllabic flames,
a color of all colors and sounds, barely pulsing bass
of earths gravitic heart:

listen to the light every day.
gradually wear less clothes, less hair, removing all mechanical
devices. unplug everything. add more windows. windows are the souls of
the eye. the eyes are border guards, the ears are river mouths,
the mouth is a monkey

it's a long way from monkey to dog, from fish to space ship.
we all define light differently. we all need light, even bats and people
who work nights at 24 hour convenience stores and gas stations.
night is when we get to talk back, when we forget
what we've heard, when I wonder why I believed all that crap
cause pressing my face to asphalt at 3 in the morning
is everything beethoven promised. external sound is external light—
not mine.

at night it all comes from inside, a chemical shift,
what the sun doesn't want us to hear and see, how so many people
only make love in the dark, while others always have a light on, a window
open, a bird singing in the other room.

I turn off the light and crank up the bass so my skin is sound,
my eyes are data screens,
my brain is a city without laws and competition,
my brain is the largest building in the world

DAN RAPHAEL

CIGARETTES ARE MONEY. CIGARETTES ARE HISTORY

when all we had to write on was rolling papers
all we had to smoke in was rolling papers
& we had to smoke, had to befuzzle the light with airborne oils
mixed with what our bodies wouldn't let in,
what our bodies decided they were tired of & threw away.

only so many matches, tithing me with caustic accumulation
tiny silver wires thickening the soil until it thinks its concrete
too solid for any one or thing to pass through, only smoke
so rich or stupefied it sees the sun at the center of the earth
and wants to grow there, wants to obscure its light,
scramble the gravitic transmissions

i cant go outside to check the sidewalks for unburnt ends
booby trapped with dried secrets, secrets we keep from ourselves
truths that can only be uttered exhaling a mouthful of smoke

DAN RAPHAEL

WATER IN ONE HAND, SAND IN THE OTHER

if the ocean is a single molecule.

if at any moment most of the ocean is empty, like a brain
neither solid or liquid, dividing space while creating time,
memory structured like a dozen concentric boxcars sheathing slippery flex
the ocean is a conduit

rain is a gift like refugees like questions

no one else will do this so the rain will rain is angels

rain is discipline. rain was never a kid.

rain, like a cat, will sometimes do what you expect.

rain on the ocean is good fortune video from the home office

when I go to the ocean we never touch

when I watch waterfalls in the mountains I stay on the path—
contact means risk—as you approach you leave solid ground,
friction sired to join the rivers run

neath a clear roof I follow the raindrop through me to the earth

where its signature, following the previous thought,

expanding like a worms influence,

the homeopathic earth inside each rain drop.

how it can take decades for soil to forget everything it knew about rain.

the clouds on the horizon as distant and thin as a memory of a meal

20 year ago when nothing happened on a stream suddenly still,

as if it couldn't remember where to fall, where the ocean was waiting.

as I want to jump to the center of the planet cause I am earth and fire,

the child of pressure, the father of sideways rain in time elapse filaments

not to climb or pluck but to absorb, getting a firm grip on a thin wire

CONTINUED

swiftly reacting to escape or slowly relaxing til enough slack
encircles my hand and snaps back to where my fingers never existed

several gulls erupt from my hands and mouth,
my eyes like satellite pictures hand stitched by gravy wind,
a lens inventing water,
as if the planets werent immersed in an eternal sea,
as if the 78% of me that's water doesn't yearn to leave me
and run into the rain, catch the next wave home
what holds my water
bone/stone/shell
bio-pulsar rivers blood salmons through

JOHN M. BENNETT

P L O P

spake my colon blab tomb crust cent
ral eating my was forked .yr nab desk
,incense spoon the bowl .shore I clust
ered ,named the tiny make ,dust it
off the quickness heaving at the hole
dropping condensation in the wrinkled lake

JOHN M. BENNETT

HACK

beef cough ,yr s tongue shoe lint a
hammock in the seep chug lake yr tam pon
maze why nabber smoke why runty index
?blab an pile ,nape an c luster fog ,peeing
in the bush the sandwich drains .long hob of
pond you breathe ,ambling in the grease

JOHN M. BENNETT

RASH GLASS

rash of clusters in yr locus t ame
dolmen)"hat"(cushion floats a bove
the corpse pit smouldered laundry with
a leg a hand a jaw towel knotted

blood tree smoking

dam nor shit nor loot nor gust nor
flog nos dime nos smut nos wasp nos
dish nom nail nom plug nom fuel nom
trap not shove not kill not meal not

mud knee choking

was rats behind the dreaming face
was soup behind the empty cage
was fence behind the tumbled air
was crawl behind the sugared glass

JOHN M. BENNETT

DOT NOON

,dot clamp ,beach choke ,syrinx
chatter ,club mote ,trace lobber
,brand cerote ,spoon shut ,crash
chowder ,blag note ,dowel spurt

rush an crunch ah nogger spun!
bang fog ,wake shushma ,try to
glunt and trance a soaper in the
scan happy limping crew gullets

brake the stone you choffered lake
the bone you glowered make the
groan you flowered ache the home
you marrowed name the loam you towered

calfed ass and blubbed in the spoon
you half ash and doubled in the noon

JOHN M. BENNETT

SPREAD PHONE

spread your shadow like a sandwich
cash your lumpness like a hammer
bend your business like a soda
horse your tonneau like a cubesteak

lost the lip and cornhole

whiz across the pornfield or
your causative shovel dance was
that the temblor clotting in
yr fencing ,junkheap scolding

tossed the shit and formal

chopp y glamour ,yr spread clue mate
,tongue dipping ,clus tore nate
gushing batter caw ,stand and foam
,yr darknest gleaming on the phone

JOHN M. BENNETT

NATES DOG

nate's contained— blut— trance blas
terd shaking— tube— before yr
face peach— tongue plast— spend
against— chump rustle— lobs

turned my clod alive

the shirt the sheet the shut the shat the
shout the shoot the shunt the shuck the
shod the should the shad the shmuck the
shrank the shrunk the shit the shiv the

shilled my blot contrived

sped and soaked my bundle capped my
rancid plod with ,towel hockers ,plot
sampled with a mouth staring bone
bright with spit oh jerk oh dog

TAMARA GRAY

DESCRIPTION OF MY MASTERS

The horizon bleeds into air
a chain link fence with curling
razor wire:
what they are not.
In a quarry stone is
piled in slabs of waste
like images themselves,
cheap, unintelligent, and sloppy.
They however, have an idea.
Let us select that girl over there
for our fault bag and mud heap.
She's sorry now. Isn't that too bad?
She's unhappy now. And then angry.
Better and better. We are the Lord,
we are the superior.
Great and untouched, like God,
remorseless, like God,
profoundly without care
very very like God.
This is why God shows no triumph.
This is why God does not appear.



Lawrence Applebaum

HAROLD KLAPPER

CHUBBY WILLIAM

The restaurant was on North Beach. Long ago, the motels new with names of far away and palaces - nights gleaming - the suntanned people would crowd in for tables or seats at the counter. Now, times changed, as though upon the fingertips of the creator coming up from below, the restaurant had been picked up and set down higher up the coast. "Lé Nosh" was fashionable again, the name "Lé Nosh" preserved.

Some things were different. Teenagers' eyes were no longer bloodshot from their noses being broken in surgery; there were far fewer dimpled children; adults were regal.

The new management called William in and told him they were moving.

"Will there be a place for me, sir?" he asked in his nervous, enthusiastic way, eyes vague like slits flecked with light.

The night manager (William worked dinner until closing), barely looked up. A new corporation had taken over, its owners from the Middle East, hiring for management their kind, all speaking with hard accents.

"Four nights."

"Please, sir," William said standing in the small office with its cork wallboard pinned with order forms. The door was half-open; even in the clatter, passing by you heard talk. And you saw William standing there before the desk with the impatient manager.

The manager kept reading orders and pinning them.

"Please, sir," William repeated from behind his thick glasses, the overhead light glistening on his bald dome. "I need a full week. Please, sir."

"Live with your brother?"

It was an accusation. He did. The old timers who worked the counters and tables knew this. William and his brother were alike, only a few years apart. Chubby, heads oval like eggs, waddle walk,

chubby arms and thighs. William's brother worked off the beach at a spot along one of the manmade inter-coastal canals.

"Please, sir."

William stood in place, the cheeks of his chubby behind bunching the polyester fabric of his neon blue pants that ended without cuffs inches above his pointed black shoes with black translucent socks. They were perennially hitched that way; you always saw his ankles.

The manager said nothing, his face tight with displeasure.

William's eyes were vague; he seemed to be thinking with the radar awareness of the brain damaged; those who from birth learned that what the creator had taken (or not given) they must do for themselves.

"I will take four days," he said nervous and excitable. He paused: "And thank you, sir. Thank you very much!" William was afraid of losing his job. William had always been afraid. Of everything. All his life. From the beginning when his hairy egg shape head emerged like a missile from a silo with **W** on it in the television ad showing "America will be protected"; and the people at Lé Nosh were younger, children skipped; unlike now, where without being prompted, at Lé Nosh, they glided with noses in the air, as their group of "chosen people" replaced the "chosen people" from then, the latter having retreated into Coconut Grove, far West inland, and memory of the martini.

Did William remember on some primitive level of cognition, how the doctor held his chubby pink body by his ankles and slapped his behind until, finally, something in his brain got it, and he bawled strange and funny?

"And please, sir," he hesitated. "May I ask one more question?" William stood, his thighs together, dressed head almost to toe in that neon blue.

Silence.

"Please, sir, will I get moving expenses?"

"What do you have to move, William?"

"My furniture, sir. The moving man." William's voice rose hoarse, eager and high pitched.

The night manager looked up and fixed his eyes on William. "Don't you and your brother rent furnished?"

William got this. The gossip passed on from the malicious and those only having fun.

“My books, sir.”

The night manager smiled.

“I do read, sir! History,” he added eagerly. “All about the battles and the generals. Now the Civil War.” Seeing the cruel smile as his eyes squinted for sight and understanding, William added passionately: “The library has books with very large print, and with my card they allow me to check books out and take them home, where I read them and then bring them back!”

Realizing what he had divulged - there are no Miranda warnings in life for people like William - they learn; and you saw it every night in every way as William hurried into the restaurant through the glass door in the rear, dome head with vague eyes behind heavy horn rims, his chubby body waddling rapidly past the deli counter with the strong blacks, while pushing his tie up (same color as his pants and synthetic shirt give or take), and then to the front entrance where the people streamed in for the divide to the counter and table assignments. There he would grab menus from the stack and say: “We have seating with Mary Alice on the counter..For two? Yes,” he would point and lead them down, give them menus and say: “Have a very good dinner” or “Enjoy your dinner.”

William added: “Then please, sir, may I please have transportation for the bus and my clothing?”

“Fifty dollars.”

Every night for eighteen years, William would arrive late and hurry this way. The waiters and waitresses noticed, especially the latter; and when they came close to each other by their stands during a break, sometimes they would gossip and laugh, drawing on cigarettes.

The waiters, some anyway, felt William threatened their masculinity, so they remained quiet or subdued. William knew. He hated Lé Nosh, and watching them in the precious few moments of a lull, he would look out at everything in a way you knew he did. Inside himself, it was lonely and dark. William hated the world.

The area got darker and rougher. All kinds of people were moving in. The new restaurant opened up the coast. It was genteel like the white sand. Most of the clientele had also moved higher: to ocean condominiums; inland gated communities; higher priced gasoline.

Some waiters and waitresses had to remain behind until Lé Nosh

closed while the new Lé Nosh opened. William too had to stay. No one really offered why. But, it seemed to make sense given the area's decline. Sometimes the atmosphere seemed sinister. The waitresses and waiters would hurry to their cars in the parking lot; there were guards in golf carts for customers who could not or would not walk, broken down like both the guards and golf carts.

William had to take two buses to work. Hard to say if he felt the changing atmosphere. As the waitresses and waiters drove along the broad highway leading to the causeway and the drawbridge, William, having gotten off one bus, would be standing with his transfer peering into the darkening evening for the Q bus, his transfer in his childlike fingers, potbelly pouting, pumpkin behind sticking out in the rear.

They passed him by.

One night, almost closing, three men came in. Their complexions seemed the result of a dousing at a garage. They seemed to like that. They were of different sizes and shapes, but gave an aura of sameness. What were they doing there?

One said: "Table for three."

William, neon red, pointy shoes, translucent black socks, pants high and rolling over his tummy where the bargain bin belt buckled him comfy, said: "Three for the counter. Very good, sir."

As William started along the counter, his chubby behind on a diagonal to the eyes of the tall man who had spoken, the short one, muscular, dirty fingers, snarled: "Table!"

"William," one of the waitresses cried out. "Table!"

William moved like the blazes while mentally like molasses. He got them to a table where, with elaboration, they pulled out two chairs (the tall one sat facing, his back against the plastic banquette).

William handed them menus. "Have a very good dinner!"

They were Southern ministers returned from the Middle East where they had been seeking land investment. They were Bible believers. Since their return, the State had closed their tent ministry on the Gulf. Now, they were passing through, which way along US 1, hard to say.

They ordered sandwiches from a blond waitress with wide-open eyes and a rinse hairdo, and seemingly not much interested in life. They were interested in William and watched him intently. They asked the waitress William's name.

"Willie," the one seated at the banquette facing out called holding

out his long arm and dirty index finger. “Willie,” he repeated.

William heard. He almost always did. Reluctantly he came over. “Please, sir, yes.”

“Dessert. What’s good?”

William turned his head on his chubby neck, sweaty and balding on top, and sang out: “Margey will be right here. Margey is your waitress.” He seemed to want to leave, but like that time with his brother in the hospital when the interns studying them on a grant for research, used two toy Scotty dogs, their magnetic forces attracting and resisting, there was a field of energy that both held and repelled him. He waited for the eternal moment to pass with nothing happening so he could pretend and leave.

“Willie!” the man cried as William’s shoes squeaked as he took a few steps away.

“William! My name is William. Please, sir!”

All three grinned broadly showing dental work and proof of the sandwiches ordered. They made William stand and recite: what time the restaurant closed...

««—»»

The van was battered and sat beyond the arc light. It was late, the restaurant closed. The help poured out and hurried to the rear for their cars. William emerged before the night manager, who followed him and locked the door, then hurried past him. William walked toward the highway to wait for the bus; his chubby body and dome head passing into the arc light and out.

The sign Lé Nosh went dark. The van slowly moved and cut William off from the highway. From the rear of the van, one jumped down, from the front another, and they came quickly to William.

“Please, sir,” William said.

At that time of night, patrol cars were rare; his cry of distress would carry as a pipsqueak’s. So this way also the mysterious forces of the universe (forget who or what created) cheated William. As they did giving him puberty - although truth be told and to be fair - the three checked William out over the peach cobbler, while they made him wait while they tasted it, showing him a naughty nude - William remained the same - then a stud in black leather - William seemed to slightly move and narrow his eyes - thus giving cause.

Perhaps anyway they were planning to kill him. One stroked his behind, the other got so close frontally. William was in fear. They led him to the rear of the van to the grating climb. "Up, William!"

He tried to climb, raising one chubby thigh from his cannonball puff cream bottom, but he couldn't make it, his pointy shoe scraped and he fell back. William was short and that made him even more cute.

"WHACK!" on his bottom.

Now, his elbows were raised up and into the dark van, and his knees dug up the steps of the grating. Finally, one ham-sized hand grabbed him pants and backside and hurled him into the van, which they slammed closed.

They sped away and then slowed for normal speed once safely away from Lé Nosh. They drove in the night, always on US 1, the motels darker and sunk back from the highway. All three were in the front; but as they appeared alike, so being squeezed, seemed normal. One turned as they slowed for a major intersection and slid the divider. William was at the space staring at them. The one who slid the divider drove his palm against it, and William bounced back onto the floor.

They turned off, slowing, tires crunching, and William heard. The divider slid open and the driver spoke slowly and softly to William. Then they turned into a narrow road with motels set in weeds and sand.

All was dark.

Two went to the rear and opened. William was there, bent forward for air and freedom. His bunny nostrils quivered. His shirt was wrinkled like low waves. His pants were even higher over his surfer's wave tummy. There was a stain alongside the fly of his pants.

The two smiled.

"Climb down, William."

William trudged down, winging his infant arms for support. He got his sea legs, and strangely, the two, looking around - one even yawned - seemed nonchalant. William knew. All his life, once he got older, he knew what space society would ever give him was when things went nonchalant. At Lé Nosh, too, eighteen years, as he stood tormented before the line of diners, and for a blessed moment, like in the eye of a storm, he could be at peace.

William started to run. His chubby body with the dome head and

vague eyes behind thick glasses. His bottom rose and fell as he ran. Wheezing sounds from his mouth; from his cute rear the sound of a piccolo. His pointy black shoes with worn heels crunched on the gravel next to the bushes planted with prickly branches to keep away strays.

But he was not Magellan, so the massive shape looming ahead drove him into the prickly, where his pain set off a howling, and the big fellow picked him off, and holding him like a toddler, carried him into the motel room where the other two were.

They kept him. They did lots to him. Things your own mother wouldn't do. (At least physically.) Never again would he have to worry about puberty - although again to be fair - they forced whiskey down his throat so he was totally drunk; and, odd as it sounds, he was even more a baby and scared then he was without the whiskey, although the pain was less. Big deal. He felt funny after and tried not to look at himself down there, but the sack, now like a deflated balloon, humiliated him.

For you see, in the loneliness of his life, in the night where he and his brother shared twin beds, with no one watching and coming for him, he would feel and then do. Now no more.

They teased him. They got cheap high-tech high-top sneakers - red white and blue - which they placed on him; and tied the long white laces together so - pink and naked - he could not run away. They made him go this way and that. No matter how he tried, he stumbled, often fell, his bottom rising. So they used the strap.

After, they coaxed.

"Please, sir!" he would cry out. "I must seat them at the counter. Sally Ann has an available three." Night after night in the darkness: "*Please let me go!*"

««—»»

Ultimately, he was boring; also how long could they hole out? It was one thing to dial 800 numbers until you got good free samplings you were supposed to return after the trial period, you took to any one of a number of establishments, which legitimately worked deals for cash. But that was before William. Now, in hiding, they went the whole nine yards. Two of them would go out along the bright lights of the highway where shopping was, and carefully, with patience, find

salesgirls, (never guys), who gave them credit card numbers; and, they purchased expensively, the signatures forged, took the merchandise, and as arranged, returned the next night, returned the merchandise, and (Bingo!) cash minus the split.

Still: how long with William? So, one night, the beach deserted from warnings on the local news of dangerous rip tides, they took him down, put him naked against a sand dune, and took turns with the whip. Unconscious and hooded (black), they carried him to the abandoned rusted beach outdoor shower, and hanged him.

Let's be fair.

While the story was sensational and treated that way, this was a "Greater Town", that when the attaché of the Middle East country left to return following change in government (she had fought in every war of her country since a teenager), and was attacked by old guys at a farewell lunch for preaching peace at a Beach hotel (she wasn't hurt), the media only later reported this in a muted way.

Let's be fair.

When the little boy miraculously was saved at sea and a local expatriate delegation went to the holy leader in Europe for support to keep him - all to media attention - when after he ducked out of sight, (on this one), there was no coverage, forget muted.

And so on.

Of course, they caught them. And they got a speedy trial, a public defender, and the death penalty. Now on appeal, there's time to check in. Lé Nosh is dark, the new Lé Nosh open in sparkling light. But it's not the same. Why? Hard to say. Quality of the food? Perhaps... Maybe...

Truth be told, the elite clientele talk in guarded tones, more of that reason, way more, than perhaps the specter of William.

The waiters stand taller at the new Lé Nosh; they seem to glide with grace, so deeper is their manhood challenged. The waitresses? Sometimes they huddle close and inhale and exhale even more, a sort of self-consciousness only time will show is commonness.

William?

What's to say.

ANTHONY SEIDMAN

MACARONIC

The glacial word, *emerald*. Cold and chiseled, not from elms, but from ice so cold it's flecked with green under crystalline sunlight. For some reason, I see black wood and *suji* screens, odor of tea steaming in the syllables, *suzerain*. Outside, the lotus blossoms shrivel, and twilight darkens the screens like the violet of a puddle at twilight. There are some words, yes, there are some words, that fuse light with distant water, and I plunge into the tresses of kelp, and inhale a liquid as vivid as verdigris. Echoes from *blossom* and *seraphim* that are more palpable than stone, a conduit to the saliva softening my first bread, the buoying into laughter as a boy when seeing the sparks spluttering from a dragonfly zigzag across the patio. I think of Artaud murmuring of word-stumps, or the babble in the torch-pit, when the taste of meat was a privilege, and the hunter felt the wounded elk in his own thigh, recognized the pulp of afterbirth in forest spoor fly-blackened on pine needles. I want to forget the heavy tomes and the definitions that blunt the pencil and deny me the tar and unnamed lice that sweeten the word *cunt* with some byword only I understand.

At the end of his life, after polluting pages with seas, horses, ramparts, looking-glasses, coffee, and bitumen, the poet realizes that he wrote for others, those he couldn't see, and that the only face he wanted to hypnotize was that reflected on the unbroken pane of a pond, the double with whom he could only speak in the grunts, random phonemes, and recirculation of words a boy repeats and repeats until they become buzzed whispers, eddies of the wind. Take me to the before of syntax, to the apprehension of a mare startling the night, the wake-up panting and skin glistening with sweat. Un-sense me, and scent me a language like thumping a club against dung. Even if it means seeing my *gasoline* in *son*, and *sun* in *bedrock*. Even if the only ride I mount is like a massacre at Rhodes, or all the other roads rumbling into some bloody rhododendron.

PETER LAYTON

RED ANTS

The sky purples.
Beads of light come off the sand colored rocks.
And the cold, not totally voided by the
Hair dryer suit.
You need to move to keep the air circulating.

Thermo pipes heated from sun collectors keep
Slush ice flowing.
From the desperate cold poles
To the islands of life;
Ice Cube Block, Near Point,
Pikesville, Blytheville,
Bradbury.

Each with a no-moving-part nuke generator.
And the microwave transmissions from E.
Another party of dirt engineers is expected.
Tunneling all the rage.
Extolling the sixty percent survival rate
For solar cancer.

LUIZ BENITEZ

THE EXTRAVAGANT UPSTREAM TRAVELER

Then I saw him in the oily water,
a gift from industry and lively hatred,
rising upstream the water:
the impossible salmon,
a brawny monster
all ornamented of green and purple,
of orange and red,
at the livery that only desire lends
to the anxious to reproduce them by all means.
Unusual iridescence between the garbage
of the condemned river,
like a stubborn man
in finding the way that says to him
“I am your life”, a gift
for the simplicity obstinate in believing
in a stimulus for the tensed muscles
under the harsh scales,
an overdose of hormones
that flood the tiny brain.
And this open mouth to the desire of breathing
still something more than its last day,
was keeping the final syllable
of those who don't let themselves be beaten
neither by their own stupidity
nor by the edges of the piers,
where they never stop, where they
never detain for any reason whatsoever.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Fortitude's Father*

LUIZ BENITEZ

HIS SMALL DETAINED TIME

The car that called him
drove away very sure of himself
and now sleeps his engine sleep
in a shabby suburban garage.

Tomorrow the blood will be cleaned
before he goes to work.

The criminal nevertheless does not sleep:
he argues with his wife about the rent
he has completely forgotten about the cat
that until the afternoon came he was already done
of muscles and charme
of bloody agility and of silence.

Now in the remote street
he is only made of detained time

and the ants are looking for him
that always walk
through an infinite desert
where the water is scarce
but the food abundant.

This hidden land, where we put the feet

The street is like always a street
like it was yesterday, like it was
in the afternoon of death
like it will be during all
those indefinite mornings

CONTINUED

the sky only somehow darker
only somebody alone
that crosses down the corner
and from time to time another car
that looks for another life being

only the cat changed
or his half that is everything

what has been left on the sidewalk
today, that the death
has caught another mouse.

GUY R. BEINING

COPY THE WATER XVI

in this caliber of ice, the cutters
simply veer, & the skaters are on
desperate paths past the figure 8.
we are so devout in the poor dimensions of our
souls that we believe in breakage
before it happens.

marks over a bed:

a can , a carrion
feet of a rat.
how to glide a bicycle wheel
& upend the nose
of Duchamp.

mend ends, & amend the act
of carrying the cloth.
set corners; decapitate the middle
& bend into brew of supper until dawn.

de(cima)ted
(top)

solar (colle)ctor
(hill)

we are on the top of the hill & disappearing
into locks of clouds, & in the fit of paying
the price of being detached
from human substance, we dissolve,
ie. we go with the luggage of Amelia.



Guy R. Beining: *2 Fingers of Hope*

GUY R. BEINING

COPY THE WATER XVIII

what is the comfort zone?
do tell me something spry & spilling over.
are you on the jesus line,
or on the road to mecca;
do you weigh your fruit carefully?
have you learnt to apply
divisions to the storm, & are you as
earnest as rats circling a new poison?
have you taken all the thread
& become the pokerman?
did you dip your tongue in silver again?
we always look for you
in the pages of future eras.

bi(conca)ve
(basin)

pneumo(conio)sis
(coinage)

walking thru mineral fields has slowed our progress.
the effigy furthest from our view,
at first, appeared to be you,
but when we got close enough to tell
it had crumbled to the ground.
all smoke & no lies.

GUY R. BEINING

COPY THE WATER XXXIII

the sorrow of morning is spotty;
the sailing light of morning is sour & abrasive.
each day takes the weight of our change.
it is the eternal slot machine.
later, you scrape heels & elbows
on a broken window that you try
to pour out of, spreading wings
into tunnel of your past.

l(ebano)n	d(eco)ded
(ebony)	(echo)

before charting your ribs
wait for the ebony echo,
& in a narrow alleyway,
having left the hot heels of lebanon,
sit & taste the crust of flies.

GUY R. BEINING

COPY THE WATER XLVIII

this stone could be my country,
the drifter thought, yet his mousetrap
mind was ready to climb heels of the city,
reaching thru rags & buckets of oily left overs.
he felt as if he was rowing into
the belly of a fish,
yet would trip the stellar stairs
forever more, like an in & out whore.
the ribs of the city were labeled as streets;
a little blood was left but no meat.

con(fesso)r
(crack)

mani(festa)tion
(feast)

be in the eye of the priest, be confessor;
crack whip over feast as it falls over
famine in a manifestation as ugly as
a new choral act that tells us
to take water to the wall,
earth onto the wall,
& pain under the wall.

GUY R. BEINING

COPY THE WATER LXII

people only bite so deep.
by church window a lark flutters,
& nips stained glass image.
a holy, myoptic, unfolding of
the eyes, the swoop, & the pecks.
was it an angry dig,
or a kiss to moisten
the cell between bird & god?

sub(indice)s	(inno)vated
(index)	(hymn)

the day is huge with clouds,
pure white, cartoon like.
there are bones in the knock
of the sun, & a voice,
somewhere deep within its yellowness.
this is not a time to index hymns.
the categories of us are fertile but inborn.

TRACY THOMAS

MIDNIGHT CICADA

We rode the bus with the tom-tom thieves until the sun went out
Jasmine all in bloom among forest fires
While the dancers dissolved in their drinks
A new sort of star shone through it all like those
White egrets that follow the cattle
Those lulled conversations half asleep
That arrive with a sort of instability in the weather
A man can drive so far south
Far from all the perfumes of mirages
The prison beneath the lake all aglow with lightning
And children among the baobabs
And the sky's atlas is completely dark
Here where the compass needle's lost
It's only a signal for the ants to carry away
The bouquet with Chinese lanterns set adrift
In the night by the Southern Cross
No matter which way they believe here
The hitchhikers crawl from some place beneath the sand
Beneath the movements of green seasons
Beneath the midnight cascade where the years
Bury their unending staircase inside you
Tomorrow's shadows hold midday captive
In amber like the daydreams of the night fishermen
They've stolen the fortuneteller's bait
They're searching for the tombs of the sun
They're searching for the world to become as little children
It's always now
Mysterious as evaporating birds
Making common cause with all the stains of the world
Because of a strange tug-of-war across the salt flats
Where our desiccated hearts breathe like smoking toads

Where the gavel comes down on glass skulls bursting
A thunderstorm of sunbirds
 escaping into the temple
That is your Saturday morning laughter
Astrological matters are resolved
With the sunrise mist from the ditches
The ditches that stash the catburglar's jewels
The ditches that are so bad with names
The mud from those ditches is the plaster of heaven
The quicksand of paradise
Where I sink beating the great kettle drum
Of life and death
And the day after

BOB REEVES

PULLING GOATHEADS IN AUGUST

Look for me in photographs of other people.
I won't be dead till I understand
people aren't their faces.

I'll be at the very end of a novel you can't finish.
But if you cheat and read the last page,
I'll be a few chapters back.

Even the spider on the fence
knows to keep to the neighbor's side
while I'm incidentally
manhandling her silk.

But the trashbag of weeds
left in the rain
smells like a dying seashore.
If I had gumption to ransack it,
I'm sure there's a whole marine ecology there.

So I won't be hiding out of sulkiness,
misanthropy
or to mess with your head.

Molluscs need to flourish from my ooze,
that's all.

Look for me everywhere you're not looking.
I won't be dead till I understand
the corner of the eye
is its center.



Guy R. Beining: *Merging*

BOB REEVES

GOODBYE, MR PARAKEET

He would sit, his cappuccino gently freezing,
at his peculiar table
on the renovated ocean dock
with its upscaly kioskfaces gazing gray into the sky
and no dead or dying leaves anywhere,
both hands on his aching cane.

On specific weekdays
he'd have a lofty but piteous smile for the tourists,
a single smile
arrived at after hours of planning.

He wore black in the summer,
white in the winter
and no one was ever troubled for him.

He preferred bow ties,
the old sort that begin as one strip
and require to be entangled.

Somewhere halfway through his vigil
the tide would change
and left things would get lost
or lost things left,
and his eyes would become realms of snow
or of elmseed, falling voluminous
among faintkneed wind
to a ground swept quiet.

CONTINUED

When he finally stood
the entire staff would emerge on the pier
and shyly, in unison, whisper

“Goodbye, Mr Parakeet.
Goodbye
again.”

WILLIAM FOGARTY

A MARRIAGE

A man and a woman begin to get old,
and also to drift to opposite ends
of the house. When the woman
grows old she sheds the last of her
desires: they are petals, she believes,
and to be a stem, to turn back toward
one's root, away from that which flares,
that is the dignified manner
in which to face one's maker.
The man will show *you* maker,
slurring his avenue creed. If you're
gonna go, he says, you're
gonna go. Why not spill
the rest of yourself into the puddle
you've been raining on for 65 years?
In the old black and white comedies
a man might fall straight through
that puddle on some grainy street corner.
It's Sunday. The woman cools the
spackled oatmeal through her small lips.
It's early. It's before Mass. He's not
plastered yet. They put their coats on
and walk together to the heavy,
glass-paned door. Down the
front steps who knows who's
saving whom from the fresh ice.



Spiel: *Mentor*

REDRESSING THE BALANCE

What I want to know is
Do you really want your mother and father
 in a factory all those years?
Let alone America selling torture devices world-wide
 since 1983,
Let alone the government injecting us with radiation
 without our knowing,
Let alone enough bombs to create a World War II every second
 for a century,
Let alone New York City using more energy in a minute
 than Wyoming in a week,
Let alone the leading bestseller a book
 on how to kill yourself,
Let alone the \$750,000 it cost to kill
 each soldier in the Gulf War,
Let alone veterans throwing their Medals of Honor
 on the White House steps,
Let alone TV devotees with 1000 channels per set,
Let alone how many taut passion-crazed boy-erections
 lubrescent and lubricating
 played with intricately
 the boy sprawled helplessly per square mile,
Let alone before Christ ever dreamed he needed to be crucified
 this Sequoia had seen 2000 years go by
 without once believing there was
 a better world than this
 and only by dying could you get there?

CONTINUED

Emphasis is on selling one's time.
Emphasis is on timetables and deadlines.
Emphasis is on speed-at-all costs.
Emphasis is on planned obsolescence.
Emphasis is on becoming a billionaire.
Emphasis is on steel-jawed leg-traps.
Instead of foundering dumbfounded,
 we outsmarted ourselves—
The names of the days and months were invented.
The number of numbers on the clock was made up.
The existence of money and having to earn it
 was made up.
No wonder we're floundering when
 no wonder is why we're floundering!
Our own planet is the planet
We daydream what it might be like to land on
All starry-eyed realizing we're from Outer Space
 and have come to teach Earthlings how to love.

Eternity is not a rat-race,
Eternity is not a traffic jam,
Eternity does not punch in on a timeclock
 or exist from paycheck to paycheck,
Eternity has no lunchbucket or thermos,
Eternity has no safety shoes,
Eternity has no second hand or hour hand
 or numbers that go around in a circle,
Eternity doesn't enter the lottery,
Eternity doesn't merger its debentures,
Eternity doesn't calculate its net worth
 on a pocket computer,
But Eternity is so vast
 in the endless and infinite reaches of Eternity
 it needs now and then,
 a poet whose full-time job is
 silently observing by candlelight
 girls having dreams in their sleep.

ANTLER

EACH SNOWFLAKE RINGS A BELL

Just because every 10 minutes
 enough snow falls on our Planet
 to make a 10-foot snowman
 for every person on Earth,
Just because every snowflake
 is 1/10 trillionths of a 10-foot snowman
 because a 10-foot snowman
 takes 10 trillion snowflakes to build,
Just because each snowflake contains
 1000 water molecules
 of exhaled water vapor
 from every person on Earth,
Just because since the formation of our Globe
 10 times the weight of the Planet
 has floated down to its surface
 in the form of snow,
Doesn't mean that when Johannes Kepler wrote
 "to imagine an individual soul
 for each and every snowflake
 is utterly absurd"
That he was right!
If every snowflake has no soul,
If every one of the quadrillion water molecules
 in every snowflake has no soul,
If every dustmote, pollengrain or protozoan at the center
 of each and every snowflake has no soul,
Why when snowflakes melt
 does air trapped inside them
 turn into tiny bubbles
 which make ringing sounds of tiny bells
 when they form?

CONTINUED

Why is a blind girl's tongue so sensitive
when a snowflake melts on her tongue
she can feel and sense
its unique design
transported to her brain
the instant before it melts
the instant before air
trapped inside the snowflake
turns into bubbles
that last less than a second
but make the sound of tiny ringing bells
when they form inside her mouth?

LEE STERN

I WILL NOT BE THE ONE

I will not be the one who strews rocks in the middle of the road.

Nor, if someone else chooses to do it, will I be the one
by the side of the road playing a violin.

The tunes I know are from a century
that was named for a pony who could only follow.
And I will not be the one who strews rocks
and other debris
upon the name that was given starlight for his path.

Neither will I be the one who strews flowers
in the middle of any day possessing an unknown sound.
Because otherwise, I am afraid,
I will begin to feel heavy in my joints.

And if I am accused of being the sudden expeditor of your business,
I will cause it to be known that I demanded
all of my trumpets back at the first sign of rain.

For I will not be the one who strews rocks and garbage
and large cinderblocks on the side of any road
against the side of which people have constructed large counters.

Nor will I ever strew unbound sheets of music
carelessly into your home.

When I walk, I will walk as I have always walked-
placing one foot after another
carefully upon the top of the nearest curb.

CONTINUED

And I will not be the one to be charged with dereliction of duty
when I tell you that the stones I plan to remove
will not be the roundest ones I could have imagined.

But the heaviest ones that the coldest ground could endure.

LEE STERN

THE FROGS LEARNED HOW TO CRY

The frogs learned how to cry a long time ago.
But I was too busy making paste to notice.

I was on the top floor of one of those
old gray buildings that was scheduled to be demolished.
I was at one of the open windows,
thanking each and every cloud that I could see.

It wasn't raining of course.
But then again, if it was raining,
so many lectures in the interest of clarity
would have been postponed.

I remember thinking that if the pot I was making paste in
was any smaller, I would have thrown it out the window.
Along with all of my papers from the forties.
But I had a radio with me that worked on batteries,
so when the hit parade came on

I was able to listen to it
with both of the edges of my left ear.

The announcer was an old friend of my dog's—
and it's funny how things stay with you like that
over the course of the various decades.

CONTINUED

What else has stayed with me?
I don't know. A few paper bags, maybe.
A couple of straws.

Maybe even that bottle of shampoo I should have never bought
because it was the wrong color

and because when I rubbed it into the remaining strands of my hair,
it reminded me of the word flaxen

and how the English people used to enjoy saying it
sometimes even when they were in the midst of a field of clover

heretofore burnished in the lingering warmth of the sun.

MICHAEL ESTABROOK

BENEATH THE STAIRS

Strangely I've just discovered (after
all these years) that when I become stressed,
for whatever the reason—
perhaps I've angered my wife
or am worried again about money
or have an airplane trip on the horizon,
I withdraw, collapse like a sink hole
on a California highway,
gather my things from around the house—
books and magazines, my
heating pad, reading glasses, pens
and pencils, slippers, my pipe
(if I had one), and stick them all, everything,
out of sight. Pulling my head in
like a startled snail or a soft-shell turtle,
I withdraw completely from my surroundings,
from others and from myself so as,
I suppose, not to annoy anyone
anymore, not to be in the way.
I feel a bit like Emily Dickinson
must have felt wanting simply
to be left alone, out of sight beneath
the stairs where she was always comfortable.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Paris, Je T'Aime*

MICHAEL ESTABROOK

A VIEW FROM MY FRONT YARD

Standing in my front yard,
in the shady shadows of three
big pine trees when I look up and see
the town drunk stumbling, shuffling
along the side of the road
in his slippers and old torn coat
and it's 80 degrees out.
And there's the stupid predictable
cigarette dangling from his
unshaven face and he's got on these
ridiculous looking yellow headphones.
Obviously, he's off
in his own little world
with its own special demons and saints,
clouds and rivers, shadows
and gusts of wind.

MICHAEL WESTON

FROM CANNIBAL IN DARKGLASSES

Deep in the valley of hagsdrin,
back under the ruins of words
that I played in—there dwells
a monster of silence so large
and naked, nattering on a
mile with a smile of black so
dark, so nothing-deep, so featureless
it's runny; under all that, there
lurks and crusts even more empty.
So much so, that I can fill balloons
until our sun goes out—how
many is that? as they go floating up
and filling the space of your sight.
I am the balloon man, filling plastic
space with a stench of air that
leaves no trace except a minus.
Watch me singe and dance
all the while my skin turns
like a ballerina
and pirouettes-so-keena in a clot
of cotton for laundry to
the daughter of a farmer, years
without me in this belly,
the haven for a vacant
man to bake in.

TONY GLOEGGLER

DINER

He flips open a menu. I slip a quarter into the table-top juke box, punch up "Thunder Road," try to remember who died, who got married the last time we saw each other. The waitress pours coffee. He orders cottage cheese, fruit, tells me he runs marathons now. I want pancakes, bacon and eggs. I can feel his eyes poking my belly, explain "I still shoot hoops two nights a week."

He slides a card across the table. The letters of his name are slanted like the sleek curves of a sports car. It says he's some kind of consultant. Computers. Graphic design. I put it in my pocket, stare out the window, watch long lines of people burrow into the subway. He adjusts his tie, asks if I'm still trying to save the world. I admit I run a group home for retarded kids, that I started writing again. The waitress asks, "Everything okay?" He's still married to Jenny, their second child's due in June. This time, he wants a son. I'm tired of living alone. I miss Hilary.

CONTINUED

Bad. He shakes his head, says
“You’re just not getting laid enough.”
I laugh, ask “Does it show?”
All I know, is that when I get home,
open my apartment door and slide
my hand down the wall, it takes
longer each night to find the light.

When the waitress clears the dishes,
he points to his cup for a refill.
I pick up the check, figure out
my half. He stirs milk in, lifts
his cup with two hands. “My father
passed away a month ago. Bone cancer.
Got so bad, I had to force myself
to visit the last few weeks.”
I reach across the table, fold my hands
over his, help him put the cup down.

DANIEL STEWART

INTELLIGENT DESIGN

In the beginning there was no time or space
only static. You may recognize this absence as the hiss
between a.m. stations. Some say the dead
speak through it, as if they have nothing
better to do than whisper at the living.

I've read we share the same atoms
that wove George Washington together,
the same atoms that ever existed
still linger. The Big Bang is in the blizzard
between Rush Limbaugh and ESPN.

Do the dead resent
our use of what's left of them?
Or do they understand, better than we do,
that we're all made of stars.



Doug Dorph: *The Face*

DANIEL STEWART

FIXATION

Mouth my God
Odd and south
Of the blue

Greed my eyes
Are. Hunger
Is a type of anger

Sown by tongue
[Red hand] into
My earth my

Favorite land and
Mouth the universe
Of you brings

The world in—
The End pearled
In the meat

Of me like
A mine, a
Mind—teeth, tongue

Tonsil, temples of
Gnash and nosh,
And uvula a

Fleshy tear aquiver
In welcome, welcoming
In this world

Leaching from me the dust I
am made of.

DENNIS SALEH

FEBRUARY NOTES

Parts of winter filled with ruts,
wet cardboard, newspaper leaves.
A faded pomegranate tree celebrates
the last dying, split sides gaping
dryly in the wind. In its strength
winter lay upon the land, seized a man,
and he cut the oleanders to thin,
pricked stocks. Now they fleck with
sprouts, even so, bits of blossom
starting to shine with sun, like offers
coming up out of the ground.

2.

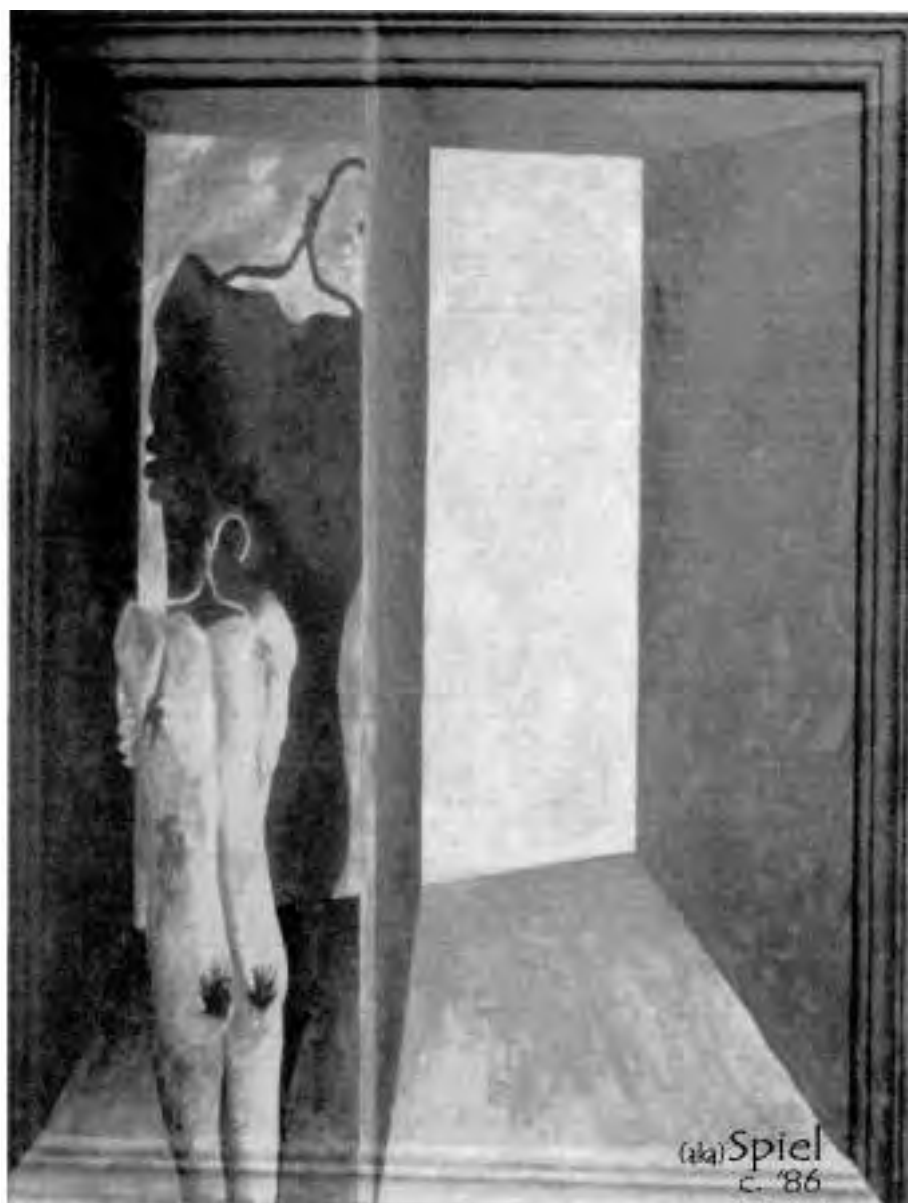
Blue-eyed wind goes about the sky,
skirts trailing days of the month.
February, like a year with no head,
shoulders shirking the air, cleverless,
tentative, assuming nothing.
The year may be here, but little else.
Clocks doze, alarms set for later.
Walking in a day, blinking in the light.
Haze covers the sun. The sea hesitates.

EPITAPH:

cast my ashes
on agitated water

where my enemy
cannot surround them

where my best friend
cannot long to wake them



Spiel: Closet/Closet

CLIFF DWELLER

THE HALLOWEEN TREE

Tonight's the night

of Halloween

and jack-o'-lanterns

are throbbing again

on the neighbor's lawn

There are ghosts

flying through windows

on a hillside

and a wicked fork

enters a dark hole

in a room,

positioning itself

for the devil

CONTINUED

The vampires are coming, the vampires are coming
with their old dark habits

**Candles drip
in their footsteps**

like a blood
that burns

Under the full moon
I find

witching grass

made of human skin

The witches are still bringing
their barks and branches

through a part

of the forest

that's alive with

raw cries of deception

Slowly but surely,
Halloween is
raising its head
like a werewolf
from dementia's darkness

The constant howl
shatters windows,
it sounds
like a wind tunnel
full of anguish

Halloween is
a tall, dark tree
bewitched by the spirit
of the raven
A boy
sits tonight
under the tree
and weeps
for its salvation

VINOD DAVE

THE STORM SHAPES LEADING TO EMILY

The woman I love thinks I'm a falcon
because her eyes once tried
to starve each other.

She carries rivers on the left side
of her face
that are too tired to move.

A gunshot, Thanksgiving,
North Carolina, two friends,
one who painted absences and near-humans, the other
the son of a local mechanic,

Her mother back in the flames of Cedar Rapids.

I love my woman who's cut open
like a marigold.

When we strip down to our silk shiver
it is late in the song
of a ladybug.

She is always fifteen years
in front of me. Each birthday

another red flock starts out

from the cavern deep in her jaw,
birds turning into furrows and black storm satellites.

Her paralyzed arm sends only
radiation messages back
from the snow falling on Mercury.

No safe places left in her eyes,
she picks apart each lily
we found drifting through the ditch farms
where Iowa goes dark.

She listens for the machinery that keeps
the void from falling
while she plows all of hell
with her one hand.

I love my woman who cuts herself open
in search of rain.

There is no rain, there will never be any rain again,
I can tell by the noises that creep down
from the moon

and the way the grasses never bend,

the way I go on building nests for
her most frightened scar.



Spiel: *Divorce*

DAVID CHORLTON

THE AIR CONDITIONED DESERT

Welcome to the uninhabitable heat
that presses its fingers around our necks
from May until it is tired
and opens the windows of an old pickup
as it leaves the desert
with an unbreathable cloud
trailing from the exhaust pipe.
We begin to measure temperatures

at one hundred and ten,
wear new records every summer
like medals for endurance
and ride for miles until
we find comfort at the rest stops
which are palaces of country western taste
with air so cold it forms crystals
in our lungs. They appear

along the highway as if a child
had assembled them from a do-it-yourself
kit with primary coloured plastic
parts. Never built to last,
they are larger inside than out
and filled to excess with offerings
to the gods of illusion. Pick up

one of the plaster Indians
or the bald eagle spreading its wings
before Old Glory, imported
from the orient,
to feel the weight of tradition
cast in a commercial mould.
The background music

CONTINUED

smells of barroom cigarettes. The voice
on the intercom is pleading
for a break. T-shirts on display
scream for attention
with screen printed wildlife
and bold face letters
legible for miles
stating you've been to Arizona.
You might buy one to replace
what you're wearing

for a few minutes of freshness
before you're back on the road
with sweat for company
and a lonely expanse in each direction
making you think about religion
in which case

you will find paperback salvation
written to inspire
through all the wars which may yet come,
although when you crave
cooler air and more soda
eternity can wait.
Back on the road
phantoms dance on the asphalt

and thorns are closer than they appear
in the rear view mirror.
The desert lifts from its foundations
as you stare ahead
unaware of your speed
or where the next rest stop will rise
in the arms of a saguaro
riddled with gunshots
and flickers' nest holes. After watching
palo verde fade into mesquite
that gives way to stones
emerging from cracks in the surface
of the ground, you want

a souvenir to prove you were here:
something tawdry

you'd never spend money on
in a temperate climate. Brushstrokes
of light mark the dusk
on a velvet sky, a coyote in profile
eats into the moon, a gunfighter
shoots blanks toward
a rack of western movie tapes,

and the cold air that assaults you
feels so good
you take a long time
feeling your pocket for change
after you've bought enough fuel
for a ride to the horizon.
It's tempting

to take something with a price tag
as a remembrance,
but cheap can't do justice
to the country you're passing through.
The cost of being here
is momentary suspension
of belief that anything can survive
without technology,
that evolution was on hold
between the last of nature's upheavals
and the invention
of air conditioning, while the culture
found in books
could never take hold

where self expression is reduced
to holding tight to the steering wheel,
pausing for a drink too cold to taste
and food too fast to digest
on a journey too long
ever to be forgotten.

DAVID CHORLTON

PIMERIA ALTA (III)

A flash flood of light came over the horizon
and washed the creosote
until it was white as the face of the priest
who knelt in an arroyo
with his hands held open to receive it.
The prayer on his lips turned to smoke

as an aura appeared around each of the flowers
for which he had no name
and the first wave of light touched his robe
which turned the orange of the blooms
on the barrel cactus. Faces blossomed
on stalks of agave. Flycatchers swooped

and drew ornaments on pages of air. He leaned back
against an updraft of wind
and turned his eyes
toward the sky as it folded around him.
A needle entered his heart
so gently he smiled.

PAMELA ERENS

SAVING ME

I.

I was cutting my food into sixteen pieces and you said, *Look at me*. I was cutting my food into sixteen pieces and organizing the pieces on eight different parts of the plate and you said, *Can you hear me?* The fan overhead sent down smells of burgers, grease, cigarettes. I wanted some hot chocolate and they didn't serve any. I wanted you to be nice to me and you did it all wrong. The fish on your plate swarmed with dark things with wings. I ran out of the restaurant and you ran after me, we ran until we found the blasted-out hole in the building where the steam pipes emerged, and sat there huddled, watching the snow fall. It was hot. You unbuttoned my shirt, opened my pants. You said, *Baby*. You said, *Don't be like you, be like me*. In our room I ripped all the shades from the windows because, who knew, if there was no light I might be dead. You said, *I can save you*. You were crying in the bathroom because you couldn't save me. You were sticking your finger down your throat, to see how it was to be me. My belly was swollen like a melon. You said, *You need some fucking therapy, you know that?* I smelled shit in the room and crawled around checking the carpet, our clothes, the bed. I said, *Let's just watch a movie and forget about everything* but then we found ourselves in a bakery, where the loaves fell from the slicer, piece upon piece. Remember when we were going to bake our own bread? It was spring then. It was so nice when we got started, you were long and lean and I hadn't held someone so big in my arms before.

II.

My plants were dying. *Give them peat*, you said. *Give them fertilizer, bone meal, fox piss*. They were all lined up in a row, blaming me. I threw one at your head to prove that you were right, that I couldn't

control myself. I couldn't control myself. I wore silk to remind me of your fingers moving up my thighs. Every time I cried you had to ask me was it pain or pleasure. In my dreams my body was strung with lights and flashed a warning sign, and you could see right through to the blackened parts inside. I threw the quilt over both of us but little by little I stole it back. You ran down dangerous streets in your worn-out sweater, trying to buy what I wanted: milk, licorice, oranges. Pictures of other people stared down at us from our walls, wondering what we could possibly be up to. *Will you be nice to me now?* you asked. In a room full of leather the shrink shook his head at us, saying, *You have your whole lives ahead of you.* I fell backward into your arms and you caught me before I hit the ground but then you didn't catch me and I kept on falling. We watched a movie in which a woman killed a man and for two days you wouldn't talk to me at all.

III.

I've never hit anyone before, you said. The light poured in, forcing us awake. We went to a dance and you wouldn't dance. You lost your appetite, took pills for your headaches, your backaches, your insomnia. You had stacks of books but nothing we needed was in them. *Let's go away somewhere*, you said. You rubbed the cold from my feet with your hands. The magnolia outside burst into bloom, as if to say, *Couldn't you try a little harder?* I could still see the puddle where you'd slipped and got up with your trust all broken. *Let's go away*, you said, but we couldn't agree on where. *We can go to the station and decide there*, I said, so we packed our suitcases and went. My clothes were huge and hung from me like rags. The ceiling of the station was painted with planets and stars. Of everyone who passed by you asked, *Did you make love to him, too?* I tried to protest but who was to say I hadn't forgotten? *I don't want them anymore*, I said. We stood under the great clock, watching the schedule board click and change. *Just you*, I said. Time passed. Evening came. You leaned near and plucked a speck of dirt from my coat.

ROSALIND PALERMO STEVENSON

6 SHORT FICTIONS

In the Sign of Scorpio

The soldiers have decided not to show their faces. Don't Puss, not now. We are here to have a pleasant time. Listen, there's a cat mewing in the courtyard just outside the window. Do you hear it? And the butcher has hung his sign: Open for Business. Rat. Boar. Meat (all kinds). Madame Girardoux will be coming a little later on. Come on now, Puss, it would be impolite to pull a face. What I like about the butcher is the sight of him at work. Such clean strokes with his knife. And besides he has all those good qualities. They brought him shark to carve this morning. It was a Nurse Shark pulled out from the tank at the Seaquarium. Do you remember when we saw it? Huddled with its brood at the shallow end. Flopped together all of them with their front teeth snapping. Madame Girardoux explained to us the reason for their name: it's for the sound they make like babies nursing. She's coming today to tell our fortunes. Last time she said I was inclined to contradiction. I think you know that's true. It's because I was born at the beginning of my sign. I am completely in my sex, Puss. Today a man, tomorrow a woman.

The Maria Axiom

I saw a child standing in the distance. We talked across the space which separated us. We talked about the *Maria Axiom* and the four corners of the world. We discussed the representation of the East and the illumination, which might come after a long period of suffering and feelings of despair. We talked about the South where one can sometimes find a safe haven. Are you my safe haven, he wanted to know. I said, no, I could not be that, not for him, not for anyone. His hair was black and his skin had been darkened by the particles of dirt that were floating in the air. We talked about the West where

everything might be accomplished, and the North where it might all be understood. I wanted to take him in my arms and comfort him. But we could not cross our lines. I, for my part, dared not.

In the Train Station

I was in the waiting room in the train station in Harrisburg. A young girl was sitting slouched on the bench across from me. At first I thought she was sleeping, but then I noticed she was watching me out of half-closed eyes. She got up and approached, all the while rummaging through a black patent leather bag.

“It’s my mother’s,” she said.

She took a wallet out of the bag, and then a photograph out of the wallet. Her fingers touched mine as she handed me the photograph.

a woman’s head against a splintered pane of glass...a thin stream of blood running down her chin from the side of her mouth...

“Does it look like me?” The girl asked.

“Yes,” I said, “there is a resemblance.”

She made a face and said she disagreed.

I held my ground. “Yes,” I said again, “there is a decided resemblance. At a glance, one would think it was you.”

Fogdog

I was looking for the mouth of the cove, walking where the sand beach had ended leaving only rocks and stones. It was almost impossible to see through the fog, but I continued walking. Seaweed had been swept up by the storm, covering the surfaces of the stones and making them slippery. When I reached the place beyond the rocks, where the sand beach continued again, the mist was too thick to see more than a few feet ahead. I was tired and my feet were cut. I found a spot just below the cliff and sat down on the sand.

Coming towards me through the fog was a boy of seven or eight years old. He had blond hair and carried a stick, which he used like a staff.

"Hello," I said.

"Hello," he answered.

He started drawing pictures in the sand with the stick, pouring a tremendous amount of energy and concentration into the activity. His pictures looked like the ancient hieroglyphics. He drew them with large, sweeping strokes, stretching the stick far out in front of him and darting from one spot to another. Each time he finished one drawing he moved a little ways off and started a new one.

I moved closer to examine his drawings.

"Do you live nearby?" I asked him.

"On the cliff," He answered. "I live right up there." He pointed to the jagged rock side.

"How did you get down here from up there?"

"There's a footpath."

"Oh, a footpath."

We were silent for a while, and then I looked up at the sky.

"Look," I said, "a fogdog."

"Where?"

"There, in the sky. Do you see it?"

"I don't see it. What's a fogdog?"

"There, right above: that bright spot on the horizon. It means that the fog is beginning to clear."

The Visitor

I had a visitor a few days ago and I haven't been able to stop thinking about her. She was young, no more than seventeen years old, exquisite to look at, her face chiseled in bone and sheathed in a layer of sheer white skin. Her eyes were green; her hair was long and dark, unkempt and wild.

"My name is Garrone," she said. "My father told me I must find you."

She had barely stepped inside when, opening her mouth slightly as if to continue talking, she collapsed to the floor unconscious. I knelt down beside her. There was a small pink wet spot at the corner of her mouth. Her eyes had become slits with only the whites still showing. Her skin was cool to the touch and her chest heaved slowly.

Finally, she came around. Nonplussed she stared at me. I reached

out to help her to her feet and she threw her arms around me, clinging to me and sobbing wildly. She talked in muffled, incoherent words. Most of what she said was impossible to understand. Certain phrases, though, came through; fragments such as, “*I thought I would be on the second floor,*” and, “*No one else had the linen cloth.*”

She pressed her body against me and I let my arms lace around her. Then I drew back a little and when I did she moved forward. It was a small movement and with it her lips brushed mine. My impulse was first to yield, then to push her away. I pushed with an abrupt, almost violent movement. I was surprised at the ease with which she let go.

I left the room for a few minutes and went into the kitchen to get her a glass of water. When I returned she was gone. I thought she had wandered off into another part of the house. I searched all the rooms but could not find her. I looked out from the windows but could not see her. I walked out on the cliff and called her name. “Garrone”, I called, “Garrone.” But she was not moving through the reeds or walking down along the shoreline or crouching in among the rock cliffs. She was simply gone.

The Nocturnal Voice of a Man

The dog’s barking is the nocturnal voice of a man. It comes from a house in that valley towards the South. The man is shouting through his dog. Since they are companion slaves for life, his sadness, his boredom, his... He is begging for his death to come and release him from his chains. That barking and the despair it inspires is the despair of an entire day, and then, suddenly, it is already night.

Acknowledgement and tribute to Carlos Castaneda for this passage from *Tales of Power*.

PHILIP DACEY

TO THE THREAD BY WHICH EVERYTHING HANGS

I love you, Thread. May I never
cause you to fray.
Magnified by a high-powered microscope,
you look reassuringly thick.

I don't know to what up high you are attached,
but I know you are attached. I look up and see you
disappear into the clouds, into the sun's corona.
On solidest earth, I feel my feet
dangling beneath me,
like those of a lynch victim
having an especially lucky day.

I think even my idea of you
hangs by a thread, thinnest of umbilicals.

And did I say I love you? Rather, I adore you.
Thread, my goddess. May I give you a sex?
Powerful yet slender, a young warrior
guarding the old world against gravity.
Thread with breasts, thread with waist and hips.

I admit I've joined forces with another,
one like a goddess herself, and her
hanging here with me, our arms entwined,
complicates your burden, but feel
the lightness of her fingers' touch on my skin,
how her buoyancy works to your advantage.

CONTINUED

And now I whisper into your ears
the names of my children swaying in the air.
Please drop me first, Thread,
that I might teach them how to fall.

In the meantime I contemplate the physics
of your tensile strength the way a votary
contemplates a holy icon, the one, true relic.
All the many pretenders break,
and the world goes on.
But you, Thread, you
are the mother of all thread.

PHILIP DACEY

HELLO?

“An engineer at AT&T predicts that someday everyone will be assigned a lifelong phone number at birth, and when you phone that number and don’t get an answer, it means the person died.”

—*Christian Science Monitor*

I dialled my own number
just for fun,
intending to leave a message
on my answering machine,
congratulating myself
on not being dead,
but there was no answer.

Dialling 911
to report a failure of equipment,
the phone company’s, not mine,
I was informed
that death was not an emergency,
only dying was,
and I had waited too long to call.

Although I wasn’t exactly feeling dead,
I knew I wasn’t my usual self either.
But when I called a friend
to ask him to call me,
assuming he’d confirm
the happy fact of my existence,
I couldn’t reach him,
leaving me uncertain as to whether
he was dead or I was
or we were both
profoundly disconnected numbers.

CONTINUED

But now I'm wondering:
If I keep not answering
when I call me,
do I have to pay next month's bill?
And these other questions
won't stop ringing in my ears:
When we die, do we keep our own number intact
or does it turn into a minus?
Does it stay the same but undergo retirement,
like the numbers of famous athletes?
Or is our number assigned to someone else
in deference to the ideas of
reincarnation or immortality?
I wish I knew what number to call
to get answers to these questions.

I'd like to think that because
I am talking to you now,
I'm not dead,
but I know the dead
speak from printed pages all the time.
I'd like to think
you called me
and I answered,
because if I called you
and you answered,
that only would prove you aren't dead.
In any case, I've got to go now.
I'm afraid
this phone booth is beginning to look
and feel like a coffin, and that repairman
outside wearing black
and brandishing the hammer and nails
is making me nervous.

PHILIP DACEY

CIRCE

I called her my reverse Circe,
who turned me from swine to man
whenever I visited her island.

My pig's feet tapping out my sorry state
would carry me back to her,
who'd scratch my bristly back and sling me slop

until under her care I saw my hide soften
and my ears round
and the tail I dipped in ink to write my words

dry up and fall away, like scales from eyes.
I stood on two legs, came to my
five senses, and knew that speech is inadequate

before the world and beauty
such as hers. If she was sorceress,
the very air is sorceress.

But the tail always grew back
and my snout as fat as a dictionary
that loves to root in swill

and scatters far and wide
the leavings of a need,
a spoor, like this, of porcine poems.

PHILIP DACEY

EFFIGY

The President's language
goes on crutches.
A bad boy
kicks them away.

Flies circling the President's head
spout war plans.
In every buzz,
a thousand deaths.

The President prays.
His joined hands
display cufflinks,
little golden sandals

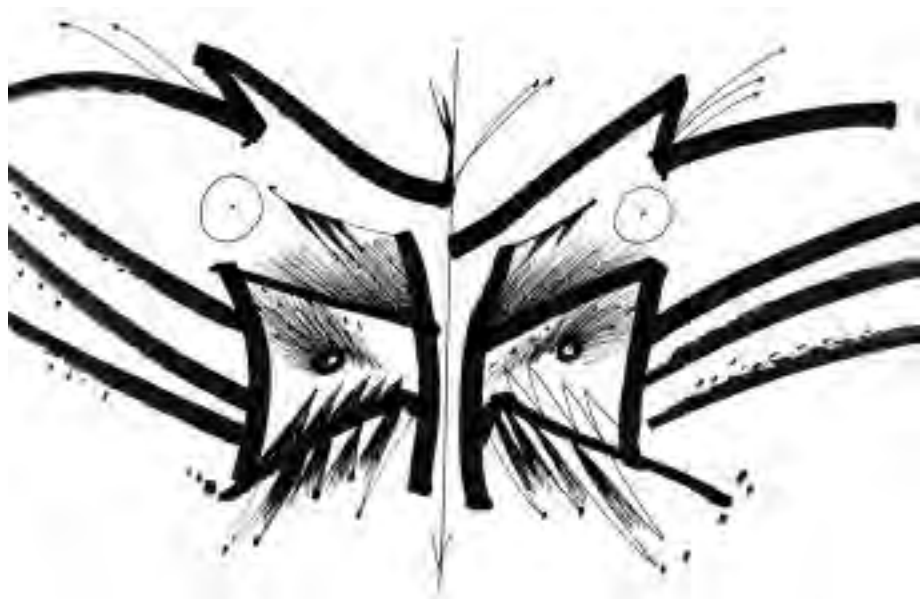
a la Galilee.
Jesus died on a big crutch,
and each bomber is another,
a flying one on which to nail

a whole city of words,
their blood leaking
from inside every book
the President won't read.

MAYA MAY

SOUTHERN COMFORT

she was born in 1912. she must have stories (lynchings, sharecropping, old slaves she knew) but her life started when she left. everything that came before 1930 does not exist. i ask her where we're from. *africa. thas wah they say. doncha heh em? alwehs tellin us to go back theh?* she won't speak about wadesboro. not that she won't. that she can't. can't speak about wadesboro because it never existed. to her the whole town vanished. and the people too. but i look up wadesboro and the town council all look like klansmen. (i think all old white men look like klansmen). i want to go to wadesboro and buy acres of land. at least 40. i want to go to wadesboro and burn down the movie theater that made my mother go round the back since we probably won't get our reparations i think we should burn the whole thing down. make molotov cocktails with carolina flags as wicks and southern comfort bottles as fuel and scorch it to black prairie. it will know what to grow once we're all gone.



Connie Chiera: Lady Gangbang: *Black Tie*



Connie Chiera: Gangbang: *Sexual Confusion Graph*



Lawrence Applebaum: *Ode To Ty Varrick*

ROBERT COOPERMAN

THE RANCH HUSBAND DISCUSSES RANCH SILENCE

Ellen's on me all the time
about being silent as Mount Rushmore.
What's to say, after I tell her
about the stock, the feed, the fences
needing mending as often as my socks?
It's not like we live in New York
and I know everything going on
in the world. Nor is it like everything
out of Ellen's mouth is smart
as a TV show, not to mention the Bible,
which I should read more often,
considering the pain I gave Ellen
in the past, with Cora Myers.

But when Ellen starts in about the state
of her nails—working an emery board
like a rasp filing through a hard-labor chain
while I'm trying to unwind with a show—
and if I dare say, “Not now, hon,”
I'll get the pummeling of my life.

“Talk to me,” she'll ask in bed,
when all I want is to run my hands
all over her, make the only sounds
that matter between husband and wife.
Or else I'll be too tired for anything
but a goodnight peck, but she'll poke me
like an FBI interrogator, and demand,
“Tell me about your day.”

CONTINUED

“I already did,” I’ll mumble.

“Tell me,” she’ll insist, “how the corn looked on their stalks; about the wind sifting through them; about the clouds, the snow caps, the shapes the clouds make.”

“Ellen,” I’ll sigh, “I’m no poet or painter, just a poor, loan-worried rancher.”

But I can forget about sleep now, alert as if the house was on fire: Ellen relying on me to save her and Sheila, by talking the flames to death.

MARK WISNIEWSKI

GLASS KIDNEY

the desk & the pull-out
left very little space
& Manhattan surrounded me
yet often I preferred
to stay in there

sometimes on late trips
to the bathroom down the hall

I'd notice a jar beside the door
of an old man I'd once seen
trying to make it
to the plumbing himself

impossibly frail
he'd managed a step
every 12 seconds

his aluminum walker
creaking against tile

his tie & fedora
declaring his aim
to go it alone

now his jar always contained
24 ounces of gold

& I'd never sleep well

until I'd seen to
its emptiness

MARK WISNIEWSKI

THE OTHER LEFT FOOT

the movie was titled
My Left Foot
& my left foot was broken
& I entered the theater & sat beside
my crutches

it was a Friday
night in Berkeley California

the lights faded
dramatically & the movie began

& even though
millions had been spent to make
that left foot compelling
all I cared about
was *my* left foot

I was in the first months
of a fellowship
& the crutches had thickened
my forearms:
in those senses I wasn't
entirely without luck

but my left calf was soft
& shrinking &
the skin under
my armpits was chapped

this is a *movie*?
I wanted to ask
the crutches

but the place was now swelling
with focused

university minds

some directly in front &
behind & to the right

all of whose
silence demanded unexcepted
stillness

they were nothing
like the woman
I'd left in Texas

& I thought about
her hardness & enjoyment of

as they say

intercourse

then remembered
the night I'd learned
she had crabs:
from then on
trust had been
an issue between us

until I'd finally
left her for

the fellowship

but within a few weeks
I'd learned from mutual friends
that she'd moved to Sacramento—
90 miles east
of Berkeley—
to attend a 6-month program
to train her to be

CONTINUED

a well-paid
paralegal

a month after I'd learned this
I'd driven the 90 miles
& we'd seemed almost the same
so we'd slept in her bed
in our underwear

& another man phoned
& she laughed with him
while I lay beside her
thinking I'd wasted
my best years
& worrying about what would happen
when the fellowship ran out

she'd be a paralegal
& I would write

it seemed fair & outrageous
& I'd never understand her
but she'd been more
interesting
than the movie was now

but my lack of interest
in the other left foot
helped me sit
long enough to decide I no longer

needed her

nor did I need

to ask the crutches if they wanted
to leave the theater early:

we simply walked out

without anyone else
moving

EMILY BURESH

IT □ S VIETNAM,

DADDY LONG LEGS

gray shingled in the back acre's barn.

The scream of a frog, the old song
of used air in innertubes sung while
my brother grew in its shadow.

It was the yardstick of his inches.

What good to speak of the fathers
who kept the silence of grandmothers,
Bibles, flypapers, the silence of bluebottles.

Why speak of the light at the tunnel's end
that flamed when my brother not waiting
to be taken embraced it. *Where is Vietnam,*
called the water trough tongued with cheesy cud.

Write us, cried the dragonflies, the blackflies,
the gnats. *What. what, what?* the husks rustled.
Floating in the ditch a civet cat's liver, maggots
glistening like liquid apple slices spat, *Fight*.

What good to speak of the mothers who blind
to fireflies sparking tree and star between farms
muttered in vegetable plots, planting
their knees in seed, praying, shivering,
becoming their sons. Unrecognizable.

Kisses cold as roots, breath bitter as marigolds.

Like woodticks, like midnight crows
they hovered low for grubs. Who said no.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Moon Snatcher*

MICHAEL H. BROWNSTEIN

THE COW WITCH

Have you seen the Cow Witch?
The one who seeks berries and tombs,
A rose blackened by water
Hard by the blossom tree?
Tent caterpillars wrangle in the sun's coils.
There are the crows; there are the ravens.
A horse runs as fast as a horse.
The Cow Witch knows these powers.

Search for me by the Crypt of St. Augustine.
I have made my home there.
Early morning I find the softening bark of cassia,
River water, fresh fish, garden snails in the dew.
Wait for the sun to reach its falling.
I will be there near the heavy door,
The fallen rock and cured sandalwood,
Kneeling in the weed and thyme, singing.

Near St. Louis gold grows in the clover.
The Tree Men of Ashanti yearn for its fragrance
And somewhere not near yet not far away
Green shoots find doors through softer soil.
St. George's herb roots deep within root,
Juno's tears flower into pigeon wood.
Here comes the vine that lives to strangle.
Life and decay hold each other's hand.

The Cow Witch is an expert in hiding.
She knows large cities hold more than sewage.
She understands her neighbors by name:
Naked Lady, the Borrowers, Porch Sitter,

CONTINUED

Those-Who-Hold-Court-On-The-Corner,
The Corn Men, the Ice Cream Family.
She knows them all by face and figure,
Walk and gesture, voice and violation.

My song knows only elf leaf and ivy.
I pluck the strings of my kora,
Beat the slotted drum, play the thumb piano.
I own the harp tied between the giant oaks.
You must come after the dew settles.
I do not sing at night or morning,
The time for rest and meditation.
Songs are not work like bridges, like alleys.

The Cow Witch will come when she is ready
Like the calf, like the bridge over the valley,
The Garden of the Sun and Moon,
Like an empty place ahead.
Heather dries in the light, seed swings to earth,
Wind tangles music from my harp,
And the farmer's wife wakes, stretches,
Calls on the bloom that may be spring.

MICHAEL H. BROWNSTEIN

A SECULAR SPOT IN THE MORNING DEW

In the secular house near the Rock of the Half Moon
the door weeps for lack of oil.
Wind bleeds through crease and hole
and my son mistakes the mourning dove's morning song
for that of rock pigeon.
We are at mercy here,
gun powder the rage as eye liner,
thirty-five poems the maximum filler for any book.

We write about our lies:
experience better exaggerated,
and questions a need for answers
left out by the back forty.

Depression binds light.
The baby pigeon knows not its predator,
a prime number knows not its factor,
sleep is an accomplished act.

We built this place for the criminal,
the insane, the man lost on his way,
one wanderer carrying spirit drums,
another a kora,
a third a cowbell tied to rope and wood.

You might as well leave us be.
There is nothing you can do.
We have made our choices,
dumb choices,
derelict choices.

CONTINUED

The place I settled near the Corner of the Half Moon
is no longer there.

All of its pieces are lost.

Everything I owned is gone. Everything I wanted to own is gone.

Everything I imagined owning is gone.

Daughter, hold hard to yourself.

The life of a cat is not that great.

In the Valley of the Death of Man-Trees,
the woman on the bridge over the train track
bends to the trestles and a confusion of ants.

Dusk-light ripples
through sky-ponds
and the farming village
thick with fresh plowed soil
soaks in it as if it were.

Everywhere you look
a farmer's wife stands near
beginnings of gardens,
skies full of eyes.

And when it is ended
dragged into promiscuousness
by name calling, half-calling, pretend calling,
Jackie Robinson moments before the desk of rude words and
aberration, racial slurs and smoke, everything that makes bad breath,
I steal my words from the *Oxford Dictionary of the English Language*,
dress a line without a care to quality, quality control, environmental
stability or the rage of the self-taught man lacking the credentials
for the only job he can actually do,
and find within the spot a spot of grace.

There is no hero in any of this.

WAYNE STEWART

TO THE WOODS AGAIN

I want to go to the woods again
With the buzzards and black-hearted crows
Where the blacksnake coils under the bush
And go where the creekwater goes

Or down a dusty, deserted, dirt road
Where cottonmouths mate in the ditch,
Where horseflies and hell-like weeds
Bite you and bleed you, sting and itch.

I want to walk once more the hot fields
Plowed down for soybean, mustard, and corn:
The sparkling grove of big live oak
Where the old bull sharpens his horn;

To walk along the barbed wire fence
Where honeysuckle and blackberry strive:
To smell the piss and awful dung
Of all things that struggle and thrive.

I would like to go to the woods again
A little older, a little more wise:
Give thanks to thistles, thorns, and briars,
Things that kill and cannot apologize.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Josephine*

HILARY MELTON

JOEY

My father's first post working for the State Department was Dalat, Vietnam. It was late 1962. During the years my family and I lived in Vietnam, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution—giving President Johnson free hand to wage war in Vietnam. By the spring of 1965, the number of American troops swelled to over 200,000. The year before American dependents were evacuated, my parents adopted a four-year-old Vietnamese boy.

We call him *little brother*,
until my mother names him Joey.
He is dark like the maids and the driver, with straight black hair
that stands up on top.

He is younger than my brother Tony,
older than me, and
Vietnamese.

His real parents are probably dead. He is
an orphan from an orphanage.
Now he has new parents, a brother
and two sisters.

We are all supposed to be nice,
help others.
Share.

We don't know how lucky we are.

Joey likes to hide under furniture, in the backs
of closets, inside the dirty clothes basket.

CONTINUED

But we always find him, because when we're quiet,
we can hear him crying.

Tony shows Joey his rock collection and his comic books.
Tony and Joey have a clubhouse. Boys only.

Speak English please, says my mother
to Joey and Tony at dinner. But it is always Vietnamese—
especially late, late when everyone is supposed to be sleeping.

When Joey's not sad, he's mad. He hits and bites.
He's a fighter. He never says *uncle* and won't ever
say *sorry*.

Bad, bad Joey.

If we can't stop fighting, mom will take him back.
If we can't stop fighting she'll give us all away.

If we can't stop fighting.

Joey is a fighter. Kick, hit, bite.
Tony gets mad too. We all do. Kick, hit, bite.
Kick, hit, bite.

The maids shake their heads, click tongues. *See what happens?*

My mother says, *I've had it*.
Then, *I've really had it*.

She puts him in the car.
We watch him leave.
He's wearing one of Tony's striped T-s.

Bye-bye brother Joey.

We see his fist press against the rear window.
He is holding something small and green:
Tony's best toy soldier, the one on his belly
with a tripod rifle.

HILARY MELTON

EDGE OF THE OCEAN

I lose track of where and what year. I have to focus, and even then I am easily distracted—the phone, laundry, going to get groceries.

Josh is a time gage. There is the year he was born. His first and second birthdays in New York. He turned three in Sante Fe, six at my mother's, and seven in Vermont.

There are two missing years. Four and five. No cakes, no presents. It was by then we'd decided, or *she* did, that birthdays separated us from each another, and from God.

The first time I stole it was from a mall store. I asked a clerk for a shopping bag—the sturdy kind, with handles made from rope—then I filled it with shirts and dresses and walked out the door.

*If God wanted you to experience prison,
the Holy Spirit spoke, do you think
you could stop it?*

Like a sari-clad monk stepping on hot coals—
I went back an hour later
and asked another clerk to help me take a set of luggage to my car.
There are no laws but God's laws.

Friends tell me what's important
is that I got out. That I took Josh
and got out.

CONTINUED

My mother let us stay with her on the Cape. It was late fall, the tourist season over. For months, each day, we'd head for Sandwich's town beach where Josh jumped in time to waves crashing as we wandered along the curve of the coast.

The wallet was near some driftwood. 80 dollars and a Massachusetts driver's license. She was 79, white-haired, and wearing glasses. I can't remember her name, but I know I almost didn't keep it.

HILARY MELTON

OUR NEW AGE INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY IS LOOKING FOR A HOME, AND MY SISTER- TURNED-GURU HAS AN IDEA

Heather thinks it would be a hoot (in that challenge the illusion/fuck with perceptions kind of way) to try to rent the house at 18241 Colina Norte: Heaven's Gate's last stop before beaming up in black sweat suits and matching Nikes via phenobarbital and vodka overdoses— their alien spirits catching the mother ship home.

We stop at Denny's in Del Mar off route five, less than half an hour to their house in Rancho Santa Fe. The waitress doesn't seem to notice our shaved heads. She tells us about them (when we ask her), how they used to order the two egg special and were mostly unobtrusive. "Unobtrusive" she repeats, her voice drifting. She refills our coffee, and adds, "Sometimes they even sat where you're sitting."

Over six years since leaving and for the first time
I have a feeling of missing her.
Of course that comes from before—
before she heard the voice of god,
before I believed her.

In 1975 we are teenagers
not talking about mom's new boyfriend,
his cigarette butts on the porch, toothbrush
in the bathroom, hand on her thigh.

CONTINUED

It's summer and the dry Montana heat lifts off
sidewalks and pavement and breathes up our legs.
Heather has her driver's license and a car,
a '69 two-door gold Datsun we pile into
and drive out to Canyon Ferry Dam—
nestled in hills where brown grasses
sway thirsty under endless blue skies.

Lakeside we cut lemons and squeeze the juices
into our hair, then baby oil ourselves so that
we gleam like fresh-caught trout ready to fry.
We sip warm Tab from hot pink cans and crack
roasted sunflower seeds between our teeth,
sucking salt from the shells until our lips pucker
then swell. When we argue, it's about when to get going.
Are we burnt enough yet? Are we turning too blond?

WENDY HOFFMAN

THE WAILING LINE

Our ancestors were at the theater.
The line moved up slowly
and my mind traveled back and back
six decades. The same people, the same
souls were standing in line at Auschwitz.
The box office clerk turned into a guard
in a brown uniform. I scraped and scraped
away the hairdos and beards, brocade
jackets, knee boots and vests,
designer handbags and glasses.
I peeled away the intelligent, sensitive faces,
the kind you see on the NYC subway;
and yarmulkes, hunch backs,
walkers, canes, thin bones.
We were standing in line, I, the same people,
identical souls. The wood floor became frozen
mud, my feet caught between the crusted footprints.
The paneled walls dissolved into cement and wire,
the domed ceiling became a gray ice sky.
It was blustery cold. Branches shook, leaves
fell and I was standing on line
the shadows around me wailing.



Doug Dorph: *Head In The Clouds*

WENDY HOFFMAN

APART IN SEVEN COUNTLESS STEPS

i.

You were the queen of heaven with the widest, most light fractured
wings to my clogged, slimy half closed eyes
and fast fast beating newborn heart.

I breathed with your every breath.

I sighed with each wrenching heave.

I inhaled your familiar, exotic smell.

I was fused to you and you were repelled.

A minuet of one.

A solo duet.

I couldn't accept it, I wouldn't accept it, and I fought.

I'll win you over by being perfect, kind, hardworking, forceful,
ugly,

stupid, rebellious,

neat, messy,

unrealized.

I'll take each one of your disasters as my own.

When you died, I tried even harder.

ii.

I thought it was me.

You didn't like that I was withdrawn or my personality, nose, voice,
chin were wrong.

You said it was my darkness and that I was born black and blue.

But it was you.

CONTINUED

iii.

You had your own frosts and missions that couldn't be.
You came from him and her.
Instead of a BA, you gained eighty pounds.
You married just because he was handsome and didn't divorce until
 your breast displayed your rage.
That's the very least of it.
But this is about me, not you.

iv.

Long decades after your death, I realize I can try to win over your
ghost or leave it behind like a bad dream
 that resonates into the day but does not take hold.
Splattered glass vases.
Pieces of self gathering.
Excavations.

v.

Neighbors are having giant trees removed.
The sound awoke me early today from this ode.
First the branches. Shrieking.
Then the trunks. Stern, grueling.
At last the roots. Intertwined underneath one another's yards.
Trucks the length of city blocks haul away the remains
 of an era before my birth.
Light drenches bereft lawns and hits front window panes.
The transformed earth is raw and pioneer.
The air fills with water from my amniotic sac.

vi.

Who will I be when I withdraw my sacrifice?
A prairie?
A horse and wagon going to California?

vii.

New dirt, slender grass planted in winter.

It will grow somehow.

From the mud and ice.

To drink from no love withers.

To sip from tenderness someplace else moves my blood.

I can sniff. My eyelashes lengthen.

I can die with love.

I shift in my galoshes towards an unknown.

JOHN MCKERNAN

EVERY SWEET BIRD SONG

From last summer
Seems to have been freeze-dried

In shadow &
Slipped inside
This slice of North Wind

Imitating
The scream
Of a monkey
Its green-yellow circumcised neck

Where is the crow now
I mistook for its shadow
In the pear tree?
Hidden? In the black hammock
Of my skull?

VIRGINIA ARONSON

SUTTEE

Blood and fresh soil, all she needs
a bite of sun, a flat foot stumble
on the cracked asphalt. She recalls
tending the camellias, scarlet silks
bleeding from the front porch, spilling
to the sidewalk where she lies crooked
in her own blood now, warm sunshine
basking and her bones throb, she recalls
her life, the story she tells herself
over and over, imprisoned in the whirl
of her narrative with such ruthless devotion.

Behind the rotten wood of the screen door, a man
the illusion of material reality, more
moon than man, pale imprint of a face
so distant, so cold he leaves frost traces
on the swirls around her until she points
the death-bone and his daily six-pack run
leaves her crushed under skids. *This is not
my leg*, she thinks of white mushrooms in rain,
so moist and crumbly in the heavy air.

This is not my sky, she thinks, blinded
by the throb of a sunlit skull, she caresses
each talisman, each wound rubbed gently
between tremble of finger and thumb
like stems and petals she thinks of fountains
of azaleas that pour from her veranda
red, red, red down to the rich black earth,
to the dervish of cement, her killer, her savior.

CONTINUED

He will crash the Chevy into the 7-Eleven
maplined eyes like a red moon swimming up, up
in a black sky face, silent, unreadable.
No one will drive up the dirt until dusk.
You can fill your bones with explosives,
she thinks, *or with hoards of stars.* Still,
the moon, cleanshaven, holding the sea in place.

BARBARA DANIELS

CHEMO

needle leaves
scarlet berries
inner bark

yews'
punishing chemistry
strikes so hard

I vomit
can't walk
to the end

of my block
as if it's my body
nine beetles eat

vivid stains on their
cream-colored shells
what they chew

gone
to salts
in the ravenous soil

CHRIS BELDEN

THE OVERLOOK

Tony was hiking through the woods when he saw them. They were up ahead on the trail, no more than fifty feet away. It was not an overly dramatic sight. It only lasted a moment. If he had come along a minute or two later he might have missed it entirely, and they could have explained things easily enough: a friendly walk, say, or a chance meeting. But at that moment there was no mistaking what was going on.

She was leaning back against a tree, and he was kissing her, his hands holding her face as if he were sipping from a large bowl. Sunlight filtered through the leaves overhead, creating a quilt of light and shadow on their clothing. She wore jeans cut very short, just at the curve of her rump, her legs long and smooth. He was tall in a striped dress shirt, untucked, and khakis.

Tony watched all this from behind a tree, wondering who these young lovers could be. Someone had told him that the Hamilton girl was dating Tad Lennox from across the road, but Tad was a short, stocky boy, nothing like this tall young man leaning down to kiss the girl, pressing his long body against hers. Then, as the girl shifted away from the tree, Tony recognized the distinctive reddish-brown hair that hung down to the small of his daughter's back. At first, he almost laughed, so startled was he to come upon Stacey like this. Then he felt hurt, not so much because she was in the woods kissing a boy, but because she had kept a secret from him. Just an hour ago he had knocked on her bedroom door to ask if she wanted to accompany him on a hike. She'd said no thanks, she had a school report to finish. He'd thought it odd that she preferred to do her homework on such a lovely Spring afternoon, but then his daughter had been acting strangely of late.

He was about to proceed along the trail, curious to see which of her classmates Stacey had fallen for, and to make sure this did not go beyond a gentle kiss in the woods, when the young man drew back his

face. It was Mr. Peterson, his daughter's English teacher. He was a youthful fellow—Tony guessed in his late 20s—tall, good looking. At the most recent parent-teacher conference he'd impressed Tony with his intelligence and obvious affection for his students. Tony remembered how relieved he'd felt after the meeting. It was hard to find a teacher so committed these days, even at an expensive private school like the Academy. Most of them, even the younger ones, came off as shell-shocked and bitter at not opting for a cozy office job that paid decently and didn't require endless patience with privileged children. Now, as the two of them walked on, the dedicated Mr. Peterson reached down and squeezed Stacey's rear end.

Tony sat on a fallen tree trunk and tried to think. Only now did the sharp icicle of jealousy stab at him. He thought of he and his daughter as being very close, especially since Evelyn's death. They cooked supper together, went to movies together, conspired together on elaborate practical jokes to play on friends and neighbors. Even more than most fathers and daughters, they shared a private language, certain words and gestures that no one else could understand. When Stacey had questions she would come directly to him and he tried to answer her as honestly as he could, with the right balance of humor and seriousness. It was he who had explained to her the biology of reproduction. At age twelve, she'd woken up to find herself bleeding and without a mother to go to. Of course by then she knew what sex was, but he had felt the need to fill in the blanks.

"But remember," he recalled saying after a brief lecture about the importance of birth control, "It's no good without love."

"You mean the way I love *you*?" she'd asked.

He pulled her very close then and said, "And the way I love *you*, too."

She was always an extraordinarily affectionate little girl, even before Evelyn's death, generous with hugs and always reaching out to hold her daddy's hand. That seemed so long ago now. His daughter was another person, a young woman, and he had to admit that she rarely reached out to him anymore.

He stood and headed farther along the trail, deeper into the woods. He walked quickly but was careful not to make too much noise. Fortunately, the path was clear of dry leaves and other debris, and he made good progress. Among the chirping of the birds and rustle of leaves he could hear Mr. Peterson's deep, clear voice up ahead. Had

the teacher been involved with Stacey at the time of their school meeting, just a month ago? He tried to recall any clues from the young man's behavior, but remembered only a pleasant, professional conference. Peterson had praised Stacey, yes, but not so much that his enthusiasm was suspicious. He even had a few less than positive comments to share, including the usual complaints that Stacey didn't always live up to her potential and often seemed distracted. He then had asked the inevitable question: was Stacey going through anything especially difficult at home? Tony remembered how Peterson had leaned forward, as if especially eager for the answer. Tony, as he usually did, made sure to play up Evelyn's passing, and the long, drawn out nature of it, and how this—even after five years—could easily explain his daughter's occasional lapses into melancholy.

This always seemed to satisfy teachers and neighbors. Just last month Mrs. Leek, from next door, had stopped by to tell Tony she'd seen Stacey sitting near the school bus stop, her face in her hands, weeping.

"She looked so upset," Mrs. L. told him. "Is she okay?"

"It's Evelyn," he'd explained. "The poor girl still thinks of her now and then. As do I, Mrs. L."

He'd managed then to spring a tear or two, and the good Mrs. Leek patted his arm and said, "Of course. That must be it. Tell me," she added, "does she have anyone special to talk to?"

"Of course," he had reassured her. "Only the very best, Mrs.L."

Later, when he asked Stacey about the incident, she had denied crying like that, and said that she'd just been exhausted from staying up so late, for which she blamed him.

At this point the main trail continued on toward the creek, while an unmarked trail branched off to wind up a steep hill with the overly grand name of Piney Mountain. Tony could see the two of them about half way up, leaning into the climb. He and Stacey had hiked this trail dozens, if not hundreds, of times. There was an overlook at the summit that she never tired of, a flat, rocky outcrop that gave a spectacular view of the lake and valley. For hours they would sit and watch the hawks circling overhead, gasping at the predators' occasional plummet toward an unsuspecting squirrel or chipmunk in a clearing far below.

"Come on," he now heard Stacey say, reaching back to help pull Peterson over a fallen tree. The teacher appeared winded, and laughed

at himself as the girl yanked him up the hill. They paused, and he pulled her close to him, and again they kissed. This time Tony felt the anger boil up inside him.

On those rare occasions when he'd contemplated it, Tony had assumed his daughter would give herself up to some awkward, gangly boy with a pimply face and unkempt hair. He'd always thought he would have a sort of grace period during which he would remain the primary figure in her life, the mature man to whom she had to listen and obey. Now she was involved—and, by the looks of it, *deeply* involved—with another older man, another figure of authority. Recent examples of Stacey's unusual behavior came to him, signs that he hadn't recognized for what they truly were. She'd been more shy than usual, for example, especially around bedtime. When he went into her room—a ritual of theirs for several years now—she turned her face away from him and pulled the covers up to her chin. She would then offer up only her cheek for a kiss, and that reluctantly. He'd assumed it was just another of her mood swings, and that things would soon return to normal, but now he wasn't so sure. Other instances of her changed behavior, like the shower incident of the other day, made much more sense in this light, but to contemplate them now, he found, was too painful.

He continued to follow them at a discreet distance. The climb was unusually difficult, perhaps because he was so agitated. His breathing was labored, his legs burning as he neared the summit. There, the terrain leveled off as the trail wound through a thickly wooded area leading toward the overlook. As his breathing slowly returned to normal, Tony fantasized about sneaking up on the two lovers and surprising them. There would be the satisfaction of seeing their startled faces, but what beyond that? If he'd brought his camera he could have taken photos to show to the school's administrators. That would teach Peterson a lesson. He also considered approaching from behind and bringing a rock down on the teacher's head. Everyone would understand. He could see the headlines: OUTRAGED FATHER KILLS PREDATOR TEACHER. No jury of parents would convict him. But he would lose Stacey for sure if he did anything even remotely drastic. Like her mother, she could be vindictive. Not long ago she'd held out her affections for days after he had criticized her clothes in front of a friend. Perhaps the best thing to do was to wait this out.

As he made his way to the overlook, Tony could no longer hear

them talking. He worried that they might have gone off-trail, but then he heard the sound of his daughter's laughter up ahead. He couldn't remember the last time he'd heard her laughing like this, the notes rising the way they did when she was particularly pleased. He thought of summer evenings on their deck, devouring ice cream sundaes and telling bad jokes, or watching Marx Brothers movies late into the night with a huge bowl of popcorn balanced on their knees.

He positioned himself behind a large boulder, just this side of the clearing. He peeked around the corner and saw that Stacey was sitting on the lip of the overlook, leaning back against Peterson's chest. The teacher held her close, his arms wrapped around her. Tony's heart beat rapidly. He and Stacey had often sat this very way, when they were reasonably sure that no one would come upon them. He would rest his chin on her head and take in the scent of her freshly shampooed hair. He remembered the day they'd watched a slowly approaching thunderstorm, not caring that they would get caught in a downpour before they could possibly get back home. The clouds had crept in from the northwest like a thick, gray quilt being pulled across the sky, jagged bolts of lightning streaking down to touch the tops of the rolling hills around the valley. She had turned to him then and said that she loved him and would never, ever leave. He could not remember ever being happier. They'd laughed all the way home that day, the rain falling cool and hard, their clothes completely soaked through. At the house they'd tossed them off and, still giggling, wrapped themselves in warm, fluffy towels.

"I've been thinking a lot about it," he heard Peterson say, "and I've decided it's time to do something about..." He sighed, then said, "About the situation."

Even though they were facing the other way, looking out toward the valley, Tony could tell from how his daughter stiffened that her face had gone stony. Sometimes, when she was upset, all expression would drain from her otherwise emotionally transparent face. He'd seen it hundreds of times.

"God, I never should've said anything," Stacey said, her voice nearly trapped in her throat.

"Are you kidding? You were ready to explode. You had to tell *someone*."

Peterson stroked Stacey's long hair. She hadn't cut it in ages, and spoke of one day shearing it all off to donate to cancer patients.

Sometimes, fresh from the shower, she would allow Tony to gently untangle the knots in her hair with his hands as she sat watching TV in her cotton pajamas.

When Stacey didn't say anything more, Peterson said, "You should at least go talk to someone. A professional."

"You mean a shrink? Daddy doesn't believe in them. He says it's a racket."

"He *would* say that."

"Would I tell this shrink about *you*? That might not go over too well, either."

Peterson stopped stroking her hair and leaned back on his hands. As if to comfort him, Stacey reached back and touched his cheek.

"I did go once," she said. "After my mom died. I was having nightmares and my doctor insisted."

In that instant, Tony heard again his daughter's shrill cries from her bedroom. The nightmares had been relentless and vivid. Every night, visions of her dying mother, emaciated and hairless, her bloodshot eyes wide as she tried to call to her from an open mouth full of rotting teeth. Barely had Stacey's head hit the pillow before she began shouting in her sleep, until one night he just crawled into bed with her and held her. It was the only thing that helped.

"He wanted me to come every week," Stacey told Peterson, "but daddy wouldn't hear of it."

"It must have been awful," Peterson said, wrapping his arms around her.

She turned to look at him, and Tony had to duck behind the rock to avoid being seen.

"It's all over now," she said. Then there was a long silence during which Tony assumed they were kissing. He sat back against the rock and looked up at the sky. It was a deep blue with wispy, shredded-cotton clouds. Tall pines shuddered in the mild breeze.

He should have seen this coming. Stacey's resistance to him, her distant manner, the tears at the bus stop—it all added up. Then, the other day, when he went into the bathroom to shave while she was showering—something he'd done countless times—she shouted at him to go away, her whole body tensing behind the glass shower door, her voice sharp with outrage. He explained that he'd just come in to shave, that he needed to get to work, but she wouldn't hear of it. "Get out!" she'd cried. "I don't want you in here with me!"

At the time he'd thought, again, that she was simply going through one of her bashful phases. Sometimes, if a pimple flared up on her face, say, she would hold back, cover herself up, worried that he might think her ugly. Now that she was filling out so nicely, with a voluptuous figure much like her mother's, perhaps she was feeling shy and awkward about her body. But now he could see what was really going on.

He leaned back hard against the boulder. He wondered where and how often the two of them would meet. Perhaps Peterson had an apartment near the school, and when Stacey was supposed to be at the library she was actually with him. They probably took long drives together, the way Tony and she used to do, and parked in desolate areas where no one would see them. So many fond memories were being displaced by this new information that Tony found himself pushing the back of his head into the rock until it hurt, the sharp edges digging into his scalp.

Finally, he heard them scrabbling to their feet. He peeked around the boulder to see them holding hands and taking one last look at the valley spread out below. A hawk hung high above the trees, barely moving, like a kite on a string. He remembered the day he and Stacey were hiking through the woods and came upon a small clearing where some trees had burned, their charred, craggy trunks rising like stalagmites from the ground. A squirrel was perched atop one of these trunks, gnawing on a nut. Overhead, a hawk was stealthily watching from the branch of an intact maple tree. "Watch this," he'd whispered, but, seeing what was bound to happen, Stacey had run toward the squirrel shouting, "Shoo! Shoo! Run away!" The startled squirrel high-tailed it into the brush, and the disappointed hawk lifted off and flew away.

"Ready?" Peterson asked, and, still holding hands, they crossed the clearing and headed down the far side of the hill. When they were gone, Tony walked around the boulder and stood at the edge of the overlook. Far off to the west hung a bank of dark clouds, the air beneath it a hazy curtain of rain. He picked up a stone and tossed it over the edge. He heard it clatter through the tree branches, the sound echoing across the valley. He squatted down and placed his palm on the ground where his daughter had just been sitting. Still warm. Below, the lake glittered and, all around it, the roofs of cottages poked up through the trees.

By now Stacey and Mr. Peterson were far down the hill, almost to the lake, but Tony remained where he was. He was surprised to feel a wetness on his face, but he didn't wipe the tears away.

He thought of that day long ago when he and Stacey had sat on this very spot watching the storm approach. He'd known then, of course, that what she'd said wasn't true, but he had always liked pretending.

The wind was picking up now, rustling the carpet of trees in the valley below. From far off came the rumble of thunder. Remembering how he'd held his daughter tight in his arms, he sat and let his feet dangle over the edge of the overlook, and waited for the rain.



Ronald Wardall 1937-2006

RONALD WARDALL

TO TOM, HIS FATHER'S ONLY CHILD

Tom, your insistence on living was not reasonable.
Wiser heads than you or I knew
two pounds, four ounces

was not enough and your lungs were undeveloped,
though you breathed for
sixteen hours

as hard as you could, and never grew to see me fail,
to ask a question, become angry,
or in my presence shy,

but worked like a miner and never learned anything
I could have taught you about
not being brave,

and though my will was not enough, with time I would
have learned from you, and it
might have grown

to match your own. "A handful," the nurse said, I never
held, and you will stay, Tom,
for as long as he,

who has still to lose his memory, though science being
science is right, you were like your father,
Tom, not reasonable.

RONALD WARDALL

ELEGY FOR THOSE WHOSE NAMES I DO NOT KNOW

After all this time it still feels unnatural even with practice,
I mean being both alone and still. For me an American
born in the 20th century in a small town with an Indian name,
some silence seems good and then the quiet turns
into a space where one should begin a job.

The voices of fathers haunt like the sound of an approaching train
from a place where no tracks were ever laid, though
the letters from the dead I saved are patient
and treat me as if I were a long work in progress, their blood
waters me, the breeze that washed over them

becomes my breath, their visions my history, their failures
my own, their very absence a place for seed. But I'm confounded by
how young my soul stays while I keep discovering to
whom or to what I should answer and I suspect
it is to all those who tried to live

just, gentle and conscious lives, while striking their own spark in
the long night so they could see for a moment time wash
over the river and I wish that more might
have been like Huck and Jim while being swept
along under the living and dead stars, lonesome together.

RONALD WARDALL

A COMING TOGETHER

This afternoon everything speaks the same language,
the rain in the garden, the piled books waiting,
Dinah Washington doing The Blue Gardenia
the pastel of the old man
pulling the wagon full of bricks up the cobbled street.

Of course it may or may not be a good thing to smell the gas,
to put off taking a nap,
to wake while drowning,
to buy a ticket for the night train whistling across the great
plains, to kiss and be kissed as much as I like.

I try not to let him out of my sight for long, the ever lurking Iago
inside me who lives in perpetual jealousy of joy,
particularly my own. The fan steady as an old retainer
goes on expelling its modest breath
and it's time

to test my agility with the razor, to shave the warts and
fling away the blood, to be merciless as a foghorn,
to get up early and go to strange places, to move closer
to the crunching machine,
to appear suddenly at random collisions.

RONALD WARDALL

MY FATHER DIED OF MANY WOUNDS

My father died of many wounds: of an aneurism
and careless friendships, of cancer and unexamined dreams,
of courage, coffee and cigarettes,
of blindness and Black and White Scotch.

He died from learning early how to be alone
and of trying hard to pretend he wasn't
in company. He died from the things
he didn't know and from the things he did.

He died from the growing paralysis
of age and from the barbell weight of his stoicism.
He died when unable to move, he knew he'd be sent
to the hospital for good.

In his last night in his own bed, he died from his never spent pride
and from knowing the time.
Because he was who he was he needed nothing
but to will it and close his eyes.

RONALD WARDALL

A TUNE REMEMBERED

The lion cub held his brother down with his left front paw
and casually chewed on his ear for the familiar
flavor of his blood. On this lazy afternoon I think I know
how both of them felt.

Keeping inside his studio in occupied Paris, Picasso painted violent
knives and forks while in Spain the work of Matisse was filled
with soft orange and yellow harmonies,
bright and tinkled as a rich child's room.

Spain was Franco's haunted castle, but Matisse made his home
in the inviolate country of color.
And sometimes I can see the stark winter limbs sway
playing tic-tac-toe with the cold sun on a sunless day in June.

The past becomes a tune that will not leave, contradictions melt together
the matador kneels in front of the bull and proposes marriage.
The Russian winter is peopled
with volunteers and Jesus punches a time card.

The open belly seals itself seamless as a held kiss and in the rain a truck
switches gears and death is the new bride,
taking a last look in the mirror before she enters while
I mediate between a straight razor and a peach.

Like a turtle I can without drama carry my home and in the long annals
of blood and waste, to have once stood looking down
on Venice, to ever have been adored— And now too close
for maneuvers, to be bold in the dark.

RONALD WARDALL

PASSPORT

Even as a boy he was aware of the skull behind
each face and had a need to discover coherencies
in different seasons and goodbyes.

He left home with strange stories and a gift for chance
as if he rode a smiling horse, knowing
he'd drunk blue spider blood and ready

to race a wooden-wheeled wagon for the dust and noise,
or hole up with a jar of peanut butter
in one of the abandoned cities of the plains.

He was not born for a mantra of loss in the Laundromat,
not ready for dirt-tongued resignation
and anxious to taste the Saragossa sea.

Later he learned to care about Indiana for
its goose feather mattresses and long golden falls
with their spilled inheritance of leaves.

The sun in Buenos Aires was smooth as an open razor,
the shadows in the cafés quiet enough
to content the customers living and dead.

And in Prague he found gods that come without ears
and stand with the dignity of great stones
making it unnecessary even to whisper.

RONALD WARDALL

TRYING TO DEAL WITH DEPRESSION WITHOUT THE AID OF DRUGS

He respected children for the foreknowledge they reveal in their morbid games and the elderly for the growing humility with which they recognize their helplessness.

He noticed gradually that his daily life was beginning to look more and more like war, war between battles— islands of great clutter surrounded by empty plains.

The eyes he tried to use were hung with scrim thinner than rice paper. He needed to find where in the ordinary the mythic weights stood. But he could only see shadows

through a fog, and though a man who is sensitive enough to shadows can break the bank at Monte Carlo, earn an honored place on Day-Time TV, start a new religion,

even possibly make his way across Manhattan without a cane, the price he pays will be that he must always be less than candid and worse, cultivate cautious habits.

He trusted plain cotton in summer, good wool in winter, and beyond that he seemed to whirl in an unstable current, so sudden floods and crashes appeared normal,

CONTINUED

any effort at even a modest assumption, comic, and if it seemed a necessary habit, was so only in the sense of a rabbit's foot, St. Christopher's Medal, or prayer beads.

Life in Brussels seemed to be continuing at its own pace while his world rattled along in fear and love, pride and futility, stubbornly—even in its decay—becoming.

RONALD WARDALL

GENERATIONS PASSING THROUGH WINTERS

It's good driving the dirt roads in the Valley
in winter seeing the working wind mills
and fresh painted barns, looking
on work that will persist through
all the hard-jawed snows.

Photographers once shot smoke stacks
cutting clouds apart, but then there's
a more quiet thing, subversive as nature
and slow enough
to outlast a long life, a vision

of a small farmer large enough to last more
than a generation, even take
a town by the ear and squeeze,
or capture a strong son,
and change the way a man sees himself,

hears the town barber say his name, tastes his job,
works hours as long as light, sits
in a chair in the warm kitchen planning for
richer soil on the north forty
after he's gone,

thinking about tomorrow's job, making his lists,
listening when the grass decides to stand up
under two ton drifts,
even enjoying his aching feet
while living in the neighborhood

CONTINUED

of the daily miracle and decides one iced Sunday
to put on his old army boots
and goes out to touch a black
frozen branch
and, not even surprised, picks an apple.

GLENN SHELTON

A LITTLE APOCALYPSE

Sometimes it's best to dream in the city
where it makes sense that I need
to thumb my nose at puffed skyscrapers.

But in the open country,
and in the countryside of my eyes and spirit,
and in the country of your feathered heart,
dreaming is dangerous.

Fear is closer in spaces
without streetlights. We need
the headlights against cosmic blackness.

Last night I dreamt you dropped diamonds
from the open sky.
You threw them into a dying fire.
I ran into the dark forest.



Spiel: *Bad Boys*

GLENN SHELDON

DISRESPECTING DEATH

Our horoscope today is wrong:
we are not Brazilian archers
shining in the post-Portuguese sky.

The view from my porch cannot accommodate
all the stars and futile kisses.
Let's alphabetize our scars

and weep for ourselves. "Cheer-up,
Cheerily" plays on the radio.
The constellations have become abstract:

uninvited guests, carolers
smuggled through a window,
then caged.

BARBARA BLATNER

WORDS GIVE US JUSTICE

justice gives us words
language is that hunger

what is between us
what balance between our eyes
we fortify with kisses.

today
the lilac blossoms
are dark gold nuggets
speaking a late
syntax

the baby pine is flecked
with petals from the bush
spreading over it

a bee travels,
sound
comes into
the yard

these moments as gentle
as you touch my face
your soft eyes open
before and after
the dimness.

the cats roam in the
leaves, investigating
the same
over and over

words like flesh
knit
or fall,
seem to have their own breath

so we come back to
the old
the new

like the cats
in circle of

BARBARA BLATNER

FLOWERS AND BIRDS

collude in beauty
uninstructed

through the clock
the great rounding
delivers us

language is fragments
we pick up
we turn
over and again

the soul or whatever you call it
in words
looks hard from its traces

I look to your eyes
for retrieval
and get back the light of
a smile

for you too
collude in beauty
an edge where we go

only to and no more

the light
I fiddle
from your eyes

where we do not
go
everything is waiting

BARBARA BLATNER

ON THE VERGE

there's still time—

that's
where I want you.

mist rises from the bushes,
ribbons of grass bind
my toes, skies flow
over my head—

below,
the city, multi-passionate
in all particulars
is laid out.

last night in our closeness
words were spoken.
the rest was up to you

you kissed
my nipple, a deep draught
you pulled me
out

the city lay below
grey
pinnacles
cresting.

again its silence drew us together
your mouth
was one of its
doors

(Published in BIG SCREAM, 2003)

TED JONATHAN

GOD'S HONEY

Bred to shop, she bled on God.
And was guided by His signs to her.

exquisite
gold blizzard
woolen curls
liquid sky
blue eyes she
stood long arms
sides holy
bible tight
in right hand
pearl white silk
button-down
blouse unbut-
toned shawl-like
over nar-
row shoulders
draped upper
back slack sleeves
fell past slight
breasts slender
presence weight-
less angel
sequined cream
body shirt—
black velvet
hip huggers—
naked neck
natural
scented swan—

Could tell, by talk she'd talk,
daddy was a millionaire—
Could tell, by her walk in my heart,
she should have been around
when Jesus walked—following him—

A sparrow on each of her bony shoulders—

TED JONATHAN

UPTOWN EXPRESS

The connecting door in the back of the car clack-bangs open. And an expressionless Asian man, covered like a Christmas tree, with assorted junk, such as glow-in-the-dark yo-yos and ringing kiddy cell-phones emerges. To trumpet his presence, he shakes a brain-banging rattle. And advances cautiously through strap-hanging passengers. Amid whom, I stand.

As he passes I'm tempted to stop him, to tell him how that blood-curdling rattle is exactly what I've been searching for, for the greater part of my adult life. But I restrain myself, realizing he's just another man, like myself, doing what he needs to survive.

A walkman wired kid maintains his pigeon head bop while gesturing to the man for batteries.

Eighty-Sixth and Lex., Manhattan's Upper East Side, is next. It's the stop before Harlem on this Bronx bound number 5 subway. Uptown Express.

It is at this Eighty-Sixth Street stop that I can always assure myself of my psychic powers. I merely will the command, and every white person in the car pours out. Tonight is no different.

At times, I've been tempted to shout that command, "All white fuckers off!" But I'm adjusted too well, or I'm too tightly adjusted. Depends on how you look at it .

The last white man—I am—and maneuver to a mid-car seat vacated by a trim yuppie girl with horsy good looks and a smart black leather briefcase.

It's 8:00 p.m., and only a few people need to stand.

After scanning all for psychotic vibes and untreatable tuberculosis, I deem it safe to shut my tired eyes for the few minutes between stops. Unless, I hear the quick crescendo clack of a connecting door sliding open.

I need to see who gets on at each stop and who enters from between cars.

Surprises, no.

Eyes shut I space, for what could very well be a personal best ten minutes straight, before the train screeches a metallic bone chill into the Harlem station. Where, we come to a jerking halt. More people exit than enter.

Subsequent stops are up the Bronx and local. Frequent and numerous. Eyes open.

A restless teenage boy passes quickly through the length of the car into another and then probably into another.

The empty orange can of Sunkist orange soda rolling on the floor stops by me.

I shove it aside with my foot and looking downward am reminded of the bruised condition of the knuckles on my right hand. On my lap rest my hands.

How the fuck do you bloody your knuckles punching a wall—when you're asleep?

Three stops—in ten minutes—later, we emerge from the bleak tunnel into the night light, high on the el, pulling into Jackson Avenue.

I kick the bruised knuckles out of my head.

At Jackson, the doors to the platform and the connecting door on my far left bang open in unison.

I take a couple seconds to see who's coming and going before looking left, to the back end of the car, where stands a five-feet-tall troll with chest-length, bushy, charcoal-colored hair.

The troll, a female, holds a long red umbrella. Mutters incoherent Spanish and attempts—without warning—to thrust the point of the long umbrella through the forehead of a seated lady, over whom, she stands. Umbrella bayonet.

The seated black lady raises a forearm and blocks the shockingly out-of-the-blue but sluggish attack. Ashen, she sits frozen.

Gripping the umbrella with both hands, like a bayonet, the huntress faces the rest of the car, lengthwise. Outside of yours truly there are only a few others in the car. An old lady seated opposite me, and a couple down the other end absorbed in conversation. The old lady stares at me. I stare at the troll.

As the seemingly wind-blown dark cloud that is troll approaches I swallow the air psychotic.

I remove my wallet from my back right pocket. Over me, the troll now stands. Umbrella alert, I fix a menacing—don't MAKE ME do my duty—glare on the troll and flash my blue Chase Master Card at her—

Terrified, the troll flees into the car up ahead, pausing momentarily, to poke the orange soda can with the tip of her long red umbrella bayonet.

Sighing deep relief, the old lady seated across from me launches into non-stop Spanish at her new best friend—me. She needs to, to expel her troll induced remnant terror. I understand, but I do not understand much Spanish.

Three stops later, at Simpson, she's still at it. And I continue to automatically nod respectful acknowledgement. Although, I'm no longer really listening. When I was listening, I was able to pick up on her strong feelings about two things. One, her desire to retire to Puerto Rico. And two, her dislike of Dominicans.

In the shelter of her forceful chatter, I space...

At East Tremont the old lady rises to exit. In five or so more minutes I'll be getting off. She exits after we exchange good wishes. On rolls the train.

I spot the woman who was attacked by the troll now sitting in the front-end corner of the car. I did not see her move. If the troll returns it will be through that connecting front-door.

I stand, zip my jacket, and walk to the front. There, strap-hanging left-handed, I lean back on the door from which I'll exit. Kill minutes here.

Glance down at my bruised knuckles and it becomes clear. Dream life reflects the human experience. The human experience must be the reflection of yet another dream. The wall had it coming.

Take the few steps over to the woman whom the troll attacked. Tell her I'm real glad she didn't get hurt.

"Bitch comes back I'll light her hair on fire!"

I nod approvingly. That explains the yellow Bic lighter wrapped in her right fist.

The conductor calls, "Morris Park!" Me.

Skip over the gap onto the platform soon as the doors slide open. Into the night. Under a blank sky.

DAVID LAWRENCE

SECOND COMING

There will be no second coming because
the first was a fraud.
If you can believe in religion
you can believe in me.
That would be chancy when God watches
everything you do.
Or doesn't.
Who cares?

Whatever has gone vanishes in hayseed
and the hay on the wagon ride
hides bony hands.
So what passes is yet to come again
and will only then if we retreat
to before the first
coming.

We are all dying on some second tomorrow
without coming back to predict
death's induction.
Time, that invisible magic marker,
writes our names on footballs
before they are punted
over the bleachers.

ROGER SMITH

SPIDERWEB

The spider pits his web
that is echo that is a veil
that is his home.

It is all his concern why
he borrows his web in a place
so unconceived to it. A web
so unthere and ending up no more.

A little more than a thought of air.
A denting wherever air breathes.
A billow of one thing's perceiving.

Some say it is how he sees
and has written the sun on its sunlight,
but the web seems to understand more
when with the gloom.

It's almost like living out of the fictional,
or tending a caught piece of smoke, or
gardening a scarf of breath.

The trek of the spider as upon
a whisper of just his memory. Gossamer strands
emulating and tracing and trading nerve.

You can't touch it without it dissolving,
without it making something of your touching
that was never its nature nor concern.

I've seen raindrops stranded in it
like jewels bankrupted of ever touching earth.
Seen fat snowflakes held from ever donning.
Seen mist confuse and thicken
among its woofly strands, and any evening
try to flesh over this skeletal
for a rest for them both.

But funny how some things live almost.



Spiel: *Racks*

SHEILA WELCH

OF THE LAMP

And who's to say this lamp,
that sits on the table between us,
doesn't have conflicts
of say — purpose —
for instance,
to light or not light this room
where we sit,
(oblivious to this debate),
listening to the leaves
making their way down the road.

And what of the lampshade — yes —
no doubt being so close
is probably afflicted with some
similar inner questioning,
to match decors (or not) for continuity,
to filter, to represent a taste,
to sit calm against great heat,
to melt down.

What of the occupants who lived here?
Who purchased this lamp
while driving out one Sunday
and happening upon a yard sale.

Or the lamp maker —
devoted to the vocation
of lamp making,
while showering,
while making love,
while making snowflake cut outs with his boy.

CONTINUED

Perhaps a proud accomplishment
for the lamp maker,
which he took home to his wife,
who sits in a house full of lamps,
failed and otherwise,
which day by day she gives away,
unsuspected.

Or, of the two of us,
in the library with
banker's lamps,
me biding my time
looking up words in the dictionary
which is where I first found you
there on the page,

smelling of the lamp.

SHARON KWIK

REUNION OBSESSION

Every once in awhile I think about highschool. About Danny, the tow-headed boy a foot shorter than me who's locker was next to mine, who used to pick up and give my books and binders a lascivious lick when I placed them on the carpeted floor to open my combination lock. About our drama teacher, my mentor, who nurtured my inner writer and was arrested for having a sex with two of his 15-year-old students in the portable classroom. About the tradition of square dancing in the gym the two weeks before Christmas—the only gym classes I ever enjoyed. About the embarrassing paragraph I wrote to accompany my graduating yearbook photo— *Sharon spent most of the year in the darkroom, not necessarily printing pictures. After she graduates she hopes to drive around Europe in a red Corvette.* My highschool had a number of cliques—popular, geeks, brains, jocks, drama nerds, new wavers, burn-outs. I didn't belong to any of them. And although our graduating year was large, over two hundred students, for the four years I spent there I walked alone and was lonely. Not long after my graduation I tossed my yearbooks in the trash and moved to Paris, vowing never to attend a reunion. Until I found this in my email inbox this morning:

Hi Sharon,

I hope that I am contacting the right Sharon Kwik!

Its Erin from North Van writing to say and to let you know that we are planning our 20 year grad reunion Sept. 16, 2006 at Lonsdale Quay. You were on a list of people 'missing in action' and I remember what a fantastic photographer you were when Simone and I stayed with you for a few days in Paris MANY years ago. I suspected (and hoped) that you had fulfilled your dream of being a photographer so I googled you. Sure enough, I found your website.

If any of this makes sense, please write me back. If not, I hope you have a great day anyway!!!

Cheers,
Erin

Ah the flattery! Not only did Erin—a ‘popular’ girl from my highschool, actively seek me out even ‘Googling’ my name, but she remembered me as a ‘fantastic photographer.’ Who could say ‘no’ to an invitation like that? Never mind the fact that Erin and Simone’s week long stay with me in my Paris bedsit had been a severe disappointment, as once they left I never heard from them again. In school they’d had been friendly in the way one is to a neighbor down the street, but we’d never spent any time together outside of the classroom.

I’m now obsessed with my highschool reunion only six months away. The organizers have set up a webpage for the Grads of 1986 with a page on which one can write in to say what one’s doing now and attach current photos. I’ve pored over the online album of yearbook photos, trying to remember names, amazed that although I recalled being the only non-white person in my entire highschool that in truth there were also three Chinese, one Korean, one Japanese and one Pakistani in my graduating year. I’ve pored over the website from the expensive preferred accommodations at a North Vancouver hotel and the restaurant/lounge where the event is to be held. Marveled at the family photo of one of the event organizers, a former star football player. How boringly suburban he looks, how overweight and middle-aged. Still living in North Vancouver. Coaching football to local highschool students. I read the as yet sparse guestbook, and check the growing update page three times a day for new additions. I have yet to put my own name on that list. I’m not so sure I want people to know what I’m doing now.

Although I’d believed I’d risen above that part of my past, I still think of the ‘popular’ girls from my highschool with resentment 20 years later. Even though I don’t regret my life now. If anything I celebrate it. Had I not felt like such an outcast in highschool I probably wouldn’t have ended up living in New York. In an era of poetic justice, the outcasts have become the arbiters of what’s cool, what’s hip, what to wear, think and do. They’re the inventors of this era’s high tech devices, they’re the musicians on your iPod; they’re

the designers of the must-wear item of the season; they're the style mavens who decide who crosses that velvet rope into the club of the moment; they're the authors that create the moniker for our generation. The outcasts. The freaks. The faggots. The fat kids. The kids on welfare. The ones with the 'wrong' hair, clothes and bodies. But their uncoolness has become today's hot item. The heroin chic skinniness, the retro ugly fashion, the dyed black Joan Jett shags for both boys and girls.

As for the 'popular' people, what became of them? The football players, the cheerleaders, the blond, blue-eyed, big titted, beefcakes, the ones with money, The ones who got brand new cars on their sixteenth birthdays. The ones who never sprouted a pimple. The ones who always wore the de rigeur Adidas and Levis. The ones whose parents went out of town, and threw *invitation only* wild parties. The ones who taunted the 'teacher's pet.' The ones who put shit in the 'fag's' locker and set fire to his coat as he walked down the hallway. The ones who sneered as we drove past in my mom's beat up old station wagon, with our braces, headgear, orthopaedic shoes, effeminate mannerisms, permed hair, hand-me-down clothes.

So far they're listed as two phone company employees, one management consultant, one paralegal, one crown prosecutor, one service director, one financial consultant, one department manager, two teachers, one stay at home mom, one product marketing manager, one territory manager, and finally and most interestingly to me, one video artist who lives in Prague. Most are married with kids. The two single men sport eighties' goatees, thinning hair and beer guts.

However as critical as my assessment may be, they're not ashamed of their lives. By their accounts they seem proud and happy. And isn't that the most important thing? And yet I am reluctant to post *my* information on said website. To say that I'm a stay at home mom, unpublished author, used-to-be photographer, with one beautiful child, loving partner and living in New York.

What is a highschool reunion for? To reunite with old friends, reminisce on the past, catch up and perhaps re-ignite or forge new friendships. Maybe that's what it is for those select few who enjoyed highschool. For the rest of us, or rather for me, it's retribution. A chance to return and say, 'You were wrong, I'm not a loser, I'm a raging success.'" And have visual evidence of that success. How sad.

To care what those people think. To care what anyone thinks. Who am I living my life for anyway?

I'm not going to my highschool reunion. I hope to post my current information on the website without embellishment or bitterness. I hope to move on with living my life, for me.

MARGARET BARBOUR GILBERT

FROM *SUGARING OFF*

II.

30. AUTUMN

91

There was a period during that autumn in which I tried to make it through three weeks on \$20. I lived on 99 cent White Rose Macaroni and Cheese and Ramen Noodle soup. Once I accidentally found a dollar bill on the sidewalk. Then I found another one the following day. Soon, I began to walk the streets looking for dollar bills, but I never found any more. I took a job selling stockings and jewelry at Saks Fifth Avenue. Mrs. Otto Preminger had actually bought a pair of nude-colored nylon stockings from me. I recognized the famous name on her credit card and struck up a conversation, hoping she would recommend me for a part in her husband's next movie. I could have played the role of St. Joan beautifully, I told her because I thought I looked a lot like Jean Seberg who had played Joan in Otto Preminger's movie. Saks was my fourth store. As a sales girl, I had worked in Bloomingdale's, Lord and Taylor, Bergdorf Goodman's, and now Saks Fifth Avenue. William Faulkner had worked as a clerk at Lord & Taylor before he began to write his great novels, and that made this store seem especially attractive to me. I would work in a store for a short time at the Jewelry Counter until I was suspected of stealing the jewelry. Then I would move on. Usually, I took only the expensive antique rings. But, in Bloomingdale's, I saw a short black jacket that I had to have and walked out with it on. I confiscated a ring with a gorgeous garnet the size of a quarter at Lord and Taylor, and another time, a real amethyst on a silver band. At Saks, I found an antique diamond ring that I took to replace my grandmother's \$3,000 Victorian diamond engagement ring, that I had lost in a New York City taxi when I had first come to New York. It had just slipped off my finger one night, while I was on my way home reading a Thomas Hardy novel. But I had never gotten over it. It felt like losing my

birthright or my inheritance. It had belonged to my grandmother and had been given to her by my grandfather, an Alabama State Senator. At night, I would sit at home and look at all the beautiful rings on my fingers. The rings gave me a confidence about myself and made me feel elegant as though something lost had been replaced. They were the jewels I should have been born with but wasn't. When day came, I would hide them away in little boxes and be on my way to work. At night, I sat in the dark with all the stolen rings on my fingers from the different stores I had worked in as a sales girl until I was fired from the next job. One night, I dreamed I walked out of Bloomingdale's with a shopping cart of stolen items. I sold the stolen goods on the street like some dime-store criminal. The editor of *Time Magazine* saw me and wanted to interview me, but I was too busy.

EDGAR CAGE

NORTH

The hotel empty except for the spider
In my bed, and the fat kid
On the sixth floor smoking cigarettes.
I trudge past his room
Where I hear heavy breathing
As he plucks the notes to Oceania
On his unplugged guitar.

Winter comes. Each room with its view
of the frozen beach,
Seagulls pulling sky over the roof,
The boardwalk where two men decide
They're lobsters and never come back.

The fat kid drags his guitar down the fire escape.
By dusk he's gone and it starts
Snowing under my blanket.

The clouds fall so hard I see only static
beyond the windows.
Last century's hair in the carpeted footprints.

I don't eat. I make up names for the radios growing
At this latitude. I stalk the pigeons exploring
cracks in the ceiling, marking my way
With dry potassium broth.

The wind stays close. It leads me to its room,
All of the clothes nearly human
And devoured in their beds.



Guy R. Beining: *Gaseous Light*

A LITTLE GOLDEN MAN

The basement had scabies and passed them to you.
They thought it was chicken pox—
I called you a chicken.
My apology was lost among scratching and drought skin.

Misdiagnosis swelled your refusal of western medicine.
No aspirin for a coagulated heart bent from the auras
of moonstones or amethysts or the thirteenth day.
Sworn off is the rosy odor of calamine lotion.

Could yoga subside the pain? *Breath in, breath out*—
defiant toxins would not follow suit. Red leaf orchards
sprayed across your limbs and shed scarlet bitter fruit,

spotted and irresistible to touch.

How many times had I held your hand?
My forearm itched. I prayed I was rebirthing my winter coat.

Days, eras, eons later, your weakness is evident.
Pot holes freckle your limbs and cost effectively add
new decoration to hundreds of dollars of self mutilation.
This makes you smile— it makes me want to connect
the dots and watch the constellations battle for attention
from the weak stomached and poor minded teenagers
not as cool as you. People just don't understand.

The rebuilding human body is so beautiful.
(as is the process, as is a woman—as is that woman)

CONTINUED

Do your crimson train tracks and planetary rings still tingle
her toes and fingers?

even the one branded by another man's ring?

It is a shame you've addicted to her salve
for she is western as the Earth spinning backwards.
(as are your thoughts, as are your intentions)

Do not think and you will not feel—

Was that from the Bible
or some other bastard long-winded version of the Tao?
Your sodden brain, searching for that vicious squeeze—
watch it shower the floor with furious infatuation.

How can something so intangible and fabricated hurt
exuberantly more than a tattoo needle or branding iron?
Those scars are not nearly as attractive. They lack healing.

And so you go lose yourself in the basement
to decollate every blood sucking parasite before further
fission can overrun the dank air with damn, dirty scabies.
Armed with rubber gloves and scorn, you rearrange
the boxes into luxuriant piles of junk and disaster.

Z.M. HODSON

MY GIRL

Someone buy Jesus a shot better than salvation
so the following can slide under shade and guise.

Where is my coat hanger?
My swift kick to the abdomen?
My exit.

The irony of greatness is its misery.
This book of hallowed poets—six dead by their own hand.
None used their jerkied hands to do so.
My people.
My enemies.
Extinct.

Should I match my plight to theirs? Our problems compare
self-inflicted.
Unseen.
Permanent.

Strawberries on flesh born slick and furry—
leathered by worldly temptation and no moderation.
Chaffed.
Bleeding.
Why won't my girl bleed?

A phone call from a parking lot three suburbs away—
seems like another veracity. I can hear the echoes
of the cancer-ridden wheelchairs behind her.
Creaking.
Crying.
Soon to be relieved.

CONTINUED

But my girl is not dying—quite the opposite. She toasts
a mitochondrion cocktail.

It resembles an olive.

And maybe the pimento is one of them.
The six ghosts—acquiescent of the populace they robbed—
requesting readmittance.

I could not live with that more successful child.
Suppose God built a universe even he couldn't find
his way home in.

Infinite.

Perfect.

Would he end it or himself? The teacher—
surpassed by the student.

Not on my watch.

Z.M. HODSON

CAPE GIRARDEAU, 1999

Wicked palpitations caromed across the New Madrid fault.

The boot heel was exiled

annexed by Arkansas and converted
to a prison where the inmates wade for walnuts in creeks
full of cottonmouths and snapping turtles.

I had been there once with a woman I will love no longer
and a friend who visits only on every third New Year's Eve.
We slept in beds that felt like tables and were quarantined
by the sneaking glances of the wed-locked.

They checked our coats at the door—which I found quite odd
because I hadn't yet my evening tea and I try to stash a spare
lemon wedge in my handkerchief pocket for such an occasion.

I pondered if the inmates would burn our coats and the spare tables
to form a swatch of char cloth—to father another fire
and cast smoke signals to the spectators in the big city.

This made me laugh, but God pitied the criminals.
He made the moon sing to them a calm refrain on wings
the speed of light—a message laced with fertility and hope.

And so they bred without restriction and manufactured
an army of four-armed untelligents with bayonets
of shod oak and pride.

CONTINUED

An army that couldn't pronounce the name of their former state
and thought Shel Silverstein was a woman and that someone should
invent an award for penning great books and give her one.

Every day I meet an escapee—
souls fighting upstream to see what north does at suppertime.
They petition to move in—but can't shed the drawl
or tendency to turn e into uhh...

Did I mention this place is one hundred miles south
of hell? Only, on Earth and in city form. It makes me contemplate
why southeast exists—or why I let it.

KATHRYN UGORETZ

EMERGENCY ROOM, ST. MARY-OF-THE-WOODS

No pockets
for pebbles that glow
in moonlight. No magic
comb, no gems
sewn into my hem. Choppers

cruise through the war zone
in the man in the gurney
next to me, screaming
for back up, his body
strapped to the bed.

They don't know what's wrong—
a maiden, legs near dead
to motion, no need to strap me down.
Grinning, a fellow saunters
over, drunk on Listerine cocktails,

we could be star-crossed
lovers in his mind's
lounge, the Prince and Snow White in her glass
coffin, the music of carts
screeching, I, alluring in

my paper gown.
The nurse hears me yell, straps
another one to his bed.

CONTINUED

Shall I gretel myself?
Be quiet, do as I'm told, wait
for my chance.

My doctor tells me
they must toothpick me
like a cheese cube, I'm no curious
bride—I've no interest
in this skeleton

key, opening of the shut,
of the blood rivering. Just
a kitchen girl curled
to a fetal position. Is it my imagination,
or did our handsome young doctor

skim the directions on the spinal
tap package before snapping
it open? I carry stories like crumbs
to drop, to find a way
back, but even the bluebirds

conspire against me. I squeeze
the stern lemon of the nurse's hand.
What bargain was made
in exchange for fluids

from the base
of my spine? Baba Yaga
at the threshold, *Are you on your own
errand or sent by another?*

KATHRYN UGORETZ

LATE BLOOM

They laughed
when I proclaimed “I shall stitch
a bestiary of the fabulous
into the sofa.”

I’d swindled enough gold
thread for the hippogriff’s
wings, the lion erasing
his tracks with his tail.

I embroidered
a weasel to kill the basilisk—
God made nothing
without a cure.

No man will have me
the roasted wings
a bud’s shocked flowering on
the late-dinner plate.

MICHAEL MONTLACK

SO...WHAT ARE YOU INTO?

Fucking? Getting fucked?
Sucking? Getting sucked?
Rimming? Kissing? Necking? Nipple play?
Piercings? Cockrings? Dildos? Leather?
Whipcream? Domination?
Just handjobs? Okay—

want some lube?
Poppers? Coke? X?
Married? Kids? Girlfriend/Boyfriend?
Open relationship? Really? That's cool.

Out? Straight, bi, gay? Not into labels? Hmm ... me too.

What about threeways, groups, water sports, fetishes?
Black, Latino, Blatino, Asian ...
Euro, Trannies, Bears, Twinks?
Porn? Glory holes? Sex clubs? Clubbing?
Bar hopping? No—gym bunny, right?
Wigstock, Fire Island, Pride, *Queer as Folk*—
I know, so over the scene myself.

From here?
Uptown, Down? East Side, West?
The Boroughs? What train—local or express?
And your background? (Really? 100%?)
Sign, rising, how 'bout your moon?
Age? No way—but you look so young.
Now what exactly **do** you do?
Where, how long?
And what about your name?
Seriously? Nice (if it's for real)
So you gettin' close?
Yeah—almost there too.

MICHAEL MONTLACK

BABY-SITTING ON MESCALINE

she saw seventeen
secondary senses:

Scale
Season
Satire
Suggestion
Sanity
Satiation
Self
Stigma
Source
Spawn
Situation
System
Suspicion
Safety
Style
Simile
Significance

sepia swirled
stereo
 see-through
sarong-ed Sibyl
stroller-ing cul-de-sac sidewalks
seeking slant
seed
cusp

cigarettes

MICHAEL MONTLACK

BOTTICELLI BOMBSHELL

A beauty fiend pacified
 motionless
but for a few stray locks
eluding their loose ribbon

 golden tassels
fringing her sensuous
 not sexual
 pale skin
 too serene
 even to pimple.

Breeze sweeps across
bare nipples
long lashes
 without a fracture
 in her gaze:
the original heroin chic.
 She's still
with us

 not necessarily
blonde or white
 nude or female—
 a vacant face

 staring from buses
 billboards
 magazines:

a sad beauty
looking lost
 but posed always
 always
 having nothing at all
 to say.

LUNA TARLO

KIDNAP

During the winter of 1935 Bruno Richard Hauptman went on trial for the kidnapping and murder of the twenty-month-old firstborn child of an American hero, Charles Lindbergh. The event flashed across the front pages of every newspaper in Canada in banner headlines. Seventy-five days after the kidnapping, the baby's decomposed body was found face down in the woods near the Lindbergh home. The cause of death was a massive fracture of the skull.

Donna was eleven years old at the time, an only child, a skinny, fearful, absent-minded girl. She had wild frizzy red hair and wore thick round black rimmed eye-glasses. Of more than average intelligence she nevertheless did poorly at school where she was bullied by her classmates. When they taunted her, she would stand staring down at her feet, a vacuous expression pasted like a mask to her face. She was repulsive to them and she knew it, she'd known it all along, and had given up trying to quell their hostility.

She lived in a house on a pleasant tree-lined street in Outremont, a middle-class neighborhood in Montreal. Her father manufactured metal frames for photographs and mirrors. During the school year she came home every afternoon at half-past three, poured herself a glass of chocolate milk in the kitchen and went to the living room to announce her arrival. Her mother would look up from her book and frown. "Donna, for goodness sake, you're still wearing your snow boots!" Or, "Go upstairs and brush your hair!" At six her father would return. He was a tall heavy man with regular features and mild grey eyes. He hung his coat in the hall closet, went into the kitchen where his wife was preparing dinner, gave her a peck on the cheek, then turned into the dining room where Donna usually sat over her homework. He patted her on the head and without a word, continued on to his easy chair with his newspaper. Donna would invariably collect her books, follow him into the living room, and deposit herself at his feet.

Although she had long ago given up hope that her father might respond when he was reading his evening paper, Donna nevertheless was unable to resist trying to get his attention. "Daddy," she would say in a peremptory tone, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy..."

After an unendurable period, her father would bend forward and glance down at her over the top of his newspaper with unseeing grey eyes.

When the Lindbergh kidnapping trial had concluded and the date of Hauptman's execution was fast approaching, Donna's mother and father began to linger at the dinner table talking, but not in their routine casual fashion as if the subject of conversation was mere gossip and of no real concern for them. Her mother's pale cheeks would turn pink and her father's eyes would grow clear and focused. Hauptman had climbed a ladder to the second storey of the Lindbergh home and had gone through the nursery window and had stolen Charles Lindbergh's first child, a son, for money, and had bashed his skull in. The subject seemed to have suddenly taken hold of them as a horrifying but fascinating form of entertainment and they would remain talking at the table long after Donna's bedtime. So immersed were they in their conversation that they often forgot she was present.

One night they had just paused to sip from their glasses of wine when Donna's mother said, "You know, George, I can just picture him climbing that ladder in the dark and stealing into the baby's bedroom...just imagine, Lindbergh and his wife were reading in the living room and he said he heard a noise but thought it was the wind or the house creaking or..."

Donna's father broke in, saying gravely, "It could have been the child falling to his death." Donna's mother hesitated for a moment, then continued, "No one else heard a thing and meanwhile Hauptman, that monster, that devil, was climbing through the window into the baby's room, creeping over to the crib...the child sleeping peacefully..."

They were silent for a time looking into each other's eyes. Then Donna's father made a circle with his mouth and sent two perfect smoke rings towards the ceiling. Watching them rise, he said, "There's some talk that he had inside help."

"You don't mean the nurse! Not Betty Gow! Oh no, George, she was so devoted. Maybe it was one of the servants?"

"Maybe. Hauptman's lawyer said the reason the dog didn't bark

was because it was an inside job.” Donna’s father tamped out his cigarette and then, his brow creased, lit another. “Funny thing is, they still don’t know for sure how the baby died.”

“Wasn’t his head crushed in?”

“I said how, Linda. How! I mean, the child could have been dropped from the ladder, there was a broken rung, remember? Anyway that was the prosecution’s theory. Hauptman had no trouble getting up but coming down he was carrying more weight and the rung could have broken.” Her father leaned back in his chair. “On the other hand,” he continued, “Hauptman could have smashed the baby’s head later with a hammer or whatever he used because it was too dangerous to keep him alive. Or he could have strangled the child right there and then, in his crib, to stop him from crying out and *then* dropped him.” He blew another smoke ring into the silence that followed.

Donna closed her eyes. Her parents went on talking.

Suddenly her father was saying, “The body was badly decayed, lying out there like that in the woods for two months. Most of it had been eaten by insects and animals.”

“Eaten by animals!” her mother repeated, “I didn’t know that.”

“Rats, birds, wild dogs, even wolves,” her father said.

“Wolves! Really? You think there were wolves?”

“There was almost nothing left for identification,” her father continued, “scraps of clothing and some kind of toe curvature, that’s all.” Her father paused. “Also a dimple was mentioned.”

Donna opened her eyes.

“Good lord, a dimple! How could there be a dimple?” Donna’s mother shivered.

“Damned if I know,” her father said. He emptied the dregs from his wine glass and puffed on his cigarette.

“More?” asked her mother.

He nodded and she re-filled his glass and then re-filled her own.

That night in bed Donna felt strangely uneasy. She looked out the window of her room at the lit up clock tower across the way and watched the minute hand crawl with what seemed incredible slowness from one stroke to the next. Beyond, the sky was bright with moonlight. Her gaze wandered from the window along the wall to the farthest corner of the room where there was a glimmering. It was the

light of the moon reflected from the mirror above her chest of drawers. She lay gazing into the corner thinking of what her father had said about the killing of the Lindbergh baby by the murderer Bruno Hauptman. She recalled him saying, "He could have strangled the child right then and there in his crib..." when she glimpsed a flick of something, a movement in the corner. Her heart began to pound. In the next moment the faint light revealed something that resembled the shape of a man. A pale featureless face floated as though detached from the dark mass of the body. Donna opened her mouth to call out to her parents, but no sound came from her. She tried to overcome the terrifying constriction in her throat, but then lay still, hardly breathing, as if any further movement on her part would attract the malevolent thing in her room. When, after a while, she was able to peek into the corner again, it was empty. Slowly, she drew her arms from under the quilt and placed them around her neck. She fingered the bumpy column of bone and the softness around it. How much strength, she wondered, did it take to kill?

The following morning the light coming through her window was a white blaze. Wind rattled the panes of glass. Donna got out of bed. The window was covered with snow and at the bottom, where her mother had left it open a crack, snow was heaped on the sill. Donna forced the window up and stuck her head out and let the snow, driven horizontally by the wind, sweep over her face.

Later though the wind decreased, the snow kept coming down. She felt the jittery spasms in her stomach she always felt on the way to school. It was a rare day that some epithet was not flung at her by one or another of her classmates.

As usual the playground of Guy Drummond Protestant Elementary School (schools in Montreal were either Protestant or Catholic) was filled with children from grade levels one to seven before the bell rang. Donna had just entered when a snowball streaked past her face. She stopped in her tracks and looked about anxiously. Another snowball came flying at her from the same direction and hit the side of her chin. She gasped, feeling a sharp sting of pain. The school bell rang. The blow was hard enough to make her eyes water and her head reel. She squinted through the curtain of snow and glimpsed a few vague retreating figures. She examined the ground and saw that the second snowball, still intact, had landed a few feet behind her. She turned around and took a few

steps and picked it up. It was huge, hard-packed, and felt unusually heavy. Its surface was glassy and frozen solid. She dropped it, and as she kicked it away it caught the front of her boot on the tip of an ice cleat. Instantly the skin of ice cracked and the ball came apart revealing a sharp-edged grey stone. She stared at the stone for a few moments, then bent and picked it up and brushed away the snow. She removed her right mitt and held it in her open palm. It was a rough oval stone. She put her fingers around it and ran her thumb over its surface and felt a number of pointed projections. She ran her thumb along its cutting edge. She peered ahead once more but saw no one and opened her coat and shoved the stone carefully into the side pocket of her heavy knit woolen cardigan.

The last class before lunch the next day was English history. Miss Roberts marched into the class-room with her usual grim put-upon face. Donna was still thinking, as she had all morning, of the snowball with the stone inside. It had hit the left side of her chin. She touched the spot again. It felt tender and swollen.

Miss Roberts was an excitable woman who relished belittling her students. Lately she had begun to pick on Donna. She was unmarried and there was a rumor she had never been the same after her boyfriend had been killed in the Great War. She had small watery brown eyes, thinning brown hair, and a loose lower lip that protruded and gave her a mean peevish look. Donna couldn't imagine Miss Roberts having a boy friend. Like the other teachers, with the exception of those who were French and taught French language and literature, Miss Roberts was a passionate Anglophile. Canada was then part of the British Empire and everything British was extravagantly admired by the English speaking citizens including Donna's father who had spent his formative years in London. It was on a trip to London to introduce his pregnant Canadian wife to his relatives that Donna had been prematurely born.

As the class was drowsing to its conclusion Miss Roberts was going on animatedly about Queen Elizabeth the First who defeated Philip the Second's Spanish Armada in 1588 and thus made England a great power in Europe. The bell rang, and Miss Roberts concluded, "And ultimately the mother country of the greatest empire in the world, which it remains to this day!" Whenever expounding on the topic of England and empire Miss Roberts' complexion grew red and her pale eyes moistened. She closed her notebook and stood beside her

desk glancing around the room. "By the way," she said, smiling, "were any of you girls born in England?"

No one raised a hand.

"I seem to remember someone." Miss Roberts' voice trailed off. "No—?" She looked around once more.

Donna raised her hand slowly.

Miss Roberts frowned.

"I was born in London," Donna said brightly, and added after a moment, "in England."

Miss Roberts stood with her mouth open, her lower lip protruding more than ever. Gathering up her books and papers, she said, slowly, "I'm sure, Donna, that *that* information was not on the list of particulars I was given about you."

"It's true," Donna said

"I wouldn't forget something like that," Miss Roberts responded in a steady tone.

"But it's true," Donna repeated.

"No, I would remember. I'm afraid you must be lying, Donna."

There was an uncomfortable silence in the class for a few moments before everyone began to get up to go to lunch. The muscles of Miss Roberts' face were twitching when she left the room.

In the overheated lunchroom Donna went over to an empty table near the back wall and sat down heavily. She took out her sandwich and placed it on the table. She looked up to see five or six girls from her home room come in talking loudly and laughing. One of them, Rosabelle, waved and started in Donna's direction. The others followed. Although Rosabelle was the most popular girl in the class and everyone liked her, even the teachers, there was a cruel streak in Rosabelle. Her family had moved into the school district three years ago and she seldom missed an opportunity to taunt Donna. Still burning with the humiliation of having been called a liar in front of the entire class, Donna watched the group approach with dread. There were a lot of empty tables in the room but they took their places around her smiling amiably and began to open their lunch bags. Suddenly Rosabelle said, "Hey girls, how about all of us going skating at Windling's tonight!"

There was a silence as if the proposal was being considered. During this silence Donna kept her gaze lowered.

"Would you like to join us skating, Donna?"

Donna looked up into the blue glare of Rosabelle's eyes. Her heart flared and drummed in her ears. The other girls were extracting their sandwiches from brown paper bags.

"Well, would you Donna?" Rosabelle unwrapped wax paper from a sandwich and took a bite. Rosabelle had long straight shiny blond hair and was very pretty.

The girl sitting next to Rosabelle said, "But Rosabelle if it keeps snowing they won't have swept the rink!"

Ignoring this remark, Rosabelle sat chewing and calmly staring at Donna. Then she said, "I don't know if you can skate. Can you skate Donna?"

Donna stared back dumbly.

"Tell us Donna, can you skate?" Rosabelle's voice was soft.

Donna nodded that she could.

"All right then, I'm inviting you to go skating with us at Windlings. She paused smiling and added, "Would you like that?"

After a terrible moment of indecision Donna nodded yes.

"So you'd like that?"

Donna didn't move a muscle.

Then Rosabelle said slowly, "But I wonder if you can skate, Donna, I really do." She paused, "Has anyone *ever* seen Donna skate?" A long silence followed during which Rosabelle's eyes patrolled the table, glancing into each countenance. "Anyone?" she repeated. "Has anyone here seen Donna skate?"

Nobody said a word.

"I don't believe she knows how to skate," Rosabelle said, then looking back at Donna, she said, "I honestly don't believe, Donna, you know how to skate." Then, deliberately, she sat back in her chair and tore off a piece of her paper napkin and looking straight at Donna, squeezed and rolled it between her fingers into a pellet, and threw it across the table. It arced up and fell towards Donna landing on her wild red hair. Everyone at the table remained silent. Rosabelle threw another pellet. This time it hit Donna's chin, where it was still sore. She blinked. Still fixed on her, Rosabelle's blue eyes were narrowed, gleaming with malice. No one moved. No one said a word. Everyone watched Donna.

"You know what I think, Donna? I think you're lying about knowing how to skate, just like Miss Roberts said you lied about being born in England."

"I didn't lie," Donna said loudly without expression.

“Can you prove to us you were born in England?” Rosabelle asked.

Donna’s lips began to tremble.

“Look at her,” Rosabelle said, “she’s going to cry!” Rosabelle ripped off another scrap of paper and rolled it between her fingers into a pellet and again flung it across the table.

As if at this signal, the others snatched up their own napkins and tore at them. With a sense of crushing helplessness, of despair, Donna watched more shreds of white paper being squeezed and rolled into tiny balls and thrown at her like bits of toxic hail, pelting her face and hair and arms and shoulders. She lowered her head until it rested on her chest. She saw the pellets dropping down into her lap and heard the high-pitched voices screaming with laughter.

They were still laughing when the bell rang.

Left alone at the table, still gazing into her lap, Donna drew a few sobbing breaths. The bell rang again. She did not get up to go to class. She sat motionless in the large silent close room. After a while she lifted her head and saw her sandwich still wrapped in wax paper in front of her on the table. Her right hand crept up from her lap looking for her sweater pocket and her fingers dug inside carefully and reached around the stone. It felt barbed and dangerous and cool against her sweating palm.

When she started home it had stopped snowing but the sky was still dark and grey. She walked three blocks dragging her feet and as usual, turned up the incline of David Hamilton street and came to a halt at the sight of a green sedan lying on its side in the middle of the road. Above the car, at right angles to the curb, stood a small van with ‘Armstrong and Sons, Daily Meats Market Inc.’ painted in red letters on its white panel. The front of the van appeared to be smashed. Pedestrians were stopping to view the wreckage. A few policemen plodded through the dirty slushy snow around the vehicles pointing things out to each other. Donna saw shards of glass scattered about and splotches of pink staining the snow. A man stood in the road in front of her. She thought of asking him if anyone had been killed but decided not to. She walked on towards the van. Its hood faced her. She was struck by how far it had been crushed back. The windshield was cracked from end to end and the doors on either side hung from their hinges. Here too shards of glass glittered on the snow.

Donna's father arrived back from his office holding the Montreal Daily Star, his usual grey cheeks bitten red by the wind. He stood before his wife rubbing his cold hands together. "This is the longest winter we've had in years. Good God, it's the beginning of April!"

"Dinner is almost ready. Are you hungry?"

"Good and hungry Linda. I'm ready any time you are." He kissed his wife on the cheek.

"Hauptman is going to the chair Sunday night," he said. He patted Donna's head on his way to the living room.

During the evening meal Donna's parents talked of nothing but Hauptman. Her mother's sallow cheeks grew pink and her father's bass voice boomed more than ever. At one point Donna's mother said, "I've been thinking George, isn't it odd that Hauptman was offered life imprisonment if he would confess but he claimed to the very end he was innocent?"

Donna, half-listening, preoccupied with her own thoughts, was all at once alert.

Her father paused, "What are you getting at Linda?"

"I'm not getting at anything, George," her mother said, "just that it's odd, that's all." She smiled.

Donna's father was scraping bits of meat with his knife and fork from the bone of his lamb chop. "Surely at this point you don't think there's a chance he's innocent?" he said.

"Of course not." Her mother drank from her glass. "But it makes you think, doesn't it George, that Hauptman insisted he was innocent even if it meant he'd end up in the electric chair.

"And no one wants to die in the electric chair, do they?" She deposited her empty glass on the table.

Donna's father placed his utensils along the edge of his plate, tapped his lips with his napkin and leaned towards his wife. "Nonetheless Linda, the fact remains that he goes to the chair Sunday night!"

On her way home the following afternoon after a day at school that felt oddly tranquil after the painful events of the day before, Donna turned into David Hamilton street and was startled to see that everything had been cleared away. The car was gone. The truck was gone. She trudged up the hill slowly looking about her. Not a vestige of the accident remained. At the intersection she lost her balance for a

moment and slipped, almost falling, on an icy patch hidden underneath the snow.

It took a long time for the light to change. She crossed over carefully. On the left a snow plough was clearing the road. Snow streamed from a thick funnel and arced over onto the side of the road. The streets were still untrammelled, covered with six inches of snow. The right side of the street was lined with shabby apartment buildings set several yards back from the sidewalk. Donna went up a few steps into the foyer of the first building on an errand her mother had asked her to do on her way home from school. On the ground floor a brown paper package leaned against the bottom of the door of 1A with a note to Donna from her mother's seamstress. She was sorry but she'd been called away on urgent business. In the package was her mother's black velvet skirt shortened two inches as requested. Donna stuffed the package into her school bag and left. As she opened the door of the vestibule to step outside she noticed someone sitting on the bench at the streetcar stop directly in front of her. It took a few moments to realize that she was looking at the back of Rosabelle's red and green plaid coat and shank of long blond hair. Donna's throat tightened. She wondered what Rosabelle was doing in this neighborhood waiting alone for a streetcar. She stepped back into the foyer and closed the door quickly. She was suddenly breathless. The foyer was small and hot. She unbuttoned her coat. In one corner stood an open box containing a pile of rusted metal fittings. She took off her mitts and pushed them into her coat pocket and then stared out the glass pane of the door. Rosabelle sat without moving. She was facing straight ahead. When the glass steamed over Donna wiped the steam away with her fingers. A police car careened by, its siren resounding against the bare walls and the chipped tiled floor of the foyer. She watched it weave, skidding, past the snow plough and disappear. Then she looked back at Rosabelle who was now leaning over her knees. What was she doing? Donna peered through the glass intently. She couldn't see what Rosabelle was doing. Donna's glasses had slipped down her nose and she pushed them back up. The hair at the back of Rosabelle's neck had parted and hung down the sides of her face, revealing her naked white neck. Donna's heart was pumping violently. She stepped back and leaned against the cracked mustard colored wall. She closed her eyes and heard again Rosabelle's mocking voice setting the others against her. "I don't believe you...you lied ...Can you prove to us that you were born in England?...Look at her, she's going to cry!"

She remembered her shame and groaned. She cringed back against the wall. She sought her sweater pocket and clutched the stone that had been inside the icy snowball. She gripped the stone fiercely and its edge cut into her hand so that it bled. She dropped the stone back into her pocket and sucked the blood away. She was sweating horribly. She opened her eyes and went back to the glass.

Rosabelle was just sitting up. The mass of heavy hair was falling together. Rosabelle looked to the left where she was clearly expecting the streetcar to appear. Her even profile was outlined against the background of the snow-covered playing field across the way.

Next to the wall to the left of Donna was the open box. From where she stood she could see the fittings inside it. She turned and reached down and grasped a piece of lead pipe. It felt heavy in her hand.

It had started to snow again. In no time the snowflakes were coming down so fast that she could hardly see Rosabelle. She opened the door and went down the stairs onto the walk. Outside the air smelled icy and sweet. She went cautiously, her feet sliding effortlessly through the snow, sliding soundlessly towards Rosabelle. Rosabelle sneezed. Donna stopped. And waited tensely. On the road the dark blur of a car passed by, the clanking of its tire chains deadened by the snow. Rosabelle sneezed again, and bent over to one side, and rummaged in her left coat pocket. Donna looked around and then looked back at Rosabelle whose head was bent over a handkerchief. She took a few quick steps forward and lifted the lead pipe and swung her arm high and crashed the pipe into the back of Rosabelle's head just below the crown. Rosabelle slumped further forward. A hoarse noise erupted from her and instantly blood began to show, dark and red, seeping through her yellow hair.

Donna was running, she was running as fast as she could through the dense haze of falling snow, her school bag banging against her leg. The light had grown dimmer and more diffused, as if it were already dusk. She passed the plough and raced on. The wind seemed stronger. The snow whipped about her. Without realizing it she had fled past the corner of the street she lived on and past the next corner and the next. Her eyes, seared by the wind, were streaming with tears. She forced freezing fingers under her glasses and rubbed the tears away. Her breath was rasping at her throat and she stumbled and slid onto her back into a deep drift of snow. She lay for a moment panting and then

pushed herself up on one elbow and regarded, through snow-spattered glasses, the silent whitened street. She sank back into the snow and had the sensation of sinking into an element of magical comfort and softness. Her hands were freezing. She got her mitts from her pocket and dragged them over her wet hands. Then she lay staring up into the torrent of flakes tumbling towards her and closed her eyes.

When she opened her eyes a man was standing above her, his long black overcoat flapping in the wind behind him. The rim of his grey fedora was heaped with snow. His mouth was a hard thin line. She had seen him before, she had seen his photo in The Montreal Daily Star her father brought home every day from work.

"My dear child," he said slowly. His eyes, almost hidden in his skull, seemed to pierce her.

She lay there terrified.

"There, there, you are my dear child are you not?" His voice was deep and resonant.

Donna didn't answer.

"No?"

She shook her head from side to side.

"Something you just did frightened you, didn't it? "

"How do you know?" she asked, her voice quaking.

"Oh I know lots of things and I know all about people like you. We are alike after all." He paused. "Don't you agree?"

"No," she whispered.

Oh but we are. We are exactly alike, daughter."

A noise from somewhere. At first she thought it was someone calling her and scrambled to her feet. There was no one. Her head was reeling. Lumps of snow slid from the collar of her coat down her neck. The plough was approaching, its red lights flashing now in the half-light. She bent to get her school bag and jumped onto the road and started running in the direction of home.

The next day was Saturday and it was still snowing. All night she had lain awake watching the snow coming down outside her window. Over and over she pictured Rosabelle as she had left her, humped over with her chin on her chest, and the heavy snow falling. Perhaps by now the snow had finally obliterated her from sight. Perhaps the plough had dumped a load on Rosabelle without knowing and now she was frozen under a deep white shroud of snow. But then it also occurred to her that

Rosabelle might have been rescued and taken to the hospital and revived. She might even be home by now repeating the story of her horrifying adventure at the hands of some murderous fiend.

Donna sat at the breakfast table across from her father. In front of her was a plate that contained a fried egg, the yolk surrounded by a still raw gelatinous white, lying on top of a slice of burned toast. Her father had prepared her breakfast because her mother was not feeling well. On the table between them was her father's opened newspaper and a brass ash-tray holding a burning cigarette. He was staring intently at what she recognized to be a full page photograph.

"What are you looking at Daddy?" she asked. Since he seemed not to have heard her, she got up and went around to his side and stood looking down at the murderer Bruno Hauptman. She went back to her chair and sat down struck anew by the frightful thought that now she too might be a murderer just like the murderer who was gazing up from her father's newspaper. Her father turned the page, took his cigarette, and glanced over at her. "You're not eating," he said.

For a moment she couldn't speak. She saw her father's teeth yellowed from smoking between his parted lips. He shook his head in a gesture of exasperation and went back to his paper.

Then, "Daddy!"

"Well?"

"Is it true that Bruno Hauptman is going to die tonight in the electric chair?"

"Yes Donna," her father said, and looking up at her added grimly, "it's the only proper punishment for murder, my girl." He returned to his newspaper.

She sat silent for a long time watching her father's eyes flicking uninterruptedly along the newsprint. Then she picked up her fork and jabbed the yolk of her egg and watched the thick yellow drift on either side from its center and seep slowly beyond the slithery watery white into the burnt brown edges of her toast. In her mind she was seeing Rosabelle again sitting on the bench, and the blood seeping from the wound beneath her yellow hair. She pushed her chair back and left the kitchen.

"Mummy!" Donna was standing at the doorway of her mother's room. The curtains had been drawn and her mother was lying in the

half-light on her bed facing the ceiling with her eyes closed. A book lay open on the bed beside her.

"I'm sleeping Donna." Donna's mother didn't open her eyes.

Donna stayed where she was.

Her mother finally turned her head on the pillow and opened her eyes. "Oh for goodness sake!" she said.

Donna confronted her mother's intimidating stare without blinking.

"I just wondered how you were feeling, Mummy," she said.

"That's very nice of you Donna."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"No, I just need to sleep, dear."

But Donna didn't move from the doorway. "Anything—?" she said.

Her mother frowned and continued to stare at her. Slowly she slid up against the headboard and patted a place on the bed beside her. "Come over here," she said. Donna hesitated for a few moments. Then, just as she was about to step forward, her mother closed her eyes and said, "No dear, I'm sorry, I really don't have the strength to talk right now." She turned her head to the wall and added, "We'll talk later."

The following day, Sunday, Donna stayed mostly in her room. Yesterday she had taken her father's newspaper when he had finished with it and had spent a long time sitting on her bed gazing at Bruno Hauptman. Now she picked the newspaper up from the floor beside her bed and looked at him again. He had seemed unattractive and distant in every photo she'd seen of him, but this one gave the impression of an almost handsome man with a high forehead and smooth even features set in a friendly expression. Nothing in his face showed that he was a murderer. She got up from her bed and went to the bathroom, turned on the light and stared at her own reflection in the mirror. She was surprised to see that her dark eyes, without her glasses, looked so small and sunken in her pale thin face. But she saw nothing to suggest that she was a murderer. She went back to her room, closed her door, and leaned back against it. Inside her head there was only a vast blank dead space. She went over to the window. The sky was dark, threatening snow again. She glanced at the clock across the way. It was late afternoon. She went into the hallway and

listened at the door of her parents' bedroom. Silence. She opened the door and saw that her mother, probably still not feeling well, was sleeping with her face to the wall. She went downstairs to the coat closet. Her father's winter coat and rubbers weren't there. He had gone out. She got the phone book from the shelf under the telephone stand. She dialed a number.

The phone rang five times. Then, a woman's voice.

"Yes?"

"Is Rosabelle there?"

"Who is it?" The woman's voice sounded hoarse as if she had a cold.

Donna's hand holding the receiver was shaking against her ear.

Then the voice sharper, suspicious. "Who is this?"

Donna placed the receiver back in its bracket and stood very still. For a moment she thought she would faint. She stumbled into the kitchen and sat down. The window above the sink showed icicles hanging from its upper frame. Last year she had barely escaped being killed by a cluster of giant icicles that fell from the overhang of a shop just as she'd stepped out of its way. She remembered the awe she'd felt at her miraculous escape from death. And then the joy, the exhilaration, at being alive. She remembered thinking how death could strike from anywhere. Like lightning.

In the next moment her stomach was churning again. She was thinking of Rosabelle. It was impossible to tell from the phone call whether Rosabelle was alive or dead. If she was dead, there was no avoiding it, she was a murderer no different from the murderer Bruno Hauptman who was going to the electric chair tonight. She wondered if it made a difference that Hauptman had killed an innocent baby who couldn't do anything wrong whereas Rosabelle had tortured her and deserved to be punished. She got up and went to the hall bathroom and switched on the light and looked at herself in the mirror. It occurred to her that maybe Rosabelle's mother's voice wasn't hoarse because she had a cold. Perhaps she'd been crying. Donna, staring at her face in the mirror, was astounded that she looked so untroubled, that her expression was calm. She turned on the cold water tap and bent and gulped from it. She stood up and smiled and the image in the mirror smiled back, a mechanical false smile. You could always tell when people were being false by their smile. She wouldn't be able to fool anybody. In her mind she saw the blood again staining Rosabelle's

yellow hair and the heavy snow descending and beginning to cover her body. If Rosabelle was dead they would find her murderer in the end the way they had found Hauptman.

She ran upstairs to her room and threw herself onto her bed. Her father's newspaper rustled next to her. She picked it up and looked once more at the photograph of Bruno Hauptman. She examined his face carefully. It revealed nothing new to her. She lay the paper down and in a few minutes, had lapsed into a sickly fragmented sleep. She woke up with a sense of pounding alarm and leapt from her bed. She ran to her parents' bedroom and opened the door. Her mother was on her back snoring softly. She ran downstairs to the coat closet. Her father's coat and rubbers were still gone. She ran to the phone and looked up the number again and dialed. This time the telephone receiver was picked up after the first ring. It was the same woman who had answered previously, probably Rosabelle's mother, saying, "Hello?"

Donna was afraid her voice would be recognized, afraid she would be identified as having called before. To disguise her voice she whispered, "Is Rosabelle home?"

"What's that?" There was a noise of many people talking in Rosabelle's house. "I can't hear you!"

"Is Rosabelle home?" Donna whispered again.

After a moment, in a voice reeking of suspicion, "You called before didn't you? Who are you?"

"Please, can I talk to Rosabelle?" Donna whispered.

A long silence followed during which there was the noise of people muttering close to the phone as though they had gathered around Rosabelle's mother. "You're not fooling me whoever you are!" Rosabelle's mother said in a loud voice.

Donna's breath rasped into the phone.

Another horrible silence.

And then the sound of the receiver at the other end being put down into its bracket and complete silence. Donna stood trembling, wondering why there were so many people in Rosabelle's house and still not knowing whether she was dead.

By evening Donna's mother was feeling well enough to prepare a meal. When they were all seated around the table Donna's parents started in again talking of nothing but Bruno Hauptman. When

Donna's father had helped himself to a thick slice of meat loaf and was pouring gravy over his mashed potatoes he said, "Well, tonight's the night he fries. At half past eight on the button."

Her mother shivered and poured wine into both their glasses.

Her father swallowed and forked another chunk of meat loaf. "He's getting his just deserts Linda. A jury found him guilty according to the law and if they said he was guilty he must have been guilty and tonight he's paying the price for his crime!"

"That's true, George." Her mother paused to take a sip from her glass.

Her father looked at his watch and lifted a forkful of mashed potatoes to his mouth.

Her mother, glancing at Donna's plate, said, "You're not eating Donna."

"I'm not hungry," Donna said. "I feel sick to my stomach."

Her mother regarded her for a few moments. She got up and placed her hand across Donna's forehead and waited. Her hand felt cool and soothing. "You seem normal to me," she said. She turned to Donna's father. "George, I don't think we should have been talking about the case in front of the child."

"I'm not a child," Donna said.

Her father was looking at her. "You're right Linda. It stirs her up."

"Go to bed dear," her mother said. "You're as pale as a ghost. I'll be up soon with the thermometer."

Donna got up. She kissed her parents good-night. As she passed through the doorway to the hall she paused for a moment when she heard her mother say, "Did you know George that Thomas Edison's electric company had something to do with the electric chair? Before that they hung people."

"Where did you hear that?"

"I saw it in yesterday's Star, George, on the back page."

"Edison! You don't say! I didn't know that Linda."

Donna was tossing about in her bed, dozing uneasily, when she woke up with a start to the noise of the radio in her parents' bedroom. She lay for a while in a kind of daze, watching the pale thin curtain wave to and fro at her window. In spite of the urgent voice coming through the wall her room seemed oddly tranquil, seemed to be floating in filmy light. When the curtain flared upwards towards the

ceiling she glimpsed the clock tower across the way. It was 9:45! She threw her quilt aside, and leapt from her bed and ran into the hallway and stood, shivering in the cold, listening with her cheek pressed against the door of her parents' bedroom. There was a tinge of excitement, of melodrama, underlining the grave tone of the man's voice.

2000 volts of electricity shot through him. His mouth opened in a silent scream. His body snapped. His hands formed clenched fists which pounded the arms of the chair. Donna's own fists clenched against the door. The current was turned up higher twice...each time slamming him back against the chair. Smoke began to rise from his head and from one leg... Donna sank down to the freezing floor. The voice continued: *At 8:47 p.m. doctors on hand for the execution pronounced him dead...* Donna heard her mother say, "It's horrible. That's enough, George. Turn it off."

Donna dragged herself up along the door and staggered back to her room and climbed into bed and lay under the quilt. She was seeing again the blood staining Rosabelle's yellow hair and the heavy snow descending and beginning to cover Rosabelle. A sudden sharp draft of cold air. Was the window open? She raised up on her elbows. The window was open. A single window set into the opposite wall. A large square window with a moving transparent curtain in front of it, like a grey mist, billowing. She lay back and began to think about Hauptman's execution — she saw his mouth open in a silent scream, his clenched fists pounding the arms of the chair and smoke coming from his head—and a terrible feeling seized her, clawed at her insides, a scalding burning pity. Another sharp draft of cold air, stronger than the last one. She raised up on her arms again and suddenly saw, flickering behind the wildly billowing curtain, something come into focus, a structure of some kind, two black vertical bars and in between, three horizontal ones. A ladder! She became utterly still, straining to hear. There was nothing to hear. There was only a strange heavy powerful silence. She dropped back on her pillow. Was it really a ladder? She lifted her head. It looked like a ladder. She fell back again on the pillow. Another draft of air from the window on her face. Then a faint creak. Another. A noise as if someone were climbing up the ladder. She opened her mouth to call out to her parents but could

not utter a sound. She tried once more but her throat only made a soft choking noise. Then the creaking grew louder. Someone was climbing the ladder step by step. All at once her body was throbbing, shivering and jittering uncontrollably. Then a slow scraping sound as of a ladder being pushed aside. Someone was climbing into the room. She saw a dark shape begin to move in her direction. It was a man. She knew who it was. It was the man who had called her his daughter. He wasn't dead after all. He was right here in her room. He had come to take her up in his arms and to carry her away.



Spiel: *Boys Will Be Boys*



Spiel: The Last Angel Sings



Lee Briccetti

JACQUELINE KOLOSOV

AN INTERVIEW WITH LEE BRICCETTI OR JACQUELINE KOLOSOV TALKS WITH LEE BRICCETTI

JK: Collection is a trope that runs throughout *Day Mark*. The speaker of “Collector,” one of the final poems, is the spiritual kin of Joseph Cornell, a collector/creator with “an artist’s collage box” who defines collection as “the work of a focused imagination, personal / metaphor with which to engage, then express the world.” Please discuss *Day Mark* in terms of this evocative metaphor.

LB: Collecting has so much to do with seeing relationships between things. Sequence and placement become tools of curation. The trope helped me select for congruencies while arranging a first book of poems written through disparate life experiences and different ideas of what a poem could do. I also hope that the epigraphs before each section help to “collect terms.”

JK: In the same poem, the speaker confides: “Everyone who collects recollects some piece of themselves; so I gather / fragments of English...which / assemble Rome, *that* piece of myself. “ Here, you invoke the relationship between memory and collection—that metaphor for artistic creation. Simultaneously, you invoke your Italian ancestry. How do these elements inform *Day Mark*?

LB: I was born in Italy. I love the place itself as well as its place in my memory. Because I left so young, I realize that it is, to some extent, an imagined place. Memory is always refining experience, and the ways in which we refine have so much to do with what we think the story of our character is. The assumptions are part of how we collect ourselves.

JK: You excel at creating poems that incorporate lists. “The Keats Reader’s Notes” includes stunning lines from Keats’s letters such as “‘some hope—something to rest on now—there must be such a book’”. How is list-making a part of your aesthetic? In the case of “...Reader’s Notes,” how did your attention to moments from Keats’s letters lead to the poem?

LB: As one of my nephews learned to write, he would copy out the alphabet as if it were the spine of an acrostic, writing the name of a new animal with each descending letter. (The alphabet is one of our first lists, isn’t it?) Even at five, this boy knew more about animals than almost anyone I’ve ever met. And his many lists—made from beautiful, just-born letterforms—became for me talismans of the whole process of writing—to be present in a world of discovery and to know what we know.

I feel about Keats the way my nephew feels about animals. The poem “The Keats Reader” is taken over by footnotes, composed of an assembled list of fragments from the biographies and letters. I played around with different lists of quotes from the books I was reading until I came up with my own re-assembled, disjunct narrative about his death.

JK: Why Keats?

LB: Can you imagine that John Keats wrote “Ode to a Nightingale” while sitting under a tree in one afternoon? Reading is an intimacy. And when you meet a mind in its music that you love, there is a kind of erotic charge.

JK: Reading is intrinsic to your speakers’ identities, in particular reading Victorian novels. How did your reading of fictional heroines shape your own vision of femininity/womanhood, a vision your speaker(s) need(s) to outgrow in order to fully come into her/their own?

LB: We have to try on our fictions to see what fits best. I read something once that posited that obsessive female readers were undermothered. I like to think of literature as formative on that level, along

with the friendships we use to create each other. In my poems about reading, I “put on” heroines that help me discover some piece of myself. Isabel Archer has been important to me because of her outsider relationship to Italy. And Dorothea Brooke is particularly beloved in the honeymoon chapter of *Middlemarch*. As the ruins of Rome pull at her understanding of civilization, her mind changes. The way they reach out—to want something more for themselves, even if the structure of the novel and their own constructed consciousnesses can’t deliver—is momentous.

JK: Theatricality and self-reflexivity are central to *Day Mark*, as they are central to Victorian novels—”Dear Reader”—and to the plays that you cite. Please discuss.

LB: I grew up in the performatory tradition of the Catholic Church. I am also an opera-goer and often think of the lyric poem as if it were a brave soprano looking out from its little stage to belt out a song. Beyond that, really, there is so much theater in all of our social interactions.

JK: You are the executive director of Poets House. How has your role challenged and enabled you as a poet? What is your vision for Poets House in the near future?

LB: Poets House has been an enormous part of my creative life for the past sixteen years. It is one of the great places for poetry anywhere, and I take pride in the role I’ve had in building it, within a community of support. Our 45,000-volume poetry library is emblematic to me of the way that poetry functions as an intimate conversation between people who have lived at all times during history.

To have my own book become part of this dialogue is thrilling and exposing. The struggle, of course, given that I must pour so much time into building Poets House, is getting personal time. Not just time to write, but time to have the interiority I need to be the person who writes the poems.

JK: Who are your forerunners in the New York poems?

LB: I love the great peripatetic Whitman poems that pull everything he sees into long lines. I hear something like the radical authority of an Old Testament prophet in the posture of those poems. I treasure Frank O'Hara's Lunch Poems and the way in which walking is the infrastructure for the mind in its big, warm music to project outwards into the city's enjambment. I go to Muriel Rukeyser to hear a woman as she constructs an independent life perhaps unprecedented in history. She helped me, by example, make a place for myself in New York City. And she offers a seamless engagement between the poem and a life dedicated to social change, which seems so brave and hopeful, especially now.

JK: In "Collector," the speaker says "Our experiences collect *us*." The title poem focuses on 9/11. Why does your collection take its name from this experience? How has 9/11 shaped the voices of New York's poets?

LB: Shortly after 9/11 a German film crew came to Poets House to talk about how the event had changed poetry in our country. They asked a number of times if it signaled "the end of word games" and "a return to meaning." I thought to myself, wow, these guys really want results. They believed so much in poetry that they traveled across the blue Atlantic to track changes in world events through our poets. But I said then, as I would say now, that art does not always have a fast metabolism.

My own situation is this: I live four blocks from the Trade Tower site. My initial response was abject silence.

Finally, all of my poems take as their starting point human events. While 9/11 was a convulsive moment in our country, and in my own life, I think the poem "Day Mark" is congruent with many others in the book. It harkens back to Chaucer's directive: "know thy countree." Given how mysterious and unknowable individuals can be, it's hard to know a whole country. But I hope many of my poems place the self within a larger context of perceived history, a reach to know.

LEE BRICCETTI

DAY MARK

During the evacuation I walked up
the thirty-six floors in a darkness
so utter the world no longer existed.
Voices, slammed fire doors,
above and below, fear, the smell of burning fuel.

Then, in the dusty air of my savagely bright apartment
I hovered over the body I'd lived in.

*

Fire-glass particles sparkled on the school roof

and the dazzle of charred steelwork
was a kind of blindness.

Triage stations, refrigerator lockers
—sound finished.
Rescuers and stunned residents under the dusty trees

remembered they were dust.

*

There is a blister on my mind.
I agree to that.

Moment as the plane, four blocks away,
turned, angling in—and I knew

CONTINUED

they would be dead but I would live.

And so it is.

Time, a membrane
we both slipped through, into the next
moment when I could scream.

*

Personality swallowed itself to a nerve:

live.

I live
above the pit, the river
a gorgeous frame

for abundant new morning light.

LEE BRICCETTI

WALKING THE RAT

I was crossing a line drawn in air by a rat down the drain
into a darkness I never hoped to discover.
My husband who loved me with part of himself that was still
 whole and secure
had let rodents spill out of his hurt like stuffing
 from a worn cushion
all over our rooms all over the city which is to say
he was beyond himself
but that's not what we called it.

He was waiting in the apartment that would clang shut
 with a metal lid
bigger than a rat trap but not so big
my mind didn't have to be cut to size
which is to say it was a battle
of such virulence we were locked in our mutually
 powerless animals
and couldn't recognize ourselves. And this went on and on.

I preferred walking in the soothing dark in the rat's path
between two points of reference, city's dark cloak
 lit from inside:
diffuse street light, bars spilling loose spools of laughter.

Tiny eyes beamed out of my anger and the voluptuous shadow
squeezed through the street crevice
flicking its tail like a dream.
My mind wore itself dumb and blind, ribbed
 with metal disappointments
a little screeching, a little lunging at the bars.

CONTINUED

Arguing can be a terrible perversion of sex, all assertion,
no glistening hold or connect.

Rat I never wanted to touch, rat I never wanted to see,
rat in my deceptive optimism I wanted to forget.
Old vegetables rotted in the trash behind restaurants
giving the city—yes,
a faint smell of sperm.

I called from the pay phone
and we walked in the night-city in which we live,
held hands, said very little,
walking the rat in the dark.

JACQUELINE KOLOSOV-WENTHE

KARAMA, OR IMPERISHABLE WISH

A stone from her hand is an apple.
Who could refuse such bounty, fragrant
as the sun-warmed meadow, sweet as
the strong roots that gave it life?

A stone from her hand is an apple,
and a bowl of Copenhagen-blue
filled with Oriole feathers
and striped kittens tumbling

onto cloth, a furred bundle
of outstretched paws, chaos
with a gravel tongue. In Arabic,
karama is not the homeless cat

scratching at the glass at midnight
nor the garden abandoned to thirst
and weeds. In Arabic, in any language,
karama is the gift of apples

just sweet enough to remind you
of the possibility of another way.
A stone from her hand is an apple
nesting beside a watering can

tinted green-gold by wind and rain.
From her hands come apples
and birds with ruby throats
come to drink from the bowl

surrounded by seedlings calling
to the green-gold watering can.
Each bird sings a lilting melody
while a hundred apples swarm the bees.

JACQUELINE KOLOSOV-WENTHE

FAST FORWARD

Running through the years. Milk white distances.
Landscape with a girl and her dog. Feet taste
fleetness. Hands and feet and breath articulate.
Going fast, going slow. Surrender to meadow-
larks, surrender to the apple's buzzing shade.
Ground underfoot dirt-sweet. And the dog
is a madrigal of licking. Shadows twist
into slumber; night blows in the teeth
of a mountain, maverick stars, and *look!*
a cream-sickle moon. Ripening, the apple
drops. Against gravity's embrace she runs,
faster, faster. Flustered surrender. Somewhere,
a girl and her dog, beneath the lantern-bright
stars, through the years, running still—

JACQUELINE KOLOSOV-WENTHE

AS BEFITTING A FEMALE DESCENDENT OF LORDS

(FOUND POEM, VOGUE)

haute couture laid waste
style icon fetishes isn't it terrible
madcap trousseau pouf dresses
piebald-pony bustiers and top
hat chased-silver platforms
bustled Brittany lace debuts
in Savile row textile morsels
Alaïa Chanel she grew up fast
no longer does Brideshead revisit
school uniforms now it's all silk
tulle and Tuleh lamé gold
she transcends chic transcends
art deco tiaras will be worn at parties
elegance and a bit of ethereal
funk dancing away to the ivory
lace at her wrist such airy
nonsense bursting beneath
a starry cosmos she's sublime
as a Gainsborough
or a Reynolds come to dine
sweeping into the room
in Lord Nelson's cape her
badger-streaming hair
and wistful dreaming air
she's gossamer with an edge
monsieur I tell you she flew

to Paris to have her eyelashes
steel toed and alligator-sleek
her heroes Valentino
and the young Turk
she fucks sharp and hard
how endearing how uniquely
unlike herself she is
beneath the unimaginable
resources the iconic
passion for just
the outrageously right detail

MADeline ARTENBERG

BEHIND DOORS: TOM AND SALLY

When Sally Hemings closes the door firmly behind her
to Mr. Thomas Jefferson's chambers,
for her, Monticello's world falls away
of prying house servants and gossiping field slaves.
For him, the blur stops
of dart-tongued, bittersweet-hearted men.

When Mr. Jefferson drags himself up the mountain
after days of struggling
to bring forth embryonic verbiage,
he quickly finds the dark cave
between Sally's breasts,
sinks his hair into them,
dreams of darker breasts once nourishing him.

By day, Thomas Jefferson pens tracts
against "man's passion for whores."
Behind doors, he lays out the tight, red corset
he bought for Sally when they all lived in Paris.
Her beauty runs away with his breath,
her long, straight hair envelops him.

In private, she's trained him to say,
"Yes, Miss Sally,"
kiss her calloused toes, still rough
from fields she once trod.
"That's a good boy," she says,
handing him a jar of thick, white cream
to rub into her feet, tired from tending
to his two vigorous daughters.

CONTINUED

Most of all, when Tom apologizes to Miss Sally
for the many buttons she has to sew,
she kisses him on the forehead;
most of all,
this is what they will remember.

MICHAEL VIZSOLYI

SATURDAY NIGHT

My mother brushes her hair in the mirror.
I am watching the evening news
out the window, a squirrel drowns
in the pool, an ambulance of flies arrives,
the crows on the fence
gossip about the location of the parents.

Looking down, my mother brushes her hair in the mirror.
The front door is open, a man is staring in the house,
when I ask his name, he says that our clock
is an hour behind, its really 9. I laugh
and grab a dog biscuit, he takes it, smiles,
and runs barking down the street.

Eyes closed, my mother brushes her hair in the mirror.
In her room, a nightgown makes a go
for the door, the bras pray to God
it will make it. The underwear will find it.
I return to my bed and tell myself that
my mother had been asleep all along.



Guy R. Beining: *Rock Symbols*

FEATURED POET

ALLEN BRAFMAN

STONE FEATHERS

IN THE BEGINNING, SMOKE

That was when he realized there
weren't any birds. It was the tree
itself that had been singing

from the beginning, a scattering
of trees, in a forsythia
forest nestled in the hills

a chorus of branches trilling like birds.
The singing stopped the same
way it began—in the midst

of silence. Every tree burst
into flame, a forest fire if
it were a forest. I don't

want to be the only
survivor, he thought, beginning
a song that started

with his name and
would end with it
when it ended.

This is where I am, he said.
It is music, it is smoke
coming from my mouth.

COLDEST DAY

the serpent was the shadow in the garden

All night snow slanting
shivers
before a dark white sky.
Trees shudder and blur.

Only the birds sleep.

And the drunk
wrapped
or buried
in straw
out in the barn.

Ferocious
dark blizzard raging—
terrifying night.

Maybe, not even the birds.
Maybe the drunk is not sleeping too.

Morning wipes the sky.

Rolling hills packed to burst
with winter's brittle white
soften
in little sun bloom
or seem to bloom
the same silver-blue
the ladies
color their hair
first Tuesday bingo
at the firehouse.

Incessant icy wind flowing
impresses the pond's thin surface
with itself
brings water to our eyes
blurs the day.
We nod.

Back and forth across the pond
birds
we cannot see.
We sense their motion, blink.
Our eyes begin to clear.
Eden may have been like this.
Adam's eyes watering. Eve's.
This was all they knew.
They did not want to lose it.

I hold my breath. You hold my hand
point out last year's corn
brittle stalks
poking through the snow
mostly where the ground abruptly rises.
Look to the rise, you say.

There. You point.
There's where the stalks show best.
Always there. Always
along the slope opposite the wind.

Smoke drifts and rises from my mouth
from yours.

I shiver again.
Again, you take my hand.

There are no shadows
here today you say.

A color
much like the color
that afternoon
last summer all hell broke loose.

BIRDS THICK AS WATER

*Each newly acquired loss
added
to all the losses
lost and tallied before.*

Into the crowd of birds
every bird finally disappears.
Or into the distance.

*local
chicken soup
tonite*

appears on chalkboard menu.

Fewer chickens
in front yard
tomorrow morning
scratch the earth
for breakfast.

*Loss accumulates—
weight of each new fruit
added
bears laden branch
nearer still to ground—*

*weight
of flowers
dried and gone.*

While he was speaking
the rain stopped
suddenly
as it had started.

He took no notice.

For he had no idea of it.

As he had no idea
it had started.

Birds disappear
where they are.

Or into the crowded branches.

Air thick with water
and heavy
those of us caught in the open
have trouble breathing.
We rush to cover

more for the air
than the cover.

The dead are dead forever.

*No, he said.
Dead are dead
only so long
as dead we remember.*

He shook his head.

Sea lapping restlessly at shore
now agitated
lifting
to rain—

Seamless flow
of endless water
briskly
turning to water.

CONTINUED

We need the dead to survive.

Comfortable on the verandah
his back to the sea
rising and falling at once
he never stops speaking.
It is just the sea.
And he has no idea of it.
For he sees in a different direction.

Sometimes a bird
hits an invisible
wall in the air
comes to earth
falls to water.

BIRD CHANGE

Two people
watch the same bird
an entire day. The bird
a jay
never diminishes.

This is the way two will learn to fly.
If one flies so will another.

A bird the color of sky. Each time
the sky shifts
a little the bird disappears
a little bit
more.

After the sky's gone
altogether
a small part of the bird
still struggling
to stay aloft
neither a cloud nor a wing
shivering in a shivering breeze.
The bird remains the same.

What has become of the people?
Their eyes have grown long.
Their mouths are stuffed with feathers.
Their arms are turning to wings.
One will be first to fly.
One will change more than another.

MEMORY

Last night, I built a snowman in the subway from memory.
With the right tool, I can build anything. The snowman
in the subway
did not melt.

In Prospect Park the other day a great blue
soaring, a dozen buffleheads,
the first robin.

After the snow. And after the wind.
Odd puffs of cotton
dangling from mazed branches,
white flowers,
nervous
in the still frigid air.

And a red-tailed hawk
—spread against the sky—
surfing the thermals

until a small creature
stirred
somewhere
among the reeds
on the near shore. The hawk dropped.

And one more bird.
I don't know what to call it,
dark, and very fast
in the underbrush.

When the sun comes
the flowers will drop from the trees in pieces
and dampen the earth.

Later, I found out the buffleheads were ring-necked ducks.
My memory for birds
is not as good as my memory for snow.

When the red-tail shot back up
something small
struggling in its talons.

Next time I am in the subway,
I will try to remember the difference
between a bufflehead
and a ring-necked duck.

Birds melt in my memory easily.
It is one of the reasons I follow them closely.

NO SONG IN THE YARD

No song in the yard
wakes him this morning—
must have gone south
with the bird.

GEOMETRY

I learn birdcalls
for no good reason.

I never need to look
to know which bird

just flew by. Pelicans
glide without sound, mind

their own geometry.
Each passing thermal

lifts my eyes.
I tilt my head

to get a better look
inside the quiet.

BALANCING ACT

Three years, you say,
you count birds
as they are, as they come
from the sky, one
feather at a time,
as good a measure as any.

Now the sky has fallen,
all you need to know, you say,
which way is up
to keep on counting,
which way to look—look out!
The birds are falling too.

How will you hold your head up?
How will you keep track of the sparrows?
The confusing
fall warblers?

You are better, you say, than anybody
at forgetting. How can you keep your balance?
How can you be sure
you are still falling?

Window box still overgrown with last week's snow—
wheeling scraps of black tinsel, pigeons,
silhouettes of a child's toy spinning,
wings too fast to see.

Where birds' feet scratched & scored the snow,
your own feet, now, indenting.
You talk to yourself as you go.

Three years counting,
you want to know
who is that bird calls each morning first light,
black tree against a faded sky?
You want to know
which way
in time
each bird will drop.

You want to stop the fragile silence counting out the days
between us.

WHAT THE BIRD SEES

I saw a beautiful woman the other day
who did not see me. I think she is
the same beautiful woman
I saw last week
who did not see me then.
The same beautiful woman
I saw the week before. The week before
she did not see me, as well.

I have been seeing
that same beautiful woman
all my life. All my life
She has not seen me once.

I am beginning to think it odd
I see her wherever I go.
I am beginning to wonder
what she sees
when she clearly
does not see me.

This began as a beautiful woman.
It could have been as easily most anything.
It might have been, for instance, some kind of bird.

I saw a bird the other day
that did not see me.
I think it was the same bird
I saw last week
that did not see me then. The same bird
I saw the week before. The week before
The bird did not see me, as well.

All my life, I have been seeing
that same beautiful bird,
or one very much like it. All my life,
that bird has not seen me even once.

I am beginning to think it odd
I see this bird wherever I go.
I am beginning to wonder
what the bird sees
when the bird clearly
does not see me.

WHAT KIND OF BIRD

What kind of bird builds a nest on a front stoop
where all kinds of people walk up and down all day.

The mason, a large man always sweating while he works,
tiptoes the moment he enters the yard
each morning at 7:00 until 4:00 or 5:00 when he leaves.

Yesterday, I met him on the corner
after he'd finished his day's work.
His face was dry.
His forehead was not furrowed.

It's not the work takes it out of you, he explained.
It's having to be close to the nest
not wanting to disturb it.

All day I hear the little ones inside wanting.

He is starting to sweat.

And the momma bird is up on a tree—
keep her eye on me.

I know she's waiting for me to turn away
so she can come on in with the lunch.

Sweat dribbles down his forehead
stinging his eyes.

I turn away as often as I can, he says, and still do my work.
Sometimes I forget, turn back
just as she is coming to the nest.

It breaks my heart to watch her do a sharp ‘u’
soon as she sees me facing toward the nest.

Some kind of fat insect
squirming in her bill.

Her babies crying just inches away.

What kind of bird builds a nest on a front stoop
where all kinds of people
walk up and down all day.

Too hard to be a bird, he says.

I love to work with my hands.

THE PIGEON

The boy holding the stick
wants to whack the pigeon.
Hit the bird, his friends
egg him on. Hit the bird.

The stick is not a stick.
It is a handrail from the
old chair scattered in
pieces along the cracked sidewalk.

He rushes at the pigeon
handrail held high over his head
and swats at nothing
as the pigeon takes off.

He does not plan on hurting
the pigeon. He just wants
to hit what he aims at. He wants
to get something right.

BREAKING LIGHT

HORSE RACE

Some say, they
are the same
clouds, circling
and returning.

He thought it
must be music. It
was the sound
of a cloud

falling.

(through the treetops)

The horse came
into view each
time it came
around the bend
filled the glasses.

He held his
breath until
he could no
longer breathe.

Each time the horse
comes around the
bend, it
fills the glasses.

Three pigeons break
the thin ice formed

overnight, skin
over yesterday's
snowmelt, mechanically

dip their bills in
and out
of the cold water like
dime store novelty
birds. He held his

breath until
he could no
longer hold it.
He let it go. A gap
opened in the fence.

He knew something
had broken. He fixed
his eye on
the opening. He cried.

The race ends
when the last
horse stops. Everyone
goes. He didn't have
anywhere to go.

IN TIME, THEY SAY

Soon after, her soft
white hair, tears
falling from his face

he could feel with
his skin, their
beard growing them

together he could
stroke with his hands.
Every corner he

turned another
mirror forbidding
him to look, nothing

but blind light
highlighting increasing
loss, glass

reflecting glass. They
see eye to eye now
when there is nothing

left to see. How
long could he
keep tears from

turning into long
white hair streaming
down his face. A sharp

blade this morning he
cut away his mourning
face all but a thin line

above his lip he is
terrified to lose, but
he knows its days are

numbered, as he knows the
days of this sadness
too will one day die.

DARK SNOW

Snow had taken the dark.
He pulled back the bedroom
curtain—a blanched

sky. The air had color.
Long ago someone
had said white

is not color. It is absence.
He could not recall who
that could have been.

He wanted the dark back,
he let the curtain go.
If he could not see

the dark was gone, it
must have returned.
He nodded his head in

recognition. In the dark
he could see everything. Snow
is a word for mirage.

CROSSING THE STREET

The woman in the rain this morning is Kim the way she would have looked today if she hadn't died twenty-five years earlier after how many years suffering to live a little bit longer for her children and for herself and for Dan who married again a few years later for the children and for himself and for Kim who would have wanted him to.

In the lightly falling rain we move closer to each other, she becoming more and more definitely Kim, irregular heaps of rubble growing on the sidewalk between us. How carefully I walk the unsteady landscape that is bringing us together. To make sure it is Kim I cross to the other side of the street turn the corner keep on going.

HIS MOTHER'S BACK

A boy he always
made it a point never
to step on a crack.

Now the mirror is
shattered he is thinking
she is supposed to

tell him what to
do, but her reflection is
gone with the splintered

glass, her tongue is cut. He
sits on the floor the
way his father sat when

his own mother had died. Rocks
back and forth he knows he is
thinking the same thoughts his father

had thought. He had been a child
then but there is nothing he does
not remember—his father

sobbing this is not the same, this is
worse than when my father
died. He knows as he sobs these same

words, if someone were
to take a jagged scrap of
mirror into the room it

would be his father's
tears rolling down his
face reflected.

CURTAIN CALL

He's an aspiring
actor, a woman
says into a cell

phone. The end
of everything was
scheduled

at the beginning.
The night the
theatre burns down

he'll change his mind
his first night on stage.
We do our job, the

fireman told the
reporter, and go.
We don't get personal.

LEARNING THE SHAPE

How do they know which one to follow, the little girl
wants to know, following the flock of pigeons
wheeling left then right then
left again in the open sky above the intersection
where the supermarket and pharmacy seem to have
allowed a place for pigeons, though certainly not by design.

Which one is the leader, she insists. No one,
someone says. They are equal and
of a single mind. Oh, she says, nodding
her small head in understanding, like fish, she
says, without moving her lips, strands of dark hair
flouncing in unison, though she does not notice.

TWO BROKEN

Once something precious is
lost, even after you

find it again from time to
time you come

across yourself
still looking.

I don't want to
talk about the people

I've spoken to on
the telephone who

died before I
got there.

CORRESPONDENCE

Your note came early this morning, yesterday,
a couple of months ago, early last year,
I did not open. I did not want to know.

My heart is origami.
My heart is a paper airplane,
creased & folded.

I hold your note in my hand, unopened,
since the early sixties.
The words in your note are flames.
They burn a hole in the palm of my hand.

I lean forward
to get a better look through the opening.
Everything I see, I want.

Soon, my palm will be empty.

THE VISIT

Five mangled deer
on the side of the
road on the way
to visit you. Your sister
sits quietly in a dime
store wheel chair in the
shade of three poplars
off to the side
of the house. Steel bolts
come through the gauze
wrapped about her ankles
and elbows. Insects are
everywhere colonizing and
consuming the torn
bodies of the deer.
We could make them out
easily from the
car—slowing down each
time just long enough
to get a good
look, then gunning
the engine to get away. We
would visit with
you longer, but we have to
get back on the road before traffic
gets so bad everything stops.
And I guess we hope
there'll be more deer to see.

THE DOOR

He opened the door and the house
was gone. Trees grew
where rooms used to be
making comfortable places
where deer were
arranged like furniture. Birds,
like finely
crafted knick-knacks of birds,
shifted about, wings
fluttering as though built
of real feathers. He turned
into a river and swam
backwards through the door

(which closed as he climbed
out onto dry land, straightening
his tie as
he increased the distance
between himself
and the room in the trees.

WHILE YOU WERE STRUGGLING

While you were struggling unsuccessfully
to breathe, I was in a cellar club
listening to a guitarist who had been famous
fifty years ago and the guitarist couldn't
keep his hands or his mouth off his bass
who is at least 50 years younger
and beautiful. The bass played along—
for the audience—part of her job, as it was
part of his, as it was part of ours to laugh
and pretend that what goes on in the cellar
is all that matters.

Outside a man shoves a paper cup
into my face. I look into
the cup. There is money in
the bottom. I want some.
I look into the man's eyes.
I do not take a penny.

On the sidewalk a clump of
feathers that used to be
a blue jay.

Do not let the past out.
Never let the future interfere.
Rock-a bye baby.
The tree collected its leaves
and left the forest like a giraffe
out of place.

CONTINUED

A woman puts a handwritten
sign before my eyes. She has
lost her job. Her children
are hungry. G-d bless you, the
sign reads, the letter “o” in the
middle of the word God replaced
by a dash, as is the custom in
certain religions where it is
forbidden to spell out the entire
name of God or pronounce it.

My backyard gave birth to a cardinal.

The tulips died. For the third time. In three years.

I watered the roof for weeks. A room
sprang up just the right size for
the new baby on the way. Look, you cried,
the room is pink. And it was. Yes, I said,
the room is pink. The baby will be a girl,
you said. And she was. The baby was pink.

She grew up to be a harpsichord.
When she plays, we die. We have
died ten thousand times listening
to her play. Each time we die we
count a blessing. We spell the word
out with every letter—blessing—
b.l.e.s.s.i.n.g—blessing. Like we were
taught how to spell in a spelling bee.

If I give everybody some
money, I will have to ask
for some of it back. I do not
like to ask. I probably won't. Though
I should
because I would have to.

I need to spend more
time on the subway
platform watching the rats running
alongside the rails.

In Prospect Park a robin stretches
to its full height listening for worms
in the tall grass.

A truck tore down the block ripped off my
side view mirror without stopping
to see what was reflected in it.

My neighbors' severed limbs squirming
in the irregular shards that were once
my mirror litter the block. I gather
up the pieces and struggle unsuccessfully
into the night to put my neighbors
back the way they were.

I am determined to stay here as long as
I can manage the pain.

A TALL PEOPLE

I open my mouth and
you whisper something
into my good ear.
I recognize the Secret
Name of God that
we are forbidden to pronounce.

I push your mouth
away and put my fingers
into your ears to silence
the remaining crippled
syllables before the mountains
become dust

out of which a tall
people will be formed whose
desires are far above the ground
that trembles with every step
and are unaware of those
who live in silence

between the stubble of their toes.

WEATHER REPORT

Just before the
weather began to
change, a child drifted into
sleep in the middle
of a nursery rhyme.

A man with a
history of violence
broke out of
the shadows, a
stiletto held
low in his left hand.

Dogs across
the land held
their tongues.

A woman ran
around the lake
thinking of her
heart, her
cholesterol, her weight,
the last
stages of the
merger she was
planning that
would set
the world on fire.

Now lasts a long
time, she
smiled. The sound of living
grates
on life's nerves.

CONTINUED

If you haven't
the stomach
stop tasting.

Strong
weather changes everything.

The dogs knew. The dogs
knew everything. Dogs are always
the first to know.

FAMILIAR FACES

Whenever he sees
someone he used to
know he crosses to
the other side of the

street zigzags along the
avenue to the subway.
More often than not
his feet twist together.

One day last month
he fell on his face
cracked his lip open.
Eleven stitches he took

in his right cheek. His
vision blurred.
He almost mistook
an old neighbor for

a stranger. He came this
close to remaining on
the wrong side of the
street. This close to vanishing.

UNEVEN SURFACES

THE ARRANGEMENT

Whenever I come across a deer in the woods
I imagine I am home
reading a book—

and the deer does not see me.

This is true also if the deer is in a clearing
and true as well
even if there are more than one deer.

As long as I imagine
I am somewhere else reading

the deer never see me—

as long as I keep on reading
as long as I want to look at them.

In Pagosa one June
I sat on the porch reading
a book by Oliver Sacks—*The Man
Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*. Late
afternoon several
mule deer came out of a stand
of young aspen
into the clearing behind the house
not ten feet from where I sat reading.

I lifted my eyes from the book
to get a good look at their ears
long like mule's ears
and the deer were gone—

CONTINUED

back into the trees, I supposed.

No! That's not true.

I *knew* they had gone back into the trees.

I had forgotten to pretend

I was reading

and they saw me.

In my stomach the branches are still shaking
where the deer passed

back into the trees

taking their ears away
because I had violated
the arrangement.

ON THE WAY

The tree out front cannot hang onto its leaves, one
after another, pale green added to pale yellow softly
cushion the way, there

goes one now fluttering down now gone
into the growing mound, some kind of sparrow
we pass by on the way to our grandchildren.

DAY JOB

No one in the audience knew
the performance had ended,
not one actor had left the stage.

You are the piece of cloth
torn from the piece of cloth
from which I am half made.

A butterfly staggers in the air
drunk with its own beauty, drunk
because it cannot find its caterpillar.

Trees leap about in the forest
where no one is around to see.
It is only then they are permitted.

Sometimes a tree stumbles and falls.
Trees have learned to pick themselves
up quietly with their seeds.

She ordered a cup of tea and a
slice of pound cake. She removed
her kerchief while she waited.

She unbuttoned her blouse
and slipped out of her skirt.
When the waiter returned

all that remained was her
clothing neatly piled on the
table. And a ten dollar bill crumpled.

The waiter grabbed the ten and
with it the tablecloth and ran
from his day job to the theatre.

Some say the theatre evaporated.
Others say it went up in flames.
Flawed memory the only record.

MY ELDERLY FRIEND

Each day he learns over again
how to walk. In the morning
he breaks the lock
that closed on his body
while he slept.

A boy, he fell out of the sky
and swam in the salt with dolphins.

In the trough between waves
they told him why
they arc in the air.
He no longer remembers
the reason.

After his body would seize
from sitting or standing too long in place

he would have to crack it open again
or never move.

Wave after wave crashes
onto shore, water
struggling to get out of the ocean.

In the language of dolphins,
he told me, walking slowly home,

thumping his cane in the sand,
there is no word for sand.

The word for human is the same
as the word for thirsty.

I need to get back to the water, he said,
where I can walk again without pain.

NIGHT & DAY

In his imagination bent nails
cover his bed he brushes away
with the back of his hand.

He does not want to bleed
while he sleeps, though he
knows the nails are not real.

In the morning, he will push the nails
aside with his toes. He wants
to make a way that will not draw blood.

One by one, he will pick each nail up
with his fingers, place it on his bed
to make a space in his room to walk in.

It is everything he knows
about changing the form of things.
He does not want his mind to bleed.

AGAINST VOLITION

It's the arthritis in
the hand, in the fingers, that
drops things that are meant to

be held. Do you still
tango, I inquired. I had not
seen him in years. I'll always

dance, he said, and
I'll always wear cologne. A smile
replaces his face. I had

never realized he
wore cologne. He knew
everything that

would ever be would
be the same as everything
that is now. How could I

be expected to
contend with an accordion
so simple to hold and

the butterfly's
eyes on the butterfly's wings
a disguise. Everything that

falls breaks into endless tiny
moments, each one large, a
style of its own.

FIRE SHADOW

A yellow butterfly lifts a little
girl from the front yard to
a forest of marigolds burning in a

third floor window box. Explosive
winds hurl the butterfly off
course, put a cinder in the child's

eye. The child falls back to the yard, free
of the butterfly, the rain that follows. The
child grows into a woman. Fed

by water. Flame that can never
extinguish. She has become the
daughter of that butterfly, large

black eyes growing on
yellow wings ferociously
she sometimes flutters.

WEDDING MOVIE

In the movie of the wedding, joy—
everyone on the screen animated, leaning
into one another, smiling or
laughing, music takes the place
of conversation. Bunched
on the living room sofa, we
watch ourselves
dance, strain to make out
what we are saying. We
wish we were there.

RAIN IS ALWAYS ON THE WAY

Rain is always on the way. What she said
is pain never goes away. Everything
he remembers from childhood, years

of reruns of home movies shadows
flicker like flames. This is a movie
of my father watching us play catch.

This one almost too dark
to make out the faces is my father
watching us on the Fourth of July

gaping at fireworks exploding
in the sky over Lake Etra where we
spent summers fishing and swimming.

Whenever it rains on television
he runs upstairs to close the windows.
He no longer recognizes the face

in the mirror he shaves in the morning.
He has forgotten the names of his children.
On the anniversary of September 11th

he shouts "Get out! Get out of the building!"
at an amateur video of the plane approaching.
He dreams his tongue is a flame

CONTINUED

licking at the feet of office workers
running to thick windows to escape.
He opens his eyes to extravagant smoke.

Once I lost one of the oars out
in the middle of the lake. I went over
the edge to bring it back. Don't go

my mother begged. I was gone
the boat rocking in the still water
behind me. There is no movie of me

swimming in deep water to bring
back the oar. Or my brother's admiring face,
my baby sister sleeping in mommy's arms.

All there is of that August afternoon—
sun ricocheting off the lake—my father
was not there to watch us through his lens—

is a poem my mother wrote the following week
she read to me this morning in the hospital
through vines of plastic tubing.

Rain is always on the way, she said.
Always wear your galoshes, she said.
Pain never goes away.

SEASONS

Afterwards, the scent of rain
fills the house with uncertainty.

Songbirds hold silence in their voice.

The garden fills with pause.
Where did the time go?
Over and over
aunts and uncles
wonder aloud
incomprehensible
language of grown-ups.
Doors and windows
all that are left of the walls.

Leaves fall against gravity
move light about.
Tremor
of unrelated ideas
excite the moment.
Sharp threads of light
disappear into invisible openings
in thin air.
Sound
vanishes in a flash into silence.

Or drop like birds
down
to where we sat before
waiting
for a bird to land
wanting to learn its name.

WHEREVER I LOOK, I AM NEVER THERE

As a boy I had been taught
never hide in a mirror.
I never have.

Never look back
I had been taught.
You will turn into a woman made of salt.
Animals will come
and diminish you slowly
with their tongues.

When someone has died
we sit on the ground
or on low stools.
Mirrors are covered.
Our heads are bowed.

Nothing alive may be reflected.
Nothing dead may be seen.

No one ever told me why,

except Larry Padwa
who didn't have a father
passed a note
in third grade civics
I could not understand—
Dead people live in mirrors.

I did not speak to Larry Padwa for a week.
I could not look him in the eye for a month.

How will I know without a mirror
whether my face is clean
when I wash?

How will I know whether my father is alive?

The thought of turning into a woman excited me.
The thought of animals
eliminating my face
with their tongues
excited me more.

I have never tried to hide in a mirror.
I have yet to look back.
I have never stopped looking for my father.

SILHOUETTES & SHADOWS

THE HUNGRY

The hungry
watch me eat
out of the corner
of my eye. I know
there is not enough
for all of us
want more. Their eyes
stir in my mouth. Their eyes
tear at my tongue.
I close my teeth
to keep what I am
inside. Their eyes
lick at my saliva. How well
we taste one another.

ANNA

That man's
talking to himself.
Don't let him

see you
looking at him.
He might
start talking to you.

Ordinary men on the subways
tear the shirts from their trousers
let the heat out.
I have always hated cooking.

Inside her eyes
telephones
ring in her ears
she cannot answer
what she does not hear.

Stuffs dolls
beneath her skirt
to bear children
she cannot bear.
She cannot bear
the absence of fire.

Not everybody sent
by central casting
is extra.
Summer
I enjoy a tall glass of lemonade.
Some of your white hair
may turn black.

Your missing hair
grow back.

Subway workers
swing
heavy tools
up onto their shoulders
turn
to look at women.

Neon vests
signal their intentions.
Work boots
take them back onto the track.

Here is a doll
tucked into a corner
of this filthy tunnel
the head missing.
No doll clothes
remain
on the body.

Loneliness
of burnt flames
no less desire
than anybody
extinguished.

Nobody
can say
they've seen me.
I never
squat on the tracks
doing my business
where they can.

SHE TUMBLES TO

Gray hair past the backs of her knees, she somersaults on a moving subway car, her hands in plastic sandwich bags—enormous crowds. She grabs a large, stained chartreuse & pink backpack from a nearby seat, zigzags, stumbling to the far end of the car, her eyes hula-hoops. The bag comfortably situated now on another seat, she sits beside it, turns her face to the wall, her back to the deafening crowd.

Questions filter dark light flickering subway afternoon. What does she know? Does she know she is tumbling? Does she have any idea why? What language does she speak—when she speaks? Is it to keep the filth of the subway car floor from her hands she wears those plastic sandwich bags? Each time she turns, a small part of her back, just above the elastic waistband of her black tights, exposed. There peeks out from behind her gray hair, a delicate sliver of pink underpants.

Now she is in the teeming street, what does she think, mysterious, where she floats, gray as an elephant's ear, her hair ripples and flows. Massive, ponderous beasts, trunk to tail, circle the ring. Arms stretch & point. There she is! Soaring above the packed bleachers. Necks crane. Her fingers turn to feet. A thin & shaky ladder reaches to the top of the big top. The crowd roars with popcorn teeth. Invisible as rain, a tightrope stretches, sways. Impulsive acrobat! Who will compel you watch her dangle from her hair? Breathless tent! Who will be first to look away?

Gray hair past the backs of her knees, somersaults with the greatest of ease. Head-over-heels, passes through vast arenas of tumbling air, flying trapeze, in plastic sandwich bags, she drifts through the center of a moving subway car, balance in the palms of her hands. She has always known how to fall.

RATS

A rat passed across my shadow.
My shadow paralyzed.

Everything I have ever known
frizzles before my eyes.

The rat itself is gone in half a second.
The shadow rat has never left.

Now my life is shorter by a shadow.
The shadow keeps on coming longer.

TAKE A CHANCE

Take a chance, he calls
a carnival barker's challenging
invitation to the endless faces
passing. *Take a chance*. The
implication: Maybe you'll come
out ahead for a change.
But this is not a carnival. This is

a New York City subway car, and
there is no passing crowd. People
seated or standing pressed
hard together. All that passes
the train tunneling through
an underground passage
and the man who is calling

take a chance. And he
is not a carnival barker, but
a man who could use a bath and
a shave and a change of clothes—a
paper cup held out in his right hand
pushes slowly through the crowd
carefully keeping his eyes from

touching any of the other eyes that
crowd the subway car. *Take a
chance*, he says, in a voice with-
out challenge or conviction. *Take a
chance*, he repeats. *Take a chance*.
Maybe I'll buy food, inviting
the faces he does not see to come

out ahead for a change. *Maybe*
I'll buy food, he says again. *Take a chance.*
Every day on the 'F' train during
evening rush from 2nd Avenue up to
42nd and then back down. *Maybe I'll*
buy food, he says, on a moving train
in a voice that could easily go either way.

NO PEOPLE

No people
living
inside these faces
I recognize edgy
uninspired features
everywhere I look
hollow looks scant
and hardened
eyes. If there would be people
living there
when they hear me speak
their faces say
they hear no sound, my voice
no longer words
but traffic
vaguely in the way.

ROOF JOB

Birds fall up into trees
with the same ease as
they fall out
down to the ground.

Beneath a black oak two
handymen argue on the
sidewalk in front of an
old hardware store.

It's a roof job, man. We can
bang it out in a day.

Yeah. It's a roof job. It's a lot of
heavy carrying. I know who
you figure's gonna do
most of that carrying.

Don't sweat the details, man. It's a
roof job. We can
get two maybe three
thou.

Maybe. Maybe yes. Maybe
no. What if they won't
go for it. What if they say
it's too much?

CONTINUED

That's when we hit em with it's a roof
job, man. We tell them it's a lot of heavy
carrying. Up and down the ladder. Then
we tell them we'll knock off
a couple hundred. Make it
easy on them. Alls we have to do is
drag it out a few extra days so's they think
they're getting their money's worth.

Yeah. Well it's still
gonna be a lotta carrying. Who's gonna
do the carrying?

Hey, man, let's just see if we can
get the damn job before
someone beats us out.

What about ladders? Where
we gonna get ladders? You do
a roof you gotta have ladders.

Don't worry about ladders, man. All
you ever talk about is hassles. We'll
get the damn ladders, man. Like I said before
let's get the job first.

A bird drops down
from the tree. Another
drops up. They
pass each other fluttering
their wings without
apparent recognition or
even acknowledgement.

It's a roof job, man. Someone's gonna get the contract. It might as well be us. We won't even do the carrying. We'll get some Mexicans or something to do the heavy work. We don't even need ladders for the carrying. We'll rig up a winch.

The old roof'll go down to the ground easy as a bird dropping out of a tree. The new one'll go up the same—just as easy, man. Just another bird going back up into its tree.

Two maybe three thousand, you say. I like that. Let's get some Mexicans. But how about we get a coupla brews first.

Two more birds fall up into the oak. Soon one falls back down.

DEATH DUST

No music anymore on the subway.
No more song. The last time

I saw you, you were a ghost
shrouded in ash, strumming

an old guitar with broken
fingers and a missing string, crouched

in a place ghosts are afraid to be—
You said you were trying to lift the

dead. It was a place we never belonged
even when we were still alive.

NO ONE LISTENS

The bottom fell out of the tree.
Green apples cover the ground.
Too many musicians
ride the subways
holding out their hands
after a handful of easy notes
two or three familiar chords
and a final flourish. This is
the way music is taught on the
hungry subway. No one listens.

ATTACKED FROM WITHIN

With each step the sidewalk collapses his heart.
He makes it to the subway entrance a hundred
miracles. The stairs going down move side to side
like a drunken escalator. The platform is crowded
with impatience. They never stop staring at him.
He lets the first two trains go without him too crowded
and takes the third his lucky number all the way uptown
and nothing harmful befalls him as near as he can tell.
He crosses over to the downtown platform grabs the first
train without incident all the way back everyone still staring
and makes it the few blocks home through the rubble hundreds
of miracles the telephone and TV still working there's
beer and peanut butter in the frig. That was the way it
was the last time he went anywhere outside. He calls out
every day for what he needs and they bring it. He wishes
they would just bring it over without the telephone. He's never
going out there again.

MASKS

Blind from every direction, they
sleep in bushes not
to be seen, eight

months pregnant hurries
down the subway stairs catch
the uptown F, the baby in

her naked belly holstered
in the palm of
her hand, doors

slip
together behind her, he is working
on a large piece, the painter

announces, I pull my shoulders back to
show I know large
is important, our eyes lock in awe pigeons

fly over Seventh Avenue in formation, maybe
they think they are geese, the Mexicans and Koreans at
the corner grocer teach one another English, who

are you, my mother asks, your son, I say, who
am I, she answers, who am I now, who
am I now, the

impressionist wants to know, turning to face
his rapt audience, squeezed
into a new personality, dying to

CONTINUED

be recognized, I have to go to
this party
in Connecticut, I was invited, she

tells the man who
works Fridays in the Halloween store.
I have to be someone.

THE ELEPHANT

Walks to the corner, turns, walks
back to the
corner, ordinary
distance gets him
nowhere, every corner
of every hour, another
few minutes to go,
an empty room every
one struggles to see
the elephant
turn round and round.
See the elephant
turn slowly
into an hourglass.
Walks to the corner, turns
walks back to the corner. What
does he think
he has learned? The elephant
is still in the room.



My days and nights are spent with my wife, often with one or more of our five children and eight grandchildren. Most of the time, it is more than enough for one life. It is the rhythm of the one life that is mine, that will end only when I do. Meanwhile, there is now.

The poems collected here are largely from the past few years, though perhaps ten or fifteen percent are from some earlier times. Generally, the poems describe the surface of a moment in time or in place, the undercurrents that con-

tinually texture that surface frequently operating as a nearly visible dimension of added tension. Regardless, all are elements of the world we inhabit which inhabits us. Sometimes, meaning is discovered with the naked eye; other times, it is revealed with a high-powered electron microscope. Either mode of perception as well as a host of other techniques works effectively to get us through the day. Poetry is the rhythm of any particular method.

