



Parting Gifts
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Death Show

First the men put their hats on,
then the birds take seats in trees.
First it's like a circus,
then it's like a high-sad opera,
birds whew-whew-whewing.

Since everything must be covered
and prayers have to be sung, women
send bread and eggs to eat in stages

First children breathe in the windows,
then on old wicker chairs

The birds in their whew-whew-whewing
say, First you learn to work,
then learn to be quiet

First hold any hand,
then hold your hand.

Rosalyn DeMaio Roffman

PROTEUS VULGARIS

Concretissimo
Is changing her clothes
She pauses naked by the door
To watch the garden
Changing into noon

Fine solar dust
Covers the dial
Behind the hedge
A gardener awakes
In his pocket are some coins
He names the game
And the rules change

Tony D'Arpino

TAKE OFF

The plane's gut drags on the ground.
On his first attempt
the pilot can't get it up.
I know it's because I'm pregnant.
We skid to the barricades on hot rubber.
he turns us the plane to try again.
He gives instruction slowly.
Rescreaniing down the runway at 300 miles per
on cue
I take my biggest breath
and for one second
I am less than I was, lighter.
All that is needed to fly again.
Trees brush its belly; my stomach.
We exhale in air.

Elizabeth Kerlikowske

Retrieving

We slid down the limestone bank
into the blue surface
cold from underground.
I noticed your freckles,
how they schemed
to make you perfect.

You were strong
that summer before Vietnam.
You held the huge striped watermelon
high above you,
back arched,
hurled it
into the water--
all to prove how smart
your dog was.

He leaped through the air
barking
legs wheeling
retrieving
wrestling the melon
paws pushing it forward
through water
back to the world.

Julia Carson

Hellman's Girl Returns from England

The cop is shouting *what the hell* my girl
is doing rolling and moaning in the ditch
like she has rabies or some other crazy disease.
I can see his concern, his blue accusation,
his billy club itching to crush my skull,
for having, as he would say, *abused* my woman.
I think to myself--Hellman, old buddy,
you don't need half your brains leaking all over
Ab's hair, she thinks already you're an idiot,
think quick boy. I say *Sir--my girl here*
has just come back from England. Her dog
and I were picking her up when on the way home
she gets sick on too much English beer. She yells
"Stop the goddamn car!" and when she yells I stop
even in the middle of the road, where the dog jumps
in front of the car, and ab jumps out screaming "Taaaaa
shaaaaaaa!" and I'm shouting "Dammit Ab--
the dog's okay!" and she's gagging, the whole
nosy neighborhood's lighting up, and I yell
"Nothing's the fuck wrong, the dog's okay and she's sick!"
Sir--I'll take her to the hospital. Things like this
happen to us all the time, it's the way we welcome
one another, play with one another, and we're in love.

Richard Long

A CHALLENGE / DIRGE / PRAYER FOR SPRING

Remember April: how the warm surfaces
with the green. How its days
allow nothing so forlorn as pity to stray
front our pampered hearts. With the grace
of bobcat / ephemeral deer / life then lunges to keep pace
with dream, betraying
none of winter's reserve. Those who claim they
knew us will marvel at the resurrection, at our trace-
less extinction of all body armor
and mental defeats.
In that one month of contoured
hope we will cheat
the rawness that has conte, will
come; that even in April is coming still.

Kat Meads

NAPOLEAN AND ADOLFO

1. The Picture

In this news photograph
now a month faded
Salvador's president Jose Napoleon Duarte
presents a plaque
from the Presidential Commission in San Miguel
to the army's head General Adolfo Blandon
iii recognition of his big epaulettes
and snappy camouflage hat
--no, I've translated wrong--
in recognition of his service and labor
to the rebuilding of the country.

They shake hands and are serious.
Tiles on the roof behind them
are shaking and serious. You can open the door
duck the barbed wire and walk in,
if you have clearance.
It is the Presidential Commission of San Miguel.
The desk is tidy,
and on the cabinets
are more photographs of campesinos
than news or text. Graffiti ghosts scale scrub marks
on the wall. Still legible:
Superman tuc muerto en Vietnam.

As the picture goes to press
Napolean and Adolfo are in the air
on a national airline flight
to the United States. San Miguel,
Santa Ana, San Salvador and rest of the saints
back home gossip about the tens of millions of dolares
the government has received

in earthquake relief contributions. Once the soldiers
have safely passed
they put signs outside their cardboard
and tin shelters: RELIEF AID NEEDED
--FROM ANYONE. Through the streets zip parakeets,
the only ones not crowded.

A pig walks into the office
of the Presidential Commission without clearance
and Commissioner Charlaix has no patience
to explain the importance of procedures;
he has raised the stick, a stick which before
the official visit
marked a fresh grave on the highway.

II. The Caption

What do Napoleon and Adolfo talk about
in clouds and volcanos and tropic winds?
Amid dozens of guards on the runway, they took off
and the sound system played "Ride of the Valkyries"
(Literal translation: "Choosers of the Slain")
and the film screen lit up
showing The Money Pit.
What do they discuss?

They are on their way to the United Nations.
The Honorable Secretary General
Javier Perez de Cuellar will introduce
The honorable President
lose Napoleon Duarte who will introduce
The Honorable General
Adolfo Blandon who will show his new plaque.
Napoleon and Adolfo will celebrate
their country's return to democracy.
They will sing of the earthquake's damage to normalization.
They will lock eyes

Pablo Neruda, you celebrate the mass of the unexpected kiss,
Insect prayer, and noon shadow caress,
Of the raising of the dead by the dawn,
The washing of children in rivers that are never blessed,
And the speeches of lightning strokes.
Silhouette of the flight of deer and the quickness of rabbits,
Believer without hope,
Elusive as the silver on the hacks of maple leaves,
Living and dead as the wind, you fly to me a city sparrow,
Retreat like sleep,
And glide, a reluctant falcon from my outstretched arms
As I weep.

Victor Camillo

Pablo Neruda, writing morning to night,
And love on a tombstone,
Striding between grave sites,
Red wine christening the lips of your soul,
Noticing the emptiness of houses,
And chopping wood with words of fire and pain,
I get up the ordinary days that you write,
To the flight of telephone wires and horses' manes,
The questions of early corn,
The hands that death joins,
And the impatience of waitresses jingling coins.
I retreat to sleep in the thick arms of deserts
And the pockets of mountain forests,
Dream in the movement of a child's fingers at play,
The light of the moon above a dim ravine made only for its,
And shadows that grow but never go away.
I have found that you are a conversation of neighbors
Over rose gardens in Santa Fe,
June spiders on backyard tables,
The sweat taxes of the desert that I pay,
The firmness of handshakes and the passion of cooking stoves,
Train rails reaching for Texas,
And bored hawks above picnic groves.
Traveling, the sun laughs at me like a raven,
Snakes on glittering rocks sing my song,
And dirt paths want to drag me to a cactus wilderness
Where lost religions have gone.
Clouds float, dead, white and alone,
A thousand miles from any replenishing coast,
Cars at the sides of roads stiffer death in air fire
So dry and slow that their bodies linger longer
Than their once swift drivers.

with the eyes of the men from Oman and Qatar
and promise more glory and peace and clear skies.
And then one by one Secretary de Cuellar
will poll all the nations to see how much more
each land will contribute
to rebuild Salvador.

The airline staff serves cognac and chicken.
Adolfo: I like the phrase "Ministry of Hope." What
do you think? Napoleon: Not for this speech.
We'll be talking to press afterwards.
They'll ask about new visa law and guerillas. Let's say
something nice about security. Adolfo: I like the phrase
"Soldiers of Hope." What do you think?

A man in new shoes picks fresh bougainvillea
outside a Miami real estate office,
the city where airplanes first touch down.

III. The Journal

In San Salvador the pictures romance awareness:
When the earthquake hit
the statue of San Salvador del Mundi
Christ fell off the world--now his foot
alone
rests on the globe. Muslin tents are hospitals.
Near the mercado a three-story building
lea mis drunken toward the street. Children carry
water jugs on their heads past prison crews
--yes, chains--
who clear debris. A corner stand sells turtle eggs

and novelties of couples fucking
at the feet of the Pope. Construction crews
reinforce two walls,
the presidential palace amid the United States embassy.
This is the city
where Napoleon and Adolfo will come home,
and a duet will play Cat Stevens songs
at the hotel
and men in dark suits
will curse the hot weather and trade rum and paper.
(in corners where homeless seek shelter tortillas
will cool on flat rocks. Dogs will play tag.

At the defense ministry, Adolfo will hang his new plaque
and the press will report it
and the poor will laugh
amid Napoleon will hang a picture
of himself with the honorable Secretary General de Ctmellar
and the signs on the street will run
in winter rains.

David Shevin

READING PABLO NERUDA IN THE SOUTHWEST

Pablo Neruda,
I have carried your books for three thousand miles,
Reading below circles of crows,
Your pen writing the weather for me,
Beside wildflowers as the dusk grows.
I have seen pueblos in Colorado
Beside light walking from stone to stone,
Cattle sculpted from the sides of wire fences,
And dogs, in small towns, bewildered and alone.
I have ridden highways to stars,
Passed the lost dreams of weathered sheds,
Seen mirages of white-robed women
And your name written in the random desolation
of abandoned barns.
I have walked with you in New Mexico's mountains,
And in the lights of Santiago
Glittering in Colorado snow.
I have run from the stares of the hungry
In the eyes of sunflowers.
You have brought summer storms low
And rain that gathered like a crowd of sufferers
on black roads,
Far from granite castles and blue cities,
I have seen a land without poems.

BED

Midnight comes and you
are long asleep across this town
whose name we made our own
through golden leaves, ice
gleaming from white eaves,
peonies bursting into flames
of perfume on the air.
A purring cat sleeps curled
against my legs, and hot
July brings scent of ripening
berries through the windows.
A week ago I said goodbye
and we pressed close in final
coupling, mouth and mind and all
our bodies knew to give.
Now I feel stars burn
above, the moon aches orange
three quarters full, my hands
reach clenching in the dark
empty with your shadow.

Katharyn Machan Aal

EDITOR AS VOYEUR.
OR THE I WISH
YOU'D SEND
THE NEXT BATCH
WITH THREE OR FOUR
GLOSSY NUDES
REJECTION

like the man
so stoned on coke
in Michigan he'd
pass out on
the phone leave
my line as dis
connected who
wanted to do a
hook of mine,
call it UNDRESSED
with a nude photo
or at least only
bib overalls,
as if only he
had the sheets
I could spread
out on

lyn lifshin

October

At the crest of the slope I stopped and turned. Our house, a three-story stone structure, represented my father's education in the stone mason trade; his father was his teacher. My grandfather and father and two brothers later added three rooms, one a bathroom. Generations of stone masons.

A memory: I'm sitting on a rock, watching my father and grandfather and brothers wordlessly assembling a stone wall. My mother is in the house. I'm alone out here, listening to the muted chink of stone on stone in the dry October air.

We buried father in the place next to mother last week, on the reverse side of my grandmother and grandfather. My father was the last to go. The headstone was already carved with his name. His old spaniel, Lettie, has quit eating. All week she followed me; through bleary eyes she watched me pack clothing in boxes, dump drawers out on the floor and finger through tacks and fuses and wire for something worth keeping, like someone panning for gold.

Lettie followed me up the hill and waited with me when my brothers went on. My brothers have discussed shooting her. I want to coax her into my car., take her home and try to get her to eat.

My brothers are already splashing in the pond. Their voices call: "Come on Lettie! Come on girl!"

Kathleen Giencke

The traffic stops and we
cross the street

our arms encircling each
other. Around us

the air is bright.
At the curb

a woman frowning darkly
touches my wrist

saying,
Tell me that you bless me."

Jennifer Nostrand

In large cities
it's hard to see stars.

A fountain spreads
like a white flower

around us.
Above the shifting traffic

and flashing lights
illuminated doorways

and pale windows
there are stars.

Jennifer Nostrand

by spiders sailing long webs off
the mountain in the wind,

to gather
on the finest motes
that float on air

a rising mist.

The earth is a memory of water.

Errol Hess

A MESSAGE FOR BILL L., WHEREVER HE IS

There was something, not your voice exactly,
more a vibration trembling down the cord,
that wire like an imaginary line
between my window and yours.
I thought of this at the telephone display
at the Museum of Science and Industry, those wires
pulled tight throughout America, all those
lights going on.

The vibrations, they were nothing
to do with us, our children's
voices at the center. It was the pure thrill
of causes, of connections. Remember that machine
you had, those metal squares
enclosed in their glass globe,
rhythmically catching the light?

Janet McCann

CHRISTMAS CARD TO A FRIEND BY LETTER

Your face does not
Grow small in memory like those of couples
We used to get Christmas cards from,
Bob and (Audi, Ross and Mary Lou,
Waving in front of suburban homes
While the whole blank landscape
Rushed into the margins like a train;
Nor did those people hide
In dreams of bombed-out houses,
Calling my name, and the names of all my dead.

I think of a thousand black-and-white
Photographs spread out on some old table,
Photographs of things that might have happened.
And yet we do not see each other
And I have little to tell you this year.
I tried to learn astronomy but it did
Not work. I carve rough boats from wood.
Wood calms the hands, and watching the grain emerge
Steadies the mind. I think that in infinity,
Parallel lines do meet.

Janet McCann

A Memory of Water

Bead of water on leaf
moon pulls a wide-arched hump
around the night sky,
then adds its force to earth's
drawing drop down flatter.
It leans to the near mountain
ever so slightly,
then to me
as I walk by,
to a bird entering its sky
and to animals that come close.

Drawn from mist
fragment to fragment to
drop
pulling themselves together
to a full round shape--
if earth didn't fight to flatten it,
if its weight didn't draw down the leaf till
it slips off,
if air didn't spread it
and pull it a streamer tail as it sails,
if ground didn't shatter it
then suck it underneath.

Moist tire
wrapped thin over a crumb of soil
is drawn airborne by sun to rise

I become words spoken by lingers
Held in a mother's closed palm,
The blue of Oklahoma's sky eyes that will soon be gone,
And a priest of the religion of the weather
As it slides on my face and creates my breath.

Victor Camillo

JACOB'S BED

There were many nights
he slept as empty as
we sleep, his dreams like ours
of distanced lust, towers, streams--
or nights he lay awake,
anxious and no angels.

And if, among such unspectacular
repose, there once descended
more memorable sleep,
let us sleep too.
At last our bed may likewise lie
where God looks down,
where the monitors of that brightness
can make of an exhausted stranger their threshold.

Raeburn Miller

MY FATHER'S CLARINET

Once the deerlick
sat close to the school
and mornings iii spring
two does bounded across 325
right in front of the bus.

I rested my eyelids
into yellow bruises
on my forearms.
The window was open
to scent of alfalfa
and tobacco.
The teacher was talking
about binomials.

Fighting with my father then
was easier than not fighting.
I knew that accepting
the blows and humiliation
would make me feel alone
as the boy from Mercerville
who opened a horse
before he shot himself.

So my eyelids kissed skin
in the sweet dusk of shadow
so close to the desk.
In a jungle of warmth
the old bulb was fizzling
arid a moth tapped on walltiles
above the thick door.

Later. at home.
I stayed hid in my room.
I didn't feel scared
even though fighting noises
came from downstairs.
Then the hifi came on.
And a door closed hard.

When my father was upset
she said, tears suffused,
he always put on this
strange clarinet music
and broke things
in the dark.

David Shevin

SULPHUR OKLAHOMA
(with the Carson and Barnes Circus)

The sun eats my fingers,
Families on corners stand as still as posts,
White seagull clouds
Sulk over the burned grass sea
And regretful brown streams
Hallucinating rain ghosts.

This is death for the summer,
Fountains fainting, parks dry in their dirt socks,
And roads melting in the wind
Walking barefoot over sharp rocks.

But there is hope in light reflected from cars
Reaffirming Sunday's twelve o'clock hymns.
Now the air stirs
A temptation of the rebirth of folded-back leaves
And the cries of birds.
Fearful flowers lighten in the Sabbath
And people are walking about,
Under the deadness without clouds.

Then the sun is still in confessing pines,
The day spins gardens out of its desert mind,
And children under a circus tent turn from the breeze
That was once the shape of death.

like a tent. She
won't wear lipstick.
Pewter wind glues
us like those moaning
who clot in a glacier

lyn lifshin

ORANGE POPSICLE

"Come on home, Rupert." she whispers.
She's got this orange Popsicle in her mouth,
it's the only cool thing going.
She's never been cool and if she wore panties,
they'd be melded to her crotch by now,
then he'd cuss if he had to pull them off
or down or out, likely tearing them.
He says, "I got no time for this,
or these," as he pinches at her nipples;
which is all there is anyway.

Then they'll do it
Standing up most likely,
in front of the TV. where he'll cuss
at the grainy picture and make her be quiet
so he can hear the sound.
Or maybe, he'll back her up against the
metal sink, but once they broke her
granny's blessed cream pitcher
(the one with the cows on it) —
it fell off the shelf into the dishwater —
a brown cow's head stared at her all day
from the dying, gray suds of the sink,
'til she threw it down the stairwell

(those pink eyes were driving her crazy) and they never used a cream pitcher anyway.

“So come on Rupert,” she says,
she’s talking to the pulled down blind,
pacing and waiting in a tin-box room.
The orange Popsicle drips down her wrist;
licking it off brings a taste of salt and
spice and nothing orange.

Then she goes and stands in front of the fan,
puts her buttocks against the wire grid,
so the blades, once fierce and shiny,
now flaked rusty
stir up stale air against the back of her neck,
the cinnamon curls, slowly wilting

But it’s hot cool.
here or anywhere else in the world,
so finally. she lifts up the dress
with one free hand, sucks off the last
of the dripping orange ice,
chews on the stick with a vengeance.

But the heat still clutches her,
the dampness creeping into all her bends
and corners and edges, making her worry
that she too might rust.

AFTER THE VISIT

all that’s left,
cigarette smoke
On a towel Kleenex
boxes in the bedroom.
I walk thin rooms
October yellow light
bleaches as if some
one in them had
died. Two summers
when it was 98 I lay
on the itchy couch as
moths flung into
screens and we read
diaries of women who
only wrote in them
in a trance
putting my hones
back together. Now
tho I’m in black
tights in a room
of a brace of pink
legs she can’t
figure which blur
is me. Without a
child, I’m like
hers still. When
my mother takes out
her teeth in Friendly’s
Angie and her boyfriend
3 booths away smile and
I feel something
in me collapsing

On Egrets

Fronde of grass at the river.
Blue bowl in the yard.
Long-necked heron
riding the cow's brown back
riding the blue bowl of heaven
walking the patient morning
river, an image herself.
Names fly up like feathers.
Fly away, sounds
no more her than any sound
her own throat makes.
Words skate the surface
like so many waterbugs
while she stands in silence. I learn
to wait among grasses.
Her comings and goings
ruffle only air.
Her presence indicates white
in the scheme of things,
only white. that's all.
A floating feather
rides blue sides of air.

Barbara Van Noord

Finally she lifts the dress up and off;
it puddles to the floor like liquid,
then she looks at herself -
a zebra of damp white bathing suit markings.
Taking the Popsicle stick out of her mouth,
she fluffs up her pubic curls,
glistening dark and dangerous--
bunched up like gangsters making a hit.

Then, when lie bursts through the door,
there she stands--
she is naked.
slowly putting the Popsicle stick
back into her orange-stained mouth.
She looks at him. solemn like a priest.
she can't yet think of his name.
can't even form a thought.

he thinks that lie must have walked
into the wrong room,
come to the wrong woman.
he wants, for an instant,
to go back out on the street.
Just to be out of here.

But then she drops the wooden stick,
it falls onto the dress curled at her feet
with no sound.
With her orangey lips, her lop-sided smile,
she says. "Rupert. Hey Rupert."

'Then lie slams the door shut

Angi Kelly

MY HUSBAND DREAMS OF DEATH

He wakes, tells me
the knife was real,
the cliff was high,
the gun sang blue
fire to his head.

Between us there
are knotted strings,
connection, confusion.
Do I throw new flowers
on the lowered casket?

Katharyn Machan Aal