



Parting Gifts

Volume 1, Number 2
Winter 1988-89

Copyright 1989
March Street Press
All rights revert to the authors upon publication
March Street Press
3006 Stonecutter Terrace
Greensboro NC 27405

Driving Off the Stray

We live here newly wed
with two dogs of our own

we have nothing to share
with a black and white runt

the front legs longer than the hind
and if one of our dogs befriended

the stray he was new here and a gelding
with no gun I threw rocks

not long enough hard enough
who cut the heads

off chickens for our supper
I threw and threw rocks

never long enough hard enough
and only then called the Humane

Society its nooses its traps
to remove the stray no doubt

to destroy it we live on
with two dogs of our own

Eric 'I'orgersen

DT Express

he was riding
the DT Express
down the long
green highway
all the way down
from Quang Tri.
He had those
terminally
shaking hands
you only got from
too many hot
hours roasting
in the sun
whistling Home
Sweet Home between
clenched teeth
dying for a drink

Ray Catina

Steinmetz, prince of his realm,
learns from the river;
stream becomes Strom
and the current carries

Steinmetz surprised

to a kingdom
not his own.

Jack D. Harvey

Mistakes

They always
say to you
when you
make a
mistake
that you're
supposed
to drink
them
"I don't
do scotch
and Ginger Ale"
I say
I don't
drink my
mistakes
I live
them

Ray Catina

Steinmetz

Steinmetz the mindsmith,
like a fetish in his canoe
twisted
and impenetrable as Vulcan.

To command the outside
the dome dumb as the
Balkan heights;
but inside the rails
lead onward forever.

Steinmetz walking on wheels
happy as a mole;
his vision floats
in the hollows of
the names of things:
airy as hawks,
his thoughts
move away from the
pain of his body.

The still Mohawk
a vision of plenty,
an outside
ordered as the law of reason.

Science?
Steinmetz searches the world's shell
for a grain of knowledge
for the pleasure it brings
for the bitter despair

for the Serpent's garden
he searches.

Morning in San Salvador

Roosters lie in the dust.
The sharp red of their combs
is the only light.
Their puffed feathers
hide the strings that bind their feet.

They are shrouded in newsprint
and handed to a woman like a bouquet.
Each feather is plucked like falling petals.
Naked, they are cooked in black pots
under the sky.

Sticks of sugar cane
stand like soldiers saluting.
Men with steel scythes swing
and stalks fall.
The cane is sold as candy
or crushed to oozing green juice.

Three children sit in a box
without sand or toy trucks.
Only stones surround them.
Their dark house is made of
fruit crates and matted leaves.
It is filled with faces of Christ
among burning candles.

Last night there were raids.
Today arms fly out of the ditches.
They cling to the feet
that walk on the dust as if
they are wild vines.

Fran Barst

Again

The night of the day her husband died Caroline sat on her porch with a blanket around her and listened to the insects until morning. They sounded raucous arid temperate at the same time. They reminded her of nights when she was a child in her pajamas on the lawn. Slow stars pressed out of the sky, and her parents, aunts and uncles, sat in black shapes and voices on the porch where the light from inside fell through blue railings onto the grass.

She and her cousins, apart from them, ran in pajamas and iii circles playing hide-and-seek in front of the barn.

On the other side of the railings, it seemed a short time that site and her sisters had talked in the dark and her children had run to goal.

Caroline listened to the insects. They sounded like children playing in the dark. They sounded like her parents. She didn't talk to them. She was apart from her parents and tire children.

Caroline listened to the insects and in her head she made their noise with her lips site sounded kree-kree-kree. Their sounds held her in her chair, held the blanket.

In the morning, light hung outside the railings, and white insects looked like stars in the light in front of the barn, stars not moving fast and not bumping into each other.

Randean Tetu

But I must know their names, please but I must know their nanies!
Before you make them gone to me
gone to me for forever.

P. S. Alberhasky

Second Moon

Once in a while
it might happen
like a second moon
in a night
you might deceive yourself
or I might turn away.

Sudha Khristmukti

"But I must know their names!"

She whined and twisted her body so
that he agreed.

It was one day
when he dropped by her house
and surprised her.

She likes being surprised
but not by him.

He came to her swinging his arms
so free
that she hated him for the first time then.

He talked to her of books and music.
She was bored.
Then he said something,
about a friend
of hers.

He said something mean.
Evil.

She hated him for the second time right then and there.

Cruel!
Cruel! She found herself screaming.

He brought up his long arms
that held the wing span as large
as the plane that dropped the atom bomb.

Cruelty! Don't speak to me of cruelty.

Catnap

the cat stretches, her white-
haired belly up. The clock
ticks away the time

I lie caught in.
Not the cat who thinks only
of food when not sleeping.

Outside, lazy January fog.
Under the orange tree, fallen
oranges. I'll eat one

for breakfast. She meows
in her sleep, curls her paws.
What dreams do cats

keep hidden?
I think of getting up.
She jumps
to bite a flea
then curves tier body
against me, purring.

Diane Quintrall Lewis

a bed

with paisley
quilt and big
pillows
my favorite
lover is
impotent

Diane Quintrall Lewis

Water Works

The line breaks abruptly as it breaks water
Fish swim somewhere to the right
Of where I see them
I try to piece the string together
In my mind's eye move
The bait nearer
These fish are no fools
They have known this fluid geometry
From the first time a bear's claw
Thrust through tile rippled sky
To thrash things out.

Things never seem
In their proper places
When water is about it's
A lesson brought borne at flood time

Water let loose in woods
Unearths a tangle of umbilical cords
When someone is in water
Ground swells
Soft as pussy on a paint brush
When someone is grounded
Water swells and finds him out
Admonishing him

When the drought comes
I cry till it is over
I reach into water as into a mirror
And pull out a suit of wrinkled skin

Herr Kafka curses them
as if he could swipe them
out of the air
by the sound of his voice.

Erased their language
in the morning sky
where my voice stretches
without end.

Russ Thorburn

(It Might Be Your Own)

Think
how a finger pointed
rattles your brain cells
makes you think you might have done

Don't

Linda Halsey-Ames

Kafka at Straschnitz

I whistle
and draw blackbirds
from the air.
I am levitating.

I dream of the Meatmarket
the faces of my childhood streets,
the charcoal snow
where one could write his name.

I am just a collection
of periods, dots
like the birds.
In a moment they'll fly away.

Now the birds collect
at the base of a linden tree
and my father's back
becomes a target.

One day my sisters
will strip before a tree,
their bodies
like summer snow.

How stern death is
like a father who comes running
to chastise a daughter
for breaking the eggs.

The birds aim for my grave.
No manna will feed them
not even my mother's cry
nor my father's forelock.

I write my name with a finger in water
And it floats free
I have built my home on stilts
So water can pass beneath
When I hear it at night talking to itself my blood leaps
When somebody dies I push their body out of the door and into water

As a dream come to a sleeper I come to water
My presence raises it up without turning it
I swim upstream mouth open to the current of dissolved air
I tinging toward my birthplace
My body broken in a beam of light
I see the line and know it is not there
And swim straight for it

A. L. Nielsen

Letter to R.

There is a small, very clean room in which music is playing. I am not sure that I can get there in this life. I have been wanting to tell you about the dream mansion, the great hall and many other rooms, the stairway to the roof gardens. All three of my daughters are there and young together. I move through the rooms without ambivalence through a doorway, into a room with delicate French furniture, upholstered in silks, I find you holding the daughter called Gail in the dream on your lap, teaching her as she might have been when she was three, how to play the piano. I want to hold myself in that doorway forever, neither entering nor backing away from the room The moment holds and begins to spin, like a crystal globe with no base or axis, the sound of the one-finger melody dissolves, like all the times we began to speak to each other.

June Hopper Hymas

A Taste of Salt

the bourbon's made you fat
a false pregnancy of hope

you sit a moment on my porch
refusing morning tea. refusing morning sunshine

we smell of strangers

what I recall is the taste of salt
not of your juices
but of the spinach souffles
you used to fix for breakfast
stirring the green fluff, glass
already in hand

you wear your anodyne
like a nine-months belly
the way a twin sometimes carries
the withered foetus of his other half
unsuspected in his own cavity

try as I may, I cannot remember
how your white belly looked under the satin sheet
or why I burned to have it there

A. D. Wallace

Furnace

I take my letters and let the wind
scatter them across the snow.
I like to think somebody's hands
will catch them, one after another.
When a bill from Sears reaches the fingertips
of a stranger, I can see his eyes.
A letter from a woman
pastes itself against the legs of a redhead
who only stepped out in the snow.
The insurance company that wishes me
to renew myself for another five thousand miles
lifts up into the air
in a gust of guffaw.
The hands of a sixty-year-old man pick it
from his porch, as he bends
for the morning paper.

I drink beer in the Furnace Tavern,
wasting hours to dusk.
I dream of a radiant body.
In the bathroom
I look to the wall for revelation.
I am Saint Strohs, the graffiti says.

Closing the door to the head,
I look for the cross to wear over my back.
I step outside,
my mail waiting to ambush me in the snow.

Russ Thorburn

Elevator Dreams

I haven't ventured downtown
since the elevator dreams started.
I'm on your floor
alone, pressing
pressing
pressing
that black button.
The arrow lights up hut
no car stops.
I hear doors sliding
open
sliding
closed.
Faint ringing
ding ding
ding ding
conversation fragments
laughter
filler through tight cracks.
No stairs
No windows
No one
to save me.

Susan Smiley

Monday the 12th

gravity in this cab
is thick the sphere
shaped driver gives
me glances that mean
mean nothing

he sez rules are for
breaking
&
that the city landscape
is best scene from his
vcr

we drive 53rd like a
corridor large store
windows hash colors all
the same odor i loose
balance
&
sense time architecture's
cold he keeps me wrapped
in plastic for hours
unable to urinate
&
the pain widens in my
skull

ave jeanne

A Kind of Mood

Cruisin' down
a highway,
slightly buzzed,
listenin' to
a runaway
harmonica,
howlin' blues,
thinkin' this
is the kind
of mood I want
to die in.

T. R. LaGreca

The Father Poem Asks to Be Born

The father poem asks to be born
in this year of the rooster on the hill.
I see you with the other boys
listening intently to the metered footsteps
in Westerns when they allow T.V.

I see you walking around the failing apples
at the Academy. All around you, you say--
"grownups are dying of crib-death;"
but you are brave--you whisper in your sleep
at night about being unable to please.

I want to come into your dream, to comfort--
"Everyone has this father poem to leave alone,
it is like a bird poking. It takes years
to forgive the tattoo he wears--carvings
of the skin--great scars and feathers--
the headdress of a stony Sioux Chief"

Here, where they direct your work
on Pippin the Short and Philip the Good
private school goes public sometimes,
with all those unsung wars left to sing
and flags to be planted in gentle arenas.

14-year-olds rehearse their lives
as if history were happening for the first time.

Rosalyn DeMaio Roffman

Even Metaphorical Storms
Have Some Direction

Once again the subtle moon
shows her inflections: old,
new, full. Day by day we watch
the tides draw the ocean from ebb
to flow, one cycle folding
comfortably into the other.

Tidepools surge and squirm
in a sunny welter; order struggles
for the upper hand, tenacious
as the starfish clinging to land's
abrupt end, while stolid barnacles
fan the furious water, strain
for food elegantly, endlessly.

Above all this gulls wing
sedately on updrafts, hold
rising winds with steady wings,
some times find themselves hundreds
of miles inland, yielding to a storm
become a gift, a given distance.

We might take life carefully,
and fold our wings to wait it
out, set sessile as anemones
or whelks, while the storm rages;
but, if we open our hearts, big
sails in a strong wind, we might
be driven to lands large enough
to hold laughter or other lightness.

Robert H. Ward

The Mad Girl Sleep Walks into Snow
That Freezes to Her Ankles

never supposes a year from them
he'll be torturous as a pap smear
that never comes back totally dangerous
but never normal enough to catch
her breath one wrong move a
domino in a house of black
squares collapsing as he
does on her never enough
to make her at
ease as she tears petals
of white slender leaves
colorless as her thighs
until she's left with
just the hole
of sun forgetting
if he will or won't come
back stay in her
arms as snow erases
where he's come in rain at
11 or 6:10 before sky's
light and she feels his lips
turn the white rose

lyn lifshin

The Quotes My Mother Scribbled
in the Notebook in the Bathroom

about losing daughters
once I saw the words
tacked on the refrigerator
before things inside started
racing some ping-pong like
phone wires in prairie wind

jade and rust paper peels from
where it's too late to catch
what went wrong where you
can't see. photographs
of my sister, before,
stun as the woman in

England who holds the
last of the septuplets
shivers sees it, too, die

lyn lifshln

"The Army of Angels,"
he calls them, those
fourteen-year-old boys
Hitler trained to destroy

Russian tanks with bazookas
in Poland.
he says they were so young
they had no fear of death

that they'd crawl
in small places men
couldn't go,
an Army of Immortals.

But at night, on the fields
exposed to cold, shivering
under thin covers
they'd cry for their mothers.

Jennifer Nostrand