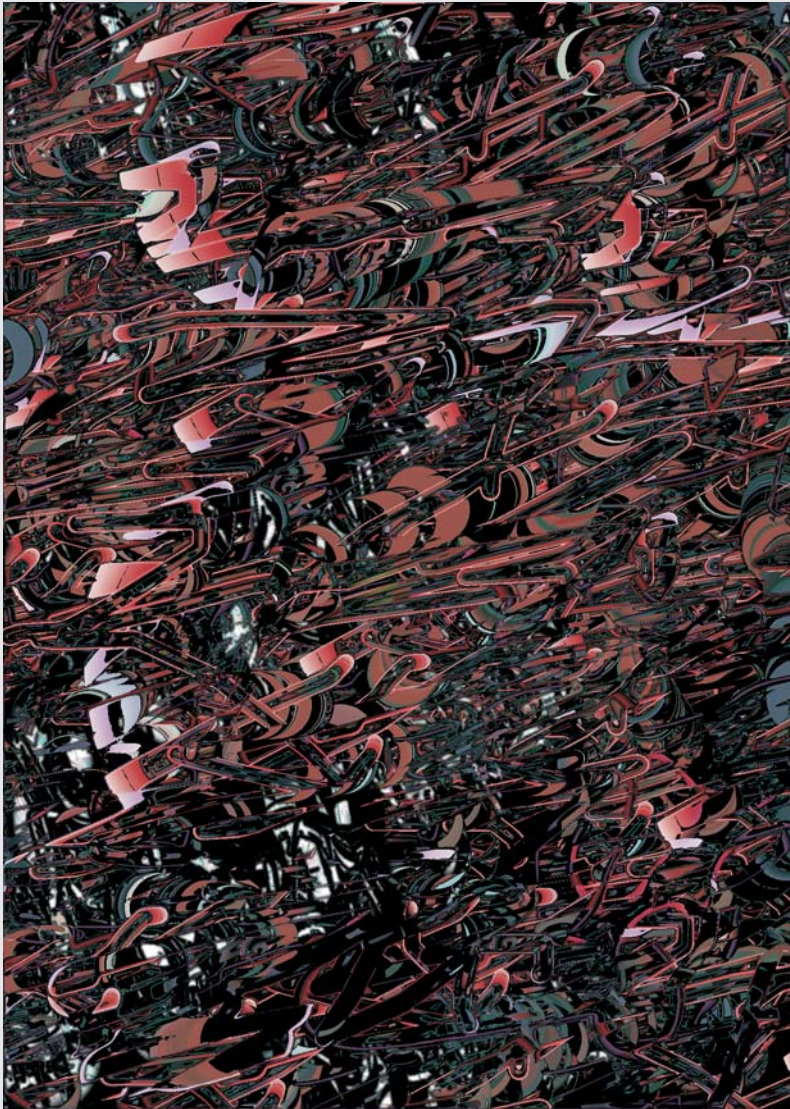


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Winter Arrives

in my Front Yard

Michael P. McManus

If we could go back before before,
What would we find waiting near the pond?

Perhaps it would be stillness, unequivocal, pure,
Neither intense nor abandoned
Like an unmoving tiger looking from its cage

At a single swan swimming in circles
Beneath the summer sun,
While not far away, sweating, singing,
Greeting the day, the haymaker works his fields.

Perhaps it would be a bottle of rum,
Two glasses, and the pumping hearts
Given to pleasure before our winter comes.

It's snowing lightly and the yard is white.
Perhaps this will continue through the night,
So many small energies blurring the sky,

Spilling over the neighbors' houses,
Charming the old neighborhood to silence-
Rooftops, alleys, avenues,
Trance-like in what will not move or be moved.

If this weather keeps going on and on,
The small ceramic swan will disappear,
The pond will freeze to an unsteady table,

Gray, opaque, daring us to walk across-
But we will not, because we are content to wait
For spring, hopeful then the swan reappear,

The squirrels once again will bark with gratitude,
Children will play dodge-ball in the street,
Unaware that the tiger waits;

And we are unable to know what we know for long,
Before we meander beyond the beyond.

D136

Simon Perchik

Without any smoke all 100 watts
—a fireball! and you
face to face the way two stars

become one and morning
—you unfold this rickety ladder
till it falls into the ceiling

—a sudden splash and wings
begin to form from wings
and that slow climbing turn the dead

look forward to :you embrace the bulb
shake it, gently! make sure
if what you hear is a loosening

or the night sky that never heals
—you almost drown holding on
and the lake drained black

half overhead, half dirt
burnt to the ground where you
still follow behind —gone, gone

—in time you will dig a place
not too far, not too wide
for the rippling among the stones.

D182

Simon Perchik

Helpless on the ground this dirt
is already salt, then darkness
though your mouth belongs

the way each winter your shadow
thaws as the flower
that no longer talks in the open

or wanders off to become the scent
that hides in your heart
and melting candles —dirt

is useless here —cold
is your shadow now, buried
in the darkness moving across

—you can barely hear the cries
watching over you, covering
this unbearable Earth.

Wear Me All April

Rose Swartz

The whole month I was yours it rained while my naked body sprawled
on your bed I was not yours because it never rains for a whole month, not yours
through lace white curtains skipping morning classes to fuck me.
If mice of nervous machines would sprawl naked on the examining table
of your step-mom's brown sofa, they would not be yours, not believe that
fake-throated love-line, glassy eyed perfect timed convincing whisper:

Blue balls are a condition comparable to cancer. It rained every single day
it never rains every day- so why don't you inspect me? Again, rub me
down your prize horse, pretty girl, young blood, sweet meat
keep that cool feeling between my skin and clothes and brain,
feel like I'd been matte finished, cocooned in sick and sad,
sprawled body on the bed.

Shoulda kept myself in a steel drum, shoulda been a bodybuilder when
I was just a girl. And you grabbed both my wrists, not your girl, felt them
separate from the arm, not your girl. 'Cause your girl would've known how
to keep her teeth from cutting you while she gave you head. Not your girl
thrown out the chemistry room window, down that hill through the mud like
old frozen soup half-choking while your dad is in the next room.

Not my dad, watching the game as I scream Not your girl because your girl
would've liked those green rimmed circle bruises up and down her arms and I
only needed them like coffee tables need doilies. Shoulda sandpapered my lips
so you couldn't have checked if I tasted like your girl, like a whole
grocery bag fullafood at the lunch table. Your girl who would have craved
your football player paws and she probably believed that she was the only girl that

looked hot
in thigh-high nylons;
whose symmetrical face
matched her good sense of style;
who was the best substitute for a mother;
let me tell you
those things
never flattered me.

The Retired Assassin

Michael P. McManus

Toothpick, ice-pick, stiletto,
The hanging tree in your backyard

Beside the restored '57 Chevy
Beside leaves piled high enough

To smoke the autumn sky for hours.
A hole in the clouds a noose

Blue as any strangled face
Thin as the rusty garrote

Centered on your porcelain plate
Sitting on the kitchen table

Beside the sawed-off double barrel 12 gauge
And a suppresser equipped pistol used to kill

Stray cats at nights in the neighbor's yard.
You've given up wearing your ring of ears

For steak and potatoes and imported bottled beer
Spending many hours in your Italian recliner

Flicking through the channels on your flat-screen
Fondling your brass knuckles with sentimental candor

Remembering the pitch fork with the broken tine
Imbedded in the farmer's head as his pitless eyes

Stared back like the autographed picture
Of Freud you placed above your bed.

Issy

Darlene Yarbrough

Issy's voice is high and peppery as she talks to herself. For practice, she admits, so that when the bed in the corner is occupied, she'll be able to speak with the patient. They have arrived and departed through the years like migratory birds who alight briefly and then soar off. She tries to remember her age—more than fifty? Time disappears without a trace.

She came to this place after her legs had begun to draw up to her chin and cramp until Dr. Stevens had no alternative but to sever her leg nerves. It had been a relief to be done hollering and disturbing everybody.

Dr. Stevens found this place, and she liked it right off. Not one of those hygienic, tiled buildings, without character. The floors are wooden and sloping and some rooms have old-fashioned sinks still attached to the wall. Late at night she listens to drips from the faucets and plays at guessing at the time interval between splashes.

Hazel, the nurse, who can't remember working any place else, says that Issy is lucky to be in a fine turn of the century residence, even though downtrodden folks have taken up housekeeping in the houses next door.

The TV image reflected through the miniature mirrors attached to Issy's forehead is slightly out of focus. The contestants on the game show have the distorted magnification of people in a house of mirrors. No matter, rich she is, winning beyond her wildest dreams, and gloating; a freezer big enough for a family, a white leather sofa, and other gifts too numerous to mention, but her exultation is reserved for a fire engine red convertible. She'll drive it hard and fast on a country road, her hair blowing behind her like wings. The questions on the game show are repeated at certain intervals. She recalls the answers from the former shows, and says them to herself all day and all night too, if the pain allows. The answers bounce from her subconscious like a balloon caught in the turbulence of a squall.

In her flights of fantasy, she rises from the bed and runs like a tornado putting down at random and racing on with the wind pumped by her heart and lungs.

Here comes Hazel. She makes a swooshing noise with her shoes like rustling leaves.

"Let's turn our body, honey, so we won't get bedsores," Hazel announces as she does every hour. Issy feels the tug of her body, which remains where it's put when Hazel tucks the blanket against her back. A urine odor permeates her nostrils. "I'm putting a fresh one on, dear." Hazel hums as her hands work out of Issy's vision.

Issy studies the wall, the peeling paint, the chipped plaster—reminding her of a Pompeian house. Like the artist she once was, she takes the fragments in her imagination, and paints a fresco. First, she gets rid of all the loose pieces of plaster and scrapes down the wall. What was fun was the anticipation of painting while she smeared the wall with a smooth layer of plaster. Then, she'd mix the colors with water, and that, with the lime in the plaster, would fix the colors as they dried. Fresco had its drawbacks because the media permitted the application of only pure color. What to paint? She had decided—a picture of a patio with hanging flowers where she could walk—particularly in the early morning and then in the evening before retiring. A brick patio. She'd have to be meticulous, but she'd handle it.

Then she'd have a small party to celebrate. Of course, everybody would be allowed to use it even if they did have to traipse through her room.

Jack—occasionally, she thinks of him. Both shared a love of the out-of-doors. On weekends they had camped at Lost Pond, the surface bubbling white as the water cascaded down the rocks. At sunrise, they had stripped naked and leaped into the numbing but exhilarating water. Later, they had a line in for their breakfast and put their catch on a forked branch and held it over the fire, watching the skin sizzle and crinkle. Later, as they hiked up the mountain, Jack had said: "Why are you flinging out your right foot? Is there anything the matter?"

"It does that when I feel tired," she had replied.

Dr. Stevens had forthrightly explained the cause. "Your muscles and nerves will methodically deteriorate until you won't be able to control them. It's an inherited disease without effective treatment."

She had waited and waited for the right moment to tell Jack. It never came. She had declined a trip with him and had urged him to go without her. Reluctantly, he had set off alone with his backpack. When they found his body, his head had been crushed by a boulder randomly loosened from the cliff above. Mercifully, death had been instantaneous. The boulder had been big enough for two.

She dreads the coming hour when she must lay on her stomach. She imagines that she has been pillowed by a lover. But no desire lurks between her legs—her nerve endings have breathed their last.

A hand touches her shoulder. He knows when Hazel turns her to the wall. He is shy and sly. The derelict who lives on the street, makeshifting a home, stuffing newspapers into the broken windows. (Hazel keeps her abreast of the goings-on in the neighborhood). She says that he slips through the front door, shuffles down the hall to her room, and fills his belly with Issy's uneaten lunch, stilling his trembling limbs. The place has a policy of not ever locking doors, the thought behind it being that the inside needs the outside.

She ponders the presumptions of love; whether adversity governs destiny more than love. She would run from her destiny if she could. The the

thought of leaving the world permanently pecks at her like a beak of a bird on a rotting limb.

"Describe what I look like, Hazel," she asks when she hears rustling leaves. "Honey, I'm going to turn you over on your back so you can watch the game show." Issy doesn't recall Hazel ever saying her name. She is patient number five in room 25. "Describe me, Hazel."

"Honey, you're beautiful," she says, as she fastens the mirrors to Issy's forehead.

"Am I worse than yesterday, Hazel?"

"Of course not, dear."

Hazel pats her head and swishes off to her other charges. No worse than yesterday. . .but she is—cancer. "It's like a wild plant," Dr. Stevens said. "Not the same as when I cut the nerves to your legs. It must be surgically removed—there's a four centimeter mass inside your breast."

Another tenant scavenger invading her privacy, she thinks. Aloud to Dr. Stevens:

"Why live, Doctor?"

"To win bigger and better prizes," Dr. Stevens replied.

"You promised—you made a promise—?"

"It's our pact, Issy. Whenever you are sure...very sure. The ambulance is coming for you in the morning. I'll be waiting for you in the operating room. Meanwhile, it's our secret," he said, squeezing her hand, his words a deadly gas hanging in his wake.

She smells her body and imagines her bed empty, freshly made with shiny white sheets. Her personnel record stamped: "Deceased" and placed in the inactive file.

Issy opens her eyes the following morning and feels the warmth of the sun's rays on her body. Hazel bounds in.

"Honey, it's here—now behave yourself, and I expect you back real soon—winning

prizes, getting richer by the day. And you can leave it all to me, your poor nurse." She throws back her fleshy neck and laughs.

The orderlies, chatting about a poker game, pick up Issy from the bed and transfer her to the gurney as lightly as a rag doll. She stares at the ceiling as the ambulance glides through the streets. Her head no longer turns, but she bets that people are walking along dressed in exciting colors.

Dr. Stevens greets her in the operating room. His hands poised in the air. A nurse, her mouth hidden, shoves transparent gloves over his fingers. He leans toward Issy, the gaunt question alive in his pupils. "Yes," Issy answers.

A gentle piece of gauze, calmness takes hold of Issy as a mask comes from behind and descends to her face. Tears drop to the corner of her eyes as she senses coming emptiness. She gasps, tries to speak, but words are swaddled in the suffocating cap covering her nose and mouth.

Night Bird Stolen from a Gray Canvas

(after Night Bird, 1990—Won sook Kim Linton)

Joyce Odam

Small dream bird, I hold you through the prison of sleep
while a brooding hawk watches from night's dark tree and
hunches itself over the release of waking, which has its
own landscape of terrors.

How will I save you when my hand is offering you flight
away from this dream; why do you tarry in patient trust like
a heedless omen of yourself?

Are you the signature of life? Symbols surround us—
surreal and dense—merging in a collage of mystery. We
share this brief connection: I give you my fear so you can
translate it into flight—yet you stay with me.

The Rented Bicycle

Joyce Odam

It is another childhood year; my mother has fallen off
the rented bicycle—the others have kept on going.

~ ~ ~

She came back angry-skinned and crying, making her
curses—my mother knew great swear words, some in a
made-up language.

~ ~ ~

Emphasis was her way—she ruled by emphasis. I am
her best example. I never learned to ride a bicycle. I
swear like a lady.

Gray Gull

(after Silence, 1990 – Wonsook Kim Linton)

Joyce Odam

A gray gull at rest on my tireless hand has three echoes made of silence. We are in a painting on a still day. A body of blue water lies between us and the hills.

The gull and I look at each other with a long trained look—my hand held out in a gesture of release—or as a brief place for it to rest. The day does not move.

Three sympathetic trees stand crowded at an edge. They are there to hold the echoes. I am faceless. I wear a white baptismal gown. I stand on my shadow.

The mute trees watch—the three gull-echoes ghost-like in their branches. However this will end is not for me to know: this is a lesson in patience.

The Bed-lift

Joyce Odam

Each night she hangs him in the air and lets him turn—a mobile—his body helpless as she smooths the hours till they flatten into sleep. He thinks life is his dream that she does not remember. When morning pulls its threads again, a ravel at a time into a shrinking calendar, another day is earned, and he is just as heavy as the broken night is long.

The Intensity of Your Eyes

Joyce Odam

I like the border of light that glows around your eyes. I like the way you stare without blinking. I like the rare depth of your pupils and the dazzling flare of the iris. I like the web of darkness there. I like the color you declare your eyes to be—the way it varies—

oh, never close your eyes upon me, lest I be flung back into distances where the dark snow of blindness covers all with its terrible white stare—where I would be lost, and you might never find me—my frozen hands outstretched over those blank obscuring distances.

The Blue Lady of Night

after Nachtwandler, Emil Nolde

Joyce Odam

At last the blue lady of night came toward me. A black moon followed over her shoulder. She floated through all the dissolving colors that seemed to lose their hold on her. Her face had a terrible look upon it. She reached out one arm as if to embrace me; with the other she clutched at her blue heart for balance. Where was I? I could not find myself though I felt that she would find me. The mirror waited as if watching her come toward it. She seemed mesmerized by her own reflection. Was I the mirror?

Not Drinking, Not Driving

Ronald F. Currie, Jr.

I lost my driver's license a few years ago, so I walk to my friend's apartment where I used to live in my drinking days.

He and my other friend are there, waiting. We used to tear it up, the three of us.

But tonight when I arrive we watch a movie and we don't talk. The movie doesn't make me feel much, except when the black man is about to be executed and one of the guards, the young, kind one, puts his hand on the condemned man's shoulder in a vain gesture of sympathy.

Later the young, kind guard puts a gun to his own chest and pulls the trigger and I can tell the director was thinking 'real' and 'gritty' when he filmed this scene because the guard doesn't linger or cry or say anything when he shoots himself—just a low pop and he's wide-eyed and 'dead.'

Again I don't feel much, other than that it seems we are all in various stages of losing our minds—some still smiling through it, some ready to put a gun to their chest—because we are too kind and it is not good for us.

I say this out loud to my two friends.

They are drinking, but they know exactly what I mean. There is that flash of recognition in their eyes and then one of them takes a fresh beer from the refrigerator and says, The problem is that we have too much time to think, and we need to undertake a great project, such as building a house from scratch.

I say, Yes, why don't the two of you build me a house.

This lightens the mood, and they laugh and take the conversation in another direction.

As I listen, I think how drinking is like a gun, and sobriety is just like drinking. For example, this morning I woke up hung over though I haven't had a drink in two years.

And while my friends talk, I climb atop the back of the lounge chair and stand with my knees bent a bit and the top of my skull brushing the ceiling.

It's a long way down.

I say, Someone get me a beer, or I'm gonna jump.

They look at me in silence for a minute. Then they laugh.

I'm serious, I say.

When Will Boys Break Bottles for Us?

(County Fair 1995)

Rose Swartz

When we were little we always wanted to be alone. Really alone, like those pretty girls who look like Barbies with pierced noses, the ones we accidentally leave out in the backyard at night; the girls who lean up against the cars across the street, girls we see in the summer when it is still light out and we are supposed to be asleep. Girls, we see them when the sky is orange and the screens smell like a rainstorm. We see them laughing at their boyfriends zooming up and down the street, the boys who shout and break glass bottles for them. In the summer we kneel at our window, twist our big tee-shirts behind us, pout and paint our nails clear with toy nail polish that even tastes good and pray that someday we will be old and alone; that we will have clothes that are supposed to be as tight as our dad's old running shirts with knots tied in the back. As the sun goes down we see visions of ourselves as those long dark haired smoking beauties, we see boys breaking glass bottles for us.

During the day while we are sitting on the curb outside our house waiting for the ice-cream truck we see the girl we named Charlotte running down that boy's porch in a hurry, her Barbie hair all dirty like the dog has been chewing on it, and Tess and I agree that she's probably going to buy milk all alone. The best thing about being one of those pretty all alone girls would be to be able to go buy milk all alone with a car, probably a turquoise one like Charlotte has, one that's loud, a big dinosaur car with ridges down the back. Tess and I already bought milk today but we aren't allowed to go alone, her mom followed us like always, said she'd pretend not to know us but ended up forgetting this halfway to Hardings, and yelled things like "Girls, girls! Slowdown- buckleyourhelmets, be safe." And then the even worse part is carrying the milk home because it makes the handlebars go all slanty and it's hard to steer and we are sure that at the most awkward two-wheeler moments girls like Charlotte are driving by with their little sisters and their perfectly balanced milk, all of them laughing because Tess and I are neither pretty or alone. And we are none of these until eleven.

At age eleven we are allowed to go to the fair alone. And Tess is allowed to wear tank tops with spaghetti straps so that makes us a little bit pretty too. I am a little embarrassed when Tess does her best impression of the way Charlotte walks, sticking her chest out and handing the ticket holder a fistful of quarters. I am still wearing a too-big tee-shirt and I don't want to tie a knot in the back because the last time I did that over my swimsuit at the public pool this Mexican girl called me a "hoo chee ma ma" and I don't even know

what that means, but she looked like a snake when she said it.

At the fair Tess is Tess The Pretty and I am Rose The Alone and we ride the Gravitron twice in a row. The man working it is one of those men in a thin white shirt who is missing a lot of his teeth and is letting hair and tattoos spill out everywhere that his clothes can't hide. This man has a mustache and a big, scarier-than-a-clown smile when we get off and go in line again the man says to Tess— "Hey Blondie, where's your motorcycle parked?" I am the alone so I don't say anything, I just look away, back at the Gravitron spinning like a quarter on kitchen linoleum, and Tess the Pretty grins and laughs and tosses her hair and I sort of hope he will take his glass bottle out of its paper bag and break it for her but I am too scared to even look but I do anyway and he sticks his thumbs in the belt loops of his pants and pulls them farther from himself, shows us more hair and more tattoo and then he says "Hey Blondie," again and "I'll let you ride again for free if you show me where that motorcycle is parked." I am starting to not want to be alone and Tess The Pretty is prettier than ever looking like that "hoo chee ma ma" snake and then the man looks at me and wrinkles his tan nose, says, "what's with your friend, where's her pretty clothes? Does she think she's a boy?" and I walk away alone and alone, Rose The Alone, looking like a boy and not ever being pretty, ugly and alone at the Gravitron forever.

Fortune

Andy Fogle

My dad always slept by the fireplace,
usually on his side.
I'd come home hungry from school

and study oblivion, the orange twilight
of his sleep, where I could count how
many times the evening flickered like a
hummingbird

before it hovered away, and blew
through
the buzzing winter house.
Back to me, he usually faced the glass
door's flash.

Inside the Moon

Andy Fogle

The boy reaches out
through the car's back window
and is not cut, as he will be
in a few years.

He takes the moon in his palm
and brings it into the car.
He twists it open, into halves,

like the plastic containers of rings
in gumball machines, and sucks
at the white luminous flesh inside,
first from one half, then from the other.

Are You Ready?

Andy Fogle

the bare three-story tree sways
back and forth and back itself

two clouds like orange lances
slant across the dusk

the window rattles its frame
windy all day windy all

sudden gust snuffs the candle
like a brook trout takes a fly

Song

for an Old Man

Andy Fogle

the pools of fever
spread towards your grandchildren
aching with distance

above the opening tree
a crow hacks its declaration

a ways offshore
a fish swims in questions
it was born there

Poppy

Paula Berman

I used to have this reoccurring dream: I was sitting at his bedside but it wasn't him in bed—it was that decaying skeleton puppet from Tales of the Crypt—and it was sitting there chattering at me, and I'd keep saying, "When are you going to die? It's time to go. Why won't you die already?"

Retention of cremated remains is permitted in Washington. Cremated remains are not ashes. They are recognizable bone fragments and opening the container may be an unpleasant emotional task for someone of close relationship.

She sat next to his bed and made phone calls. "Cremations Only" was the cheapest, "And if you purchase the service before your loved one dies, you get the entire package for only \$495." Mom pulled out her credit card.

The state of Washington does not require that the cremated remains be placed in a cemetery or other permanent disposition site of the cremated remains have been ground up into fragments of 5 millimeters or less.

He moaned in pain all day. I stood at the end of his bed and he gave me dirty looks. When my sister arrived after work, he perked up, "Amy, Amy, I love you so much." "Who is that?" my mother asked him pointing at me. "I know who that is!" he snapped, "The concierge!" Those were the last words he said to me.

Serious consideration should be given against retaining the cremated remains since their disposition will become your heir 's problem at your demise.

At his request, we dumped his ashes into Port Townsend Bay near Marrowstow Island. He'd once run aground there in his boat, did 3000 dollars worth of damage to the hull.

Consideration should be given against placement of cremated remains upon your private property since in due course the property will be owned by another.

For years, I'd lay on his bed. "When you're dead, try to turn the lights on and off." "Houdini couldn't come back. What makes you think they'll let me,"

he'd laugh. "Well, just try," I'd say.

Should you move to another state with the cremated remains in your possession, you will be subject to the laws of that state—which may prohibit such possession. Airlines also will not normally allow cremated remains as hand carried luggage.

He died at 8:42 p.m. A few hours later, my friend woke me up. "I can't sleep with the light on," he said. I opened my eyes. It was 3 a.m. My bedroom light was on. I smiled and fell back asleep.

The Dead Man's Apartment

Paula Berman

The police were standing outside the old man's apartment door.

"What happened?" asked a curious neighbor.

"Just stopped breathing," cop said.

The landlord put an Apartment for Rent sign in front of the building.

Later that day, I snuck outside and scrawled the words "Dead Man's" at the top of the sign in red paint.

The Marble Tomb to Crown Life

Vladimir Orlov

It was caused by nothing,
aimed at nothing
but popular outrage.
Frustration, discontent, unrest...
all these offsprings
of the disabled single party rule
are now issuing their pervasive yells
all around the new
and the same old country
caught up in complex implications
of its discarded but
thoroughly tenacious past.

The unknown present day
breaks in upon the petrifications
of what has been sanctified
by the multitudes of the ever-marching
purple, red, bloodstained, bleeding
banners now carried high
by the staunch advocates
of the good old totalitarian days.

Their lofty calls
seem to fail to chime
with the somewhat less lofty
cries of those butchered
in Stalin's prison cells,
now wafted to the marchers' ears
from the cells
of their own lingering memories...
The marching former convicts
crave for Stalin whose much
lamented death
let them out of the prison cells
but buried them
in those of their wounded souls...
Are these parading relics just the
guns
Stalin triggers off
from under his marble tomb?
The marchers never question.
They are called up from the past
and are here to obey.

I Will Send My Message Collect

Vladimir Orlov

I will send them all the torn-out copies
of my last message collect,
as I stand breathing in the sight
of the frozen silver, its faulty light
fettering the river's glassy ice.
My memory, in its inveterate longing
to plunge into the sweet water of hope,
is being thrown to the gusty summit
where regiments of ghastly ghosts gather
to perpetrate their ghoulish parade.
Time rumbles down the bumpy street
of my crumbling consciousness, as
I am being effectively run down by its heavy cart
which used to stop at my beck and call before,
but which now will positively not,
even if I vociferously plead with it.
Days are being sipped out of me,
with relish, by the subtle connoisseurs
of the delicious wine of time and age.
I will send them all the torn-out copies
of my last message collect.

The History of Christianity

Edward A. Dougherty

Genevieve, at the end of her life
(a story I know nothing of),
said she recently realized
that Christianity has made
little impression, and is sad
to think she's come to this.
When I consider the history
of the Church, I'm reminded
of the guy in Ionia, Michigan
who tried to rob a service station.
When the two attendants
refused to hand over the money,
he threatened to call the police.
They stood their ground,
so the robber called the cops
who came and arrested him.
When you look back over
so many centuries, so many
human generations
inventing and using
things like the telescope
or paper clips, there's some people
selling things and others across the
counter
buying them. All the while,
somebody's got to get up,
go to work making straws
or contact lenses or altars. Even now,
somebody's back is aching in a
factory
turning out handguns,
and somewhere else, cash registers
roll off the line right under
somebody's nose. Is the Church

just another manufacturer of souls
and convictions? Scanning the
landscape
of action, even what people fail to do
takes on a shape, a contrast
to the surrounding context,
like how hills become a dark valley,
a pile of sky. I wonder
what those two young workers
in Ionia (I assume
they were young but with things
as they are one could have been
a woman trying to raise her
teenage kids on a thirty-hour
part-time job) I wonder what
went through their minds
as they handed the thief the phone.
Genevieve spoke her disillusion
to a nearly-empty
room, a room filled with
listening. Is Christianity
an attendant waiting
to serve? She was cut down
in the middle of the work day
by a man too drunk to stop.
Words like responsibility,
morality, doctrine lack meaning
outside the lived expression
of a single human person.
At her funeral ceremony
two shopkeepers stood in the silence
to pay Genevieve tribute:
how one life becomes an exemplar.

Now, an instant Edward A. Dougherty

Now : an in-

betweenness

like parentheses
embracing a shy
white smile,

like not-

knowing : nothing
waits and fills,
freezes, thaws, and is drawn

off piece
by reluctant piece
until the space is again

all

there is : this moment
fluting open
like a corn stalk

That Spring Nancy A. Henry

for Ken, who lost his lover September 11, 2001

After her brief serenade of sky
she is going to return home
he is sure

she meant to tell him that
when she called on the phone
when the sound
went to smoke and whine.

He begins taking
morning walks
to find her.

She said that
guardian angels
were people you loved
who had died.

He holds grimly to this.
She had always wanted
to become a bird.

He thinks he'll know
which one it is.

I slip out into the tombs of houses

Mark Fitzpatrick

I slip out into the tombs of houses
that have summered this neighborhood with life.
The sky, undisturbed blue,
bends over foliage tinged—ever so lightly—
with the subtle approach of autumn.
It is one of those last days of summer,
you want to grab fiercely and run with,
squeezing every bit of warmth, clarity, sweetness out of it.
I want to be allowed to do that more than ever today.

“There won’t be many more days like this,”
some yard-worker should greet
as they squint-smile at the sun and me.

As if slipper-footed, I walk among these solitudes,
nothing stirring, threatened by somber though invisible clouds.
Suddenly, a television blares the news.
I took a walk to forget, to forget
the broadcasts buzzing from the houses
of those who had no use for news,
of those who should be out yardworking,
of someone who should be greeting me,
“Won’t be many more days like this.”

Inside the Museum of Tolerance

Seth Michelson

a Survivor explains loss
for his first time in public.
He exhumes murders
from the mass graves
and ovens of Auschwitz,
how his brother, 20,
touched his sister, 13,
through a single diamond
in the electric chainlink.
He watched both siblings
shot for the contact.
It was her birthday.
He next explains hunger:
his incinerated wife
smuggling him south
by mule, then cart, then train
until they strolled
the shore of the Aegean.
*I survived
because God hates me.*

An Immodest Proposal

Joan Wilking

What if after we've given birth to the last of our
babies, after they've suckled us dry, we have our
breasts, the troublesome things, lopped off, and
replaced with new ones selected for their perfect
shape and size, their rosy nipples artfully reapplied?

What havoc would we wreak? An end to
lumpectomies, radiation, chemotherapy? To
tamoxifin? How many English yews we would we
save? How much time would we free? Time for
clinicians to search for cures for other things.

Would we go braless? Shirtless? Would we? Would
we stride down city streets? Country roads? Sit in
cafes? Push shopping carts trailed by screaming
kids? Would we thrust our shoulders back? Would
we push our perky new pink breasts high?

Would we stroke our nipples, tattooed on, or
better yet, reconstructed from the bits dangling
between our legs? Would we flaunt them? Would
we have them painted? Sculpted? Hang them,
stuffed, on our walls?

Would we stand side by side? Bare breasted?
Confident? Unafraid? Would we stand in front of
mirrors? Would we nod and say, Look at you. Look
at me? A bunch of old broads with perfect tits.
Would we live forever? Would we?

A Mother Speaks to Her Lost Son

R. Yurman

Buried among dust-covered
cartons in the garage
your sister found
the old shoe box
I'd forgotten I had—filled
with your immunization records
and report cards

You're not just dead
I'm told but—addict
and street-hustler
to the end—probably
murdered, though no
body has been found.

I dreamed last night
you kissed me on the cheek
exactly like you used to
as a child—another part
of you I'd somehow
forgotten—and woke to find
a damp spot
just below my eye
where the cat
must have licked me.

Emily Jane Nancy A. Henry

Something is after her.
Underneath her worst fear
is always an even deeper darkness.
The petals of a tight rose bloom
all clenched in bud,
she's ready to slip through the sleeve
of morning, leave the blackness
where she takes on the dreams of
others.
She is bleeding in place,
operating at an unsafe speed;
her pain is real.
You don't want
to have to hurt her.
They will be expecting her
to go on
breathing.

May Nancy A. Henry

Passion is fishing in your hair
for a strand of that particular light.
She holds a blue pencil
softly wrought with all you need.
Passion is fishing
with a very delicate hook.
She plays fiddle by the graveyard,
wakes the dead,
will not let you bury
any beautiful thing alive.

Death in the Public Market

Pike Place, Seattle

R. Yurman

Beside the fish stalls
torso and limbs sprawled
on the concrete floor
left arm thrust wide
clutching a thick finger
of sausage he lies

exposed
like his untasted last meal
naked curve of meat
its bun flipped
to some screeching gulls.

The stopped crowd encircles him
stares across the gap they've left
does not approach.
His eyes stare back.

Later I pass the spot again
rhubarb filled paperbag
balanced in the crook of one arm.
He's gone.

The newly arrived
move along the edges
of the dark stain—
in another hour
it will have dried.

I step carefully past
where he lay
and can't help wondering
about the hot dog.

It's a sin
to waste food
mother used to say.

Did the paramedics pry it
from his cold grasp
and toss it—
did they think about
taking a bite—
or did they load it with him
onto the stretcher
and cart it away?

The Last Day

after Waco

Loretta Dunne

Loretta, limbs dislodged, will die in Deptford,
That town I always railed against
On a hot summer day acrid
With the smell of pig farms

I will die at my high school
With all those friends and enemies
I have avoided since graduation
Carried through the street on my bed

And they will say she looks so good
Almost alive, then turn back to each other
And how many kids do you have
What ever happened to your life

Or maybe death will be kinder to Loretta
And she will not have to revisit those places
Hated most in life
I will see that my body parts are well attached

That day of reckoning will be a winter Sunday
Like the day I have here
Sun and cold equally brilliant
All truths will be frozen into the ground with me
Each bone in place

Visit to the Waco Kid

Loretta Dunne

While the surgeons rifle through his brain
We sit in the dark, watch Blazing Saddles
Mel Brooks, Gene Wilder.
Slim Pickins
Shoots his own horse. Rock Ridge
Does not want any black sheriff,
Savior or not, Black Bart
Holds himself hostage, gun to neck.
Free of the stale smells of the hospital,
We breathe in the heat of the wild west.
Laughter holds back the scrape of saw to skull
Illuminated by the shifting screen.
A town is fun to save,
But a brain, oh a brain
Is messy and in the end
When everything is pushed back inside
The bone replaced, sewn tight,
And Madeline Kahn sings a sexy song,
We are ready to face the doctors
Long, slow, word, malignant
And the recovery room.
My brother groggy, head back together
Hey, you don't look half bad
As Gene and the laughter ride off with the sheriff
into the sunset.

Watering the Seeds

Beth Bahler

Heidi shakes her dark unruly hair over her flower pots and says to Warren, her husband, "Something's definitely the matter with this one." Then, contemplating, she stands almost perfectly still.

Warren, who has been anxious about Heidi's moods for months, notices that her watering can arm is shaking.

Intending to be reassuring, he gets up from the kitchen table and joins Heidi beside six small flower pots on the peeling window sill.

Heidi nods at a painted ceramic donkey and wagon with an opening in the wagon for dirt and, presumably, growth.

Warren has had a wonderful day. He's been in a combination of grad school classes and labs for the past seven hours and he is exhilarated. He may soon start working with his advisor on a new research project. He puts a comforting arm around Heidi's shoulders. "Sure you put a seed in that one?"

"A tangerine seed. But all I get when I water is wet dirt."

"Just planted it?" He moves back a step, rubbing at his eyes, which have been stinging lately. The other flower pots, standard, hold modest greenery. He wonders to himself if you can grow anything from a tangerine seed, a tangerine being a hybrid.

"February."

"That was last month."

"So?"

"So, is there supper? If nothing's grown yet, maybe you should give up." He covers his face. Damn. He's blown it. Heidi is going to be difficult for the rest of the evening.

"You never can tell, though," Heidi says evenly.

"You honestly water that mound of dirt every day?" He can't keep himself from asking it. At least he doesn't laugh.

"Every few days." With an exaggerated movement, Heidi splashes the rest of the water from the watering can—actually the gravy boat from their one set of dishes—into the sink. "When I think of it."

"Well, don't get angry at me about it," Warren says finally, going back to the table.

He watches Heidi position the watering can on a mat on top of the frig, then open the door and pull out two dinner plates.

Each plate has a small pink half-grapefruit on it.

"As long as I'm in the apartment all day," Heidi says as she sets the

plates down, "I might as well water it. If something grows, I'll feel as if I'm accomplishing one good thing."

"You're in a great frame of mind tonight," Warren muses, plunging into his grapefruit with a spoon. "You wanted to stay home and write."

"But now I want to go back to work...I think." Heidi recuts the membrane around one section of her grapefruit.

"Did you write anything today?"

"One weak first draft of a story."

"Better than nothing." Warren licks his spoon. Truth is he just can't get interested in Heidi's stories.

Heidi pushes her grapefruit to the side of her plate and stands up.

"Aren't you going to finish it?" he asks, referring to the grapefruit.

"I'll have it for dessert, Warren." She lifts a spatula from the utensils rack and pulls open the broiler section of their small white enamel stove. "There's only one hamburger apiece." Carefully, she maneuvers the hamburgers from the stove to their plates, then adds a baked potato and string beans.

His hamburger is sitting in grapefruit juice. But he's very hungry. He doesn't care.

"There's salad in the frig," she says. She takes small orange bowls of lettuce, celery, and carrots, and plum tomatoes from the refrigerator. "Food for today was pretty reasonable." She sets the salad bowls on the table and sits down.

"Maybe next year the grad school fellowships will be larger," Warren says. But that isn't the rumor going around his department.

Heidi presses the palms of her hands on the table. "Do you want water?"

"I'll get it." Warren pushes himself up and goes to the pantry closet for two glasses.

He lets the sink water run until it's extra cold.

"I walked out and bought a newspaper this afternoon," Heidi comments, looking momentarily toward the curtained window. It is obvious to Warren that she is not as casual about this as she wants to appear to be.

"Ummmm?"

"What's wrong with me getting a paper?"

"Nothing—but I bet you didn't see any decent jobs."

"I saw one, downtown."

Warren examines a piece of hamburger on his fork.

"It pays pretty well, Warren."

"You've already quit an okay job. I thought your thing now was to be a writer." He keeps chewing.

"I've tried." Heidi cuts open her potato and mashes it down with her fork.

"Try harder."

"Writing isn't that straightforward. And in the meantime..."

"We're managing."

"I'm probably going to apply for that job."

"Whatever. And for the last half year, you were going to have a baby, too. Remember what you told me—work was making you too tense to get pregnant."

"It's just as well I haven't been able to. We really can't afford it."

Warren jabs his last beans onto the prongs of his fork.

"But you want a baby."

"So?" She picks at her salad. "There's no dessert. Finish my grapefruit."

"You eat it. I have to start studying. I have an exam tomorrow morning."

He reaches down to his backpack and pulls out two big stacks of notecards.

Heidi takes her spoon. "About my working again, Warren. How do you really feel about that?" Lately, she's been asking him a lot of questions he doesn't know how to answer.

"If you want to work, work. To write full-time was your dream, not mine." He pauses. "And the baby will wait."

Heidi's spoon drops on the table midway between them.

"If you don't want the grapefruit, I guess I'll eat it,"

Warren says, ignoring any significance in the prone spoon. He puts his notecards down on the corner of the table.

Heidi passes her grapefruit over to him and then starts to clear the table.

In the midst of washing the dishes, she groans.

Warren stops rearranging his notecards and looks up. Heidi is reaching to the top of the refrigerator for the gravy boat watering can.

He watches her fill it. He worries that she might pour water over him.

Just in case, he covers his notecards with his arms.

Very deliberately, Heidi sprinkles a few drops of the water into the donkey pot.

"Do you think I'll ever publish a story?" she calls out.

"I think so." There, that was better on his part.

"Do you think we'll ever have a baby?"

"Yup." He is absolved! Now he can study without guilt.

"If I ever learn to make gravy," Heidi asks, spinning around like a top, "how will I water my seeds?"

Your Aunt in the West Village Marilyn McConnell

She died the spring after
I first saw New York,
her epitaph congealing
in that strip of rent-
frozen rooms as we walked
into the office of an Atlanta church
to purchase a prayer
from a Margaret-something.
I still have the photograph
I took of her plastic
split-leaf philodendron at
the Perry Street window,
a drama of shadows, her lace curtain
etherealizing the fire escape.
It calls up my attempts
to reconcile that bathroom door,
too warped to shut against
the kitchen, with the urban charm
I could read into the brick
funnel of air shaft where she hung
stiff hand-washed clothes.
I remember how my reigned-in horror
froze you off and into your own
poor past, how one night you left
the lumpy hide-a-bed we shared
to sleep on a cot, how by day
your silences fleshed out
the saddest planes in those yellowy
New York rooms, an irony
of chiaroscuro, a doll
in altar boys' garb affixed
to the wall above the dresser.

The University

Marilyn McConnell

Here in this scene of white stone
and large trees, weather shapes itself
to every thought and movement,
even to restraint and any
detour of attitude.

Reaching between these strokes of wind
and into time
is a kind of tragedy, like certain
too-large eyes in children,
like never having fathomed Superman
on a real street or on the roof
of, say, the Catholic rectory
two blocks over.

Still, walking through here, I think
about youth, about art school,
how the air—the so-called negative space—
contained a new connection
between the past and present, how time,
because we had more of it, was displaced
by color and light, the definition of beauty
adding onto itself like land
rising from oceans.

Hurting Hector

Kevin Frazier

Someone hit Hector in the face with a set of brass knuckles. Hector was Mexican. He had grown up in Veracruz. Then in his early twenties he had moved to Finland.

He had now lived in Helsinki for the past ten years. He worked as an editor for documentaries and as a director of music videos.

The attack happened when he was walking home on Iso-Roobertinkatu, a well-known boulevard in the Helsinki city center. It was two-thirty in the morning. The boulevard was deserted except for some customers at an all-night falafel stand a couple of blocks behind him.

The attacker came from around the corner of Point, a hair salon on one of the boulevard's cross-streets. Hector caught only a glimpse of the man's short stocky body and hairy hand swinging through the dark. The brass knuckles were a gray blur that Hector recognized an instant before they smashed the side of his face. Feeling his cheekbone snap, hearing its sharp dry crack, Hector fell to his knees. The attacker ran away.

...

Hector was in the hospital for a week. His cheek required reconstructive surgery. Then he stayed home from work for nearly a month.

Sanna took care of him on Mondays and Wednesdays. Brita took care of him on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Leena, triumphant, was given the weekends, Fridays through Sundays. And every night there were other women who visited. They were always blond, always big-breasted, always variations on a single dating theme that Hector had pursued for nearly a decade. Big-breasted blonds were his type, his fetish, and he had never tired of them.

...

He had generally found it easy to meet women in Helsinki. They would throw themselves at him while he was working: models who danced in the background of his music videos, assistant editors from the local production companies, program buyers for the Finnish TV stations. Strangers would flirt with him in the bars, ask him to dance at the clubs, strike up conversations with him on the trams.

Finnish men would often watch in stoic resentment as he brought one blond after another to his editing room or his favorite restaurants or his friends' parties. His smooth brown face and thick black hair were unusual in Finland, and he had delicate features—a fine small nose, long cheekbones, a slender jaw-line that some women felt an odd need to touch and caress. Even more appealingly, he would hold a cigarette in one hand and a glass of

beer in the other with the practiced grace of someone who enjoyed the give-and-take of small talk, of casual conversations where he never made suggestive remarks but simply waited for the woman to invite him to her place for a drink. And as he talked and listened, nodding gently, he would set his cigarette down on an ashtray so he could rest his fingers on a woman's shoulder or brush his hair out of his eyes. For many Finnish women, he made an ideal one-night-stand.

...

After the attack, however, he began to limit his dating. He had sometimes slept with married women, and his friends in the Finnish TV business told him he should be careful about this.

"You think it was an accident someone smashed you in the face?" asked Tuomas, a documentary filmmaker who had worked with Hector on dozens of projects.

"It was a fluke," Hector said.

"Brass knuckles aren't a fluke," Tuomas said. "Brass knuckles mean a jealous husband."

Petri and Juho, a pair of YLE technicians, said the same thing. They pointed out that Helsinki was one of the safest and least violent cities in the world, and that muggings on Iso-Roobertinkatu were extremely rare. Everything about the attack, they said, suggested that Hector had been the target of a planned assault.

"You're wrong," Hector told them. But while his face was mending he put an end to all of his love affairs with women who had husbands or serious boyfriends. Then he wondered if it was time to think about finding a wife of his own.

...

He proposed to Leena in the winter. They married the next spring.

By the time of the wedding his face had completely healed. Leena, an actress who starred in a daily Finnish soap opera, adored him. She believed that the power of her love had transformed him into a devoted husband. He didn't plan to cheat on her, he later said. He just fell into it. Some of the other women—the ones he'd rejected for Leena—were so devastated by his marriage that he felt almost honor-bound to comfort them. They needed his reassurance that they were still attractive, still desirable, and he gave it to them. And of course the women at the clubs and in the office also continued to pursue him. It seemed more natural and more honest to give in to them occasionally than to pretend they never interested him. The marriage lasted four months.

...

Single again, and running a new production company that he owned with Tuomas and Petri and Juho, Hector quickly returned to his old dating habits.

He went back to sleeping with married women as well, despite his colleagues' warnings.

"Why can't you just stay away from anyone with a wedding ring?"

Tuomas asked. "Is that so hard to do?"

Hector reviewed a dissolve on the TV monitor. He was very calm and patient when he was editing. "I'll stay away from them," he said, "when they stay away from me."

Two days later, as Hector was stepping out of his apartment building, a man in a ski mask slashed him across the face with a rusty butcher knife.

...

The scar on his face was long, deep, permanent. This time, though, Hector didn't stop seeing any of the women he'd been dating. Instead, he started seeking out married women deliberately and methodically. He would find them, sleep with them, convince them he wanted to live with them. Then he would drop them as soon as they told their husbands about him.

"What are you doing?" Tuomas said. "You've got to stop this, Hector. I'm sorry about your face—we all are—but you can't keep doing this. You've got to stop."

Hector responded by seducing Petri's wife and Juho's seventeen-year-old sister. Tuomas raged at Hector in the editing room.

Hector, absorbed in his cutting, barely seemed to listen.

"You can't keep doing this," Tuomas said. "You can't."

Hector smiled thinly, scratched the scar on the side of his face.

"How long do you think you can get away with this?" Tuomas demanded.

"That," Hector said, "is what I'm going to find out."

(Not) Excavating the Dump

Elizabeth Kerlikowske

When I wanted to forgive my broken past
and I mean at the exact moment of readiness
I rushed to the Sherman Township Dump
which was exactly as I remembered it:
a two rut road winding through woods ending in debris.
I didn't bring a damn thing useful for excavation.
What was my thinking: my artifacts would be spread out
like pajamas waiting for me to hop into them?
I even knew what object would make the quest
complete, a seminal find the blue Delft platter,
one of two above the cottage mantel, mates like Gran
and Grandpa. The dump was locked, gate pulled to,

No Trespassing sign stuck in the window
of the dump man's hut, geode of solo hubcaps.
Outside the gate a mini-dump had formed
of deliveries after hours. I chose a rusty wheelbarrow
for heaping the treasures of my own antiquity,
a make-up brush and two tined fork for painstaking exploration.
Through the gate, I headed for the plate stacks,
indestructible Melmac, chipped Russell Wright
and mismatched Country Fair. No Delft.
In toys, no Eskimo dolls. No reel to reel recorders,
no Archie comics. I sat in an unfamiliar chair,
staring at a kingdom of rudders, when I realized

I was searching the wrong sector!
This was new refuse; I needed archives,
mausoleum of bear-cleansed artifacts.
But the hinterlands had been bulldozed and left fallow.
I stood on the original dump site knowing
under my feet were histories, mosaic tiles Byzantine
and grand in a small town kind of way.
I scaled back my expectations.
I would have been happy with an extruded Delft shard,
but there was nothing here for me.
What I wanted was buried too deep; it was subsoil.
It was almost coal. By tomorrow it might be diamond.

I wasn't interested in some latter day morel
whose roots had to be left each year.
Standing on the grave of the mid 20th century
empty handed felt all right. My inheritance
was more than a wheelbarrow could hold.
Bears' eyes shone from behind bushes.
I shut the gate just as I'd found it
and started down the path, but ran back.
I should leave something with the dump
to find again, a doll's eye, a prize from
Cracker Jack, but at the gate a second time,
what covets immortality had passed.

Yellow Skein

Gerri Rosenzweig

A cloud thin as a strand of wool.
Must be what's left of the skein
of yarn draped over my wrists
in the house of lace curtains.

It whispered away from me
when I wasn't looking.

Someone at the other end winding
it into a ball resembling the sun?
whose daughter I am.

On a Staff Below Zero

Gerri Rosenzweig

Snow coats the north
side of the house.
The hour, blurred
by white, loses its place
on the church spire.
Jack, that bad boy,
skipped over the rim
of another hemisphere,
his pail dreaming of shells.

My voice, which was flute-high
in summer, deepens to a rusty air.
I am not afraid.
I practice my scales in the dusk,
on a staff below zero.
I am still in the world.
I fill the pail.
I carry my life up the hill.
I pledge allegiance
to the spear of a crocus
sleeping beneath a thatch of snow.

Cloven As My Heart

Gerri Rosenzweig

Was it the sound of my breath as I blew dust
from spaces between the letters of the keyboard?
Words bound away like startled bison.
I coax them back, tend their slow bulk, water their needs
with yesterday's wild flowers.
This is how it goes.
One steps close, all flared nostrils,
another rubs its side against a door post.
Scent of a damp prairie rises in the room.
Sounds they make to each other
are familiar as blood-calls in my ear
while I turn on the pillow's small hour.
When they twitch the ropes of their tails, lower their heavy heads
to the pale straw I put down for them at night,
I keep an eye on their hooves, cloven as my heart.

Old Woman in a White Pleated Gown

Gerri Rosenzweig

In a field of uncut grass she entered, like a shaft
of moonlight, or an old goddess asking for wine.
I wanted to lie down in her infinite pleats, in the scent of her

drifting through me warm as wind from distant orchards.
Half way through my life, my arms still round and firm,
I coveted the way she moved, her speckled shoulders gleamed

in lamplight, her voice was light as the frosted drink
she lifted to the end of summer twilights. I loved her grey hair swept
back with shell combs, loved even the patient shadow at her side.

At the Parvin Mill Road Bridge

(Parvin State Park NJ)
In memory of Wm. & Florence Nixon

Kathe L. Palka

Above the water, swallows race
their twins across a riffled sky
haloed by blossoming woods.
Where the wing walls guide the lake
into the spillway's churn, they fall
along the sunlit arc then rise
with deft grace to light upon the rims
of weep holes high in the walled channel
beyond which flows the Muddy Run.
Each year they return to nest in concrete
pulsing with the resonant voice of a waterfall.
Once reared, their young discover the miracle
of flight to soar above the tumult, or drop
like fluttering stones, born as we all are,
alone into this thundering beauty.

White Liars

Elizabeth Kerlikowske

She's trying to prepare me for her leaving
when she's partying with friends till way past late,
by not exactly lying but small deceiving.

When she goes out, I sit at home believing
that at midnight she'll arrive intact from every date
but she can't, to prepare me for her leaving.

Cloistered in her room, her phone receiving
heart felt breath from beaux across the state,
she practices girl skill of boy deceiving

with no nod to luck or genes ho hum retrieving
love from cyber space. Upstairs, resigned Fate
has settled in to prepare me for her leaving.

Even now she hikes on Isle Royale, weaving
her own way through tough terrain, restraint,
attention, confidence all there. No deceiving

the other mother, Nature. Yes, I've begun grieving
but she's got wanderlust, the cleaving, a family trait
she works to prepare me for her leaving:
she tells two truths (I gasp!) then calms with small deceiving.

Percussion

Elizabeth Kerlikowske

Checked with tiny scars from knives
and metal edges, staples, splinters,
dented from being slammed in doors,
my son's fingers tap his thigh, always
moving to the trap set behind his eyes.
Is it tempos, heart beats, blinks, wrens
slamming into windows, a faucet drip
he hears?

What?

My son yawns and
stretches. "Later," he says, but it's just
one syllable, saving time he can use later,
fill. Detour through hair, his fingers
hit transom, ping frosted lamps, find
the phone.
Half past time to jam.

Moby Jane

Elizabeth Kerlikowske

Can you store a caramel father,
remember pulling taffy at Gran's, sweet
rewards few and far between,
how did the chicken get under your bed
to leave its bones, what was it you were trying
to hatch, are your breasts tucked behind
your arms, water wings, oh too much
of a good thing, have you eaten your way
around The Dish, chewed intricate filigree
into the styrofoam of your sugary latte,
when will you be fat enough chair busting,
seam splitting, shock absorber challenging fat,
is there anything you do not like to taste except
slimy mushrooms that remind you of sex
you've never had, are you brushing
the crumbs from your bosom, is that a name
tag from another bakery, is your uniform
plum of colossal proportions, did you
float in the Atlantic, a pink island natives
doused with water until you could rejoin
your pod, did you get the chocolate Ahab
I sent for Christmas, if your cat dies,
will you eat her, where are your fingernail
clippings, I want you to send me your clippings,
that tattoo on your ankle, is it the moon or
a moon pie, did you think you were too light
to matter, 3X, 4X, all the candy in the heart's
gone, daughter, don't you feel loved?

Photo Session

Marilyn McConnell

Hair slicked sideways,
the child measures her smile
into the eye-sized aperture
that holds a world of audience
for as long as it takes a photograph
to become air again. She knows
that time is power, even though
it passes skates and bicycles
as only a slight wind.
She's seen the weighted light
of four o'clock solariums
folding with the echo of piano notes
into a shadow's long pause, and wonders
how an afternoon can freeze
for a fraction of a second so small
it fools the clock but stretches
to let in, for instance, a dead uncle
and a humming sound that numbs
the neighborhood, making ghosts
of the close-set houses,
the leathery city trees.

Pit Stops

Marilyn McConnell

We didn't know there was a creek
till the mallards showed up,
at least three dozen of them,
plodding through the weekend drizzle
like a scene from Hitchcock.
The kids stopped clanging breakfast pans
to feed them, and that cat we had—
the calico—slunk past the open screen
and into the kitchen.

I'd never seen such yellow
as the rain produced in maples
that October with those washed,
mauviskies for contrast.
The kids got finished being kids
that year and left, my son's letters
punctuating a path around South America.
Somewhere between the ducks and that,
we heard a body had been found
in the creek that season,
the first in a series of victims
who appeared in water even as
we cooked our meals and flung old
Corn Chex over the soggy grass.

Night Thoughts

Marilyn McConnell

In this gate-swinging sound
cicadas make, it's easy to see
how time fakes immobility,

as if the physical world were a rusty
hinged thing flapping around like a romance
stuck in its season. It takes

such near-invisible events
to change a face, to alter the crook
a hand takes on explaining things.

It takes these wands of poplar
shaking off an incidental path
of wind, the sun condensing to its blurred

geometry; not only memorable
weather, like that sudden January light
that wipes out topical consciousness,

then shuts down just as fast,
with as great a silence, changing
the meaning of the porch slats,

or of the man silhouetted in the window
of a second-floor apartment.
It takes a lamp going out

and the sliced moon falling from the blinds
onto the bedsheets, bending
to one or two bodies.

The Interview

Stephen Cucé

He asked me the wildest questions like have you ever cheated on a guy you loved and tried to talk yourself back into his arms so he was finally turning to you after his hurt and reaching for you and shushing you and nuzzling you and telling you not to torture yourself, that he loved you and you were not to be a bad girl again and you felt a little guilty but amazed like a used-car salesman who got a customer good and whacked him over the fence when he didn't expect to. When I said, yes, he said did it work and when I said, yes, he said, show me what you did. I thought it was a come-on and he was gonna try something funny so I said, maybe you forgot but this is a job interview. He said all right, but it's for sales, right? And I said, yeah, so what's this baloney? All he said was follow my lead, and he was so wide-eyed that I said okay, still leery that he might be pulling a President C on me.

She sipped her coffee before she went on. This room's ears would be burning if it had them. Here we blurted out our love lives and all their intimacies to each other. She continued...

Then he started: Where were you all night? He was so angry I thought he meant it. I was with Shirl. Oh really? Then why did she call at nine looking for you wanting to talk to you over a pizza she'd bring over? She was upset about Lester, thought he was seeing someone else and she wanted to talk to us about it. Oh I saw her later, that's where I was. How later? About ten, and then we started to talk on and on... He put up his hand. She called at eleven, all apologies, but when you came in would I please have you call. I bowed my head. Well? I love you and only you so even if you get mad, please hear me out and don't ask me to leave. Who were you with, furious. A guy you never met... Who? shouting. Stan from work. We've been meeting after work this whole week for a drink or two and, like the saying goes, one thing led to another. Holy shit. One thing led to another? I knew what he was doing and for a whole week I led him on just to see if I could turn him off, and in the end I didn't want to. I was actually talking myself into wanting him. So when he picked his coat from the back of his chair, I knew I'd go with him. So you tried him out? How was he? It doesn't matter. Don't answer that. You were there all night. That tells it all. No, that tells nothing. An irrational desire for this guy I see only a few minutes every day came over me, and I wanted to fight it, but I didn't. I know I should have, and up to the time we got to his apartment, I thought I would fight it, and when he put his arms around me and started to kiss me, I still thought I could stop myself and then he started to plead with me and when he saw I might back out and, I don't know, I began to feel bad that I had led him on...so I let him...only once. He slept the

rest of the time. And to torture myself more because of what I had done to you and to him, I waited around until he woke up and made breakfast for him. Please don't send me away. I love you. Please say you'll be home for dinner and I can be here for you.

No...I want you to leave...You have to know how much your smile means to me, and your looks and the way we joke even when you're in the other room and how funny it is when you make fun of stuff I say, how much I'll miss the way you look at me. The way you loved me and all the unintelligible things you muttered in my ear after you kissed me the utter love we had for each other to be ruined by a thoughtless moment. I'm sorry...my darling.

You saw him only this once? Now the past is coming back to me, the late afternoon meetings, quite a few of them, now, I remember. It seemed an inordinate number at the time and I remember asking you about that and you were vague and offhand and laughing. This goes back a few months. He actually seduced you. Are you pregnant...and he won't marry you? There was a silence that must have lasted a minute and because he had guessed it so perfectly, I finally looked up and in a small voice, just like with Tim, I said, yes.

He said, I'll call you. And knowing I had lost the job, I quickly went on.

Stan always used precautions and so did I, so the baby must be yours. And I must have wanted it that way because I wasn't always so particular with you. No, it wasn't because I was tired of not being married, or that he didn't ask me. He did ask me and we had talked about children in a general way and he seemed to think they were an unnecessary burden, and the idea of being with him a lifetime made me ill, so I told him I was pregnant and he immediately thought I was trying to rope him in and I knew he would, so I was glad when he told me to leave. And I came home to you because you are home. He put his arm around me and said, is it true? We're going to have a baby?

That's a good comeback even if it's not true. It could be and most customers, if they have been convinced they want the product, want to be fooled anyway. Can you report for work in one week?

How Could I Have Known

Loretta Dunne

Abandoned pig farms become developments
Big lonely houses divided by naked yards
I never thought I would miss those pigs
Hog houses, long rambling styes
A secret just glimpsed through sheet metal fences
Smelled for miles
It was not possible to ignore those pigs

Before the world was full of trash bags
We'd put the garbage can at the curb
Stuffed with eggshells, half-eaten broccoli
Peas a child refused
All of that would end up at those pig farms
Feeding pigs we never really saw

Now Deptford is known for its malls
What is left of the farms is collapsing
And the pigs
Those pigs
Their scent no longer floats on a hot day
Straight toward those big, new houses
I never thought I would miss those pigs

Droppings

R. Yurman

dozens of tiny hard pellets
in the backs of kitchen drawers
or the space under the sink
I pray they come from mice
rat shit's more than I can face

when I was nearly four
I wanted to climb the rocks
in the park across the street
granite humps so enormous
mother wouldn't let me near them

fifty years later I went back
expecting them like everything else
from childhood to have shrunk
they were enormous still

boulders smooth and round as dreams
I pulled myself atop the smallest
the best my aging legs could manage
a triumph over prohibition

I've lived with termites mice and
roaches
but rats violate our darkest spaces
one raced across the roof
and fell into the enclosed patio
outside the kitchen window

the thud of his body
startled our attention
we jumped to slam the glass doors
trapping him
before he could recover

in my dreams he's enormous
a rock beyond mother's imaginings
four days he hid behind the
planters

bright eyes slowly starving

a man with shovel and sack
heat him and removed the carcass
death allowing us to reclaim
our small square
of cement and flowers

Summer Wedding

David Lawrence

My old top hat ran away on a bicycle down
the street.
It had lost its body
but its formal beard made the wheels
go.
If I only could get my hat back.
I'd take my tails out of the closet
and go to a formal garden
wedding.
I'd tell the parents that love
wrecked me.
that they should save
their son.
I'd stand on top of the cake
and tell them to give me
to the dogs.

Not Mine

David Lawrence

The less I remember the more I am sure
that there was less than the little
I saw through the periscope.
I come up from under the waves
to dance with seaweed
and hang from
clams.
I never loved you.
You were my best friends girl.
That's not water
in my wind
pipe.
Ifs the music of death
I swallow.

We're Hot

Joan Wilking

We're hot. We're cool. We're sitting in a Pontiac Bonneville convertible, top down, waiting for the light to change. Rafe just told me he's been having a thing with his workout partner, a tall black buck named Keith. I just told Rafe I'm going to have Bobo's baby. He says, "You've got to be kidding me."

We're singing along with the radio. It's so loud the pedestrians standing on the sidewalk are bopping to the beat. One guy cranes his neck and make a kissy face at me. The sun is drilling a hole into the top of my head. Rafe is tapping his fingers on the steering wheel when he says, "You're absolutely sure?"

We're bopping to the beat. Someone screams. The crowd on the corner parts. A small guy, with a sacred heart of Jesus tattoo on his left bicep, stands alone, hand to his ear, blood dripping in thin lines, down his fingers, down his neck, staining his white T-shirt red. Rafe turns to me and smiles one of his *I'm the best looking white man on the planet* smiles, and says, "Now that's what I call, being ripped off."

We're waiting. We're watching. A little guy in a sleeveless T-shirt and tight jeans is bleeding onto the sidewalk. The pedestrians are looking up and down the street, at their feet, at the sky, at us, anywhere, but at the guy bleeding. I shout over the thumping radio, "Do something." Rafe gives me one of his *you're completely crazy if you think I'm going to get involved in this* smiles, and says, "Shit. We're going to lose our reservation."

We're on our way to Cha, Cha, Cha to eat black beans and designer burritos in a converted gas station in a not-so-hot part of LA. If you have to pee, the waiter gives you a set of keys. I'm feeling a little queasy. A little off. A little queer. Something's growing inside of me. The light changes. Rafe guns the accelerator. The car lurches into the intersection. I watch over my shoulder as we speed away. The guy dripping blood is just a shimmer in the heat. Rafe steps on the gas, grips the wheel with both hands, and stares straight into the haze. He doesn't say a thing.

Immigrant X

or a Poem Found by an I.N.S. Officer in the Pocket of a Young Man, Dead
in the Desert on the Border of Texas and Mexico

Mark Fitzpatrick

Over the hill and far away,
through the valley of unawakened bones
in the desert where the coyotes play—
beyond that, beyond that, they say,
lies the land floating in milk and money.
So,
seeing how the New Jerusalem plopped itself down
on the other side of the barbed wire,
who can blame any one of us
for wanting to cross over?
(And why should one crowned king
keep the whole kingdom to himself?)

And so, the legend of a poquito mouse hole
one might be able to crawl through—
there's a chance, a chance,
a way of slipping through the back basement window
since the front door is bolted shut.
The first time through is like a baptism
you're very conscious of.

**** *
**** *
**** *

If you stagger, if you falter
you may never make it.
One stutter,
one word
spoken in your own language—
your own mouth a booby trap.
Your brown skin, your black hair—
you are most certainly looking at betrayal.

Hell, there are those who have pleaded
that they've lived there all their lives,
have a mortgage and a car loan to prove it –
if you would only check, Mr. Texas Ranger, sir!

(But when has a winning white king,
ever been considerate of a black pawn?)

**** **** ****

Old Man Coyote is a Trickster,
they say.
He might take you there, might not.
Might start out with good intentions
then guide you into some arroyo
where they will find
your half-baked vegetable body
with buzzards celebrating mass on it.
Old Many Coyote might lead you along
and lead you along and lead
you along

until the Texas Rangers are spotted—
then he'll split in a tail wisp!

Oh, Old Man Coyote, don't you have any sympathy
for the part of us that wants the Good so badly
it becomes illegal to get it.

The Art of Attention

Edward A. Dougherty

In the summer-stifling
gallery-workshop, a man
in dark shades mixes
doses of gas-flame
with his breath to shape
a lump of molten glass,
glowing, into a bulb,
then a teardrop,
just as any one of us
makes of the materials at hand
a friendship or a song
to make the baby sleep.
I think of slowly crafting
our own lives in the heat
of attention. In a half-circle,
spectators quieted
to watch the glassblower
tap off the shaped mass,
recognizable now
as a vase, cooling to blue.
He pressed an ingot

to the base, secured it
to the rod, then with tongs
widened the mouth as he rolled it.
Back to the flame, foot
to the gas, now to the chair to flute
the opening like a white petal.
As he returned again to soften
the cooling vase, I turned
to watch the amazed faces
—drifting away, the rhythm
slackening. He's lost it!
someone whispers. I glance
in time to see him
yank the vase free, a ragged hole
burned in the side;
then without a word, he took
the next rod from the assistant
and began again.

Dear Robert

Edward A. Dougherty

These days of “security” and grief sometimes feel so dreamlike that if I turn down a hallway or turn quickly enough on the stairs, I will wake up to a sanity & miss. So far it hasn't happened, so we call and write our reps, stand on street corners, write letters, wear buttons... When we were in Hiroshima, we used a slogan: *Make visible the dream of peace*. Each one of us must find our way of doing that.

Caged Garden of Life

Vladimir Orlov

In a gloomy garden of the golden cages
suspended on the golden chains
at the whim of a wistful gardener,
trees of a quashed joy rustle alive,
alive to the roaring wind rudely stripping them
of their yellow apparel of an anticipated slumber.
Lawns of gilt offer their own
rampaging yellow, lawns of a decaying life
stifled to death by the marauding weeds.
The whole garden is an ungainly cage
of rust which is the gold's aftermath.

Body Plays Dumb

Rose Swartz

In the afternoon morning that is only morning when you have been drinking.
We sit on the sidewalk of the dirtiest drunken city. Outside the record store I
ask body if it knows where it's been. Body plays dumb. Says no. I have to
remind it how to feel. Feel like the baby bird bodies outside his house last
night, the baby bird bodies we crushed under our feet, accidents that looked
like Pollack paintings. Mottled and fucked up, body, that's how you should
feel. I ask body why there are no tire treads on my back—why there is no
sloppy seam running from brain to thigh where he slices me open. Body
shrugs, says "look up at the lovers." Arm in arm, they smile too much so we
heckle those lovers. We glare our ugliest glare. I scream at them "Hey look,
we are in love too!" But body scrunches, knows this is a lie. I have to tell it to
shut up, that this is just a joke. Now me and body yell together "We've never
been happier!" I peel us off the concrete and accidentally leave some of
body behind. We wail together "...so in love it hurts!" We chase the lovers
but they are too in love to notice. Body gets tired, gets so jealous. Quits on
the curb. I ask it again—where have you been? Body just cringes, says you
don't even want to know.

Black Night

Vladimir Orlov

The arid fields of dusty silver
lie fallow for years and years that pass
in the farewell trembling hues
of the night too black and dazzling
to look real.

The placid ponds of gilded lilies ripple
with the sinking shades of this suffocating
twilight, the black night's faithful employee.
The corrupted fates of grandeur,
formerly sparkling, now vexed and weary,
lie scattered on the banks
which the nightly Rider of Justice haunts.

Caged Respite

Vladimir Orlov

Life's refugees used to willingly
lock themselves in these endless fields
of the golden cages unfolding all around
in the menace of their deceptive splendor
that the life's loyal martyrs eagerly fall for,
longing for a minute's respite
from the uncanny pain
of vulgar day-to-day existence.

Anticipating the audacity of a departure,
shunning the rip-off of a return,
the poor convicts on the death row
of the guillotining golden cages
are still readily reaching out to them,
to the stretching swampy fields of them
running far beyond the life's horizon,
so peacefully and joyfully serene
in their placating, inviting, vermilion green
of the countless time-chariots of pastures
affording the ready oblivion
the convicts are yearning for.

Fine Cutlery

Paula Berman

Sex was the only thing we shared,
although sometimes, he'd make me dinner.
Once in the kitchen, I cut a tomato on a plate.
"What are you doing?" he screeched,
"Don't you know how to treat fine cutlery?"

I don't own fine cutlery.
I bought my knives at the Puyallup Fair
from a guy in the Home & Living Exhibition Hall.
He cut through a steel can and then through a tomato.
I bought the set for 20 bucks.

My knives came with a bonus-
a corkscrew knife that cuts potatoes into slinkies.
My slinky potatoes became very popular
and my knives never need sharpening.

I Am So

Tangled In This
Lyn Lifshin

but remember the
woman who read tea
leaves, whispered
"you feel very
intensely but not
for long." The no-
word from Word
land, taste of him
on my skin which is
a lie, never being
that close to him
except here on the
sheets that aren't
the sheets I imagine

Cart Wheeling Birds

Lyn Lifshin

the one image
that comes over
and over. Some
one asks" have
you written about
the 11th? And
I shake my head.
E mail full of
terrible poems
about it. Chats
and rants. A
couple holding
hands, jumping,
how they look
like flame birds.
"Cart wheeling
birds," someone
said, their arms
linked like wings

Birth

Paula Berman

My mother's water broke at the Jewel Food Store
My father, the doctor, embarrassed, ran off to sit in the car.
As the labor pains started, he offered to drive her to the hospital,
but she insisted that she get her hair done first.
Angered by this, he told her to drive herself.
She went into labor while still in curlers.

It's against the rules for an obstetrician to deliver his own child
because, if it's a monster baby, he might freak out and be unable to finish the job.
Unfortunately, the only other obstetrician in our cow town was at a concert.
My dad rounded up some doctors to assist with the delivery,
a pediatrician and a psychiatrist, both friends of the family.
I was born at 10:50 p.m. He kept a careful log of all his deliveries; I was #1552.
He listed nothing in the comment section like "my daughter" or "my little girl."

In a picture taken shortly after my birth,
I'm sitting on my mother's lap.
My hair is combed up so I look like I have a pointy head,
but my mom's hair looks great.

Yeah You Are Andy Fogle

In the desert of erasure,
in some shack crumbling like a dirt clog
in the hand of a man about to leave everything he
knows,

a phone can't stop its own ring,
the smoke alarm is haunted by a fire
somewhere down the hall,

the tv can only express its own temptations,
and a man has his eyes closed
just as tight as he can.

Think of a Woman

Who Takes a Brown Small

Lyn Lifshin

purse and walks up
to the falls, sets the
bag down. A woman
like that must have
nothing left to loose,
churning inside like
Joplin but without
anything to get her
up. It's just after
Labor Day. Who
knows where her
man is. September
light is already thin
in Buffalo Her son
is groaning on the
living room floor,
drugged with pain
killers after the
cycle accident,
won't let her touch
his hair. There's no
comfort to give or
get. Sun on the water
intoxicating as so
little else in her life
will be

Five Dollars at the Door

Rose Swartz

And the sizzle noise you hear in your head when you put a cigarette out on the top of a leather boot, stoned and fifteen in the balcony of a concert hall; sweat drops flying from the metal head in front of you as he runs his chubby fingers through drenched hair; the sharp elbows of strangers in your stomach; how numb your hands get as you keep clapping for the encore; the lobby wheezing like a congested lung when the show lets out and all the fans want walk or home or sex or beer; dimly red lit brick walls, the apologies of drunks; the bum who threw your pennies back, past you into the ashtray; fists balled in sweater sleeves protesting the late October air; this game we play in Michigan- how long just a hooded sweatshirt will keep us from the cold; girls wearing combat boots and boxer shorts in filthy cardboard kitchens, hair long and greasy but dyed brilliant; boys playing chess on a spray painted plywood board, four feet by four feet; empty Rolling Rocks substituted for lost bishops; the feeling of urgency siphoned from the music; crawling up with the fleas from the sea of puke carpet; from the first distorted bar chord; we must sing along with this.

And the sizzle noise you hear in your head when you put a cigarette out on the top of a leather boot, stoned and fifteen in the balcony of a concert hall; sweat drops flying from the metal head in front of you as he runs his chubby fingers through drenched hair; the sharp elbows of strangers in your stomach; how numb your hands get as you keep clapping for the encore; the lobby wheezing like a congested lung when the show lets out and all the fans want walk or home or sex or beer; dimly red lit brick walls, the apologies of drunks; the bum who threw your pennies back, past you into the ashtray; fists balled in sweater sleeves protesting the late October air; this game we play in Michigan- how long just a hooded sweatshirt will keep us from the cold; girls wearing combat boots and boxer shorts in filthy cardboard kitchens, hair long and greasy but dyed brilliant; boys playing chess on a spray painted plywood board, four feet by four feet; empty Rolling Rocks substituted for lost bishops; the feeling of urgency siphoned from the music; crawling up with the fleas from the sea of puke carpet; from the first distorted bar chord; we must sing along with this.

When I Think of Millay

Lyn Lifshin

how she stopped pursuing
men, became reclusive.
When I think of her falling
for a man 15 years younger
and getting booted out.
When I think of her in bed
with a man that much
younger, think how a friend
said it's not the sex in the dark
but if lights went on suddenly
and even thin, we're not 20
years old. When I think how
my legs are fine in stretch tights,
but the blue lines are road
maps. When I think how I
begged the man with no legs
to at least crutch after me,
fall in thru this opened door,
grateful as someone getting
their fix. When I think of Millay
no longer being a savage beauty
and having to admit it

Styx

Andy Fogle

Sky is made of fog today, not itself,
like the black water of a dream lake.

The tragic flaw is to row across
only as a man, and nothing else.

Clamor

Andy Fogle

For a full decade, the house was a silent choir
with all the singers' eyes wide open,
but the crows were rawing the day before he left,
cold as a dead star, quick as a hummingbird's wings,
out the door into the January wind.

The bleached sky swept
its very own clouds against the winter trees.
In the first few years of his absence,
no matter how much that woman yelled,
louder than a lunchroom, sharp as a yucca,

thrashed like pine needles in a squall,
the telephone and hallways withstood it all,
and sneaking back into his room night after night,
as the boy grew up, he only grew quieter,
and the sky swept its very own.

The Rug Changer

Joyce Odam

Here comes the rug man, gliding in smooth essence from path to path with his small exchange-rugs across his arm, moving with vanity and charm, laying them down in the cold hallways. His job is important. Like an elegant purveyor, he proffers the cleaned rugs to the floor, as if he loved them; as if he wanted them to hold neatly in place, with their edges down, to give the ambience of warmth, buffer sound, and softly cushion all the walking.

Tuning Up

Joyce Odam

Let the blue begin, Maestro, of the blue fugue. I feel you shudder the blue notes into silence. Let me hear the blue fugue follow the flow of curtain that flutters its hem at the stage where the lights release the shadows to dance around the legs of the chairs where the sad musicians tap their feet, —not in unison, but in private throe—just as you, Maestro, raising your blue baton over the air to memorize the grief and weep onto all your music which flutters to the floor in pages of white birds that escape now in their own discordances.

The Widow

Darlene Yarbrough

Wherever the Reverend's eyes roamed his study, the object transfigured into the face of the widow Hawkins, who had lost her husband not more than six months ago. If he focused on the clock, its face became oval and soft as flesh. The Roman numerals reshaped into her comely features. Numerals danced on her cheeks like restless, wild eyelashes. After more than sixteen years of pastoral work, he had never felt so deeply the anguish of another. Today was Tuesday, the day he had set aside for those members of the congregation to visit and be consoled as they prayed with him for renewal of their faith. Drop-in counseling he called it, for he had learned that a spur of the moment decision was one more often acted upon. Mrs. Hawkins had dropped in the last two Tuesdays, so there was no reason not to expect her today.

As he neared the half century mark, the Reverend still had the look of a man much younger, tall and big, with a full head of blond hair and trusting blue eyes, and blessed with a mild manner, and an air that instilled confidence.

A member of his flock had mentioned to him last Sunday that he was filling out a bit in the middle, so he had given thought to refusing Sunday dinner invitations, but then he had promised himself that for years. Eating with the members of the congregation was like a feast of redemption, (he liked similes, the figurative language was so persuasive in his sermons) coming together with them for fellowship gave them the opportunity to renew their trust in him and it refreshed his soul to see it taking place. On one occasion after a Sunday spent in the kitchen, his hostess had announced proudly; "It was the next best thing to cooking the Last Supper."

With the exception of standing at the pulpit on Sunday mornings, his study was his favorite place; it had the same quiet dignity of purpose. Its floor was covered wall to wall with thick plush carpet which tempered and tended to quiet anxious souls. An enormous mahogany desk dominated the room, the brass plaque from the donor clearly visible. A soft yellow covered the walls blending magically with the neutral colored carpet. Subdued lighting illuminated the sacred paintings on the wall, and loosened tongues.

Chairs abutted the front of his desk. One was for the Reverend who might feel the need to come around and hold the hand of a bereaved. A flame leaped lively in the fireplace, lit mostly as a reminder to sinners.

As he sat at his desk now staring into the flame, there was Mrs. Hawkins dancing a wicked dance of the East; her skirt made of strips, riding low on her belly, her body undulating, her hands moving slowly around her swaying hips

and then rising above her head, beckoning him.

He closed his eyes and quoted aloud—"the head is sick, and the heart faint—lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil—lay not up for yourself treasures upon earth." Oh Lord, he had mixed up the verses, but when he opened his eyes, the flame danced alone. As he waited for the visit of a troubled soul, he pondered the effect of his counseling—did it quell temptation? He had solved the problem of his flesh by marrying as Saint Paul had advised. He and his wife, known for her well-organized church suppers, had struck the right pose for the minister's house next to the church, a mansion of many rooms. The Reverend was handed the keys to a Cadillac each year by the owner of the dealership, an elder in the church and one who tithed handsomely. It was befitting, he said, that the minister look his best traveling about on the Lord's business. Acknowledging such wisdom with soothing words, the Reverend, nonetheless, accepted a Chevrolet.

A buzzer at the door to the study purred softly.

A woman's head appeared, and hesitated, adjusting to the dimness. She advanced toward him as her feet sunk into the cloud-like pile. Her skirt, which was form-fitting down past her waist, suddenly flowed out as if she were about to waltz. One eye was hidden by the brim of her hat. Below it, her hair had the folds common to another century.

"Mrs. Hawkins," the Reverend said as he motioned her to a chair.

In response to his gesture, the widow glided as if on the Sea of Galilee.

A handkerchief appeared in her hand from somewhere deep in the sleeve of her shirtwaist which clung to her body like the fine silk it was.

Should he encourage her to speak?

"Reverend—" she faltered.

The word Reverend flowed into his ear like a song. And he had always regretted not being called Father—Reverend was a damp world like the mechanism of a machine. Father was intimate—more powerful and persuasive. Now, Reverend sounded as if a bee, its feet coated with nectar, had crawled across the word.

"Reverend," she said, her voice gathering confidence. "So much was left unsaid last week. thoughts have come to me about grief and love that I must share with you."

"I'm so glad you have come, Mrs. Hawkins. I was just thinking that since the Lord has granted you such a fine voice for hymns, you might think of singing in the choir as a way of lessening your grief." Oh, the sweetness of anguish, the Reverend mused in silence.

"Reverend, how does the grief end—gradually—sharply—without warning? Does it mean one no longer cares for the deceased?"

As the words fell from her lips, her lips moistened and brushed against one another, and parted again.

The soul can be observed through the eyes, but the Reverend realized

that both must be seen at once. One eye conveys mystery, not revelation. Is she going to remove her hat?

“Mrs. Hawkins, each of us must determine the time when grief must end, but we must remember that grief is part of love; somewhere in the heavens hands are joined and two people become one, marching together throughout eternity.”

His fingers doodles with the Bible marker. He stopped and lowered his hands to his lap as he recalled that a fidgeting preacher could distract from his own counseling.

Mrs. Hawkins reached up and slowly removed a hidden pin and dropped her hat in her lap, then tucked her hands under the crown. Her eyes met his filled with the waters of her grief. Tears flowed down her cheeks in a miniature stream until they disappeared into the fractures of her lips. Her mouth opened, she tasted her tears. As if his pores were in harmony, the lines of his face moistened with sweat.

The intense quality of the room made him aware of the need for soft hymnal background music. Has the Lord in mind a task for me for which He is now testing my strength? Just last night he had slipped away from his sleeping wife into the spare room where he had knelt in prayer, talking in low confidential tones to the Lord. Usually after such conversation he had been comforted, but last night after praying, he still groped in spiritual despair.

“But Reverend, I am confused about the marriage vow which obligates only unto death. What is expected of me after Mr. Hawkins? Wanting—is it not human?”

What was he to reply? Has he not worried about whether his counseling quelled temptation? “We both remember the warmth and kindness of Mr. Hawkins who was taken from us so suddenly.”

“I’m still young, Reverend. Can the weakness of the flesh terminate grief? Is that the Lord’s method of permitting us to go on living when death takes a loved one? Is loneliness the first step toward the healing process? Are these the mysteries that God offers us?”

As if a hand had touched his shoulder, the Reverend rose and moved to the other side of the desk to the chair next to Mrs. Hawkins.

His eyes traveled to the clock and to the burning logs, and then, suddenly, his thoughts centered on a film he had seen at the Seminary about the liberation of a prisoner-of-war camp. When the death-starved prisoners joined together in freedom, a man and a woman, mostly bone, laid upon a cot and copulated, noisily as skeleton met skeleton. A spur of the moment decision was one more often acted upon. Had he not already realized that about human motivation? His mind was clear—immediacy—the handmaiden of sin—the Lord has granted us options so that we can freely choose between dos and don’ts.

“Could it be that when grief becomes too great to bear, the Lord actually

alleviates pain through his creation of the desire of the flesh — a balancing act?” Mrs. Hawkins asked.

“Mrs. Hawkins.” His hand reached over to meet the hand which had rested under the crown. “Yes, Mrs. Hawkins, there are many mysteries that God offers us to alleviate our suffering. The greatest of them is the power to choose.”

Her hand rested confidently in the cupped palm of the Reverend. Tilting her head toward him, Mrs. Hawkins said: “Reverend, the Lord was wise in selecting you as His servant.”

“Let us pray, Mrs. Hawkins, together, on our knees.”

The Reverend dropped to his knees never taking his eyes away from the eyes of Mrs. Hawkins. With her hand still cupped like a small bird in the Reverend’s hand, she lowered herself to the floor until she was on her knees beside him. The Reverend’s lips quivered as the ecstasy of faith filled his veins. His lips opened in prayer: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want—,” he hesitated and repeated the words as if he had not heard them before. “I shall not want—he maketh me to lie down—in greener pastures.”

With a knee touching the faithful cloth embracing the knee of the Reverend, Mrs. Hawkins, obedient to the faith recited: “The Lord is my shepherd—”, the words reverberating through her breasts and for a brief moment beating as one with the Reverend’s, the rhythm tuning as a musician to the beat of another instrument. As her eyes closed in prayer, she felt as if she were levitating above earthly yearnings. Equilibrium, no longer dictating to her body.

At this moment the Reverend exulted over his success at the transformation of the soul of Mrs. Hawkins. The wonders of prayer continued to amaze him even though he had never been in doubt as to its efficacy. While they spoke in intimacy to God, the long curve of Mrs. Hawkins thigh caressed the firm thigh of the Reverend. It was as if the fires of damnation and salvation had struck simultaneously. He saw again her wicked dance of the East. His knees waddled over to face her, her head still bowed in prayer. Mrs. Hawkins lost her balance. She toppled backward as the Reverend’s body pressed forward. His body flopped awkwardly onto the fallen woman. His hands unclasped from their pious fold and grappled with Mrs. Hawkins’ shirt as his lips quivered in search of her lips, folding around her parted mouth as he grasped her skirt lifting it to new heights. His hand dove between her legs as he struggled with the zipper enclosing his priestly powers. Words slipped from his mouth: “Damn the Lord!”

The door to the study opened as the Reverend’s wife advanced toward them soundlessly on the plush carpet.

“Your lunch is ready, Reverend. Why whatever is the matter with Mrs. Hawkins?” she asked as she observed Mrs. Hawkins’ body bowed in an awkward pose as if in pain.

“We were praying together and she appears to have fainted from the sheer burden of her grief” The Reverend had never been at a loss for words.

“Let me help you, please,” she said to Mrs. Hawkins as she massaged her wrist.

The Reverend still on his knees mumbled a prayer with an addendum: “The Lord works in mysterious ways, his but to wonder why.”

Mrs. Hawkins sipped the wine offered by the Reverend’s wife. “Perhaps, you’re hungry my dear, won’t you stay for lunch with us.”

Mrs. Hawkins’ eyes opened wide in bewilderment as she nodded assent.

As Mrs. Hawkins was assisted from the study by his wife, the Reverend followed at a respectful distance. After lunch he would work on his sermon for the coming Sunday, the title forming in his mind, “The Lord’s way of quelling temptation.”

When I Think of Millay No Longer a Savage Beauty Lyn Lifshin

suddenly reclusive, when
I trace lines over my lips,
hear of aging beauties
photographed thru Vaseline
lenses. when I know if he
doesn’t call or write, it won’t
be that he didn’t have me.
I’ll be sure it has something to
do with his being younger.
When I think how it always
seems this way tho never for
me. When I think suddenly I
understand the woman who
wanted to dump students,
lovers, friends before they
could drop her. When I can’t
stop checking e mail, feverish,
doomed, waiting. When I
wonder when the red flag
won’t still promise what
it can’t bring, or care

Mornings,

I Have Come By

Michael P. McManus

Like this when the lion has opened its mouth,
roar, roar, I expect to hear.

Instead a peacock sticks out its head,
spreads its feathers like a banded garland.

Flight, flight, I expect to see,
but see instead a horse grazing

in a winter field with winter on its back
and all the belongings of a man

piled neatly on the ground beside a creek.
Someone died today but not me,

surely this could be symbol,
a hopeful Genesis before we are bull-whipped

into submission, before the pillow
is pulled from beneath our head,

or placed there once again
to dismiss the only life we've led

while walking through a fine drizzle
in sight of seven mountains

and one spillway heavy with spring runoff
One more summer and its idleness waits,

one more lichen covered rock on which
we might slip and fall, borders the path

under the oaks, a conveyor belt of beauty,
not so much a machine, but a body

gathering light after point of light,
caught in the flame that licks us clean,

buoyant in the elusive fluttering
of imagined wings down a darkened street.

Zac, You Won't Know What to Do When this Happens— Rose Swartz

When the brown grass hustles up a smile
on your wooden face and the rest of you creaks
with surprise. When your unfit old boots graze
the barren Michigan field. You stand with
your head shaking as you look to the sky,
hopeful, 'cause you hear flapping.
Your neck is stiff like once-wet-and-now-dried
suede sneakers, your big palms open so far
that they close. Now get those feathers
out of your mouth, find your father's flannel shirt,
keep those hands deep in your blue jeans' pocket—
(hide the two things that were ever loved)
those rough, chapped whittling sticks for the world,
keep them warm and wait. Soon oneathose birds is
gonna fall, awkward, like water
balloons served on fine china from the rooftop—
and when it hits the half frozen ground
and you run through the woods;
will you be running to go save it ?
Or hopping that barb-wire to steal its bundle and ask—
had the other storks had been circling all these years,
were they indeed carrying your babies?
Did they simply have the wrong address?

My Wife Begs Me

Not to Shoot our Dog

Michael P. McManus

It's not about negligence or neglect
like last summer's incident on a dead-end street
when a neighbor's Irish Setter
got tangled in its chain,

the metal noose cinching tight
with each movement it made trying to get free
until it could not breathe; the absence of air
heard(by who?) in its last bark, sealed in its glassy eyes.

Today it's about old age and necessity;
the snowy muzzle, cataracts, hip dysplasia,
the side to side gait going nowhere,
nights he growls at the kitchen chairs.

My pregnant daughter watches us amble
across the backyard winter grass.
Beside her stands her boyfriend, a thief of sorts-
two months out of work, but always with enough money
for cigarettes and beer.

Like a reluctant shadow, my wife trails behind me.
Under a gray sky which hints it might sleet,
the garden hoe leans on the shed near the wheelbarrow.
In a few minutes it will be used to haul him off

A little larger than my hand, I carry a .22 pistol
similar to the hushpuppies we carried in Viet Nam,
though this one has no suppresser
to muffle the surprise announcements
we would use back then on village dogs.

When we stop walking, my wife covers her mouth
with both hands as if she's trying to keep something from falling out.
And Luke, his eyes drunk with whatever condition
lives behind them — a soul, I hope,
keeps wagging his tail, unmistakable motions

he made whenever expecting a doggy treat,
not this blunt nub I've placed behind his pointed ear;
suddenly raised in instinctual alert as if it's heard
the squirrel chattering in the blue smoke above us.

D59

Simon Perchik

As if the pump for the well
is carving her shoulders out
and the invisible stone

you will hold when it dries
broken up among the ruins
though some rocks

still squeeze one hand
too tight and the faucet
cover you with a place

that can not rest
—what you grip will be this cup
left over from the first death

no longer noon but a cramp
for which there is no potion
only her lips falling from the sky

almost empty, worn down
clings to the ground
as minutes, hours, evenings

—for years one hand
closing over the other
already a shadow

half grass, half thirst
half some vague hovering
inside your throat

—mouthful by mouthful only cold water
at last in the open
pulled up and still falling.

St. Therese

Michael P. McManus

Long ago the bells stopped ringing and the nuns
filed across the street to the school where
we were no more only records remained
of parochial boys wearing white shirts
and black pants our ties black too and the girls
dressed in plaid skirts giggled at our crude jokes
when we were too young to care what love was
or who it came for only Jesus died
to save us the parish priest would tell us
and if we did not believe or listen
to his catechism our knuckles felt
the sadistic ruler come crashing down
o we were made to suffer as all good
Catholics will learn that no easy road
will carry our souls to the afterlife
long before my brother put the pistol
in his ear because no longer did he
want to hear the sounds of Viet Nam there
and so he died for his own lonely sins
the moment of his passing a long path
winding under the midsummer trees
under which I now walk the neighborhood
quiet as an empty confessional
the flutter of birds rising all at once
above a robed priest standing in the street
at sunset holding his little flower