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THE THINGS I STEAL FROM SLEEP
(from the Notebooks of Theodore Roethke)

Feeling exists in time, and in a dream.
The things I steal from sleep are what I am.

Why is poetry scary?

In truth, the diabolical comes with its desolations,
Its voices, its sulphurous shimmers,
On desert and plain, over the warped bedstead,
The wavering delusional flowers...

The minute rages in the clock.

My bane, my joy,
My bandy-legged boy,
Came roaring down that manic road...

Harvard is not enough.

I walk in this great decay:
The woods wet by the wind,
The dying moss, the brown
Features of time’s delay...

I seem to be in darkness all the time.

NORTHWEST
He believes too much, and he knows too much. That's what we call mad.

* * *

Reared in another place, he came to woe
As to his dinner: it was the thing to do . . .

* *

Shall the gnarled soul
Be reminded again
Of an old motion,
A slapping of water?

* *

There is suffering and imaginary suffering. Both can be productive of art.

* *

I lost what I found
On a dark day,
A mind unsound
In extremity . . .

* *

The mirror told a dirty joke.

* *

A heavenly swearing, tearing off a piece of the wind with his wild words . . .

* *

He stretched himself into the greatest good,
Only to break the borders of his mind:
All these went spinning like a cloudy day.

* *

There are brains strewn with nothing but bones.

* *


* *

A mere dying-beetle energy.

* *

Now certain names knock on us like a bell.
Who would believe the meaning of a stick?
There's no one here to tell us we are ill;
The loved adore the loved; the sick the sick . . .

* *

I am undone by knowing what I've done.

* *

Running from God's a long race, and it always ends in a dead heat.

* *

For hell is always here: upon the chair
And in these papers strewn upon the floor.

* *

I'm tired. Is that maturity?

* *

Do I stink the rolling air?
This guilt's enough for towns of men:
I keep it navel-tight;
My pride tilting at sticks,
I put this darkness in the air . . .
When shadows start, a changeling steps
Into my dearest dream.

* *

I'm waiting for what I am.

* *

I'm feeling with my feet
To make myself complete.

* *

O God, we're all so full of splits. Can I have Blake cutting an orange?

* *

My hair and my ear, my most local condition,
My mile-high meringue, my prodigious pudding . . .
I tasted, and I ate the world.

* *

I once took third place in a hog-calling contest.

*
I fear I have no mind at all.

O ye motions in air, the chameleons of disorder!
The shape of the mind changes, and we move slow and silvery.
What stamp is on my brow, most particular Toe?
The bright features of lost angels: Yes, yes,
The bright stars say . . .

Something in me doesn't want to be a poet.

I praise myself with howls.

This swarm of swells betrays,
The small trees swirl around,
And only motion stays
The thin wafts of the ground,
The chilly, daft profound . . .

I was not good enough for my own madness.

The birds are going, and their slight songs.
I am ready for a deeper silence.

For a moment, he almost knew what he was doing.

No way back through the long arbors of the dead.

A desire to love myself in another world . . .

When am I sick? When am I well?
Not even God, I think, could tell.

I feel sorry for the cave, said the Bear.

In his grave he went on dying.

* * *

Carolyn Stoloff

Four Poems

IS THIS THE PLACE?

Awakened from death in a strange city
by a bolt of sun, or a maid's key—
the closet door is ajar
in a hotel room that smells of hot paper.

Voices scribble the ear; a bell rings;
there's a squeal in the works of a clothesline;
enines rattle the knobs of a chest;
scooped out, we have no defense. From nests

of linens we rise, damp, stripped
of familiar hands. There's nothing to do
but ripple the broad calm of avenues
trailing a wing and a shadow
across the piazza at noon. If we dip

in narrow streets to pry for local graffiti
we see pigeon women at windows,
heavy breasts on sills of their arms,
mouths full of names: Giovanni,
Leonardo, Armando, plump as worms.

Our parade of loons floats by
unconcerned policemen; greedy eyes
widen to old geography. We pass
barriers of backs. Is this the place?

We feel a tug at the sleeve
and wheel, ready to dive.
A boy with something to sell!
We reach out—to touch a wall.

(arranged by David Wagoner)
I inch my way blindly through midnight, the deserted avenue.

Where is he? I clutch the hilt my hand closed on when I fell.
Does it hold a steel blade?
or the prop of a spoiled child.

This must be my street. Though he holds my thumping heart in his pocket
I drag my meat from folds of his cloak and hope the cop on the beat
will stroll through the bar door twirling his stick, that he'll look
up and down when I call and not mistake me for a criminal.

Yes, the hand of authority lifts me, slips me my key.
Mother croons in my ear:
I am here, I am here,
as I splash in her warm spring opening circles into morning.

~

POET IN TOWN

Eyes rising from under ponds of classes, you, scholarly to the blunt point of a pun, run
from those who love you, who would hold you even by a long cord
like a dog in the dangerous country. Lonely loose-jointed and afraid of nothing
but nobody, quietly frantic in your hotel
And now I spin on the silky tide
In a whirlpool wider than my heart,
Vowing, "no matter who goes down,
I will save myself, myself."

II

I think I shall go to the city
But I shall not go today.
I am sent for to sign a treaty,
To mine bridges, and teach ballet.
I must ride to twelve crosses on asses,
I must paint in Peru and Algiers,
But they've hidden my hat and my glasses
And I know they have need for me here.

I think I shall come to the country
But I shall not come tonight
Though I've given my word to gentry
Who are tartars at any slight,
And I'm needed in Nome as a witness.
I have access to key and to file,
But I have my own feeling of fitness
And I tell you I'll stay for awhile.

There are fishermen willing but weary
Who are waiting to hear my good word.
Oh, the man with the pouch and the packet
Is attentive on pike and on pier,
But they've hidden my hands in a jacket,
So I know they have need for me here.

III

Father, I dreamed the horses came,
Their nostrils red and wild.

Our dreams are slow and all the same,
So sleep, so sleep, my child.
Mother, I dreamed you left my god
And ran to wed another.

   Your fancies are so wild, my child,  
   I only kissed my brother.

Cousin, I dreamed I loved you,
But you were not in danger,
So why was I afraid for you?

   Miss Smith, you are a stranger.

IV
My long legs are old
And my kneecaps are skinny,
It is many long years since they were skinned.
I wear glasses, not braces, my hair is not shiny,
I have already dined.
Years ago I whistled in a new way,
Walked the street with the step of an angel or a boy.
Dry greens are gathered now, and why
I have remembered, telling of them, is a mystery.

My neck is not nice. I have a mole
I did not have, on my right breast. But formerly
No one could jump as high at a new word spoken.
Oh, millions could I suppose, but they are unwell.
All fact is formal now, seeded and sold,
The cakes disposed of, all the pledges made.
Strangers saw to it I am afraid,
At least not strangely. And if I thirst for joy
I shrug. It passes. My losses are not new.

Lewis Turco

THE SIDEBOARD

   The monster in
   the corner the tame gargoyle kisses
   the daily china guards

   the stainless service
   serves as retainer swallows towels and
   sustains this daily bread

   till it is
   served sets the tone complacent against
   the wall which like

   the lining of
   a belly envelops the hours envelops
   the food of hours

   heartbeats watchticks pulses
   and upon the top shelf of
   the corner familiar there

   is enshrined an
   old heart a windup clock its
   pendulum counting meals stainless

   service linen and
   conversation ruminant browsing continent the familiar
   monsters in the corners.
Robert Hershon

Two Poems

THURSDAY, JULY 27

1. Morning
waiting for coffee
smoking reading
a 1961 ladies home journal

bugs on the big window
some inside
some outside

wanting

2. Afternoon
sitting on the queen
red tens on his thigh
the weather will clear by noon

look for kings
his mother said

rain ending by two
the three of clubs
torn the five the nine
the jack in the toilet

weak sunlight
around four

3. Evening
the same black bird
flies toward the house again

we do not sense the variety of his circle

shadow not shade
the grass rapidly upgreen
the ice melting another dinner

probably the same black bird
probably the same last boat on the bay
probably the same fallen channel marker

we fight during dinner
i slam a door you throw
a plate the children hide
we attack our guests

still it grows dark again

4. Night
a moth in the room
wings against the window

thunder. the storm moving closer. children will awake.
you dream always of lightning.
the moth will fly
into my mouth. i will
eat its dusty wings.

lightning. the same face
at every window. a dead gull
on the lawn. headless.
a thousand silverfish devoured.
torn moths on the waves.
scream of a boatman. vomiting
hunchback under the house.

darkness again. insane whispers
of children in night. then silence.
fraud. everyone awake. waiting.
wings.

~

BY THE BEAUTIFUL SEA

I am fading from the bed and reappearing on the floor
three feet to the right, reformed by these
compassionate machines, the oxygen, the blood,
the intravenous feast, the pump that drains my gall.

An uncle shaves me and cries. The wallpaper dances.
The tools of my living flow from a painted bullseye
slit, my heart staining the sheets, my lungs
slapping to the floor, doctors wade in my juices.

I am in a boat, eating transparent sandwiches
with the father of the nurse. We are kelly green.
We are thinking of pie. Banana pie. Only pie.
Moving to the right. Dante thought of pie. Coolidge.

~

Alvin Greenberg

NEW YEAR'S EVE, 1966

now's not the time,
I said, for watching
the time, just time

for some few things
instead: say, get
this mess cleaned
up, kids off to bed,
cards put far away,
lights out, and you
to party though you
don't like that word

or deed and in mere
waiting answer now
the question of my
temporizing, or: how
late is it, anyhow,
when in another room
the kids are playing

poker, and the seas
are full of bright
blue jellyfish, when
the southern cross
lies so badly tilted
down on the horizon;
in short, the day is
gone that I wanted
to dive in, the tide
is out, that kite-
shaped constellation
can't cut loose and
soar, the beach is
dark with still blue
lumps and the dealer
takes two (one for
me and one for you)
and has to smile at
some secret in his
hand, a change in
rules, the game is
fish, all the suits
are blue, they play
by starlight, bent
down over numbers,
all goodnights said,
counting the costs
and determined that
tonight it must be
we, not they, who
have to go to bed.

~

James Mauch

Three Poems

FOR MATTHEW AT TWO YEARS

Chance of a stardust speck
thrown off a galaxy,
my seed whirled from love's flash
to reach out and join into
the God-willed miracle
of this billion-celled boy

now sleeping in his room,
whorl of blond hair pressed
to the flat, square cribsheet,

breathing the dark world in,
exhaling himself molecule
by molecule into air

flowing over the sill
and touching the twist-plumed
cypress that shadows his window,

drifting to feed black flames
of bushes, settling on ivy
coiled thick about the house,

as his white dreaming settles
upon me softly: manna
in the mind's wilderness,

quieting the murmuring tribes
of thought under the cold
moon of fatherly wisdom

that faintly outlines
the rock-strewn spiral path
of forty years' wandering.

Love leads me to his door,
I stand there, a cut-out
man in the squared moon,

my shadow reaching out,
split by the crib slats
into fingers, lies across him

like the soft hand of death.

~
THE ALTERNATE WORMS

(For Kay)

...the lover, unlike wren or stallion,
Allies himself with worms, his alternates.
—Thomas Hornsby Ferril

Lashing my face and hands, spattering the mud at my feet,
the first hard rain of winter whips in from the west
through the hedge of poplars that point their branches,
long, bare, and white, upward against the murky afternoon sky.
The elements have their way:
Birds, animals—all living things have settled into place.

I'm left with my life.
Between heaven and earth, without roots or wings,
I walk into my thirty-fifth year.
(Time's truth clipping, severing, laying open to the quick.)
A slender self is finally
the self. Fragile. Free.

I know another world,
the ground heaving, splitting open to bare the slime
of worms, chaff of moles, snake refuse,
the burrowers coming up to scurry in panic about my feet;
and the sky dropping,
impaling itself on the racks of trees,
shrouding, isolating me
from all but the scream of bewildered birds.

One wedge keeps the world level,
a blunt steel fact you've driven home:
we love each other.

I walk through the poplars to a bare hillside,
gladdened by the sting and chill of the rain,
the numbness in my soaked feet;
the flat gray sweep of heaven focuses down to the joy of my eye;
in the soil beneath me, pledged to us forever,
lie the supplanting snakes and moles, the alternate worms—
Let them now keep their place!

AFTE R BATHING MY S ON D AV I D

The water spiraling into the drain takes your eye,
enchants, perhaps even frightens you:
the trembling wreath uncoiling, momentarily beautiful,
drops down the black hole.
(That's right, it's trickling through the sewer pipes
out to the river,
and the river flows to the sea.)

A long time your eye will sight down the line of my finger—
I'll show you the shape of rainwater cupped in a leaf,
a rainbow flag hanging in the mist off a fountain,
suncaught spray as a dog shakes off (silver porcupine!),
a point of fog moving across the marshes like a sow
swallowing up glints of sunlight with her reeking mouth,
and when the moon lifts her hand from the Pacific hump,
letting the harbor waters slide back out the channel,
you'll hear the suck and hiss of jetty rocks and pilings
that have eroded like milk-teeth roots,
the creak of straining hemp and the thump of wood over in the
moorings,
the sigh of newly-cut runnels
that crack the sandspits with dark threads
draining the tidepools....

Little boat, I've seen too much.
You're tied to a rotting wharf,
a wharf that quivers as each feather wake crosses underneath.
The most placid day, there's a storm between hull and piling,
and I've watched a too-short painter lift a prow out of the water—
as well as pull it under.
Pilings buckle, planks sag into the mud, harbors silt up.
Water takes it all.
You will go with a floodtide,
the sea's shoulder nudging you into the current.
Love will cry out in the snapping of lines.

~
Stephen Kessler

A SONIC

BOOM! awakens you at dusk.

(I’ve been asleep) but now the broken glass
of every dream you ever had prevents
your bleeding eyes from opening (So this
is it) you think (I see it clearly now:
it’s growing dark) / If you begin to move
you’ll trample on the many-colored frag­
ments (And if I do not?) you’re bound to bleed
to death (I see) / This is the way the world
begins: not with a bang, but syllables
(I hear decisions climbing up my throat)
a pair of sneakers for the voice whose hopes
are your descendants (They—) descend: they move
ever so carefully across the crack­
ing dome: they feel their way along the air

Stuart Silverman

Two Poems

PHASE TWO

I

Homunculi fascinate me.
I almost could be one, travel back from the womb,
wait for the right time, the moment waiting for me,
and fling myself out in a great mob
happy to be part of that froth of being.

I remember the row of bottles in the castle-shack in Clea,
evil liquids shiny like oil covering midges.
They were said to hold souls those tiny forms
and in deep nightmares they moved, only slightly,
floated in the oil, their unshut eyes filmed with lust.

II

Alas, poor Tristram!
Defrauded of half your vital spirits,
a lady’s whim scuppering your currents,
the old clock tittering in its beard at the stairhead,
and Walter, who in his fifties grew exact,
humping his beef down the hall to cornet time.

Tristram, I often think of you
ebbing into the dark, waiting for time
to catch you at the end of a tube.
and spew you into the world wet and spongy as a newt.
What ever became of your violet eyes and lashes tipped with jet,
and who, once Yorick died, shoveled you into your mound
soft and furry as man's first descent?

III
Out of the startling cinema of dream
I broke, scratching through to reality.
There was no one there. The walls pushed the paint
in green slabs against the powerful air.
Sunlight moved in New Guinea. The Red Guards broke down
in tears
unable to focus their violence in Peking. Our leaders
fled from desire moving into a gray of being,
not quite satisfied with what they said but finished,
and plotting something on the Big Board in another room.

On the Chicago River ice slowed, the river went underground.
We saw University Hall, through snow, unable to come down,
stuck in the sky like a gigantic lob.
“'I built that thing'” I heard a workman say
waiting to complete Phase II despite snow, ice, and an air
dirty with Gary, Indiana, and South Chicago
blowing between the vanes of that stone rubber.

IV
I grow not better as I grow older.
Like Tithonus, struggle to be young wasting night after night,
feed on the thought of ageless cells frightened into movement,
gathering by stages as salmon do, moving like eels
to seed-grounds a thousand miles away.
What larks, Pip! it looks like going on for rain!
If, in all this hall, I could trace a human form,
my touchy flesh might tighten like my tie.

Understand: a full professorship is not the end of my ambitions;
I've even stopped eating in the faculty lunchroom, in protest.

Craig Curtis

Two Poems

ON THE STRAFING OF A CHURCH
IN BARCELONA, 1937

One of their own came down on them today.
Accelerating smoothly out of the sun
It made the beads tremble on churchyard tables.
Sellers scattered with that buckshot run.
Now vague, now out of breath, tradesmen sort
Their ware. The quarrel may go on now, content it begged
The question admirably where bodies nestle by the door
In the mild catholic noon and flies dream on still legs.
That plane may climb and follow down a threadbare
Road its map and plan. But can it, its drift
Wide and generous, escape the modern night
Those cannon make? Do any go anywhere
Over the dead? Or do they only lift
A bruised face toward unimaginable sights?
In the afternoon, through the heat and bicker, a loyalist
Found him. Recumbent, very quiet among others
In the shadows, among coats and faces missed
By country buses, his eyelids silk with dust.
Brothers, those in Granada, those few in Madrid,
Shall hear of it. Touched by a partisan, too dark below the road
For the view of generals, Lorca lies. What he did
Proved little, only that he lived in a childish mode.
His killers might have stopped him for the heckle
In his words, but few saw greater danger soon
Or late in a song. To know what Lorca wrote
Was to know it useless—as useless as freckled
Leaves in autumn courtyards, where pale half-moons
Do nothing for those Spaniards vagrant in their coats.

~

William Harmon

Two Poems

LITANEIA

Rose of Sunrise
Ourlady of the Time of Disease
Pinetree green green under snowdrop showing

Rose of Terror
Ourlady of the Prime of Erotic Money
Pinetree green under snowdrop

Rose of Suicide
Ourlady of the Clime of Flowers Unfolding
Pinetree green green, under snowdrop
growing

Rose Inexplicable
Ourlady of the Lime of the Firing Squad
Pinetree green green under snowdrop blowing

Rose of However
Ourlady of the Crime of Imaginary Numbers
Pinetree green green under snowdrop going

Rose of Heresy
Ourlady of the Dime of Upward Mobility
Pinetree green under snowdrop

Rose of Yes
Ourlady of the Rime of Nevertheless

~

Brent Logan

SONNET IN HER ABSENCE

She had no place, particularly, to go,
so, going, went her pretty way wherever
she was sent: loved all her family through
their differences because the Bible told her
to, believed the Bible at her priest's command,
obeyed her priest lest God object, and, as
reward, was blessed with beauty and a mind
that never questioned where her conscience was—
it went its subtle way wherever it
pleased: ignored the ugly, praised itself, and more
than eagerly accepted what it felt
rewarding to its conscientious tour
de force: it pared her pretty soul to the bone.
She had no place to go—and soon was gone.

~

POETRY

NORTHWEST
THE BLUE DRUNKARD

The blue drunkard who
numb to intercourse
fell naked off his
own frenzied front porch
step and spent all night
Saturday snoring
in mud and pine-straw
mulching among the
boxwoods woke on his
bad back Sabbath dawn
and peeled pink eyes to
an absolutely
beautiful morning
glory growing blue
around his hands and
fingers and winding
up a long white string
beside a spider’s
elaborate web
connecting rib cage
armpit elbow and
hump of hip and there
captivating a
couple of odd gnats
and moths

Sudden emphatic
fast American
panel truck passed with
its polychromatographic
load of sweet-smelling
Sunday papers up
the empty street of
the development
laughing

Dizzy teethbrush no

Benjamin Saltman

SUNNY ENGINES

Now I’m 40
I see the machines.
Machines love the light.
Even the stars are oiled.
A human face grows white,
the eyes coiled
in the head,
but machines are better
than that.

Toward evening the bridges
have baby cars,
winter sunset traffic is frail,
wrapped in orange flannel
flown out from the town.
Why put down machines?
Reflections rise
from deep sides of the cars
like water.
Her mouth cool at the window,
the sun combs
her dangerous long hair.
I have no wife or child so fair.

We've failed so far,
or I've failed,
looking this way and that,
swerving, duplicate,
changing only lanes.
I fall home nervously,
we're nervous
on the mildest winter nights.
Streetlights and headlights,
chromed goes wild in the underpass.
Our earth rocks its children
in curved glass.

~

David Widener

Two Poems

THE ORPHAN'S WAR

It was in the time of Ali Baba,
Jap flags and Sabu,
Dry Bones on the radio,
And rock candy from RKO.

It was at the Home during the War,
Where children put in their time:
Nice if you were pure orphan,
But okay if you were not.

Father for a Day
Would bring in the Marines:
The sentry games, the walks.
Every fourth-week Sunday

The Movie Ladies, the walks:
A thousand and one hugs
In the hush of Fairyland,
Rock candy, honeysuckle.

Now in this time was a boy
At war with a billboard Camel,
A boy more strange than Sabu,
A Camel as real as Japanese.

Each night from our monkey bar jungles,
The matrons asleep with their radios,
Everything twinkling and ready,
We awaited the first Jap-shadow sign,

When down the fire escape he would come,
Crawling on his belly to the fence;
Then up, up and over, assaulting
The smoke rings with his stick

While kissing his wrist with teeth,
The Japs falling back, falling back
In the circling heat of that Camel.
Up up on Suribachi he climbed,

To sit like a blue-eyed jelly ad
Wiping the smoke from his eyes,
As Hollywood, that golden snake below,
Curled into her warm Pacific.

Soon he would jump off with his shovel,
That stick that is all things to a boy,
To bury the dead of his war,
Licking the blood from his wrist.

~
CELEBRATION

The sirens sang the War out
and I was eager to be
the first boy over
as I crouched by the fence that night,
each tree beyond a quick Jap waiting,
huge beneath the August stars.
Inside my chest
castor oil spoons beating, beating,
drum roll for the first boy caught.
Slowly, up the vines,
honeysuckle buds at my neck,
cold wire gashing my thumb.
Then over and running
with blood in my pocket,
the wind like a sponge in my throat;
running running from the Home
into Hollywood, into the celebration:
white paper snow
falling in the hair of women
lifting me up in their joy;
fire high beneath the Warner clock
the Ali Baba dwarf
waving the news of the Peace;
dancing without his boots
a drunken soldier with a silver dollar,
"Here kid, go buy a wash cloth."
Then deep in the Chinese,
taking the stage
with my best Jap yell;
flashlights closing in
to shush my dark captives,
though waking the old man
who lived behind the curtain.
Then out the exit
with a bang to be heard in China;
the War going on, going on—
the cop coming out of the night
like Clark Gable.

John Taylor

Two Poems

IMMORTALITY THROUGH FREEZING

Frozen like cod or haddock, drowned
In liquid nitrogen that smokes
From cold, no mourners will surround
Your solid silence. Only jokes
Will follow you into the sleep
Until the final trumpets sound
And wake you though God knows you'll keep.

Birdseye has frozen peas for you,
Spinach and broccoli are green,
But you are white and are the true
Inheritor of this unclean
Jumble. Eat the frozen host
Although your lips are ghostly blue;
Nitrogen is the Holy Ghost.

Stiff as the crucifix you wait
For resurrection on this earth,
Kept in a can like catfish bait.
You are a thought for present mirth
But we may change our minds. You try
A gamble time may consecrate
And only mystagogues deny.

I looked into the future and
I saw you thawed. The room was packed
With hungry faces; every hand
Reached for a steak. The butcher cracked
His knuckles, and began to cut.
This is my flesh, you said, demand
The best. I saw your eyes were shut.
A ROTTING LOG

Falling away to dust,
The log becomes itself
More completely the more
It settles slowly down
Into its own slack length
And lies sleeping, dull
As that other sodden log
The beached alligator,
And as it sleeps digests
Its own slack length
And lies sleeping, dull
As that other sodden log
The beached alligator,
And as it sleeps digests
Itself in slow decay,
Falling, falling away.

The silent, smothered fires
Glow coldly at night,
Mere rumor to the eye—
The log is its own ghost,
A body that haunts itself
Although it is dead,
Possessed and possessing
With its muted violence
The saprophytes that feed
Upon this density
Keeping its proper silence.

~

Arthur K. Oberg
Two Poems

VOYAGE

To scamper back, out of the long dream,
Must we have always the thin glass
Shattered over the sink, sharp shards
In our hands? Love has been difficult

THE EXECUTION OF ORDER

These days, its skittery ways a problem
Child rocked in the womb. The public
Waiting to brand us by insult
It nightly thinks up—pulling the bed
From under us, inventing what today
Shall pass as good and valuable.
Always a new game groomed to throw us off,
Or a new cloud, seeded for storm,
Bring us up short of the house,
The door only to enter
Our lost children, playing old
Spoons for music,
Plates spread out on the lawn, the five
Of us wet from the descent down.

~

Hearing the longstream go
Again, beneath, after the rains,
I know, that to have you
For the woman you are

Is to come out of that sleep
When the servant, sent
By the king, went whipping
The evening flowers,

That sleep we put right
By love, annealing
The uncoverings of lash, fury
Sent out before us like a flame.

~
THE MOON KITES

O solitude whence come the stones
of which, in the Apocalypse, the city
of the great king is built.

Are you conscious . . . of the stages
of your growth? Can you fix the time when
you became a babe, a boy, a youth, an adult,
an old man? Every day we are changing,
every day we are dying . . . —St. Jerome

This is Maple Grove
and no one comes here much—
a few kids now and then
or from the new
neighboring apartments
some retired fireman perhaps
to exercise his dogs.
No one seems to mind.
They bury now across the road.

Well, this spring, after months
of pacing in your room
or staring absently
at books at letters saved
or never sent
or looking simply
at whatever monuments
of absence distance or decay
the day might balance nicely
on the back of a hand,
you’ve come once more
to Maple Grove, reading out
as absently the names
you’d memorized last fall
and are vaguely pleased

that things look much the same,
that the same few graves,
the smaller headstones
near the fence, remain
decked sadly out
in last year’s green
and plastic evergreens
and that the mausoleums
still manage somehow to suggest
a small grimy compromise
between an old unhappy school
and its adjacent church.

Somewhere beyond the mausoleums,
fluttering somewhere
over the used up place
where the monuments
have settled, tilting
oddly in the weeds,
two kites are rising
are floating like the moons
you might imagine
keep rising still
over childhood’s leveled
and disremembered town,
the silly moons of love
moons of that moonlit
and leafy entropy
of random stones
towards which the blank
white and real moon
or even love itself
so irretrievably depend.
Still, how colorfully they speak
our need for flags
bright signs and metaphor—
for such simple
celebrations of the weather
as the forever hovering
and impossible angel
might afford those saints
like bald Jerome
who, though sick
and altogether weary
nonetheless sat quiet
in his wilderness,
neither wary of the lion
nor bruised enough
with the wisdom of stones.

THE TENNIS MATCH

Midnight. My serve.
A darkness stirs
in the far court—
the tricky competition
warming up, rehearsing now
with either hand
some deadly fore-
or backhand shot.
The banked lights hum.
In the first rows
the faces tighten
and then diminish
into father’s best
disapproving squint.
This helps. I wave
and give it all I’ve got.
The ball drones importantly
then leaps off . . . where?
Into nothing.
The void perhaps.
Perhaps never to return.
My father finishes his beer
bends the can
and leaves. The crowd leaves.
Doors slam. The last
beer cans tinkle softly

from the parking lot.
Tense, vibrant, competitive
I crouch and stare
into the far court
listening . . .
as the slow stars
revolve and flutter
over the blinding lights
which fix me here.

Robley Wilson, Jr.

THE MARAUDER

When they shot the bear out of his tree,
North, on Monday, in Cedar County,
It occurred to us the bear knew, too,
Something was not enough—a stirring,
A yearning for sweetness buried deep
In the shrunk gut, portentous forage.
We knew and he knew: it was something
Not to perish of capture, sloven
And soft from caramel corn, smarting
With mange under the fur, with cinders
Lodged in the cracked pads. Something—at least
Not a cage—but not truly enough.
When they shot the bear out of his tree,
A single shot, and the limber trunk
Yawed with the target, sprang back, sang out
As green wood does in the springtime, stopped—
When the bear chose to drop, swam the air
Littered by yellow buds, pulled with him
The slim top twigs to the populous
Field—the tree bled; the earth at its roots
Shook and worms far under felt: waking.
For them, too, not enough, but something.
Two Poems

TIRESIAS

You:

what did you eat last night?
what books
have you swallowed, which
dreams, whose women?

What shirt did you tear
from your brother's eyes
to hang
    dripping
with scarlet buttons
on that clothes-line
stretched between your arms?

cannibal...
pirate...

Whose words
pierce your throat,
and why are your pockets
filled with gold
ripped
from other people's mouths?

Under your collar a fat
Nero
scrapes his fiddle
with the legs of girls
or grandmothers,

and behind your brassiere
a white bull

plunges at the moon,
spitting
children

with the red weapon
of his love.

~

HANNAH'S VISIT

Like Sabbath flowers
sewn
to the jaw of an old man, for
decoration, for love...
or a nightingale
plucked
to its poor wrinkled skin,
she enters
the deepest room
of your house
with all her fingernails broken
into colored paint, and
sits
holding
the points of her knees.

Eggs
fry in the corners of her smile,
their yolks screaming
conceptions
at midnight, when thighs
open, and green owls
hunt rabbits
in her private jungle;
her voice circles
once
or twice, and lands
on the knobs of its claws
in the middle of
little boys
rubbing themselves all over the rug.

Is she pregnant?
will her father ride
black
horses
on her best friend's bed?
why have her teeth
turned into glass,
and who polished her brain
until it gleams
in a knot
of crooked mirrors?

Platinum waters creep up the shore,
seasons are folded in a fan. Hands
and whispering heads are here, now.

I have come to this knowledge
with every tooth and grain of light.
Knife, spoon, even the rocks, breathe.

~

SERENADE TO MY WALKING STICK
(for Fernando Mercado, who carved it)

Whittled from a mop handle,
painted blindman's black
and topped with a carved wood head,
you, stick,
stride through the fields
and heaving hills
without bending a knee
or taking a breath.
I'm not so perfect:
heart sags in my chest,
even my wrists sweat,
and my knees, my knees,
old creakers—worse
than an Erector Set.

Don't look at me that way,
wooden head. You are
no better than a mandrill's mask,
an African witch doctor's
cheap disguise.
And you, stick,
tattooed
all the way down
like a drunken Dyak
paralyzed in sleep—
your looks leave much
to be desired.
Even the bearded old man,
the patriarch
half-way down
your hipless form,
is no one to talk:
his pursed lips
are chiseled and cracked
and always prepared
to admonish or deride.

Stick, I stood you
against the wall
so you could rest.
Why do you question me so
with your swirls
of circle and line?
Every night, your silence
and your stares,
your perfect posture
though you lean
against the wall.
Say something, tap
against the bookcase,
or do the dance
that's sacred to the trees.

Stick, you are not
a companion I enjoy.
You show me how
all objects
are separate and alone
and only keep
the place they occupy.
I felt the past
was carved into your frame.
I thought each face
would speak
unwritten laws

and wanted you
to share my weight
and stride with me
across this world
and know
the things I loved.
But you were what you were,
and like the others
kept your secrets and your face,
unable to release
affection
or anything that's passionate
and reciprocates
with more
than cordial grace.
Stick,
you're more my deputy
than my friend.

So stand like that
against the wall
until I grab you
by the head
and make you walk,
propel you through
the empty
evening streets
like a grandfather
guided
by a bullied son.
For even though you show me
nothing but contempt,
it's true you make me swagger
when we walk
and are an almost
human presence
in my hand.

~
Frances Colvin

THE GREAT MUSEUM ROBBERY

Feeling that someone must have painted her portrait, long ago, she kept walking through museums (Uffizi, Prado, Tate) looking for her face.

Today's a frame that will not hold me; I must be embraced in gold. No weather's safe unless it's walled, air still, light constant.

I am so old.

But she found nothing like herself:
no eyes, no smiles, no fingers scorning the green satin they caressed and pinched.

Yet in this gallery of glances I am surely here—my other self, the one original Velasquez or Vermeer, to straighten my bewilderment.

Among the Picassos her eyes seemed out of place. She felt her cheek and stared and stared. The colors rose; she fed.

No obscure corner was unvisited.

Louvre, Orangerie, she was the last to leave.

Beneath her hedging tweeds, Rubens and Titian fought for master.

She gained some weight.

When morning came, the guards were stricken by pallid Cezannes, Rembrandts with faces gone,
Degas without a single dancing girl, da Vincis stripped of everything but sky.

Onto the street once more, unrecognised, and yet my face, my face, this blur, this flap of flesh, somewhere looks down on crowds, replete, magnificent.

Until I find myself, odalisque, saint, or queen:
sustain me. I hear there is a small museum in Ghent.

Ramona Weeks

Two Poems

THE POPCORN DAY

What is that old man doing, said my friend, peeping out the curtain of that dead house where upstairs lived a poet with the face of his grandmother on the ceiling of his mind and in the front room lived a merry chase of fairies. In the house behind

lived an old man, a moldy turnip-top, who hung his underwear out in the rain to dry, and had a phiz like a valentine gone to seed. The noise shot like a thunder-clap over that neighborhood, a dinosaur spine crumbling, a loud, ransacking Hindenburg pop.

It was the garbage burning in a barrel, but it was more: the Saturday uproar of ricocheting popcorn in a pyre of red and white and yellow. The old fossil's put popcorn in his garbage! The backyard air was full of whizzing, blossomings, and whistles.

The old man looked bright and unbelieving. The popcorn jumped for joy; parachutes landed on the embattled yard in small cahoots like cauliflowers; punctuating in uneven, dying syllables, forlorn dashes and dots, leaving a cloudy littered trash of heaven.
THE PERILS OF NYOKA

"Allah be praised!" the girl was always saying in the Saturday serials, crisscrossed upon the torture racks while the ceiling fell with spikes and the turbaned hero arrived with a lever in the nick of time.

Somehow before she was pulled into the cave of everlasting winds, her fingers slipping, sarong tearing, and the sheikh massaging his moustache, help always came: the legionnaire who had forsworn his fortune, the little dwarf who loved her more than life.

She was the missing daughter of an earl: in an impossible plot, the Arab villains knew she had the famous Inshallah pearl, but didn't know it. And the legionnaire came riding out of some old guilt to find her there upon the burning pyre, while vultures danced in the ascending smoke, longing for her eyes.

In the last chapter, which I always missed, she was restored to wealth and joy, the famous pearl a pasty landslide on her heaving breast.

Her father beamed a foolish, earlish smile upon his daughter and inquired what he could do for her. She begged for and received a pardon for her savior. See them ride out, unparalleled, to meet the dawn. Long will the iron maidens languish empty, the bright knives hack the air, the vultures hang doleful in a fireless void.

Adrien Stoutenburg

SCIENCE NON-FICTION

You will not live here, nor your children, nor the old, laughing coyotes who once sang in these hills. We are leaving here soon, as the grizzly left, and the condor. (Who has seen such claws or wings?)

There is a moment yet, before the engineers arrive, to watch hummingbirds strung with garnets, madrones brown as the wrists of Indians, bay trees that smell like green candles, and listen again for the silence that made a darkness for owls with horned mouths speaking like the E string of a guitar.

The termite with his sad drill opposed our tenure, but could not defeat us, nor the bats strumming their teeth within the wall where the telephone snickers—(they have always been there, in strange cradles, a tiny echo of dark wires)—nor the wood borer on the sill with his attic dream.

Our trunks are ready, a funeral of hinges and locks, stuffed with snapshots, rose pips, pencils, and cool clothing for the desert—the compass at hand,

POETRY

NORTHWEST
the water bag hanging from the bumper
like a leaky, gray pillow.

(Who has not seen the latest clover leaf,
the wind socks, orange cheeks blown out,
above the black-topped bay,
and freight trains hauling greater hills?)

Who, on this coast, has heard
any word of the ocean
since the last cement truck passed,
starfish still burning in its wheels?)

~

Shirley Kaufman

Two Poems

I HEAR YOU

The promises of mother—
smiles, soft fingers
children could not touch.
You and your sisters
gliding like fish
(the tank was full
of your stare) to market,
to market, sun
in your scarves, the ripple
of exquisite goiters.

You never wore a hat
except in mirrors,
your eyes were violet
under the veil,
under the knotted squares
calling me child.

But I went after you,
mother to mother,
put you together
when your bones rode you
apart. Something
was always breaking
down inside you.

Save me, you sob
in a dream, but nobody
runs like a friend
to your door. And I'm
in my own garden this time,
digging a ditch
for my heart.

What
did you give me, mother,
that you want it back?
An empty book to put
my poems in, peeled
apples, Patsy dolls.

Each day I sucked
at your virtuous breasts
and I'm punished
anyhow.

~

MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS

Through every night we hate,
preparing the next day's
war. She hangs the door.
Her face laps up my own
despair, the sour, brown eyes,
the heavy hair she won't
tie back. She's cruel,
as if my private meanness
found a way to punish us.

We gnaw at each other’s
skulls. Give me what’s mine.
I’d haul her back, choking
myself in her, herself
in me. There is a book
called Poisons on her shelf.
Her room stinks with incense,
animal turds, hamsters
she strokes like silk. They
exercise on the bathroom
floor, and two drop through
the furnace vent. The whole
house smells of the accident,
the hot skins, the small
flesh rotting. Six days
we turn the gas up then
to fry the dead. I’d fry
her head if I could until
she cried love, love me!

All she won’t let me do.
Her stringy figure in
the windowed room shares
its thin bones with no one.
Only her shadow on the glass
waits like an older sister.
Now she stalks, leans forward,
concentrates merely on getting
from here to there. Her feet
are bare. I hear her breathe
where I can’t get in. If I
break through to her, she will
drive nails into my tongue.

W. R. Moses

AUGUST: LAKE OF THE WOODS

I

The hand of the shriveling prisoner in his dungeon
Reaching through bars for the water out of his reach
—No, of course not. But I feel the stretch
Of secret roots down a rock slope covered too thinly
With earth, for the last, least undryness, and only
Finding more dryness. The sun, you could say, has won.
The birch leaves above those roots have become sun-
Color. They are very lovely, the most charming
Incongruity of color, congruity still of shape
With green leaves near them on lucky trees rooted deep.

Some losers are fiercely open about their trouble.
Many an island pine has been heaved by the wind
Down; all the high, feathery grace
Without grace sprawled, flattened, skinned.
Wherever that happened, look what the roots have done:
Hauled right out, for the inspection of anyone,
A root-clutch of soil, to show how poor, meagre,
Thin it was, clipped weakly to unhelpful rock.
Sometimes they have hauled out a big slab of rock;
That wasn’t good enough either, when things got serious.

II

The poor old assaulted water:
How pieces from above, from the smug air,
Keep poking and altering, probing and shoving it!
Sometimes propellers of active outboards
Will pour it all of a swirl, a dizzy twining.
Sometimes paddles, or ambling dull oars,
Will punch deep, angling and dipping and jabbing.
Bright plastic lures, armed mean with steel hooks,
Come plump down against it, and sinuously bore it.
Well, up here there are acrobatic, tough pike; Hook one, he's likely to air his pugnacity Like a bass or salmon. And now, plunge, Yank! I have hooked one. Agile, no prudence, He flares from the surface. Abruptly I picture What he's really like, the avid, high-pressure Leanness—a club the angry lake plunks Hard against air, and leaves it all pulsing; And against my vision, and leaves it all pulsing.

III
It's an old, old concern: emptiness that isn't empty. Cavemen side-squinting into the dark; soldiers Side-squinting into the dark . . .

Now, this water Opaque in the cliff's shadow—is it heart-certain No fangs can rip from it? Is it sure no force That animates granite can slam down a cliff-chunk On trespassing heads?

—These are just exercises In atavism; they pall; they don't last long. But now, from the cliff top, from brush we can't see Comes a crash, a big crash, perfectly here and authentic. The dog, by her angry fear, declares bear. But we can't see. We wait; only silence. We wait; only silence—but what an odd silence! There is nothing there, yet the emptiness isn't empty.

IV
Amorousness? Greediness? I don't think either. But see our dog Kiss, kiss, and again kiss The scales of these two fish that sag On a stringer: our noon provision: The walleyes we have kept for lunch.

And see her hover cheek by jowl With me who crackle twigs for fire.

Now she leans close to the ritual Of knifeing filets from the bone. What can such eagerness require For satisfaction, for relief?

I'll never know. Composure comes.

I watch excitement sublimate Into the dignity, repose Of a sculptured black Egyptian cat I saw in some museum once: The dog sits, staring with zircon eyes Toward wave and tern and island line.

V
Slow gases now expand as smoke Above the cabin chimney; good. We need a counteractive for The past hour, when we opened up The motor wide for home, because The day drew tight with rain. Riding Squeezed tight away from icy clothes, Seeing the downdrawn vegetable, Fascinating the indrawn animal Along the shore, we seemed to know Contraction is a movement in The pain direction, the fanged clutch.

On slaty riding waves that ride The lake, some brown mergansers ride Down near the rock shore. They look pert And pleased under the rain and wind. When the lively flock has drawn too tight, They do what flocked mergansers do: Run on the water, spraying out To make each bird more water room On slaty waves. Thus expanded, They settle, looking pert and pleased.
About Our Contributors

Theodore Roethke, at the time of his death in 1963, left hundreds of notebooks and thousands of pages of worksheets full of fragments of poetry and prose, chiefly unpublished. "The Things I Steal from Sleep" is one of the first few suites or monologues, in imitation of Roethke's methods of composition, to be made from these materials.

Carolyn Stoloff lives and teaches in New York City. She won this magazine's Theodore Roethke prize for 1967.

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Robert Hershon's first book of poems, Swans Loving Bears Burning the Melting Deer, was published in 1967.

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Morton Marcus last appeared in our Spring 1967 issue.

Frances Colvin, one of the editors of Ante, has published in many literary magazines and is currently working on a novel.

Ramona Weeks lives in Phoenix and has published in many little magazines.

Adrien Stouteburg, whose poems have appeared nearly everywhere, was last in our Spring 1967 issue.

Shirley Kaufman, a graduate of San Francisco State College, has had poems in most major American magazines.


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If anyone would care to establish, or help establish, a new prize, in any amount or of any kind, the editor would be glad to discuss the possibilities by correspondence.