Three Poems

DENYING THE DAY'S MILE

THE FIREFLY

ON FINDING THE REMAINS OF A CRYSTAL RADIO

ON BEING TOLD TO BE MYSELF

A LOVE POEM—PROBABLY

A WASHINGTON TEA, AT 5:00

Felis

STORM

POTENCY

WOMAN AWAY FROM THE LOOM

SWallows

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JUNE NIGHT ON THE RIVER

Tonight the river is calm enough. A string of cars drums the long Eads Bridge toward Union Station. Pullman windows charge the secret spans of the bridge and tall lights travel over the water. They are hooded monks gleaming among the piers.

Now I see whole mountains honeycombed with monks, and one of these, a boy from Athos, fills the blue Aegean with his own image as he leans beyond the prow of his skiff and tries his luck with a hooked line for his life, his serious gesture.

The train goes its way, the long lights go out. I pour myself a careful beer, tilting...
MY SON READS THIS POEM

My son reads this poem.  
His six years  
measure the length of each word  
like a drop of pain.  

I hold him against my chest.  
I feel his small heart  
straining to break my hands.

DEATH AFTER PROMISE

The child  
unfolding here is a butterfly.  
Death after all promise  
has come to me.  

Now I walk in it,  
its great gold wings  
beating the air around me.

I cannot sell you my death.  

It is a whole nation  
forgotten by its fathers.

Isabella Gardner

Two Poems

FRIGHT AMONG THE RUNES

Love, flute my veins  
And float my bones  
and freight my loins  
to fruit our vines  
but though you may be fraught with means  
my sweet love, never flout my lines

ROUNDDELAY

A blood-red bird with one green eye  
and one gilt wing is hanging high.  
Slung by the neck on a Christmas tree  
dangling there in the tinsel he  
is not about to sing for me.  

The tree it trembles, the glass gauds swing  
like that bird with his one gilt wing  
who bows his beak, whose one eye glows  
as back and forth and round he goes  
to grace notes and arpeggios.
DENYING THE DAY'S MILE

Always on clear mornings
I wake across their valley
to face the day's horizon:
quickened by my tentative
steps, I leap it like
the jumpy shadow of a big
jet—behind which I
am the sun.

By the time
dusk drinks my neighbor's
streetcorner, and staggers
me home, I'm overcast
always: I imagine men
in the Andaman Islands
waking to fish, women
giving breast in Lhasa
to children the color of rice.
But I can never conceive
what weather they wake to, or
face those multiple hands
that bait my eye to a map.
I've never even been sure
whether they're still beginning
a day I've already lost,
or a day I haven't begun.
Even with my ear close
as a child's to waves
bounced off Afghanistan,
the Black Sea, and London,
there is too much static
to pick up children eating
fists of Tibetan snow.

Before God died, I thought
it might be fun to try
his game for a while: not
to judge the world, but simply
to listen in on how
it was getting on. Now
I couldn't bear it: I can't
even stand my neighbors,
or face myself when I go
to bed with no love left
from the day.

Always on clear
mornings I wake intending
to walk a mile, and to hold
that mile's particulars up
to the general flight of jets,
as they pretend to climb
over human weather, and land
on cement deserts that have
nothing to do with love.
I am overcast always
for having flown to escape
wild chicory I might
have picked for my wife, the man
next door I hate, and this
lousy city that managed,
without God, to smog itself
through another November day.
If I were Mayor tomorrow,
I'd fish for better weather.
But tonight I'm not even
myself; where I haven't been
is already yesterday.
Getse Freshie

Transmitting from a sinister studio: the Green Hornet with his incredible car, and Inner Sanctum—complete with creaking door, bloodsucking, traded brains, and a severed hand that played while the pianist boiled in hell. Below, while I slept wrinkles in my turning mind, I felt the boom of my father’s console set meaninglessly tuned to another station. Then bugs built webs and shells inside the earphones, wires broke, my coils unwound. Today I’ve found this lump of crystal like a saved tooth to roll in the palm, to bite the memory and sing a dreaming thread of lies and truth it played into my head for several years until I turned it down for poetry.

THE FIREFLY

That night, explosion of a pineapple, sweet-sour flames in which we danced while the orchestra played chrysanthemums. I remember the luxurious faces at the tables, the glamour of their words which I did not hear, the scent of their unseen eyes. And then the piano frightened itself and fled into the thicket of lights.

Glossy one, stuffed with dolls, I held you with all the passion of a child. I remember the curl of your blonde wig reaching out to me tenderly. But when I tried to kiss that luminous worm, it flew away toward a derelict building.

What a black house I bought! A house of charcoal standing on its hillside like a fragment of the Circus Maximus. It hurts my fingers with its blackness and throws the acid of dead flowers in my eyes, this monkey, this white-haired penitentiary.

ON BEING TOLD TO BE MYSELF

I ask, What self? The self I was born with is long since lost With infant teeth, and what remains, Given the seven-year change, Is only a groove in the brain— A fiction I can mold with half an absent hand.

Myself on waking am a spider, Measuring with approving eyes my geometries, Spun in a night that threaded them with stars; Or at noon I’m an eel, or a sloth, the one Seaming the waters in secret travel, The other hanging head foremost from an indifferent branch.

Flora J. Arnstein

ON FINDING THE REMAINS OF A CRYSTAL RADIO

Altitude lost, cracked-up on a sheer plateau, Jack Armstrong worried me for an episode while elephants thundered, 500 feet below, toward their graveyard, guarded by Pygmy arrows. Villains named Dirk sneered and gnashed as they ambushed my heroes.
All through the afternoon I range in my skin,
Shedding like the punctual snake,
And at night, walking the dizzy street,
Hot in my paint and rolled hips asking,
I wish myself unforked, like a mermaid,
Who lures to no mating, but combs her spume,
And has no self that answers to a name.

_Saint Geraud_

_Two Poems_

**SUMMER EVENING**

Sky meloning in the sky,
the fountains are burning their blue idols,
the sun has left its black stinger in my wine.

~

**MAZES**

Words are huge and isolated. You walk, miserable and lonely, a long ways between them. Pray that on their snows there is even a little light.

I know you assume my face whenever I sleep. Sometime I’ll wake up and catch you: then you’ll have to keep it. That’s the rule.

~

**Josephine Jacobsen**

**THE ENEMY OF THE HERDS, THE LION**

"The enemy of the herds, the lion feeds on its prey on decorated box-lid, ca. 2500 B.C. which was found in the grave of the Lady Shub-ad at Ur."

—_Magazine of Natural History_

At Ur
the Lady Shub-ad's small
bright box went into the larger darker
shelter of the grave and stayed there roughly forty-five hundred years.

Its lid—
a sharp arc—shows a thing:
a lion-sheep without division,
lion on top, sheep under, still consummation point.

The sheep
neck is in the lion fangs
the lion claws press upward the sheep throat, they are trance and ardent in an act of taking utter enough to be love.

Back so far
the mind tires on its trip;
yet so close, the kohl, to redden
the lip, lengthen the eye for pleasure's pleasure, is tonight's.

What
is changed? Not the coarse hairs
of the mane; victor, or victim; a woman's body;
certainly not a death; not the colors
of kohl or scarlet.
She
cared for the box; by wish
expressed or guessed she took it along
as far as might be. Why this one? What
word did her box beasts mean?

Possibilities: the chic symbols
of the day, on a fashionable jewel-toy,
the owner modishly ignorant; or, corrupt,
an added pulse to lust.

Or:
mocking or wise remembrance
of innocent murder innocent death,
the coupled ambiguous desire
at dinner, at dressing, at music.

Or,
best—and why not?—of her meeting
all quiet terror, surmounted by joy,
to go to her grave with her; a pure
mastery, older than Ur.

William Dunlop

SINGLE MINDED

"Well," I say—
For the third time—as pauses
Lengthen, like the shadows outside,
"I'd better be off..." —but I stay
For that one last drink, and savor
How he's getting fatter,
And sip at her prettiness: though, of course, I'd
Want something better.

"Please don't trouble..." I say, but they have
To come to the gate,
Though it's turning colder.
And I turn, at the end of the street,
For my casual, obligatory wave
Just as she snuggles her head
On his chest, and his arm rounds her shoulder.

Not that I'm envious! "Poor chap,"
(I was bound to say) "one saw it coming:
Still, he could do much worse."
And I—think of those all set to come running;
Am I sorry I didn't...?
Just the reverse.

Yet I see them still, as I round each corner,
In the same attitude
And the kiss uncompleted; she lifting her face
As he moves to secure her
In the way man and wife
Flowing back to each other, may turn to exclude
Mere acquaintance from their life.

"Do come again!" she said brightly,
And he chimed, "Any time..."
I might, I suppose, but it's not very likely....
Could they entertain
All my thirstiness? No,
Though not seeking to slight them,
I won't go again.
Until we can invite them.

—
Robert Wallace

A LOVE POEM—PROBABLY

A huge moth sleeps against my ceiling.
You will laugh if I tell you,
or put him into a poem
—huge, with huge wings of mottled browns
like dust, circled,
in which rain has fallen.

I did not invent him;
the painters left the screens down
and the windows wide to the night air.
I cannot hear his breathing
—huge, antennae in the dark,
he grows to the shapes of all shadows.

Since you will not love me,
nor believe me,
and can go from me so easily,
I will not say who this terrible fellow is—
unmoved in the night—who
shares the ceiling I sleep on.

Raymond Roseliep

A WASHINGTON TEA, AT 5:00

A tea with Katherine Anne Porter is what
you would expect it to be. Before a long
fifteenth century walnut table cherished
from a monastic refectory, you sit.
Sipping the tallow colored tea with lemon
gold rind twisted like wet embroidery thread.

You mention it is good to be here, letting
the Bach Magnificat in D major claim
your ear as it dims the eye of your hostess
remembering (God knows what man child), and you
take one sugar square more than you wish because
you like to watch the small white fingers plant all
of Ireland's sun-lit grass beside your china:
o no emerald ever blazed such continent.
You expect that Venetian cherub to slip
down from his votive station of parcel-gilt
bronze, flanking the madonna below a half
length of Christ, and you smile quietly at the
reverent posture, the young genital un-
perturbed in the movement of the August sun.
A sherry tart as crisp as a fall petal,
now some excellent Purcell on gay spinet-
fingering, and the afternoon is an old
man tripping down a gangplank to his own land.
Keeping an eye on the brass foot of Eros
who hauls a dolphin on his shoulders, you wish
for a rapid color change when your hostess
brushes her eggshell gown against their progress,
and that young god blushes in your busy skull.
The lady moves back and forth to her console,
the silver service, your cup, the thronging books:
there is no wilderness of crowds among these
lives, known as true lovers are known. She touches
page and dear page from the lapful she has picked
(once climbing her nephew's perilous little
winding ladder for a Milan leather Keats),
and she reads softly, in English-and-southern
accent, the periods of Henry James, songs
of Breton fishermen, an early cryptic
of Ezra Pound (who declined her offer of
clam broth at St. Elizabeth's), Eudora
Welty opening her Post Office story,
J. F. Powers on the golf links with Father
Urban, a musical paragraph about
oysters by the wife of Robert Penn Warren,
notes from Ovid's Orpheus. When you summon another Catherine who said "My nature is fire," the stonewalls of Siena crackle in the sky of your mind. You drop an index finger on the walnut heart patch, then you trace the leaf pattern suggesting the modest fig those old friars surely slipped over Venus. Music for the funeral of Queen Mary puts italics on the clock, so you are careful testing the almond on your teeth, catching the salt on your tongue like a new baptism:
You are a child before grief and the lady who has mingled on deck with lovers and fools, voyaging this late afternoon to deeper sea, more golden than tea in your bonewhite cups and her robins outside too tired to quarrel.

Robin Magowan

FELIX

Knots of light speckle the wall over the hospital bed, and a smile floats up to where I stand gazing out on the hillside of streaming cars; their bulbs glow through the fish-mouth dark as day like a grove of oranges begins to dawn. Below streets glisten, bright salad leaves, & I stand, suddenly very small, a funny shy umbrella sheaving my head down which light trickles in a tinkle of pencil points. Outside father paces up & down, his voice rising & falling across the umber room like giant medicine balls. Attendants drift in, out with nothing that can be done nothing that at the same time won't stop your coming. Finally 16 hours later you come over the fish-clot eyes smiling bearing the wand & as you strike the screams sing and dusk is cut in sandwiches of green & gold. The threads wind out of your eyes & you lie there stretched lengthwise across the amber of the belly loud and glistening in your nine month skin as in a vial of oil—the mouth wide & twisted like a harp eyes the color of distant firs and mountains they tip upwards, small pontoons. Later behind glass I watch as your mitted hands stir in their blue tidepool sleep, starfish searching, & with blind heron eyes you wade arms legs throat kicking seeking your length of gum-green water like the answer to some dream of distant raft and sunlight thistle & thigh-white cloud.
Phyllis Choyke

STORM

In older times, I'd have seen gods in this sky today, for a huge purple mantle seems to enfold the edge of the world, there, where truncated buildings make blunt teeth on the jawbone of the horizon. In the northwest, thunderbolts in his hand, a black monster of rain grows, like a Renaissance engraving showing a puffed face.

From a log on the beach, I watch the lake as it turns from that translucent blue-green of sea caves, to waves colored mother-of-pearl. Distantly, lightning flashes. Storms seem ambivalent: fish will die, but crops have rain. In a different storm, Pompeii was saved and destroyed.

While motorboats speed for their lives toward shelter behind twin iron breakwaters of the ditch, I dash for my house, slam doors tightly, watch the violent waves go lead brown, see cottonwoods bend half down against the clotted sand, feel smack of thunder as the windows shake, smell ozone.

I haven't shelter from my storms. Even if they come under cloaks, or with other faces, still I know them, cannot this easily shut doors hard to keep them out: betrayals, and accidents that were not accidents, and my own violence, which is not ambivalent.

Still, freed from those myths who rode the sky, must I now fear inner behemoths purported to reign over me? Or will they too, like statues in their robes from Tyre, old magic portents, beast gods, alchemy, soon disappear? The mind's straits are harder crossed than Gates of Hercules, but, long ago, in this sky today, I'd have seen gods.

George Keithley

POTENCY

The hawk glides
in a high wind over the orchard
acre crows nest in
to the elm and oak forest south of the lake.
A southern rain spreads behind him
and
he is low in an oak
and dry as the near limbs:
he is the jump into the warm wind, and the brown glide
and the fall to green cover, braked and steep.

Down the slate
bank from the plant rain and wind lie on
the river and it
is absent of the drone of motor launches:
turbines turn the generators
at
3,600
rpm, spinning of
the rain, rushed splash of the low waterfall, and on out to the lake the long, blue and gentle sweep.

When the trout
sinks against rock the men on the bleached slate laugh, slipping, set the poles down and climb the steps of the power plant, watching a hawk fly the green lake
woods to the river. Rain has passed. The trout is down beside a rock and holding under the current the rise and quick plunge and the swift, silver leap.
WOMAN AWAY FROM THE LOOM

I
Unsinister she stands and sees the days
Go swinging by like acrobats upon a rope,
Forgetting all of this is not immediate
But is of the whole far-reaching search for truth,
And whether you decide: “foregone for Lent”
Or “known for Valentine” won’t be seen
On the big rug.
Uncryptically she waits; senses stir and pull
While fate concurs, love abates and he,
Narcissus, does not demur.

II
It is a time to see the bird and worm
Fly by the window in simple relationship.
She shall not question certainties:
The artichoke will wear its tail;
The almond still will keep her furry coat;
The fish though baked retains his eye;
Blue birds upon a Persian bowl
Command insight in perfect flight;
Plump cheeks of a white milk pitcher
Bound in gold blow forth delight.
But then the flying squirrels begin:
Thump out their tune, hold contests
In the attic; the cat who dogs her footsteps
Dies; children cry out in sleep;
Cannibals and crows exalt their state;
Cousins look in mirrors, and then
With cousins mate. The nursery rhymes
Come truer than all histories.

III
The plate waits full in the warming-place;
The vinegar’s mother comes early;
The eggs refuse their hiding place;
While whippoorwills keep lonely wives awake
The showers drip with nylon shirts.
As snow falls on the aerials in May
The lady policemen, carrying stopsigns,
Hurry to board the town-bound trolleys.
Gray with self-pity, she holds
The old familiar phrases close
Playing them over and over
And over, reviving old powers.
For a little while, memory, a clever one
Knows when to leave out the nightmares
In the middle: unaware, she sees the cats’ tails
Thicken as they walk from room to room.
Standing vulnerable as St. Sebastian
Waiting for the arrows, she feels a fury
(She does not know at what without her glasses).
Something has robbed her of her sense of power:
There is no magic anymore
(Senses like room conditioned by air
Feel unbreathed to the human breath).
There are few windows to look out—
They all look in to show a pretty picture:
Roses in a vase, their lives prolonged
By aspirin. There she stands in the uncertain light
A madonna without hands (the wind
That blew her mantle into shape was mild).

IV
Outside in the snow where birds and cats
Have walked, the moles pop up their heads
To talk, the snow melts on the painted roof
Running down leaves, bares the place
Where the opossum yawned last fall.
In the corner of the white window frame
Small cobwebs seem blacker in the snowlight
Where the fly is caught.
V

The red bird cries
The green plant dies
The roses climbing on the red barn fall
The honeycomb is open like the tomb:
Her illusions, like Lazarus,
Pop forth from life, not ready,
Opened up with essence and emptiness revealed
Out of time in nature and the season.

VI

She sees the firelight dancing on the backs of books.
It waits behind vases, gay as Narcissus
Let out of the closet. The shell is pushed away.
Now air, blowing in the winter window
Is strong and sure as Spring.

Jessie Kachmar

SWALLOWS

She scurries to keep the dark out,
Fencing chaos from her window box,
With a fabric tried with many colors.
At fifty, her supple hands seek out
The light from lone peripheries. Her
Solitary hands could always mould
A balm against strangelings in somber
Alleys of her years. Years lambent for
Her always radiated from a man. With him
The hands could lull a while subdued,
Then turn for their common enterprises.
She could not comprehend the flurried
Energies she burned as sacrifice to him,
Mulling love, then chafing sodden embers.
The same with every man. Loneliness again
And hands like swallows in a prevailing wind,

David Ray

STANDING OUTSIDE A CHAPLIN MOVIE
ALL THE WORLD IS WATCHING

Feeling like a fool outside
the Chaplin movie I hear
Their disembodied shrieks, the dismembered
screams of the tickled & goosed.
Inside their curtained room
they can read the lines,
know the score:
Charlie eating Shrimp or Shoeleather;
the quality of their wisdom
floats out;
the velvet of the curtains cannot stop
such a thing.
Horrible: it could be anything.
Deaf-mutes barney-googling love
in a borrowed backseat
Always I’m at midnight even in these
Sunday 8 p.m. corridors.
I’m walking through the green gas
of the suburbs,
The stars blighted out,
hating the cars, the monstrous
lovers.
The red bird cries
The green plant dies
The roses climbing on the red barn fall
The honeycomb is open like the tomb:
Her illusions, like Lazarus,
Pop forth from life, not ready,
Opened up with essence and emptiness revealed
Out of time in nature and the season.

She sees the firelight dancing on the backs of books.
It waits behind vases, gay as Narcissus
Let out of the closet. The shell is pushed away.
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The hands could lull a while subdued,
Then turn for their common enterprises.
She could not comprehend the flurried
Energies she burned as sacrifice to him,
Mulling love, then chafing sodden embers.
The same with every man. Loneliness again
And hands like swallows in a prevailing wind,
it makes you wonder where the music really is.
Just that: the music silent on the paper,
leaning on the prison bars
and looking out: each note helpless,
alone, until the silence is too much for us and we are forced to shriek.
Then watch them dance inside the prison, hear their bodies bang into the bars until they sag like strings, arms and legs bowing a loud cacophony while the heavy organs groan inside our throats.

~

Morton Marcus

LISTENING TO TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Listening to two hundred years ago
when Bach
at the organ going blind
heard
what I am hearing
and sketched an orchestra
to play
two hundred years
on paper,
I think of him and how he screamed,
the tough growth
bulging in his cornea
while local butchers,
still in bloody aprons,
held him down
and one cut in
who called himself
a doctor
blooming high above the patient
through the petals of his blood.
That scream is never in his music,
though it killed him
when the doctor with his rusty tools had gone,
though it moved him with a truer song than he had ever sung.
Or when you think that everything he wrote is not a sound,
but hieroglyphs, hushed silhouettes on paper,
THREE MORNINGS IN SEPTEMBER

1936
I wake in my father's house.  
Autumn smokes from the earth  
As the clock gathers itself, as the sun  
Shoulders up from the river.  
My dog lifts his ears at a neighborly bark,  
Scrabbles off through the arbor.  
The concords swell, the apples fall  
In light wind. Cows swing heavily.  

The first shadow thickens on the wall.  
Now the sun strikes through the window,  
The blind cracked like a blueprint,  
Through the web-woven barn window  
To the searing edge of the scythe.  
The oak leans out of its shadow  
And silently bursts into flame.  
My father tries to cough up the war  
In the shallow trench of his sleep.  
I tie on my sneakers, drift out  
To run awhile with the hounds.  

1946
I wake in my father's house.  
Autumn coils in the roots  
Of trees still breathing night.  
I know some night will stay  
Along the vines. Some night will take  
The birds, shrill in the oak,  
Until, as if a north wind whistled,  
They will rise in one black cloud  
To rain down on a far horizon.  
I know that color builds along the ridge,  

Copper, brass, the bronze pears,  
Until, like a bomb in Berlin rubble,  
A hard leveling of black and white.  

An army has taken the town.  
Uniforms die in the closets,  
With shoulder patches, stripes and ribbons  
Already turning to Greek.  
A far sun lifts from my tan,  
Old commands ease from my muscles.  
The earth aches for the harvest  
In the first full year of peace.  

1956
I wake in my father's house,  
A veteran of thirty tans, hanging  
Like uniforms in dark closets,  
As I march up to the front  
Of the war which burns in the trees.  
Outside an unanswered bark bites on the wind.  
My children whisper like hoarse leaves,  
Eager to run with the hounds  
Where color gathers on the ridge.  

My wife turns from her sleep  
The full harvest of her body.  
We pull the quilt, bright as fall leaves,  
Up to the edge of sleep.  
We are between the wars again.  
Snow sends its first, white scouts  
Into the dreaming valley.  
I send this prayer out into the light.  
May children wake, in ten years' time,  
On the full brink of harvest,  
Safe in their father's house.
ON VISITING LINCOLN'S GUESTROOM
IN HIS SPRINGFIELD HOME

"Since there is little record of
the Lincolns' having houseguests,
this room has been devoted to the
two younger boys, Tad and Willie."

Here in the only home you ever owned,
standing like a dark surprise
in the midst of Eighth and Jackson Street,
the houseguests whisper up the stairs,
feeling along the walls like blindmen,
as if to touch a hand against the wall
that touched the hand
so many hands reached out for.
Nothing's added to the second floor
but the inscription at the door.

Perhaps it's the heat of this Springfield
day, but I have no trouble
seeing Willie there and Tad,
invisible but for the visible
toys that gather in the room:
the baskets, hoops, the little horse and wagon,
an abacus, some marbles made of stone.
And Willie astride his rush-seated painted chair,
Tad jumping on the high caned day-bed,
heaving hairstuffed pillows through the air.

After awhile the houseguests turn and leave
Willie who lived to twelve
and Tad eighteen, hosts of a sort,
guests of a sort,
in the house on Eighth and Jackson Street.

---

MY RISING PROFESSOR

The professor needed a ladder
Or rather,
He needed nothing at all
So great his zeal.

He was not handsome
Nor ugly enough for striking;
There was only his fire,
His desire for teaching Economics.

In yellow autumned Ohio
In the old towers of College
He pretended—by God he knew!—
The growing cold
The weathers of doubt
He could shape up as snowmen
Whose coal eyes, red as fire,
Would wink down blasts.
Each day in the fusty classroom
His chalk raced like a pony
Hopping the intricate hedges of thought.
His mind, his eyes,
The sweat on his plump round face
Started in a stoop, then grew
From the bottom of his blackboard
Rising in a white dusty storm
To the topmost inch of the slate where
Undaunted he mounted a chair
Or in his own peculiar hustle
Levitated both himself and the
Copulating figures of his mind
Until the chalk—daily—
Scrawled the walls high above the board.
It was as if duress and stoutness
In a rage, in a faith, in a love
Always flew.

Never one to moult he mounted.
He left his mark
Far above most faculties.
—It was the only raise he knew.

I left him there—
Years ago.
Like Angelo at the ceiling.
God knows how high in sky
Now he is.

Jean Farley

A QUALITY OF LIGHT

(The Spies of Israel Overlook Canaan)

Far behind them lies easy the amazing sea
Where surely this day the ships are deft
Among shining curls of fleece.
Inland the light strikes clean
—As eagle to angular lamb—
On the craggy face of every man.
They mark among lustrous leaves the grapes are red
And hope overtakes them while they breathe,
Clasping thick feet in thin hands.
Set with eyes like golden seed,
Picked by sunlight from each shaggy head,
They glance afield over all their future,
Searching the place in a chosen land
For God’s clear mercy on a murmurous band.

Barbara Overmyer

“Poetry should be oratory or song...
the colloquial is nothing...”

I
I would be poetry to you,
but will not bobble pebbles
over a sea, a mob of men
swaying in each opinion’s tide.

II
I will not stump the grass roots,
print my face on billboards
or enter into great debates
with makeup and hot lights.

Perhaps I am closer to song,
but barely have the backing
for a break, a riff of instruments
improvised by ear.

For I have little wind or brass,
spend my breath on broken reeds,
and sound percussive only
in the snares and kettles of my heart,
the strung drums of my skin.

I could sing a plainsong
out of a lost tradition,
an aria off the top of my head,
dry recitative
scarcely audible.

III
I would be poetry to you,
but would rather be a woman
with smudgy hands and crinkly hair
and the plain speech of my feelings.
Paul Pera

HORACE THE TERRIBLE

horrible horace.
the wonderful little
ugly, senile janitor
who worked his strawberry
arteries out sweeping the
ashtrays that would soon
contain the sandy-grey ashes
of his dried prune body
loved to spend hours
whistling cerebral tunes
like: I'll be down to get you
in a taxi honey—
and, take me out to the ballgame—
with choir-solemnity and child-aged whim
until one day the
white-haired goat man
was blown like a puff of pink smoke
from his tunes
and ashtrays.

Martha Friedberg

LINES FOR A SMALL DAUGHTER

Child, I love you
Because you match the daylight.
Your arms, vivid and thin,
Clasp my neck as if it were
A fluted column of ancient strength
That fails the rest of me.
And when you toss your books
Across the hall, and shout
You're off to Susan's for the afternoon,
Then slam the door;
I stare into the slurring dark
Of all my early loss
And envy you, you have a place
To go to, and to come home again.
You, with your demanding red heart
And nine year innocence;
I love you for your fresh wounds,
And for your tears
That rip me out of my earlier self
To shelter you.
And yet, my slender light;
I weep for you
That I haven't understood
What keeps enclosing me
Inside my own, strange daughterhood.

Stuart Friebert

THE WINTER OF 1856

The longest of any modern winter.
Snow on a level with you then suddenly
thirty feet deep in the ravines.

Elizabeth boarded some woodchoppers.
All the water she used washing after them
was snow, melted in boilers on the catalogue stove.
She remembered some deer
coming through clogged woods.
They walked into the sharp sun.

The men saw them. The deer
broke the color of the crust
and went too deep.

The woodchoppers,
shoeing the snow,
went for their axes.

---

**Franz Schneider**

**LAST LETTER OF A CONDEMNED PRIEST**

*Alfred Delp, S.J., executed by the Nazis in the Pötzensee prison on February 2, 1945.*

Already
Black wagons
Are rolling
To take
Our corpses
Away.

Last night
I dreamed
Of a loaf of bread
And a basket
Of bleeding fish.

When I awoke,
The dawn swam
In the sky,
Moving gently
Her reddish fins.

**Sister Mary Gilbert, SNJM**

**THE BREAKTHROUGH**

And the skunk came, singular (I hoped)
though the stink was loud as a multitude,
pervasive as fear where I walked in the shadow
more afraid than before with the watchdog beside me
and tried to be neutral and couldn’t
like Adam who wore the figleaf
and waited detection.

Away from the wood I was peaceful at first
like the rational being I am, in a Franciscan orgy
of loving my brain understood but refused to convey
to my nose. “We are both God’s creatures,” I said,
“whatever his stripe, and we know what it’s like
when onlookers harden and sniff from a great way off.”
But I knew that I had to know more.

His fur, my informant declared, from the seventeenth
floor of a building downtown, was glossy and soft;
his fluid drive, activated on attack, was chemically
sure and could be manufactured in a lab
from scientific interest or pure spite; the white
stripe was a trademark; domesticated, he could be
tailored to conform, a regular pet.

I agreed. And yet
I could not go to meet him in the skin, although
I saw him everywhere: in the vague rustle of bushes,
the innocent puppy rushes and the tautened ear;
in the blur of the hurtled rock, the shape at the foot
of the stair blocking escape; the wild
scattering of birds pursued
and the dreams defiled.

Today with the rain cooling our summer fevers
I stay inside with the hate and the fear,
as if they had
meaning. Be aloof
and indifferent—
staying drunk
is the only way.
Look, you sot,
when the sun goes down
turn on the lights.

Richard Deutch
Two Poems

PSYCH TEST
In me there is the image
of a lake, a pony grazing on the
gentle slope beside it,
a wooden raft.

We have traveled the dusty road
surrounded by cornfields,
and carried the ancient key
because it soothed us. We climbed
the wall,
good brick footholds and the red dust
scattered beneath us.

Now we have come to the place.
We lie down beside the lake
because we are here.

S U D D E N B I R D S
Sudden birds in the forest—
A jangle of Bedouin dancers
Among the tentposts!
David Wagoner

Two Poems

SONG TO ACCOMPANY THE BEARER OF BAD NEWS

Kings kill their messengers
Sometimes, slicing wildly
Through pages delivering their grief
And you may do the same
With this page under this poem
Tear it lengthwise first
With feeling, cutting off
Each phrase into meaningless halves
Then crossways, severing
The mild beginning from the bad ending
By now you know the worst
Having imagined the remainder
Down to the painful inch
Where something like your name
Closes this message
You needn't finish now
You may stop here
And puzzle it out later.

Kings kill
Sometimes, slicing
Through pages
And you may
With this page
Tear it
With feeling
Each phrase
Then crossways
The mild beginning
By now you know
Having imagined
Down to
Where something
Closes

You needn't finish
You may stop
And puzzle it out.

Their messengers
Wildly
Delivering their grief
Do the same
Under this poem
Lengthwise first
Cutting off
Into meaningless halves
Severing
The bad ending
The worst
The remainder
The painful inch
Like your name
This message
Now
Here
Later

You may tear it into meaningless halves
Lengthwise first then crossways
Severing something like the painful inch
Later under this poem messengers
Delivering their grief puzzle it out
Having imagined the worst
Kings kill wildly through pages
Cutting off the bad ending
Do the same with this page
By now you know the mild beginning
Down to where your name closes
With feeling now you may stop.

~
Given one wall and a roof at a wild angle,
The problem was to find the rest of the house
In Engineering Drawing, to string it along
Its three spread-eagled ninety-degree dimensions
(A line is only a line when it lies flat),
Then trace it up and over, tracking it down
At last to a blunt façade with a shut door.

The whole hot room of us on dunces' stools
Maneuvered compasses and triangles
Over the sliding T-squares and onion skin,
Trying to be on all six sides of a house
At the same time, locking slabs in place
As firmly as the edges of our graves.

We stared at the box like catty-cornered neighbors
Or, losing our perspective, swiveled the earth
Like one-eyed gods till porches spread their wings
And the slant sunlight's isometric waves
Leveled all distance, simply, at a stroke.

And that was that—top, profiles, and front view,
The backside and the rat's collapsible heaven:
Spaces cut out of space like paper dolls
And modeled on a blank interior.

None of us had to draw it inside out,
Sketch in the beds, let smoke through broken windows,
Locate the milkman bleeding in the garden,
Or cross-hatch people running off the paper
Where weather crumpled the uneven corners,
Or knock at the door for any other answers.