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POETRY NORTHWEST

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POETRY NORTHWEST

SUMMER 1976

Daniel Mathews

HOW TO WALK

The earth pulls your feet, let feet pull your lank pelvis, scapulae
will follow, let them fall, sky-hook to scalp whorl will hold you up,
elastic tension through cervical spine.

Of your head, let only the eyes feel the pull, down, so low in fact
you would appear as sleepwalking, if anyone were looking: your
feet pull them down, to help feel out their way.

Don't think the huge white one across the valley is lost to them
merely because it is out of focus.

Your steps are very small, and slow, leave them so, you'll get
nowhere fast, but look behind you: how far you have come already.

On your feet you wear boulders, no, cobbles, lay them, lay them
down, mason.

Often they must be rotated one way or the other to make the fit
right. Hips will turn with them, only less, shoulders head each a
little less still. At the top of the line, the sky appears hardly to
twist at all.

Wasp, on your wrist, has *his* foot for a nose: you were never quite
still enough to see this until now. Now, you can even *feel* it, ro-
tating one way and the other, mapping contours of pores and
creases between tall hairs.

Q Can you place *your* feet as wisely, as tenderly on the earth.

A You can: for the heather is brittle and your nakedness soft, so your
feet have been allowing for this all along.

"I wake at night sometimes and pray for you."
Dangerous words. They open up the sky and paint a yellow stripe
across it,
Fetch doubts that bury me in question, leave me
Trying to be, not you, but something as implacable:
You in your wrinkled skin; the light of nights washing youth across
your face.
What can I do to get back at you, how rob you
Of your fierce heathen loving weapon?

SLEEPLESS NIGHT

A box with dry edges, there's no
Collar or ridge, joinings
Draw space into themselves, they
Spit out objects like peach stones, they're
Shiny as onyx, you can't see
Your pale face in those walls, they swallow light.

If I could stand up and open out the evening
Like a sharp can chiseled down the middle
It would spill me out into a space

Open, deserted, where banks of moss are piled in terraces
Against a milky sky.

Somewhere a line of marchers trudges over a shuttered bridge,
Their boots graze near my ear, they make complaints
Of creaking bridge ties,
They pull a tired walker, his feet scraping behind him.
I'll try to follow them down their slope of night,
A steep roof
With a slow slide to a shelf at the bottom

Where a woman is waiting, holding a cup of water.

Douglas Crase

Two Poems

IN MEMORY OF MY COUNTRY

As the land lifts
The weather begins at once to wear it down:
Its ridges lose their minerals in the rain,
Its valleys open in wide parallels. The hills
Sink of their own weight into plains, the plains
Sag into rivers of their own debris, and features
Hard as rocks will be transformed
To clouds of dust that drip out of the sky.
It is the land, as it appears,
That tells the world of time: conglomerate,
So fiercely made to pass through day and night,
Heaped up and gullied and borne away.
The falls cut upstream every year, the delta
Spreads, the breakers sort the sands
With no mistake. There is no place on earth
Hidden from earth's patient spin: the stumps
Of mountains turn in the same custody
As the worn plateau over which they rise.
Hard as granite, the weather levels the record
Of the toughest past whose moments unfasten
In confusion with the active land.

ON YOUR BIRTHDAY

We escaped together and nevertheless arrived
At separate retreats, being guarded day and night.
Messages smuggling out from either one of us
Arc over spotted fields to die against
The sides of intervening hills,
Insufficiently propelled.
See them, those melts appear thinly in the clouds?

That's where my words are falling through the sky,
Far short of their destination,
Far short of where you are.
One after another in the cold
They lie wounded and shrinking with no one near,
Their shapes evaporate, their little hearts
Subside into the snow.
In myriad drops I sink away from you.
Yet this much I guess we've made occur:
Wherever you go will be no farther
Than you are now, and this is why
Though with you my intimate opposite was fear,
Without you is going to be despair.

Julie Mishkin

THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

"This world understands nothing
but words and you have come into it
with almost none."

Antonio Porchia

A countdown had begun.
The air vibrated with the ticking of a huge clock.
In the cities all the lights were extinguished.
The dust circled like a mad dog.
Children were sleepwalking through the streets,
holding mirrors to their mouths for fear of losing their breath.

Language retreated into the past, a tunnel that gaped everywhere.
Words cracked against each other as if hurled from great distances.
The era of hands was ushered in:
all the mouths flew off the face of the earth.

In the country the women lay down one after another to give birth.
The rain stuttered and began to fall.

A trail of wet cradles led from one farm to the next.
When the wind blew, the cradles rocked together.
Inside they were thinking of the new life:
the piano without hammers,
the train without its doppler,
the voice box without a voice.

The first man to waken deaf was declared President.

Stephen Gardner

Three Poems

AN OPEN POEM TO THE SON I DO NOT HAVE

I understand.
And when you say
You believe in the efficacy of war,
Or do not believe in war,
You will still be my flesh.
I will not turn on you
To rip you, smiling, into useless parts.
And if one day you say to me
You want to be a poet
I will tell you
That to write great poems
You must embrace the dark
And fear the dark;
I will say you must know
The terror of what you cannot see
And love the unseen.

And hurt. I wish you
Not to feel the pain of things
That hurt us all,
And that you know
All our agonies, aching until places
Where your blood does not flow

Are bleeding,
For if you live,
If you must live and die
To write, then you will
Hurt, hurt deeply, and fail
If you do not
Feel the failure of us all.

ADAM'S DREAM

In the last male hour
Warm with the change of his sleep
She came from outside his mind

In a birth he could not have known.
Around him were shapes he had named:
Solid tree, quick deer, trusting sheep.

Yet this was something more,
Sliding down the curve of his back,
A hand that wasn't his on his side.

Before this soft light turned the earth
He had lain in his dreams without fear.
But the terror that rests in us now

Sprang then for the first time in him.
The forest floor rolled with a heat
He sensed, but without name or form,

And the sun framed the world new again.
And the garden he lived in had died.

WALPURGIS

New York *Times*: "Pasadena, Tex., Nov. 5, 1974. The police filed murder charges today against the father of an 8-year-old boy who was poisoned on Halloween by a candy straw filled with cyanide."

Rain holds the goblins close to home.
The town's afire with porchlights.
Businessman militia watch the streets
To keep the ghosts unharmed.

But CPA's and slow police alike
Can't deny my mood. The taste
Of candy's all I need. And now
I'm older in the night. Clowns

And bedsheets scream; I hand out
Tribute into orange bags; I close
The door. The faintest smile I know
Comes to my face. What witches

Coldly wait to fly you off tonight
To darker candy moons, my son, my son.

Jim Barnes

SCOUTING TOM FRY HOLLOW

The trail in I blazed on pine is gone
without a trace. The lay of the land and sky
has run amuck. I check the ridge south,
look for marks I know cannot be there now.

One thing remains unchanged. The hollow hard
below: the brown, brown grass flowing around
chimney rubble and collapsed corral, the sound
of distant wolves keening in the stony hills.

I go down, as before, to look for the grave
I will not find again. The wind always
blows and sundown comes hours ahead of time.
Little chance any artifact is left

to clear the name of bones the hollow bears,
Grave unmarked, the hanged man still hangs under
the ghost of every tree. I raise a stone,
poor homage, for the next man to wonder on.

Madeline DeFrees

Two Poems

COVER

I went along on the map to Virginia,
said your name like the rape
of women who should have run for cover
to the Iowa River,
those days of ease and clover
never carried home.

Wet through I stand under the folding
umbrella of your concern, the clouds
uncertain as that first day
you fell on me and I learned
where our roots were tending. A knot of wind
dissolves. You forget how I grow

away from you all these weeks,
my one good eye turned honest for the asking.
I bend over radical leeks to follow
revelations of the sun
when petals flare,
their sudden stamina.

Whatever blade's on fire by the gate, going
to seed, going wise to sleep, we fill

the exiled body, animal caves, feeling them
open. The heavens
fall on thin skin. Outside.
This mortgaged apple
paradise.

HOW THE AMISH WOMEN WENT DOWN IN THE IOWA RIVER

Went down under quilted leaves,
the beards of their men
rough against homespun cloth.
Went down on the green verge without a sigh
under broad-brimmed hats,
the log jammed stream of their coming
overriding the shore. The hostler unhitched
and watered the horses.
Girls in their Sunday dark, white caps and aprons,
sheered the fragrant night.

Down like a jet from Moline at 30,000 feet
with the throttle open
in the shade of horse-drawn carts,
sad boots on cobbled streets of a country town.
Went down in the heat
of iron kettles filled
with boiling lard. Elders in black felt hats
shook their heads and warned.
The tactful fathers, spared, let down
their guard and turned away.

Now it is noon when the women rise.
Their cottonwood stand of simmering trees lapped
in light. Bonnets down to the groin,
they are caught in the April freeze
of the floodplain. The river grips them hard,
full loins skewed
to the mouth of summer.

Joseph Garrison

TALENTS

I can start
almost any plant
from a cutting,
grow my lawn
into a green,
keep the mower
from stopping.
Every appliance
in the house—
even the vacuum—
thinks before
it calls me in.
If floors tilt,
I know where
to use pressure
and how much.
My guitar sings
like a glass
at my touch.
Pieces of wood
in my hands
come out birds.
With some luck,
I could change
Robinson Crusoe
into a Franklin.
My talents keep
my world awake,
even in sleep,
where I dream
of sending them
away, in return
for the talent
I do not have—

finding familiar
names for things
that no one else
could have said.

Conrad Hilberry

SONG

When the body rocks
in its own arms
like a swimmer held
in a net of water
at night, the senses
fall asleep.
Taste and smell
keep their own counsel.
No telegrams
come rattling in
from someplace else,
no pictures
perch in our eyes.
The only news
is cool air
caught in our lungs
where it melts
into the blood.
With no eyes
to define us,
our edges waver
and dissolve,
our colors bleed.
But we are not lonely.
When we rock
to the black water,
we are plankton
where the quick fish
come to feed.

Robert Gillespie

THE TROUBLE

It will not go away anywhere even for a visit.
I offer it money, a vacation in Florida.
It settles in like an old clunker in drifts by the barn,
gearshift frozen up stiff as a birch stick.
"I can not possibly get away," it tells me.

Stuck with it, I invent
a tramp out in the far field
as if to an assignation:
It has stopped snowing after days
Cheerfully I bow to it
I savour it deliciously by the handful

and for the first time
in ages brilliant
as filament I'm full
as the sky
of white light Love
is our revenge on reality.
At last,
crystallized, utterly happy completely
alone, I am exalted as new snow.

In a flurry
I rush out to meet this person. Together at last!
Things are joyously out of hand in my head!
As I bolt all fired up around my domain
a woman bumps into me that on the spot
I marry I am so happy,
we have seven lovely children, each summer
tomatoes and lettuce and pearl onions, chickens,
and I a friendly lazy old brown hound in the sun.

Oh my god! What have I done?

They will not go away anywhere even for a visit.

Frank Cady

WALKING

The field slowly escapes the sounds
of a careless city, as car horns
give way to the improvisations
of yellow-breasted meadowlarks
who play their arpeggios down
the wind. Yellowbells begin
at 3600 feet, and my feet slowly
take hold and find their way
through air that is its own master
and pours down from a sky piled high
over the northern range, brilliant
in sun and silence that's breaking up.

For days, it doesn't speak, just broods,
waiting until the fragile plants
are strong enough and I can walk
to the place my field opens, bathed
in the orange chalk of evening light,
the patches of purple pasqueflowers,
the delicately veined waxed petals,
yellow clumped on high stamen centers
that survive snow and wind and rain,

and climb to timber line
from its underside, greet windsong
in silver firs and calm surprised birds:
the isolations of air are safe, I come
in peace to walk a windy light,
and turn with lichened rocks into
a setting sun, follow it over
the spine of a ridge to a valley
I didn't know was there, the distance
caressed by its watershed, and stop
at a shootingstar, wavering between
sun and a full moon that stretch the sky
as wide and taut as it can be.

Ray A. Young Bear

you know we'd like to be there
standing beside our grandfathers
being ourselves
without the frailty
and insignificance of the worlds
we suffer and balance
on top of now
unable to detect which to learn
or which to keep from
wearing the faces
of our seasonal excuses
constantly lying to each other
and ourselves about just how much
of the daylight
we understand
we would be there:
with the position of our minds
bent towards the autumn fox
feasts
feeling the strength and prayer
of the endured sacred human tests
we would set aside the year's
smallpox dead
whole and complete
with resignation
like the signs from the four legs
of our direction
standing still
sixty years back in time
breathing into the frosted lungs
of our horses the winter blessings
of our clan gods
through dependence
they would carry our belongings
and families to the woodlands
of eastern iowa to hunt our food
separate and apart

from the tribe
following and sometimes using
the river to cleanse the blood
from our daughters and wives
not knowing that far into
our lives we'd be the skulls
of their miscarriages
as a result:
the salamander would paralyze
our voice and hearing
under instruction
our sons the mutes would darken
their bodies with ash and we'd assist
them erect sweatlodges with canvas
water plants fire and poles
from the river
the scent of deer and geese
the hiss of medicine
against the heated rocks
belief would breathe into their bodies
camouflage and invisibility
somewhere an image of a woman's hand
would lunge out from the window
of a longhouse
and it would grab from our fingers
the secret writings of a book
describing to the appointee
the method of entering
the spirit and body
of a turkey
to walk at night in suspension
above the boundaries of cedar incense
to begin this line of witchcraft
travelling in various
animal forms
unaware of the discrepancy
that this too is an act of balance
a recurring dream of you
being whole and complete
sending the glint of your horns

into the great distances
of the gods
acquainting yourself with ritual
and abandonment of self-justification
to realize there is a point
when you stop being a people
sitting somewhere and reading
the poetry of others come out easily
at random
unlike yours which is hard to write
to feel yourself stretch
beyond limitation
to come here and write this poem
about something no one
knows about
no authority to anything

in disgust and in response
to indian-type poetry
written by whites
published in a mag
which has rejected me
too many times

James Anderson

RUNNING IT DOWN

Running it down. The serpentine once-over then
Sighting the damn thing in. All so extremely
easy you wonder why you have waited so long.
There. Just a little to the left
near the crease that marks the center
of the hood.
The look of recognition will last only a moment.
The glance up as you stare down
And then:
You run the damn thing down.

Down as you have done a hundred times in dreams
later waking fit for the day
turning sour before the first break, and
down as you have done countless times as
conversations drifted
And you imagined just the slightest thump.
Now you will do it. Then drive on
as if nothing happened and no one saw.
Running it down. The easiest thing in the world.
The look of recognition will only last a moment.
The rest of your life will be lived content.
The days you have will spend like stolen money.
The men and women you know will sense something great.
The cry in the dream will come from the next apartment.
Others will be the ones who bend beneath themselves.

Rory Holscher

ELEGY FROM PINE CANYON, UTAH

For Abie Clemens

A gray wind floods the sky at dawn. Snow clouds
are weighing the hilltops down.

By noon tumbleweeds are loose on the plain.
Wild as lightning balls, they're headed for Wyoming.

Late afternoon, pickups go rattling home.
Country music says love is in shambles.

At sundown the snow begins to fall
in a quiet weave with the coming darkness.

Lonely ranchers far out on the desert
have waited all day for the storm to arrive.

My friend, your death is part of the silence
where I am learning to sing.

PANTOUM

As beech trees bend in a violent wind
The night before the funeral,
All the small deaths knock against my heart.
I remember my mother saying,

"The night before the funeral
Anger washes the swirls of memory from my brain."
I remember my mother saying
"My brain is soft and gray, an oyster."

Anger washes the swirls of memory from my brain.
I begin to take the risks I never took as a child.
My brain is soft and gray, an oyster.
I want to take my hands off the handlebars.

I begin to take the risks I never took as a child.
The dark grass shivers at moonrise.
I want to take my hands off the handlebars,
I put my hands down slowly on the bodies of two lovers.

The dark grass shivers at moonrise.
I put my two hands down slowly
I put my two hands down slowly on the bodies of two lovers;
An image scars the inner eye.

I put my two hands down slowly
On a photograph of two faces, side by side,
An image scars the inner eye.
Familiar as a glimpse in the mirror.

A photograph of two faces, side by side:
The chief of police blows out the prisoner's brains
Familiar as a glimpse in the mirror,
I wonder which side of the trigger I am on.

The chief of police blows out the prisoner's brains.
All the small deaths knock against my heart.
I wonder which side of the trigger I am on,
As beech trees bend in a violent wind.

PERSEPHONE IN HELL

I grew in a city layered like the mind,
Among white ruins overgrown with poppies.
In the early morning the gates of the city
Blushed with sunlight.
Young girls walking, arms encircling waists.
Mourning doves, blue in that early light,

Fluttered from the trees.
At night, the walled city closed tight
As a sleeping child's fist
And the sky shivered in my cold eyes
Promiscuous with stars.
What tempted me.

My breasts swayed, heavy, two handfuls of earth.
Skirts mothered my thighs.
Picking anemones, I smeared
My hands with pollen as dark as blood.
The sound of horses pursued me,
I hid behind my hair.

A dark man caught me with his bitter smile,
Netted me with his bitter tongue, and dragged me
Underworld. The dead lie sucking
The underside of the earth, beneath the soil,
Under the tangle of worms and roots.
Each night I must lie down

Along the side of a sleeping man,
Like a coastline beside a dark sea.
Alone beneath my own skin,
I dream of the snake twisted between my breasts,

Of cold constellations turning in the sky
I dream I sit at the crossroads biting a pomegranate.

The red seeds stain my teeth,
Smear my lips.
All day I wash and wash the clean smooth bodies of the dead;
While my wild mother is sweeping and sweeping
The clean bare earth,
Sweeping away the green corn, the green wheat.

Those thin fierce heroes, arrogant in bronze,
Can spill one cup of blood and take the knowledge
Of the dead, then turn and go.
Their eyes shine with burning ships and fields in flames.
But I, who descended without a guide, kiss and kiss
The sweet King of the dead as he sleeps.

I taste a song of the earth's open mouth,
The temptation in the fruit,
The pomegranate's bite that holds me here.
But an old woman descends the spiral stair
Dancing with a green wand
In each hand, dancing

Me up, step by step,
To where the wind ripples meadows
And April steals me back.

Jay Meek

THE LOVES OF JAMES BUCHANAN

I am a murderer. Of course, I do not
know I am justified in saying I
am anything at all, or how it
was I earned the right to be severe
with myself. But on the chance

I am what I dream, I accept it,
if only for the penalty of failing to
remember, which has made my life
so impossibly vague and utterly
without precedent. Honor, what is it?
A pride that congratulates itself
with principles? On my honor,
then, I killed you, in how many ways I
can not count, but since that day,
love, I have not kept company
with guns, knives, ropes, or arsenic.
I have stayed away from parapets
and chasms. But it's no good.
For on the evening of my swearing-in,
my first night in the White House,
I sat by the fire remembering,
what, some liturgical melody I heard
or did not hear, a *Stabat Mater*
in your lovely soprano coming
from an upstairs bedroom in that mad
Georgian house in Philadelphia.
You singing: "James, I am dead,
I am dead." So I looked all about me,
into the mirrors and ornaments
in every room, and I was found
missing. How young it makes me seem
just to say it: *your bachelor*.
No, it is best to say I am not
anything, that I-who-am-I have melted
and hardened, like a blue candle
at midnight. I remain at most
your unwedded widower, your old wick,
your bad dollar, your ambitious
murderer. Which is why, dear,
I came in a fast carriage through fog
to Philadelphia. It was August,
no, another month, a cold one.

James Masao Mitsui

PAINTING BY A MENTAL PATIENT, WEAVERVILLE,
CALIFORNIA JAIL, 1922

—now displayed in the Weaverville Museum

It is the picture of a man who dreams
at night, his dreams a color
he can't forget in his blue cell:
a fork chases a hard-boiled egg
across the smooth paper,
watched by an angry alarm clock.
The clock rings
and the artist knows it is morning
even though the iron cell
is in a basement with no windows.

In the middle of the painting
the devil blows a whistle
and his pitchfork drips blood.
Above in the night
a man has taken off in a rocketship
heading for a yellow, one-eyed moon.
He grips the steering wheel in the open cockpit
and never looks back.

In a quiet corner
under a naked tree
a satyr sits and plays his pipes.
The music weaves all around the painting,
twists around a girl
dancing in veils.

The man who dreams all this
pulls at his covers,
sleeps at the bottom of the painting.

The man who painted this
died in his dreams.

The painting of his dreams
rests on an easel
in the dim museum corner.
Past closing time, past the turning out
of lights, the people in the painting
listen to their own noise.

Colette Inez

Two Poems

OVERVIEW, CHOICE

I put my heart
to looking for your voice
on film,
granular reels, cluster of vowels,
the filmclips in a canister.
Your voice said ahem.

I had cast you as a Sultan,
the soundtrack hummed our names,
sirocco, Algiers, zodiacs turned.
I was your singing Nubian
blue-skinned as a seal.

Overview, wide. I hear the whir.
There's the scene where you sing
Mustafa and his Astrolabe.
Here's the scene where I ride
to the fringe of your oasis

and you sweep me inside
the tent of your realm,
my body like a dune
collapsing under hooves.

Steeds. A shot of sky. The camera pans
the caravan.

Blots on a screen moving in frames.
What was your wish, the Caliph asks.
A dream of water, my low voice blurs
trailing pale cracks in the sand.

LISTENING TO DVORAK'S SERENADE IN E

Everything has ripened,
the oranges glisten
in their sharp worlds,
the apples have broken
their juice
in my mouth,
I am alone at the edge
of all the gold seasons,
a tide of clouds
bearing me home
like a migratory bird.

And this bright music
shaping dancers
on a bitter dust of roads,
divining rods
that point
to a further distance:
stone, water, stone.

Dowser, find my deep stream.
Builder, make my house
to last
in the ochre heart
of the falling sun,
in this shining harvest.

Carol McCormach

RIDING TO BED WITH THE EMPIRE BUILDER

Shinny up, mount
and settle, the black ribs
divide your knees, the sinuous flanks
stretch back, now you're beginning, raise the blind
on a violent moon, a glazed sea, snow on the Badlands
flowing east, breaking against the black brow, swirling
around you, under your buttocks the engine croons and rocks you
westward almost to sleep but always
you wake at the lip of a dream, the moon on the blanket, your
arms dark
on the luminous sheet like twigs in the snow, and feel the beast
below you shudder, a one-night bed
through the one-horse high seas, whistle stop, thistledown,
seckisee seckisee

Linda Pastan

LEAVING HOME

I take a giant step north,
Mother, may I?
No, you may not.
I take three baby steps.
Mother, may I?
I give up a green forest
for trees the color
of fool's gold.
Mother, may I?
Fool, you may not.
I take an umbrella step
and it is raining
leaves. They drift

through my hands
like migrant children.
I read their crumpled palms,
they have no life lines.
I take four giant steps.

Mother, may I?

I follow a trail blazed
in paint, broken white line
broken arrow north.
They call it Indian summer,
Indian given.

I take six scissor steps.

Mother, may I?

No, you may not.

I tip my head back
for the final drops of sun
and feel the cold—a blade
at my bare neck.
And I am caught moving.
And I am sent
all the way
home.

Michael Sofranko

TURNING OFF THE PRESIDENT, I SIT SILENT

It is clear November freezing.
The moon, white glass, half full.
Light spills out on the clouds that pass,
men with big stories, going to war, moving at night.

The spare boughs of the elms on this street
rise and fall as lovers sleeping.
Across the street the neighbors are anxious;
you, next to me, breathe easily in the dark.

The night news makes its way around
the block and back again.
The wind is less certain.
It pushes a thousand stories between us,
spayed and scented, entering the room
and staying there.

The bones, well fed, are still.
Only when no leaf or other thing
moves can I hear their mingling.

Tonight there is no talk among them.
The war grows, stone by stone.
The clouds roll, so many I can't count them.

Bruce McAllister

THE RETARDED BOY OUR PARENTS SHOULD HAVE HAD

I promise I will sit
in the aluminum dinghy

head resting on the orange cheek
of a big life jacket
soft against mine.

I will hold the pole
without a sound
fish hookless, safe
there in the middle of your living-room floor.

I will let you hug me
without understanding.
I will let you feed me in that fog
your voices like horns.

People will come to sit
on the sofas, those docks
like brushed velvet. They will see

how good you are. Your goodness
or my knees, connected to my smile
by clear fishing line
when I run in dreams

will make the women cry
in their cars, going home
asking God
for a world like ours.

Henry Morrison

A BALM FOR ENNUI

The worst dogs
clutching their throats in mid-bark—
you, you, you, an endless address
loaded with every zip code on the map:
finding yourself, in dogs, is your
kind of destiny.

The sleek and naked murderess
slashes the knife through her night table
laden with concoctions of yesterday's wind, tomorrow's dust.
She has no tomorrows to wait for. You
are a feather on her wind, blown end-to-end in the hourglass.
Your time is a grain of sand, perhaps, a universe.

That dog is you. *She*, barking her name,
is you. Destinies pile up, sure as cigarette butts.
Accumulate: that's the lesson—names, winds, whole
atmospheres, a universe, a place to be. Dolls
to slash knives through. Voodoo on snap-together plastic souls.
At last, your turn to bark.

Kathryn Snyder

JOB'S WIFE

Day after day he sits in his ashes
moaning like a lawyer for judgment:
I ask, is he the only man?

Our sons lie broken on the sand;
they will not chase their straying sheep
in summer pastures: their wives wail
at night (I hear them) on the empty couches.
Our daughters do not sing beneath the yew trees
at their spinning; they will not dance,
heavy with child, their hair scented with almond.

Was Satan's wager worth these?

My heart had room for many children;
let it go. I do not ask for life.
I am not Sarah, would not laugh
if angels came to me;
I would drive them from my tent with spittle,
hack my belly with knives.

My children's father is beloved again,
awaits new babes from strange wives
in the house of women. Sheep and cattle
flock to him, gold rings and oxen console him.

Let God send the world to Job!
I will trade tongues with Satan
and eat grass in the wilderness.

I curse to speed my dying.
I have heard my children's voices in the hills.
I have heard the rattle of dice from heaven.

THE BURN

John Unterecker

A tiny scar just off the life line:—a kind of cucumber, $\frac{3}{8}$ inch long, $\frac{1}{8}$ inch wide.

'Call it stigmata.'

'Not on your life—off center.'

'Call it a cigarette burn.'

At 37,000 feet, land edges in:

9:15:

wrist wrong.

(It is dusk in Ireland, afternoon in Labrador.)

Change time.

Shed:

cover/uncover

Ten hours: I have shed Sligo by two days, Mountrath by one:

'I am beginning to shed Dublin.'

(Patrick Street:

St. Patrick's.

Goodbye, Swift.)

—to remove a covering (as skin) / a lean-to (flimsy as faith)

'Shed of God'

motor idling

door slam

'Write.'

Nobody's home.

'Keep time,' I say to my wrist,

and it listens to Greek dances on a Donegal field,
night voices by a Connemara lake.

(The dancer is the song inside my wrist:

I know that dancer's name:

grace is a gesture we must learn to bear.)

Friends, I have lost faith:

37,000 feet straight down:

I fly on artificial wings,

mine gone.

'Burn this,' I think.

It will explode.

I saw a barn burn once,

a flare against the Pennsylvania night.

I was young:

a kind of gathering, embers

swaying pell-mell toward black.

My reach is emptiness.

In a week, the scar will be gone:

an absence burning the palm of my hand.

Who doesn't press his mouth against fire, then lick the wound, flying home?

ABNORMAL SONG

If a songbird is raised without
hearing the song of his species,
he will develop incomprehensible
vocal sounds never heard in nature.

For the reader

Tired of our own voices asking
always the same question, bluff song,
the same preen in small talk,
bright feathers of the dialect

of longing, we learn less from birds
than we might have wished.
Gone to listen in a scrubbed field
in simplifying winter how less cold

a white-crown sings the day,
we don't hear normal song.
He's learned another melody
in tanner shrubs, his fellows singing

lower notes here over the hill.
He's never heard his own voice, may be,
and never modifying his glib whistle,
he's lone, outlined, in the leafless

oak tree. Awry as a bud
in the silver air. What are we to do?
The singular voice in the wind
falling on dead ears. Oh,

we cannot look openly
into each other's eyes. Neither dominant,
we look at a neutral place a few inches by
our faces, rock on our feet, breathe slant.

The bird warbles and warbles and warbles.

THROUGH THE DARK

Midnight is a place,
a town you hitchhiked through
in the dark. The fields beyond
the ditches recede, locked up with night.
Berries hang on roadside vines, their shadows
and yours twisted by moving headlights;
they are your black jewelry, amulets among thorns
as long as fingers
you cannot see, but sense, the way,
turning in the dark,
you sense her breasts
and her hands sleeping, dreaming of becoming
rabbits, stung by the dark
of moons.

HIGH AND DRY

After they have eaten
Your friends will leave you
Alone and drunk, and the night
Still young. They have to get up early,
They say as they pour you
The last of the bourbon
By way of apology. You want to dance,
You say, getting up and putting on your coat,
Looking for your keys.

They think you will sleep
When they leave, promising to call
In the morning. But you will sit up
Half the night and watch the moon
Through the black trees. You will think
Of a poem like this one. It will be

No better than friends. It will be unable
To say goodnight or make love.
The poem, like the night,
Will leave you
Too tired to sleep
Or write.

Mark Moe

BLIZZARD

At first we compare it
to ourselves: silent, evasive,
wishing to be left alone.

We stand by the dark panes
guarding the light, the wives,
the children already lost in sleep,
the listless cats who cannot save us.

Toward the end we begin
to wish for less: a few stars,
a tree stripped to the veins,
the sound of chains and water.

Afterward
we drift out around our homes
in small boats of silence,
waving our shovels

like the sweaty exiles
waved their torches on returning
to the dark islands that had suddenly disappeared.

Henry Carlile

Two Poems

THE NIGHT CAT

The black cat climbs onto one of the seats
of the upside-down canoe and sleeps there purring.
The sky is his sea where fishbirds swim.
In his dream he hears their watery voices.
Perhaps he catches a few—the cardinal
a bright red snapper, the shark-colored dove
whose voice is like the tunneled wind.
Their feathers overlapped like scales drift away
from his raking paws, through the riptide of his bite.
In the cat's world, everything is reversed, the sun
rising, sinks deeper into the sea,
illuminates the depths of his dream with refracted
light, glances off the hull of his ship conveyed
at blinding speed as he rests, an inverted Viking
prince on the first of nine passages to Valhalla.
The cat will wake, climb down from his throne
and walk blinking into the light.
The world will come right again as he slinks yawning
over the snow, beneath which mice, temporarily snug,
tremble as the night passes over.

O°

Already he appears to disintegrate,
head wrenched in profile,
barely enough snow to cover
the juncture of wings, breast and head,
a shred of oak leaf stuck to his chest,
the skeleton's outline rising
through a pulp of orange and gray down,
and all around him spears
of dead grass, twigs, and shredded leaves
aim through the snow.

His feet, maple twigs
with curved shiny nails,
have simply let go.
He seems more fossil than recent casualty
failing into the landscape.
Or else the emblem of a defunct
European state
on the tattered background of a flag.

Only the powder-blue primaries
retain something of the speed
and curvature of flight,
as though flight's cunning alone
could hurl the whole mess,
skin, feathers and bones,
flaming into orbit and so oppose
this blind separation of powers.

Helen Dickinson

Two Poems

BEINGS

Why prize anything out of sentiment for the event?
Things themselves are better than souvenirs.

Teapots, beer bottles, hammers, old clocks—
not for the weddings, not for the salty grip of hands
now gone, not for the moon struck twelve—
these ghosts, though mattering, come, go.

Curves, colors, the weight and feel of the once-imagined
thing, though, these stay.

And minds that patterned
clay, sand, dull metal into these forms,
outlasting factories of thought,
also stay, silent and crafty, here.

WALKING THE GHOSTS

Here they come again, the goon squad, up your stairs
to rattle you out of your sleep, trick you into the long ride
in the country, the shuddering walk on the waterfront,
past Lady Macbeth on a meathook.

You were good all day, except for your goat-footed heart.
You didn't rat on anyone. It was a long hot day, forging
the letters, stashing the unmarked bills, garroting a pigeon.
You helped eat prayers for breakfast. You coughed up for the family.

Why you? They ain't talkin', them over-coated thugs,
them hooded red-eyed hags, them runts. Why can't some cool
blue cop nab you in broad daylight, show you a warrant?
You'd sing then. They could shut you up in the slammer—clang!

You'd come clean, inside. Barred up, you'd write
the horse's mouth book, tell how your brain got rotten:
experts misguided you. Screwed loyalty—your only crime—
was primal. People would be human, understanding.

Well, Mac, these freaks aren't human. Sharp at two a.m.—
police are in the coffee shop, the guard is busy changing—
they click-toe up, pick, claw, splinter your door down.
They're up on the bed, slathering your face, mauling and pawing.

They stamp on your chest, ramp on your belly like incubi,
romp with your tender phlebotic leg. Their tails
beat you like black-snake whips, rubbery hoses
cracking with welcome, as if you'd planned to skip.

You're theirs, you pulp, every night. Old pals,
old pets are like that. Never leave us, their loose eyes beg.
Slap! Schlup! Up! Up! That's how it is with ghosts, man.
They need their exercise.

THE QUESTIONS IN THE DARK AIR

We should have used double-headed nails on the lid,
and, like arkwrights, teak for its tight-nested grain.
We used idiot nails and the wide-open grain of young pine,
hoping memory might wander inside the boards and get lost.

Cruelty in the lost hours sang in back of us,
as we looked along your gray face like an old knotted
board, seeing so much kindling, so much debris,
so many unknown planes. Many days later we palmed
up damp sawdust to putty the pith of distance
and fill the checks.

On the final day our lapses before and after
hardened with the pitch, long after you hung in the garage,
joining the sap and smell of bruised
wood blooming in our soft throats.
We bundled you aside in wood, out of fear and respect,
the child tucked under the slate gray blanket of tarps.

We laid our tools aside then for rest at dusk.
At evening the stars dropped low, and the nettles
gathered strength from ocean winds to carve out dumb
rasping cries in the dark air, almost speech, as we slept.

At nightfall the wolves came down to dance
for the stranger you became, floating in our levels;
they raised in the dark air questions
that pierce wood, flesh or stone, that bury mechanics:
what would we have done?

THE POTATOES

Trapped alone for weeks in the cupboard
the ten pounds of spuds turned blind eyes
away from harsh light; a forest of albino

twines grew from these eyes, groping
in the plastic and wood for a check of soil,
a row to lie in.

They are all that is left this evening:
I move, knife in hand, and pry
them loose, whacking each tendril
and each eye off, without mercy.

Their eyes stare out of the brown sack.
Long after that evening I dreamt
of cunning small men who grafted those eyes
back with snippets of string and old rusty nails
clutched firm in palsied fingers.
I decide not to eat potatoes for awhile.

Now and then, at midnight and noon
a low soft whisper edges out with the skid
of door and panel, saying: "All we want
is a bit of earth to kiss,"
and the air is filled with the noises
of white roots groping snail-slow in hiding.

SELLING YOUR HOUSE

The brine tank on the water softener
fills up, spills over, the floor
growing sticky with salt. Bugs lick
in the dark corners. Then,
the blower motor on the furnace overloads,
starts its slow burning. Thin flames of odor
kindle in your nose. Then,
the water heater starts to leak
its rusty bottom spreading

well beyond middle age.
It's no longer a joke.
You take out your tools:
chewing gum, pencil, a bag of notes.
Now the water level starts to rise,
bubbling up under the floor:
the pipes have burst. The ceiling
catches fire, gas fumes struggling
for your throat. You brace yourself,
prepare for the explosion.
Meanwhile, upstairs, your dry wife is signing
the papers with the buyers,
smiling, holding up.

ALONE

There is something about loneliness
that keeps you riding your skin
like an elevator
up and down its empty shafts
looking for old hopes.
You watch the doors open and close,
people getting out or in,
but when you return
to any particular floor,
no one's there.

Love, could I woo you
into this conceit, imagine you long enough
to fix you there,
even a metaphor would do,
would be something more
than this clumsy isolation.
But as the door opens on every floor,
only pathos, the snot-nosed child
is there, shoving its sad way in.
I've lost you that far.

BUILDING A WORKBENCH

I suppose nails.
Some two by fours and a hammer.
Yes, I can imagine it.
I open the plans.
They are so simple a child.
I cannot read them.
They disintegrate in my clumsy
hands.

When I pick up the hammer
its head falls off,
leaving me with the stump.
The nails slip through my fingers
awkward, insincere.
When I raise my voice
against the wood,
it splits.

I'm sitting in the basement
with all the spells I cannot manage:
tape measure, plumb bob, T square,
my hands full of splinters,
nailing here, joining there,
furious now,
building my workbench out of thin
air.

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