Taffy-pull, you sugar heart, 
I unwrapped you like candy, 
bit into you with pleasure 
and savored the taste.

Taffy-pull, you tasted right — 
sweet satisfaction for a moment 
but I always wanted more 
and tried to recapture the first taste.

Taffy-pull, you put holes in my teeth, 
a bloat on my stomach, 
a drain on my mind 
and a blight on my heart.

You Candy, you heartless sugar heart, 
tempting me with satisfaction 
as brief as your sweetness.

— Diane Sampson
Eat me whole lazy carrot
— Paul D'Annunzio

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A Visit with Jecoba in the Woods

by Deborah Land

The girl left the village and ran into the forest one day after all the people laughed. She knew it didn't really matter but she wondered why her stomach felt wet and black inside.

The bowl that morning had fallen out of her hands and the meal had spilled into the dirt. If she had been watching her work, said her mother, instead of the young men... Everyone laughed.

Zerona ran. She knew the paths of the forest well and she knew where she was headed. Her friend would know that they were foolish for laughing. She would tell him that she hadn't been looking at the boys; their games did not impress her. He would believe her when she told him that she was watching the sandcrabs who walked sideways. She had counted six of them.

She approached his dugout slowly and began to wonder if her visit would not bother him.

"Come in, Zee!" She heard him say. She smiled and crawled inside the dark hole. For a moment the dark slapped at her but then the small fire made it slowly seep back into the edges of the Earth and she could see around the shadows.

"Hello Jecoba," she said. "They laughed again," she told him and she sat and stared down hard at the ground between her crossed legs.

"That makes you sad." said Jecoba. His bushy yellowed mustache joined his beard across his pressed together lips. "Why today?"

Zerona shook her head. "It doesn't matter, really. They don't know enough to hurt me." She sniffled. "Besides, we have other things to talk about. We have to get ready."

Jecoba laughed. "Oh, Zee. You are brave for one so small. Tell me. If your family doesn't matter, what does?"

She thought, searching for the answer.

Jecoba laughed again, a bursting, bubbling sound. "Remember when we met that day on the edge of the water?" he asked her.

"The day the geese came, I remember." she reached to take the piece of tangy fruit that he offered.

"Yes, the geese..."

He didn't say more and she pretended to be patient while she felt his thoughts fly around the little dwelling.

"Hm," he said finally, with a little start. He stood up stiffly and took three slow shuffles to the board that the racoon skin stretched around. Zerona watched as he scraped the fat from the inside-out pelt.

"Jecoba," she said softly. "What about the geese?"

"The geese? Oh," he shrugged. "What about them?"

"You started a story," she said.

"I did? I thought I was just remembering." He stopped his work and searched the air. "Yes, I was just remembering. You simply walked in on a memory, Zee." He took a breath. "I have lived many winters." He sighed. "I've grown old and tough, maybe wise."

"Very wise, Jecoba."

"No, Zerona, just very old." He turned, stood straighter, and she could see his shiny eyes through the darkness look into her own. "You are looking for magic answers found in stories, I think. There are no magic answers," he muttered. "Only stories." He went back to the rhythm of the scraping.

After a moment, she said, "Can I still come here, Jecoba?" Her voice squeaked and she whispered, "Do I bother you with my questions?"

Jecoba laughed. "If you follow your heart, and it brings you here, how can I turn you away? But please do not come to get answers. I cannot feed them to you."

"Where do I get them, then?" she muttered, pouting into her lap. She looked up quickly, fiercely. "I need to be nourished, and my family only gives me meal."

Jecoba stood up very straight and he seemed to fill the whole place. Already, Zerona was sorry that she spoke so rashly. He slowly turned to face her.

"Yes, your family gives you meal, young girl, and without it, you would die." Then gently he added, "It's all right, Zee. Some day you will know. Maybe not the answers that you think you want, but something else. Something without a name. That is why I cannot tell you." He shuffled over to her bowed head, and bent to kiss it. She looked up and the fire light made her tears shine.

"I am sorry, Jecoba," she said. He smiled at her.

"Dry your eyes now." he said, turning back to his work. "Does your family need your working hands before the dying sun?"

She nodded and sighed. "Yes, I must be going home now." She stood and even though there was room, she bent over to avoid the overhead Earth. "Next time," she said with new found cheer, "I will bring a basket of purple berries."

"That would be nice, Zee, but you do not need to bring a gift to come visit. I will see you when I see you again. That will be more than enough."

She nodded, but the cheer was gone and she felt like she had lost something that day, although she could not say what that something was. When she climbed out of Jecoba's hole, the sun stabbed her eyes and she wondered how she would ever be able to see again. She shut them and watched the purple designs shift and move inside her head. Then she blinked, and finally, she could see well enough to follow the path back to her dwelling.
Disturbances,  
and no one to tell them to.  
Today,  
sprung up like tired flowers,  
fresh and ancient with the earth's  
first breath . . .  
the sun stroking on and on  
its fingers to the snow and  
melting  
everything to liquid like  
a starved lover.  
Now the night closes  
and opens its lungs, breathing  
me in like a vacuum.  
Disturbances,  
and no one to tell them to.

— Patty Collins

La Despedida

(Translation)

The day declined  
and skyscrapers swallowed the sun.  
The full moon began to show  
and my love embraced me.

He touched my cheek  
in front of the church he gave to me  
A light caress  
and of Love, my love spoke.

Trembling at dawn  
I confessed the same to him  
and with his fleeting kisses  
my love — bid me farewell . . .

— V.G.
Smear Art

Donuts remained unsold. Smear art victims they soon would be called.

"What a lovely idea."

Sugar and grease in art can begin.

Art, the end of murder.

— Mark Tesoriero

It is the language of silence that I have nothing to say about and the twisted limbed trees, looming like corpses that keep me quiet. Sounds are only this empty house pulsing and a distant howl from some distant beast who sounds too much like I sound saying without words what I say about this language of January that hurts us both without deliverance, as silent as stone.

— Patty Collins
Noah’s Revenge

In a drunken rage against God,
Noah cuddled contently between silk sheets.
A bottle of wine drooled on the carpet.
Noah hiccuped and giggled
thinking of the rain that seemed
to tap dance on the window of his boat.
The phone rang.
Noah reached over his wife. Before he answered
she slapped his hand away and hiccuped.
They made love.
Soon after, someone knocked.
The juices of the rug seeped
in between his toes as he shuffled
to the door in his boxer shorts.
Noah dressed then stood at the door scowling.
The rain seemed to slap
against the window of his boat.
And in came the animals two by two.
Noah accepting two dollars a head,
and his wife stamping hands.

— Chris Motto

ASSIMILATE

Spending an evening
in the same room as
you
+ her
makes three
Is like lighting a cigarette
with two pieces of flint.
EXHAUSTING.
Is like taking a knife
and twisting it into my heart.
FATAL.
Is like pulling an all-nighter
with a pot of Sanka®.
FUTILE.
Is like reading a novel from cover to cover
starting at the end.
SENSELESS.
Is like watching re-runs of “The Brady Bunch,”
continuously for 48 hours straight.
ANNOYING.
Is like reading the same sentence
five times over.
DISTRACTING.
Is like putting off two French papers
until the very last minute,
and writing them in the 24 hour room
all night long.
A PRESSURE SITUATION.

— Keyo
As a Magnet I Breathe

I walk.
I am the walking
because the sky is red,
the red sky of dreams over
the lake between two
lands that
men call countries.
Because the walking I
become
becomes attached to
the road
shadows of land and lake
becomes attached
to the purple breasts of
mountains laughing
darkly somewhere about the
joke of
time.

As a magnet I breathe.
I become the breathing.
Everything comes to me,
becomes me
walking.

— Laura Molinelli
A Peach
  dangles in the sun
Radiant and new
Ripe and Untouched.

The Fruit
  coyly comes undone
Glistening with dew
to a hungry clutch

A Bite
  pierces supple flesh
Give, Give, Give your soul
There's passion in the Pain

A Pit
  spat out by the wretch
it's fruit devoured whole
Betrayed-lies in the rain

Warm core
  now covered with cold earth
Darkness, silence, solitude
Rots—
or seeks Rebirth . . .

— V.G.
Goodbye Innocence

Softly,
gently,
without knowing,
they changed
forever
with one
passionate,
stolen kiss.

— Lisa Malo

No Turning Back

Staring at the back of your head
as you sit in front of me in the class,
I close my eyes and remember —
the back of your head
the waves of your hair
tumbling sloppily over my pillow.

The back of your head —
water dripping
from caramel skin
over slick shoulders,
hot steamy water dribbling, dribbling down
your smooth slim back.

The back of your head —
messy off center part
twisted ringlets hanging down
as you strum your guitar.

The back of your head —
you sit on the edge of the bed
in Levi’s, bare backed, silent,
head hangs down.

The back of your head —
waking away from the table
at the bar
away from our fighting,
away from me.

The back of your head —
you step out of the car
not even saying goodbye.

Just can’t forget
The back of your head
earlier that night either
as we looked down at a mangled cat
bleeding on January’s dark highway.
We watched it die
along with us.

Right now, the back of your head
in front of me in class —
I want to reach out and just touch
but I stare
and write a poem.

— Lisa Kean
The Old Woman

Standing on line at Price Chopper.

eggs
milk
and
an
onion.

An old woman wobbles
yet I pass her by.
Why didn't I help her?
I thought she could manage.

Her eyes are old and worn.
She had slipped and fallen
and employees gathered around her.
The ambulance came.
The people at the check-out
lines avoided their eyes,
looking away from the ancient,
tired, frightened eyes.

But I looked at her eyes that
looked straight ahead.
Eyes of no future.
Eyes of wrinkled sad acceptance.

She is ninety, I heard her
tell the ambulance man,
and yes, she did have high
blood pressure.

I have just enough change
for the eggs
milk
coffee
and
onion.

I will eat well tonight
and the problems I have
do not compare
to falling down at Price Chopper
and needing and ambulance.

I walk my smooth face
out into the cold night,
moving swiftly.
Solid steps on cracked ice.
Weary

The parking lot is blocked by trees and the waves lap in the breeze. I turn my back to the smokestack and sit on a rock that earned its place in my memory, by facing a tree that our relationship has come to.

This tree grew right through rock. Rock that stretches as a lake-lapped shoreline. How far do the roots of this tree, a trunk diverging into two limbs with branches stretching everywhere, stretch? We made love to the lap, lap, lap of waves.

I think of it now, alone. Later I'll be in town and see my friends, men, and women and I almost fear I'll forget her for a while. And who's Mary and who the hell scratched her name in this rock I'm on?

And why didn't Biz and I just cut out our place and make it an Island?

— Martin Steinberg

Brother's Burden

A brother laid his head in the lap of a sister and felt the hearty, revealing rumble of her laughter. He said to the sister, “Your laughter is so full, so genuine. How can I, too, laugh such a laugh as you?” The sister rumbled again and answered, “When you want to laugh, forget for one moment that you are a brother. Laugh and laugh and laugh until you feel it wash the blood underneath your face-skin, pound down your tight stomach walls, and burst tears from your dried up eyes. When you can truly let yourself cry a genuine cry, remember that you are a brother: your own hearty, revealing laughter should come shortly after.” The brother tightly wrapped his arms around the sister's legs and closed his eyes. “I knew this sister,” he said, and a tear slipped out from under his eyelid.

— C. C. Ellis

the crippled woman speaks

he cracked me open and i lay curled and shivering expecting that i would be left i did not cry

he drew me out with gentle fingers his soft mouth on my hair willing me to breathe i cried out

— kim akins
A Message from the "American Red Cross."
To learn something about a man who knows nothing about mechanics and has to feel strange walking past a woman in a broken down car is to learn something about a man who misses a bus while writing a poem.

— Martin Steinberg

Ruth Mae's shoes leave a trail of prints in the dust coating the attic stairs. She carries a broom in her right hand to defend herself from the webs of the spiders who have taken possession of the stairwell. Her left hand clutches a flashlight which she hopes will frighten away any mice who may be living among the crates, boxes and tattered upholstery. The attic stretches across the top of the frame house, its ceiling following the contours of the roof. Ruth Mae can stand upright only in the center portion of the room. At each end of the attic are two fair-sized windows wearing yellowed lace curtains that once hung in the first floor parlor. That was before the same curtains had dressed the windows in Momma's second floor bedroom. A few rays of sun have managed to seep through the film of dust coating the window panes and spread themselves over the surface of an old dresser that she remembers once served a useful function in Momma's kitchen.

Momma is selling the house where she has lived for over thirty years. She says she is lonely rattling about among the drafts and memories. Ruth Mae knows her mother no longer has the physical stamina to care for the three-story sprawling building nor is her widow's pension adequate to cover the expense. She has requested her children to retrieve whatever they may have left behind. So, Ruth Mae, the fifth of Momma's dozen children and her eldest daughter, peers into the dim depth of the attic and wonders what she could possibly want in this clutter.

The attic seems so much smaller than the attic in her memories. She had felt safe up here with no need to carry weapons against cobwebs and mice. Up here, she and her younger siblings had a sense of freedom from the close supervision of Momma and Aunt Celia. They would arrange the odds and ends of old furniture and set up housekeeping with their dolls. Here they had staged plays written by Jacob and Ruth Mae. Their costumes were the old clothes stored in Grandma Stetson's black trunk. Ruth Mae's flashlight finds a square imprint in the dusty floor where the trunk, with its rounded top and leather handles and Grandma's initials, E. A. S. has recently stood. How like Rachel to get here first.

There is no point in looking for the books that filled the shelves of Father's law office. Momma has already given those to Jacob. Ruth Mae remembers the day Father had brought home those books and put them up here. After that the only book she can recall Father reading was his Bible. She had asked him why he did not go to work in the city anymore and her father had quoted a passage from Matthew about serving two masters and learning to hate one of them. The then, ten year old Ruth Mae had not understood what Father meant. She knew that Grandma Perry was very angry with him.

Life was different for Ruth Mae after that. Father worked for neighboring farmers and anyone else who needed a hired hand but there was never enough money for the things they had been used to, like new cloth for dresses. That fall, she had worn to school a dress that had been made over from one belonging to Grandma Perry. The soles of her shoes wore thin and Momma had made cardboard inner soles that had kept out some of the cold but not the
Momma had become thin and cross and spent a great deal of time lying in her bed with the window shades lowered. Aunt Celia had come to stay with the family and Grandma Perry stopped in everyday to give Aunt Celia orders. Ruth Mae had asked her aunt why Momma was sick and had been told “she’s in a family way” and she would not explain further. Ruth Mae approached her grandmother who had said, “Your Momma’s all tuckered out with the work and worryin’ and it’s all your father’s fault.”

Aunt Celia ran about in nervous circles and had no control over the children. Adam and Noah, the oldest, teased their aunt mercilessly. They would put ideas for pranks into the minds of the younger Jacob and Joseph who would end up being whipped by Father. Rachel and Rebecca quarreled more than usual and Ruth Mae ended up having most of the responsibility of caring for Moses, Samuel, David, and Solomon. When Father was home things were peaceful. The older boys behaved themselves and the sisters settled for making faces.

One day Grandma Perry had been upstairs with Momma since before breakfast and Father had been very late getting home for supper. Grandma Perry had come downstairs wearing what the Perry children called “her straightening out face,” the one she wore when she disciplined a child. She had walked up to Father as he was taking off his coat and said that she could well understand her son taking the good book seriously and being fruitful and multiplying but she very much doubted her daughter-in-law would make it though the Old Testament much less clear to the book of Revelations. That night Josiah had been born and he was Momma’s last baby.

Ruth Mae’s teacher had been Miss Ripley who was everything Momma was not at the time: healthy, enthusiastic, caring and she smelled so wonderful. Ruth Mae invented excuses to stand near her teacher’s desk so she could baste in the fragrance of her person. The teacher asked the class to write a composition about their plans for the future and Ruth Mae had written that she was going to be a teacher like Miss Ripley and smell as nice as she did. The teacher had drawn her aside and said she was glad Ruth Mae wanted to be a teacher when she grew up but she did not have to wait until she was grown to possess it. She knew better than to approach Father with such a worldly desire. He would scold her for not appreciating the plain soap someone just like Miss Ripley. She knew better than to approach Father with such a worldly desire. He would scold her for not appreciating the plain soap he provided for her use and quote scripture about appreciating what the Lord provided. She was about to put the bar of soap back on the shelf when Father walked up to Father as he was taking off his coat and said that she could well understand her son taking the good book seriously and being fruitful and multiplying but she very much doubted her daughter-in-law would make it though the Old Testament much less clear to the book of Revelations. That night Josiah had been born and he was Momma’s last baby.

Aunt Celia was always mopping. Ruth Mae had overheard Grandma Perry say to Father that Aunt Celia may have been hiding when the Lord passed out brains but she certainly had been in plain sight when He handed out the ambition. Father grew weary of Aunt Celia’s complaining about not being able to clean the kitchen floor properly when she could not move the dresser. He had the older boys help him carry it to the attic.

The dresser had not been in the attic very long when Ruth Mae was given the rare privilege of accompanying her father to Mr. Fiddler’s grocery store. While Father visited with the storekeeper, she had wandered among the shelves of merchandise. She had stopped at a display of soap, all arranged in neat stacks. She picked up an interesting oval-shaped bar that was wrapped in pink paper and held it up to her nose. At that moment she discovered her teacher’s beauty secret. She longed to have a bar of that lovely smelling soap and it seemed to her that possessing it would make such a difference in her life, make her someone just like Miss Ripley. She knew better than to approach Father with such a worldly desire. He would scold her for not appreciating the plain soap he provided for her use and quote scripture about appreciating what the Lord provided. She was about to put the bar of soap back on the shelf when Father called to her. As she turned toward him she had slipped the soap into her coat pocket and started for the front of the store where he was. She could think of no way to put the soap back on the shelf without being observed and did not know how to explain why it was in her coat pocket. She kept on walking toward Father and followed him out the door. She had even managed to smile at Mr. Fiddler as she passed him and felt very guilty because he was a nice man who gave the Perry children candy at Christmas time.
She walked behind Father on the way home. He carried the supplies he had purchased in a burlap sack flung over his shoulder. Her hand tightly clasped the soap in her coat pocket and she was thankful to be out of the range of Father's eyes. He had a way of looking straight through to your soul.

When they arrived home, Ruth Mae hurried to hang up her coat and help Aunt Celia get the supper on the table. All the time she hurried to and fro from the table to the pantry, she worried that one of her sisters would grab her coat in their haste to get to the outhouse and discover the soap in her pocket. She had been so nervous she could hardly swallow her supper. The worst part had been listening to Father's prayers. It had seemed to Ruth Mae that he would never say “Amen” and that every word of his prayer was directed at her. Only the fear of getting a whipping kept her from confessing what she had done.

Certain the household was asleep, she had stolen down the stairs to get the soap out of her coat and had been standing in the kitchen wearing her nightie with the coat in her hand when Adam walked in the back door. He asked her what she was doing up so late and she had blurted out something about going to the outhouse. She had stuffed her arms into the sleeves of the coat and bolted the back door. She had stood shivering in the woodshed waiting for Adam to climb the stairs and hoping he had not noticed that she was barefooted. Where was she going to hide the soap in the cramped room she shared with Rachel and Rebecca who were always snooping in her possessions? For want of a better solution, she had tucked the soap in her drawer under her clean underclothing and climbed into bed. All night she had tossed and turned certain that the soap was glaring at her from within the dresser drawer.

The next morning she had wished she was too sick to go to church and thought about pretending to be ill. Then she thought better of it knowing how worried Momma would be and how she would stay home with her and Momma liked going to church. It was the only time during her busy week that she got to sit down for a whole hour. So Ruth Mae filed into the small country church behind her brothers who followed Momma and Father. Each of the older children had a younger brother in tow and Aunt Celia brought up the rear. The family overflowed a pew so that some of them had to sit in the pew ahead of Father and Momma. Ruth Mae can still remember the feeling of the narrow, hard bench on her bottom and how glad she was that at age ten her feet could rest on the floor, and did not get all numb and tingly from dangling.

The sermons had been long but the Perry offspring paid attention because their father would be asking them questions about the pastor's message. It was part of the Sunday dinner ritual to discuss the sermon. Ruth Mae had watched the pastor wipe his sweaty brow with a large white handkerchief which he waved around in the air between wipes. His voice had gotten louder and louder until he was shouting “There, right there, is a sinner,” and Ruth Mae knew he was pointing right at her. She had burst into tears. The pastor had been surprised and had hastened to reassure the congregation that he had not been pointing at Ruth Mae. After all, he knew she was a good little girl but Ruth Mae knew differently. Good little girls did not walk out Mr. Fiddler’s store with a bar of soap in their coat pockets. Although the concept of burning in hell had been real to her, the thought of Father's whipping was more real. Hence she did not confess her guilt.

The next day she had found an opportunity to take that terrible, wicked soap out of her bedroom and hide it in the attic and in a short time she forgot about it.

Christmas was coming and the house had filled with the delicious smell of the good things that Aunt Celia and Momma were preparing for the holiday. Aunts, uncles, cousins, and Grandma Perry were coming for the dinner. Among them would be Ruth Mae’s favorite relative, Uncle Jack. Father did not approve of his wife’s brother because Uncle Jack smoked cigars and told loud somewhat risque jokes and he was very fond of female persons. But Momma always convinced Father that if her bachelor brother did not spend the day with her family he would only spend it getting drunk trying to forget his loneliness.

Santa Claus was another personality Father did not invite to his home. He did allow his children to hang stockings on Christmas Eve reminding them to thank the Lord for what they found in them. Each stocking would have an orange, some nuts, candy furnished by Mr. Fiddler and one small gift. That Christmas Ruth Mae had pulled a small oval-shaped package wrapped in pretty pink paper from her stocking. She had run to her father and threw her arms around his neck and sobbed as if her heart was going to break.

“What is the matter?” Father had said, as he unwrapped himself from his daughter’s embrace, “I saw you admiring that soap in Mr. Fiddler’s store. Thought you’d like some.” He shook his head and murmured, “Girl children.” All that day she had carried the soap with her and she had slept with it under her pillow for a long time. Finally, prodded and teased by her sisters, she had used and enjoyed her gift from Father and shared its luxury with her sisters.

The adult Ruth Mae bends down and opens the bottom drawer of an old battered dresser, its missing leg replaced by a block of wood. Could it still be here after all this time? At first all she sees in the drawer is a pile of shredded paper where some mouse momma has made her nest. Gingerly she pokes about in the paper shreds with the broom handle and uncovers what is left of a small, pink oval of soap. It is full of tiny holes made by mice teeth.

“Did you find anything up here you want?” It was Momma standing in the attic doorway.

“Yes!” Ruth Mae calls to her, quickly shutting the dresser drawer, “I want this old dresser, Momma. The one that used to be in your kitchen.”

“Why, my dear child,” Momma moves closer for a better look, “Not that old thing. I told your father to throw it out years ago. It is nothing but junk. How about that settee over there?”

“No, Momma,” Ruth Mae feels she owes loyalty to the old piece of furniture that has sheltered her childhood sin all these years. “I want this old dresser. I want it exactly the way it is.”
sunday evening, 1976

imagine
my father sitting
on a leather sofa
smoking a pipe

blowing
rings around the room
i try to catch them
like bubbles in the wind
they disappear and i am left

holding nothing
but holding everything
in my hands

on sundays
they are clasped in prayer
and i light a candle

for my mother

who is dying
and i don't understand

but i am told
to count my blessings
and my rosary at night
the lights are off
but i stay awake staring
at shadows on the ceiling

— Carol Foley
Symphony in Three Movements

Movement One

The moon first stretched then settled in the sky,
Preparing for the evening. Quiet and mild
It looked upon the countryside like an eye,
As if the land was its young and resting child.
The little girl cuddled between her sheets
And listened to the symphony that God
Conducted outside. She hummed, out loud, the beats,
While peepers plucked, and frogs came in with odd
Tunes and hopped from pad to pad. The grass swayed back
And forth, waltzing to movement one. And fire-
Flies, like ushers, would flash a light in the black-
Ened house to escort the small buzzing choir.
The little girl slept. A gentle breeze went by
And stopped. The moon settled and stared like an eye.

The Instruments

They strum upon their wooden bass, and in
Reply it howls out a lonely tune;
And all the other strings vibrate within
While making love to one another. Soon
The flute will float and purr above the rest
Linger ing behind like the sweetened scent
Of the Soprano’s breath. He exceeds her quest.

The Note

Like black little insects they bang and clash
around the page, scurrying about to arrange
themselves in harmony. The notes just crash
in two-four time, and then on two exchange
a line. A tie tiptoes across the page
nudging the rest that places a beat upon
the half note. Beethoven’s fifth breaks out in rage
as little dots play musical lines upon
the scale. A trill and sudden urge to run
seizes the notes and off the page they go!
Now Maestro leans and twists and moves for one-
ee and a two-ee wishing that the show
was done. They jump back up onto the stand,
in place, they bow and shake the Maestro’s hand.

— Chris Motto
A dose of your own

I guess in verse it'd be said best —
to you and yours I only jest.
At times you think I'm far too grave.
(It's better than being a foolish knave!)
At once a joke is turned on me —
I stop and think of what I see.
A joke's been played, that's not so bad —
But if I'm quiet you think I'm sad.
If I reply with equal intent
I quickly meet with sharp dissent.
What's the deal? It's all a joke!
But fed it back, we tend to choke.

— Saul Taupin
Losers Weepers

Is this a game?
Finders keepers, losers weepers?
I feel like a game piece,
moving around the board,
but always landing on a space
to lose my turn.
When will it ever be my chance
to win?
Sometimes I think I'm ahead of the game,
and I have you
but I just don't have a poker face
because I always go bankrupt
and lose you,
only to find you've become
the winnings for someone else
with a better hand.

— Lisa Malo
Red Hair

It worries me
that I never have
fights with anyone,
that all my words
go in to poems.
This must be
why
I had to dye
my hair
red.
*
I have a
vision in
my head
that has a
lot to do with
love,
and not much
to do
with fights
or poems
or red hair.
*
It is of us
lying against
the sandy belly
of the desert,
picking stars
from each others
hair,
and breathing the
imperfect moon
all night,
until we sleep,
holding,
knowing.

— Laura Molinelli

hungry power

you have called me
carnivorous
i could sink my sharp
teeth deep into your flesh
and tear your limbs
from their proper sockets
watching while the bloody insides
oozed down
i could chew on your flesh
devouring the tender sweet
spitting out the tough gristle
leaving you on the hot sand
for the vultures to pick
i am powerful
my fingers my jaws my calves
are muscular and aching with strength
i am powerful
but before that
i will lick your wounds
seal them with my lips
hold you on my hard back
hold you in my strong arms
i am powerful

— kim akins
Ghost Walker

I walked through the streets of my town.
The town where I grew up.

The streets, silent, trees against sky.
I saw the house where my grandfather lived,
a big house upon a brown hill.
I walked up this hill.
Grandfather's house winking
through the trees.
The road was steep,
the air fresh on that November day.
I had been away for awhile,
and the past engulfed me
like a dull flame — remembering
scenes of years ago
in the schoolyard, fighting off bullies,
running to Miss Wilson’s class,
drinking first beers in the fields.
Always vomiting.
My friends always laughing.

Feeling my first clumsy passion
in the sixth grade.
Fumbling in awkward silence
at the movie house.

I paused upon this street
in my town
and looked back.
The street behind me remains
unchanged: a long row of houses
with white picket fences,
Big Wheels, debris, and
plenty of hedges.

The prebyterian church on the corner;
its steeple points to the sky,
needle of eternity.

The school kids play on
the swings behind the school,
kindergarten to fifth,
The same school where I
fell off the monkey bars
that day and looked up to
a ring of big faces leering

"Are you alright Stephen?"
Foggy head.

But I felt removed, as I resumed my
walk upon the street in my town.
I turned the corner
and before me was a house
I had remembered from years ago,
when it was full of laughing, happy children,
knocking, stomping in a home,
mother screeching through the din.

But now a for sale sign full of holes
and a broken shack with its doors wide open.
Black holes of windows.
The house of the past is a broken shell
and its spirit has flown.
I am a ghost walker
and this
is no longer
my home.

— Stephen Rhodes
May 13th, for what it's worth

A sunny day...
seven teenagers squashed into
a beat up Chevy Nova —
laughing, joking, singing,
making attempts at harmony.

There's sweaty arms and squashed feet,
one guitar too many.
Light brown ringlets shine in the sun
darker brown waves blow in the wind
of an open window.

Then later, seven youths
stand on a sandy shore.
Three guys splash in the lake
and try to balance
on a slippery log.
Water drips
from their clinging Fruit of the Looms.

We toss frisbees
and sneak off to pee in the woods.
walk down a sandy trail
and a stranger takes a snapshot
of us seven crazies
as we kind of run
kind of skip
kind of dance
down the trail.

We settle down
on picnic tables
sing "Rocky Raccoon" and
watch the warm sunshine
turn into the cool dark of night.

A slow car ride home...
the evening summer breeze blows.
A soft hand presses against another.
Ringlets and waves
intermingle for a moment —
the two in front exchange a kiss
at the 7 eleven
as we stop for gas.

All of us lean our heads back against the car seat
and feel the cool breeze
against our flustered skin.
In our minds music sings,
water splashes
frisbees fly
and someone hums.

— Lisa Kean