Grandmother's Story

When I was small, the grandma said to me:
Sit here and hear a story grown old.
I climbed into her lap (What else was I
To do?) and listened. Her ancient voice hummed —
A spinning wheel. The yarn fell from her mouth
Well-spun and even. She was no novice,
The woman knew this work. I caught the strands
— One strand, so long — and wound it round my arm,
Occasionally dropping a loop. I yawned.
After forever she was done. My arms were
Tired! I wanted to go and stretch but that
Dumb yarn and grandma's arms held me there still.
Weave a rug with it, the grandma said.
Of course I didn't know weaving, so I sat:
Awkward with yarn wound round and round my arms.
Mom winked and said: (put it in a trunk for now).

— Jennifer Gibbs
look, I am not in the shadows
have not been for some time
look, with your eyes, ears,
mouth and tongue
there is not illusion here, this
woman this child, is of flesh and
bone, if you cut it with a knife
there is blood, I know
I have seen the scarlet drops
I have felt them hit the earth
they make no sound, only echo
out their past lives, so that
some distant strangers, dreaming
might remember.

— Susan Landau-Markowitz
Fall

Back to the roots of
The earth from where you were grown.
Change and grow again.

— Paul D'Annunzio

Haiku

Living without floors,
squirrels hop on the frosty
evergreen branches.

— Martin Steinberg

Cycle

Where is the sunshine?
Rain seems unending, but the
Cat chases her tail.

— Jennifer Gibbs

One Senryu

Shifting clouds, do you
Form a pattern other than
The design I see?

— Jennifer Gibbs

Freedom in Idleness

Hardened students, system's de-vo-tees,
we commit the act of idleness.
Laden with guilt, we set aside
those prescribed, printed pages,
only to be what we need and want to be,
who we honestly are —
soft, patient, and creative.
You pick-n-sing;
I listen-n-write,
with natural, wanderless attention;
continuing in "idleness" until
your song is sung,
my poem done,
then back to printed pages.

— C.C. Ellis
Lists

Yes, I know and so do you; something isn't quite right between us anymore. Well is it you or is it me who continues to say the cutting criticisms, who mildly mocks what the other says and does? You tell me how I'm wrong, I tell you why you're rude — and the lists go on. I guess one of us could "tear up" these lists of why we don't like each other's style anymore.

But the lists go on and on and on. I supply the materials for the lists, and so do you. We write things like — "Why I Detest the Things You Say and Do", or, if one of us is feeling especially ambitious, "Why the Things We Both Used to Stand For, the Thoughts and Ideas We Used to Share Are No Longer the Same."

We sit with stacks in front of us, ready to begin our lists. And then you start; you draw sheet 1. You think back to all those times when you said, "Oh yeh, you're right after all" when really you wanted to blurt out, "You're wrong, I'm right. I'm tired of you. Just go away ... for good."

'Negative Feelings I Have Always Felt About Us But Never Had the Guts To Share — Well Now I Do (here goes ...) and that's Sheet number 2. You pull more sheets and make more lists. You look over your shoulder and watch me sitting at my desk, my body firmly planted into my chosen seat of discontent.

We make our lists, like you, except when you stuff those invisible paper lists into your head, to be shuffled around and some discarded, I etch my lists right onto my brain. That's why, you see, I can't toss my lists around my head like you, nor do I spew them out at you the way that you aim yours at me — all crumpled and distorted from being crunched inside your head so long. My list is printed, stamped and scrawled upon my skull's lining. I can't just push EJECT like you. That's why the ink keeps building up; that poison leaked out when it first was up inside my brain. It spits out every now and then so that the junk wouldn't clog my brain and cloud my thoughts. Well now the ink spills out every day. There's just too much up there. The lists keep going in and ink keeps spewing out.

Funny how it never disappears; you'd think the lists would be gone by now — but no — that ink just gets more and more smudged — been smudged so long I can't even read the lists anymore; they're still there, though, etched into that soft, grey matter of mine, making it mangled and mushy too; it's not as sharp as it used to be.

And still I make my lists and watch you make yours too. You see me hold my pen but you can barely see above your mountain of crumpled sheets that surround you.

I glance over at you.
The ink drips beneath my lids and I can barely see your face at all anymore.

— L. Kean
This light rain
falls soundlessly
softly soaking the earth
and running, jumping, dancing
over the black top.
In the light of the street lamp
I see the swarms
of raindrops
against the newly
darkened sky.
Tumbling gently, slowly swirling
almost like their
colder cousin,
whose name must
not yet be
whispered.

— Deborah E. Land
He Thought We Were Buffalo

It was time to take a train
because a shiny silver box of guitars
was howling honky-tonk
in the sun smoke of a cold cigarette room.
Because yesterday some people wrapped in
warm autumn clothes ate apples
and did balancing acts on rotten railways
because they plucked milkweed pods
and tossed their whiter silver insides
to the cool temples of the sky.

So we got on a train,
tripped over the purple umbrella
of our imagination,
and paid the guy with the gun.
The many colors and textures of America
slid by, and sometimes beneath
the thin paper lids of our eyes.
Remembered images made no sound,
They just hung there before us . . . dreaming . . .
dripping and they did not die,
You know . . . they did not die.
The guy with the gun shot us,
because he thought we were buffalo . . .
and we all exploded back into yesterday.
Back with those warm autumn clothes
and apples and rotten railways.

As we lay there on the tracks,
thinking we were dead,
the white silver insides of the milkweed pods
settled like wings on our thin paper eyelids.

— Laura Molinelli

Just A Cycle?

Radiantly he caressed across the water,
sparkling all the way to the shore.
With hope he pierced brightly through
the clouds.
Crowds gathered, waited, and then with
splendor, he appeared, then went. The
crowd went with him. For the crowd had
called it the end.

Yet I knew it was just another beginning.

A black velvet carpet covered with an
endless ocean of pearls, slowly emerged
to take his place. Among them, one larger
and more brilliant, his sister. This too
would come to pass, his sister would
slowly and peacefully bow to her brother.
Once again, The Beginning.

Then once more, they would gather to
watch, yet only with short and brief
wonder. For he was only good for pictures,
the crowd thought. Still, I could see what
many eyes could not. What grace and beauty
he endures, this creation the lord has
given us.
It pleases me greatly that man can not
possess him, for if man could, he would
surely fall to ruin.

— Robert Anthony Stilwell
Sorting Out (Memories of Minden Ave.)

We didn't know what we were looking for
But some meaning was found
No matter all the Bullshit
And all the words we tossed around.

Maybe we were looking for a way in
Or at least an easy way out,
But we were too small to judge
And never questioned our doubts.

We couldn't see what we were thinking of,
Too busy trying to analyze
Trying to act all grown up
That we never stopped to realize

That some things change
While others only act that way.
Someone surely gone for good
And others know they'll stay.

— Vince Priblo

The One Wild Red Eye

I've seen your one
wild red eye
in its drunken wandering
Wondering why I am watching
The slow, shaking
head.
Slow
Shaking yellow sunhead,
and the quick glancing away . . .
What? Why are you seeing me?
Go away stay.
Oh red yellow wasted head,
Burnt and windswept stretching over
face and soul.

I have touched you with my fingers
under stumbling, shaking nightskies.
Oh shit I love your swirling stars . . .
I love the way you crumble,
and throw up on my mother's car.

— Laura Molinelli
The Last Night in Dublin

Christ was crucified three times on the wall of a falling down building in Dublin. Three wooden crosses, unintentional passports into international holidays, for . . .

The Indian man, who was loudly chewing his bread . . .

The girl from Hong Kong, who had a lovely green apple . . .

The Germans who were solemnly planning their route.

But I was going the other way, and I felt the different tides of our journeys, crashing together at the bulwark of time.

Oh, god the radio was fading out and the ferry waited all night long in broken bottles of empty shady streetlamp docks, for drunks and harpoon toting sea skippers of a thousand years ago.

There was something ringing in my ear, It was too close for me to hear.

— Laura Molinelli
what will happen when i go blonde?

i will scald the color
from my night hair
the heat will flow fluid
from a brightly colored bottle
scattering the darkness
into corners and into the earth
leaving me shining
warming
the day will shine from my eyes
they all will turn to see
their eyes will be blinded by the light
and it won't matter anyway

— kim akins

Dead-End Street

How's life on your Dead-End street?
Can you afford nice things to eat?
How's your boring, stagnant life,
And your loud mouth, pink slipper hairpin wife?
Are all your dreams still incomplete?
Is keeping happy still a feat?
Does the crusty-eyed poodle still keep guard
Of the Pink Flamingos in your yard?
Are you getting fat in your lounge-a-matic,
Watching black and white football static?
How're your plastic ducks, your ceramic cat,
And your cracked and faded welcome mat?
As for me, I live in an alley-way,
I pick my nose to pass the day,
I use a newspaper for a sheet,
And I wish I lived on your Dead-End street.

— Jeff Queen
Spear Meant, Intaglio, Daniel Nisbeth
magic shoes

you are no one of
any great importance
yet you have the magic
shoes
of electric blues and neon
sea greens
you tie on your magic
shoes
that can lift you let
you reach the earth let
you feel the sky those magic
shoes
shining shimmering electric blues
neon sea greens you fly
on waves knowing you have magic

— kim akins

The Shopping Day
by Mary Kraus

Nadine's hands were sweating so badly she was sure the handle of the cart would be rusty by the time she finished shopping. Looking down, she noticed her knuckles, whitened from pressure, standing out so boldly on her brown hands. She couldn’t stand shopping, especially with her mother. She was different than everyone else there and they all knew it.

“Are we gonna be much longer?” she asked her mother who walked behind her. “We’ve been here for over an hour.”

“No, we ain’t,” her mother answered back. They were walking through the fabric section, her mother picking at the bolts of cloth, always taking a few seconds longer to look at the ones with flowers. “Do you like this one? It would make a pretty dress.”

“No, Mommy. Flowers ain’t me and you know it. I want a plain color dress for graduation.” Her high school graduation, it was only a few weeks away. Her mind wandered through images of school. Being one of the few black girls in the small, Catholic school was hard enough, but being unliked by any of her classmates was worse. The other black girls — there were five including her — didn’t even like her. Nadine’s first day of school, they just stared at her and so she promised herself she would never be friends with them. After that, whenever any of them tried to talk to her, she would ignore them. They weren’t truly black, she thought, and wondered what it would be like to be black and be able to pull off the life of a white person so easily. That was where her mind would go blank, though, because she couldn’t fake being white. She’d tried once a long time ago but gave up.

It happened the first Sunday after they moved into their new house. She was thirteen then and her father had told her to act like everyone else in the nice, white picket-fenced neighborhood and she would be fine.

“But Daddy, I can’t do that. These people are white. How can I do that?”

“It’s only in your mind,” her father had told her. “If you feel different, you will be treated differently. The trick is not to feel different.”

“Okay, I’ll try not to feel like a black person,” she had snottily promised him. How couldn’t she feel different in a white neighborhood, she thought.

That Sunday they’d gone to church. The priest introduced them to the rest of the congregation expressing how wonderful it was to have a new family in their parish. And Nadine felt like he truly meant all the nice things he said and she even felt warmth at the clapping everyone gave her showing that they accepted her family.
When she went up to communion, she walked proudly behind her mother, father, and brother. They were the new family everyone was so happy to accept. After communion, she waited in line for wine. Consecrated wine, the blood of Christ, the first drink she would take in her new church. There was a woman behind her, probably her mother's age, around forty. After she took her sip, she wiped off the cup with the cloth the altar boy gave her and passed the chalice to the person behind her. The woman smiled at her but Nadine could see behind her smile. The woman was saying, “Thank you, but I'd rather not drink out of a cup a black girl has just touched.” And so she had realized that even if she acted white, no one would see her as that.

“Can we please leave soon?” she asked her mother again. “I wanna go home.”

“What's with you? We haven't even been here an hour and you wanna go home. We have to catch the sales while we can.” Her mother was wonderful at being able to talk louder than anyone around them when they went out places. She always said she never meant to but that always came after her daughter was embarrassed and shaking, wanting to leave wherever they were.

“Please. Mommy.”

“Please Mommy, what? Can't I talk while I shop?”

“Yes,” she whispered. “But do you have to be so loud? Everyone just heard you saying we're here for the sales.” Not that that was bad, she knew. On a Saturday morning, half the people shopping were probably there for the sales. But it was different for them. They wanted to buy the things on sale. They were smart shoppers. But Nadine knew that everyone would look at her and her mother and know that they had to buy what was on sale. They were dirt poor, black poor. At least that's what everyone else around her thought, she was sure.

They weren't really poor. Her father had a good job and they did live in a nice neighborhood. She had gotten a scholarship to high school but no one except her family knew that. She just didn't like the looks she got. When she was out in the stores she could feel everyone looking at her as if they knew everything about her and didn't like what they knew.

Her mother always shopped in these kind of department stores where everything was an imitation of some other brand, where everything was just one step lower than what all the other people she knew had. It was mostly out of habit, the girl knew. Her mother had had a rough childhood and so she just learned to shop in places like this.

When they reached the shoe section, Nadine stopped her cart and stared at her mother. She couldn't believe they were going to look at shoes, too. The realization that her mother could keep her in the store all day scared her. And she wanted out. Her body hurt from trying to walk proudly through the aisles, her head held high, not looking at anyone.
Going down an aisle of children's shoes, she looked down and saw a pair of rainbow sandals. They were rubber with red plastic loops to hold the toes in place. She'd had a pair of these shoes once. Her loops had been blue but they were the same rainbow rubber. She remembered back to a day when she'd been on the beach with her family. They were having a picnic and she had taken her ham sandwich down by the water to watch the waves roll over her toes as she ate. She loved the slurping noise the water made between her feet and sandals as she walked.

Another little girl was standing by the water that day trying to make a sand castle with a little metal bucket and shovel. Her body, pinkened from the sun, was the same as the pink bathing suit she was wearing. She had rainbow sandals on, too. They were the same as her own, Nadine thought, and so she told the girl with the bucket.

"No, they're not!" the girl shouted at her waving her shovel around in the air.

"Mine are the good ones. Yours are cheap. Look, you don't have the tag." Nadine looked down at her own sandals and saw that there was no tag. She hadn't noticed that before. The girl with the bucket pointed at her own feet showing the little white tag glued to the heel.

"Don't tell me I have cheap sandals," the girl shouted at her and flung sand into the air. The sand flew into Nadine's eyes and mouth and all over her sandwich. She had dropped it and had run back to her family a few yards away. She stayed close to her mother on the blanket for the rest of that day.

"Here, try these on," her mother was saying to her. She threw a pair of white sneakers into the cart. They were nice shoes, white leather with blue stripes on the sides. But there was no name on them, no tag.

"I don't like them," Nadine said and took them out of the cart. Her mother was already halfway down the next aisle so didn't hear her. When she caught up with her, she would tell her mother that she tried the sneakers on but didn't like the way they fit. She didn't feel like hearing her mother yell about how picky she was. She didn't want to hear her mother yell about anything in the store.

They had been shopping for at least an hour and a half by now, Nadine knew. She couldn't take it for much longer. There were people all around her, all different. She could see them steer away from her as they went down the aisles. She saw mothers grabbing the hands of their curious children and she knew that it was to avoid her. Out of sheer boredom she started to pick through a bin of socks. She noticed that whatever pair she touched wouldn't be examined again for a few minutes. She knew what they were doing but realized that most of the people probably weren't even aware of how they were avoiding all contact with her. But she was aware and that was what made her so anxious to get out of there—to get to her house where no one would look at her.

She wandered around with the cart going down empty rows so she wouldn't have to look at anyone or be looked at. She found her mother after a few minutes.

"Where've you been?" her mother demanded. "I'm walking around carrying all this stuff looking for you." Her arms were full with laundry detergent, some shampoos—the store's brand—and even a pair of the same sneakers she had thrown in the cart before. "You don't want new gym shoes? You were complaining all last week how your's were so dirty." Her mother didn't understand that she wanted new shoes but not from this store. She wanted to get them where everyone else at school got them. But she didn't say anything because she knew it would make her mother mad. She would let her buy them and then just keep them in her locker for the rest of the year. Maybe she would go home from school one day and say that her sneakers had been stolen.

"Can we leave now, Mommy? Are you done?" Yes, her mother was done and they could finally leave. But leaving was just as bad as staying because they would have to wait in the checkout lines. They would have to stand cart to cart with other shoppers, with the other shoppers who had been avoiding them all morning.

Nadine got in line and stared down into the cart. Nothing looked nice to her. They had picked out a lot of things but she didn't want any of them. Even the socks she had thrown in when her mother wasn't around, didn't look like they had in the bin. She didn't even want them anymore. She picked them out and put them on the table next to her along with all the other things customers had at the last minute decided not to buy.

There was a little boy standing in front of her. He was about five and had the rosiest cheeks she had ever seen. He was begging his mother to buy him a candy bar. She finally let him pick one out and, as he was eating it, he looked back to Nadine. She smiled at him. He was young enough to like; he didn't know how different she was yet.

Smiling, the boy broke off a piece of his candy, "Do you want some?" he asked her, trying to reach the candy up to her. She started to laugh and was going to say no thanks, maybe even ask his name, when his mother grabbed him by the collar and spun him away from her.

"Don't do that, Joey," his mother warned him. "You don't share with strangers."

With strangers like me, Nadine thought to herself. Did that woman think she was whispering when she said it or didn't she care if Nadine heard or not. For Joey's sake, she hoped that she was trying to whisper. But then again, Joey would be old enough to have those same thoughts himself soon enough.

Nadine started to take the things out of the cart to give to the cashier. Her mother came with a few last minute items. "Look! This was on sale!" she yelled, holding up a package of razors. She kept her eyes down on the things in the cart, not wanting to have to see everyone turn their heads to her mother and laugh. She wondered how her mother could feel so comfortable shouting like that. She must not see all of the people watching her. Maybe, after a while, you just don't care anymore, Nadine thought. But she didn't want that to happen, either. She doubted there would ever be a day when she wouldn't see everyone watching her.

"Now, that wasn't so bad, was it?" her mother asked as they were crossing the parking lot to their car. Nadine could say yes. She thought she could tell her mother that she never wanted to go again but she knew her mother wouldn't understand.

"No, it wasn't bad," she lied. Telling her mother would be like trying to explain why she didn't want those sneakers. It would be better to keep quiet and pretend it didn't bother her as much as it did. Already, though, she was dreadning the next week's shopping day.
No One Heard His Call

The little boy cried again
He asked himself
Why he could never win.
He called out to someone above
And asked for help
Said he was sorry for all those sins.

The little boy was alone
No one wanted to talk to him
Not even over the phone.
He didn’t understand this
He was so well known,
How could he have missed?

The little boy was sick now
He didn’t care somehow.
He was so sad of it all
So he took some pills
’cause no one heard his call.

— Robert Levy
Another Poem

Started to jump
but I wondered why
so I walked away again.
I wanted to be free
but I choked off my sob
when I wondered what that meant.
(what does this poem mean?)
Now I have time to brush my hair
slowly before I leave the house.
I don't get out of bed 'til afternoon,
still I'm tired all the time.
It hurts to think
and it hurts to breath;
I can't remember why I'm sad.
It's getting harder to get the cheese inside the bread.
I need this time to stabilize,
to organize,
to realize... what?
Why can't I just do it?
Why don't I know what to do?
I want to be happy
but how would that help
in the larger scheme of things?
(Who answers the questions asked in poems?)
If I laugh the pain will just crackle away
leaving only a dusty pulsing core.

— Deborah Land

Into your palm
I fall again
frail and helpless
against the wind
and snow of time.
I have not a song
to sing.
I remain tuneless,
immobile,
barely being whatever
it is I am.
I have no art,
all vision's gone.
It has left, slipping
into night
retreating like a drunkard
into Sunday morning.
Today I stand stripped
and bare as a birch
in black December
sleeping, swaying,
however existing,
waiting for the lips
of spring while still
engulfed in the mouth
of this winter day.

— Patty Collins
Man and Tree

A tree laid lonely in the middle of a field —
I imagined a big man with his mechanical saw looking over his victory — exalted —
then I imagined the tree standing up again —
planting itself back into the earth —
I saw a man crying.

— Russell Hallac

London, 4 a.m.

The reality of 4 a.m. impales itself upon the silent heart, thrusts its breathing into day with some stark urgency. Mother moon, her eye an observent whisper exhales over us with gusty frigidity. She knows where her home is. She knows of all, each homeless smile or tear.

— Patty Collins

gourmet

i couldn't see him
i could taste him
his skin tasted so good
it tasted warm
and brown and sweet
i wanted to spread him on toast

— kim akins
Peep

YAAAGHRRRRROWWWGHRRRAAHHRROWWWWRR
MY LOUD GROWL BOUNces in my Head
and I ThrOw it through my beak
but for all I speak,
the crow hears . . .
peep . . . peep . . . peep . . .
and the muffled weep
I weep after the
tiny crumb is stolen.
I think of tons
of stolen crumbs.
Still, the Crow Comes.
CRows COme.
CROW Control.
NO Control
CROWS GROW.
CROW'S ROLE GROWS.
GROWS RULE DOUGH.
DOUGH GROWS.
DOUGH'S ROLE GROWS.
CROW'S ROLE GROWS;
ROLLS, ROLLS, ROLLS,
ROLL ROLL ROLL ROLL
RRRRRAAGGGHROWWWRRRRRAAGGGH
I GROWL Till I'm Weak
but the voice I seek
is in my head
and not my beak
and the crow hears . . .
peep . . . peep . . . peep . . .

— Martin Steinberg

Oh, Thank You!

The nicest bouquets
buttercups
dandelions
daisses
are presented with breathless
grins
freckled smiles
and Kool-Aid lips.

— Meg Barone

A House Cat Speaking

Sometimes they call me nice
And nice I threw back.
I told them on a stack
of lies — I've killed mice.
Sometimes they call me nice.
More than twice they sighed,
But held 'till I replied
No man Ever slept twice.

— C. Landers
The Longest Days of the Year

I.
These are the longest days of the year — these are the days when those who suffer, suffer a bit longer a bit harder — when the earth’s soul has changed once more shifted its ugly imagination once more. These are the days when the dark evening sky shows itself a little bit later, and when it appears not dark. So these are the days when you and I can see the starving madness in fleshless faces of sick homeless angels lost in a misconceived world — indeed these are the days.

II.
These are the days when you don’t think of the future but see pathetic pictures of the present looking through your garbage cans and finding nothing — days when I can sit on sad stoops between Madison and Fifth and be lonely knowing fully well you’re watching us. These are the days when the feeling of death seems more real and more pleasing, days when I can see the hands of lovers being held in appaling passion more than other days — these are the days when I can feel the rain inside my head and sense that it’s getting hotter, and know that it’s not going to stop. These are the days when the whole world should gather in a large field and masturbate — yes, these are the days — days when Martin and John and Groucho should rise from the dead and make the world understand.

— Russell Hallac
Aztec Village

The slant sun washes over the earth's face
before the night
and gold-red glow graces the barest place
with tides of light.
An adobe city transcends the clay
— from dust comes gold.
Thus sanctified, it has power to stay
night's coming cold.

— Jennifer Gibbs