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SUMMER STORM

My giant, aged (and leaning) Cottonwood tree,
Splendidly singular in a forest of back yards,
Is filling the air with a storm of white tufts.
Democratically, the wind is distributing
These melt-less snowflakes into everyone's yard.
We are forgetting no one. And no one seems grateful.
My neighbor on the left has been out to rake
Three times this afternoon, and will not speak;
My neighbor on the right stands in his yard
(A white, fluttering crown on his head)
And offers the loan of a power saw.

Back and forth through this glorious downpour
Fly multitudes of birds. Most of them
Have nests in the garage (I never remember
To close the door). A humanist even in
Avian circles, I nod at their coming and going—
Though they whiten the roof of my car.

Trying to finish a poem in the midst
Of all this uproar, I dream of buying
An old caboose, setting it under my
Cottonwood, writing within its wooden quiet
Before the storm of years comes to an end.

R. R. Cuscaden

TWO POEMS**A Painter of Grey Doves**

I found a dove
on the high road
half-eaten by spring cormorants.

You wrote down angrily,
"spring cormorants
on grey doves feeding—"

But he, a grey dove
painter, makes his whitened doves
like resting water lilies.

We saw the silver doves
of Juno rising
from the Dead Sea

and the sun god's light
poured blessings on their wings
of fire and air:

but he paints the doves
of cormorants
in their red dreams.

Joan White

Ulyssa

(For a Greek Teacher)

As a child she learned
very late to walk
and talked early

was quaintly awkward
with her fingers
and often fumbled
touching, and loving.

But her small wise head
was graceful:
hair and ears and crescent

eyes that seldom
rested without seeing,
as a clear grey mirror

or a brilliant water
shines for clouds
and with them alters.

And as an old old lady
skin dried, withered,
she often faltered
walking, reaching things,
and she knew by then
reverently and slowly
that she had made nothing

in her lifetime, nothing
masterful and gleaming:
only talked revealingly

about an undead tongue
invoking its rich words
and master-speakers,

as if Ulysses' voice
told tales behind her,
and in her alien flesh
a traveler tired of grace
and accuracy took rest.

Joan White

Death of a Psychiatrist**for Volta Hall**

Now the long lucid listening is done
Where shame and anguish were subtly opposed:
His patients mourn this father as their own.

Each was accepted whole and wholly known,
Down to the deepest naked need exposed.
Now the long lucid listening is done.

For the raw babe, he was a healing zone.
The cry was heard; the rage was not refused.
Each has a father to mourn as his own.

When someone sees at last, the shame is gone;
When someone hears, anguish may be composed,
And the long lucid listening is done.

The ghostly child goes forth once more alone,
And scars remain, but the deep wound is closed.
Each has a father to mourn as his own.

A guiltless loss, this shines like a sun,
and love remains, but the deep wound is closed.
Each has a father to mourn as his own,
Now the long lucid listening is done.

It was not listening alone, but hearing,
For he remembered every crucial word
And gave one back oneself because he heard.

Who listens so, does more than listen well.
He goes down with his patient into Hell.

It was not listening alone, but healing.
We knew a total, yet detached response,
Harsh laugh, sane and ironical at once.

Who listens so, does more than merely pity,
Restores the soul to its lost dignity.

It was not listening alone, but sharing,
And I remember how he bowed his head
Before a poem. "Read it again," he said.

Then, in the richest silence he could give,
I saw the poem born, knew it would live.

It was not listening alone, but being.
We saw a face so deeply lined and taut,
It wore the passion of dispassionate thought.

Because he cared, he heard; because he heard,
He lifted, shared, and healed without a word.

May Sarton

Ballad of the Traveller

O traveller, tell, what marvels did you see
In old Japan over the shining sea?
In Kyoto I saw a garden planned
As a closed fugue of rocks arranged in sand;
Raked lines by natural shapes inhabited
Are seen as mountains and an ocean bed —
The severe limits release as well as rule.
Here the imagination goes to school:
I saw a thinking garden, rocks and sand
Become a dream that I could understand.

O tell us, friend, what wonders there are
In far Kashmir, in ancient Srinigar?
In Srinigar, that world of snow and sky
Where the *shikaras*, shallow long boats, ply,
I saw a kingfisher watching a fish
Sit his long pole with concentrated wish,
Wait, wait, wait — then take the dive
And swallow his bright wriggling catch alive.
In Kashmir, the sheer sapphire of that flight
Hit like a shot the bull's eye of delight.

In Katmandu? The sacred black bull dozes;
The painted eye of Buddha never closes;
There Vishnu rests. I saw the great god sleeping
With all life in his vulnerable keeping.
He floats, stone hands clasped under his head,
Wholly exposed there on a watery bed,
And I was moved to see a god defined
As vulnerable, as open floating mind,
His power expressed in simply being there,
Open to every trick of earth and air.

O traveller, you have told us many things:
How to relate them as the ballad sings?
An abstract garden, a wild kingfisher,
And a stone god lying in naked splendor —
Each had a daring spontaneity
Within strict limits, so each spoke to me.
I looked at them. They see me now; they hold
Me in their presence, who begin to mould
And work their changes in the slow blood-stream:
They are the dreamers. I become the dream.

About the holy places, traveller, tell us,
What of Benares? Nara? What of Patmos?
In Nara, ancient sleeping city, deer
May safely graze; pagodas, tier on tier,
Rise through the mist, a mushrooming Te Deum.
There are too many Buddhas in the dark museum.
The image blurs, but I shall always see,
And keep intact the moment of Chugu-Ji:
The shining peace, the absolute consent
Of pure compassion's image in the convent,
Kwannon so subtly moulded, every line
Is drawn to marry human and divine;
Nor man, nor woman, nor intellect, nor sense:
The godhead smiles, and prayer is simply Presence.

After this pure, cool image of Japan,
I feared Benares and God-drunken man.
No one had told me how it would be,
And I was unprepared for majesty:
Above pale blue, the palaces stand high,
A circle of great walls against the sky;
Below them, endless flights of stairs go down,
Below them, the thick multitude of men —
In emerald and white, in pink and brown —
Goes down into the river at the dawn.
When the sun rises, man worships and is free.
All unprepared for such tranquility,
I saw the hungry multitude made one
There in the Ganges at the rising sun.

Much later Patmos, a stark barren island,
An empty place where only exiles land.

Thyme and wild roses, here and there a sheep;
Rock, barren rock, an island like a keep.
No multitude here, but each soul alone;
Great height, wind whistling in the bone.
Here John carved himself out a little bed,
Within his cave, a hollow for his head.
Disturbing angels shouted without cease;
He wrote The Revelation to have peace:
On Patmos, soul is soul alone and wild,
And once became half-lion and half-child.
I walked the rocks. I knew the angels were
Not gentle in that wilderness, but fire.

May Sarton

At Lindos

“What are ruins to us,
The broken stones?”
They made for the sea,
These elementals,
Possessed by Poseidon.
“And what is Athene?”
The sun flamed around them.
The waters were clear green.

What compelled us
To face the harsh rock?
And why did we choose
The arduous stairways?
There it lay, the crescent
Of white sand below us,
And the lucky swimmers.

But at last we emerged,
Stood free in the white light,
And we knew you, Athene,
Goddess of light and air,
In your roofless temple,
In your white and gold.
We were pierced with knowledge.
Lucidity burned us.
What was Poseidon now
Or the lazy swimmers?
We looked on a flat sea
As blue as lapis.
We stood among pillars
In a soaring elation.

We ran down in triumph,
Down the jagged stairways
To brag to the bathers —
But they rose up to meet us,
Mysterious strangers
With salt on their eyelids,
All stupid and shining.

So it is at Lindos,
A place of many gods.

May Sarton

HAMSTER CAGE

Quiet, the children look on
As the small mammal
Nesting in chips and lettuce
Gives birth, bloody and natural.
They see how it's done,

Watch her licking them clean —
But more than licking, the teeth
Working on the diminutive head,
Back, haunch, one then both,
Till blood and a tuft of down

Are the only sign. Drawn
By cries, parents disbelieve,
Then, believing, go silent,
Send children off, remove
The unspeakable mother whose calm

Jaw mocked their bargain:
Treadmill, breadcrumbs, suet
In exchange for a clean bit
Of wilderness, a pet,
A cage of instruction.

Conrad Hilberry

LUNCH

Someone asked me
 passing the creamed
peas, you'd be
interested I think, he
believed,
 in integrated housing.

I am but how
did he know to say that
 after the salt please
and meeting me in the
hall.

The water pitcher
is frost bitten and has
broken into its cold
 chaste sweat.
It turns the corner from
hand to hand
 becoming friendly,
and in each glass transparent
communion
 it sits in object
and reflects window light and
my hands
 when I talk.

Whose name owns
the face across the table.
His lips grind about the
 buttered bread

and turn to the chewing eyes
of his neighbor.

They speak as if
agreement had been served in
heaping casseroles
as if I in
entering the room and moving
among the tables
to join them
had partaken of discipleship.

Here we serve ourselves.
Each of us invited
to break the day,
and I am apportioned
around the table
before my turn
to wipe the edge of my
mouth
and cut myself
a piece of conversation.

The room
has opened its mouth
and listens.
An announcement.
I wait
before my iced tea.
In case I didn't know, today
I should know
that thirty
years ago this day
was that once
that once that

makes us look up
from iced tea.

Bring us all
 that larger chunk
of yesterday and how
deliciously it flavors pie.
Now I save
 newspaper clips
and remember the caption
under brassiere ads
 and I
move up the stairs
where I will casually
reach into my pocket
 to show I remembered them.

How did the
man on my right
know that I
was interested in
finishing my den?

Henry Birnbaum

TWO POEMS**The Flea Circus at Tivoli**

Let a saint cry your praises, O delicate
desert companion, the flea.
So tiny a mover ruffles his faith
and sends him, scratching and singing,
praising the smallest acrobats of God.

The lady with alligator hips and
hummingbirds in her hair, tramples invisible
trumpets.

The lights in her eyes dim.

Now from an ivory box her tweezers pluck
three golden chariots and a cycle, spoked
like a spider, drumming the swathe of green.

"Behold," cries the lady with delphinium voice,
"Olaf and Alfred and Madame Wu, three fleas
of ancient lineage, fed at my own breast
will race to this miniature castle of pearls."
In the twilight of her eyes, the gold
wagons advance, cautious as caterpillars.

But for the drivers, who can describe
them, save that each carriage moves?
That a golden bicycle whirls forever
toward heaven, moved by invisible hands?
“For those who doubt, here is a glass,
which reveals the cause of the tiniest motions.”

But clearer than any glass, we believe,
we admire their wizard beaks and their tiny legs
pumping the wheels hard, their gardens and
parliaments,
pleasing as postage stamps, commemorative,
and we go out praising.

N. M. Willard

Saint Nicholas is the Patron Saint of

children and scholars, by virtue
of a subtle likeness
acknowledged by neither.

I have seen scholars fall
in love with the print
and forget the poem
as children, unwrapping a costly doll
are most pleased
with the small tag on its gown:
“cleans with ease.”

The worth of a guinea springs
from no solvent powers.
Its cameo world rejoices,
is therefore saved,
ranking with shells and with pressed flowers,

amphoras, apes'
skulls, words, and wings
not to fly with but to delight
the eye as things,
caps and categories loved
for their smooth shapes
and voices
calling nouns home for the night.

Patron saints
of order where none appears,
of a forest which neither sees:
children bend homes in the trees
and scholars, gathering mushrooms, fear
the fat man who abuses
their harpsichord hearts in a stew,
the lean man who cries
their colors as speechless white.

Their order belongs to eyes
that the earth chooses
to edit a work much vexed:
de verietate rerum,
an occult, particular text.

N. M. Willard

THREE POEMS**Counting My Bones After Falling from a Tree**

Ribs, bones (ninety of them), limbs:
Five of uneven length. Head, detached
Upon a knee, fingers poking for lice;
This being Heaven the lice are gold,
The bite of the flea is without malice.
Not one man but three (four)
A woman perhaps within, her cheeks inflated,
She spits (a snake) it goes on,
Trivial persists, the hope of grandeur is
Slim. One man falls, another man
Gets up. It's the same tree in all cases.
The same irrelevant confusion.
Not the beginning but the end of a creature
Condemned to deaf, blind and dumb.
No use pouring honey, ashes prevail,
Remain, bitter ashes. Not a soul,
(There are nine of them) but a heart
That turns black and cold at night.

Charles Simic

Water

Not only a fear. She exists.
I swear it. I see her often.

Her limbs weigh nothing.
How easily they bend.
She is shapeless.
The earth fears her.

The water unfolds, steadily.
A bandage. The wounds are many.

(But one must move
Tiny bit ahead of her.)

I speak from my thirst.
Thirst which is not yet knowledge.
Knowledge which is not yet water.

The water groans in her sleep.
She hungers and eats of herself.
And there is no waste.
And there is no decay.

One must practice to become her equal.

Charles Simic

Extinct Species

He leaves a trail of chicken claws,
Slime, gutted frogs, roots pulled in violence,
Poppies disheveled and bent
Like bishops suffering from back-ache.
The powder on the wing of the night moth
Upset. Argosies of water bugs

Gone aimless. Dark cathedrals of mollusks
Empty.

The mole has gone blind
At his sight. The worm has carried
His presence into the depths of the earth.
The fear of him thrives like a memory
Of eclipses bringing war and great winds.

Here on this earth where tears and dung
Go undiminished, all moves
As if still in his presence.

Charles Simic

FOR DINA KENNEDY

My daughter, born one week after
the President was killed

You were born in a terrible year.
Men lurched in a crazy life—
A time of wonders and perfect cruelties.

The Pope went to Gethsemane and we
Buried John Kennedy along with
Bits and possibilities in Arlington.

The World's Fair seemed departure;
While science kept up with minor ailments,
Madison Avenue moved down to the Village.

As Christmas and New Year approached
Celebration went tasteless as afflicted bread
Nor bitterness, nor salt of tears would come.

And millions prayed as of some end.
Auguries of stars extinguishing
Their light put out our lights.

Your fire-fly-life seemed abrupt.
You were a token in our will
To life and difficult continuation —

As Dina was to Jacob with her
Love, despite her brothers' hate,
When in the hour of a painful healing

They murdered peace and brought
Their father's head to shame,
Brothers in the blood and stone.

What advice I have, I give you in
Your name. This consanguinity is best
Of all the things you'll need to know.

Know it well and keep the faith
With the best in men for
That is how God sees himself.

James Lewisohn

So much news to tell of births and burials,
 So many songs to sing. The Yiddish hung in the air
 Like happiness at a Bar Mitzvah, like a freilach, like
a wedding.

A thousand dollars those three days in Minsk cost
Meyer and Sara,

A cool thousand for rooms and food and music and
presents,

More than they made in two months from the chicken
ranch at Petaluma.

Even the blind cousin came from Pinsk with his wife
and children—

The blind cousin who had his eyes burned out
 In the old days by the wrong medicine.

Everywhere there was Meyer,

Four feet eleven, with a head like a Turk,

But laughing, laughing —

Dancing with the young girls, singing with the boys,

Sitting with the old men and remembering:

Only the old men could match the memories Meyer
had—

Those days of 1905 when they practiced target
shooting

In the snowy, sound-consuming woods.

Being fifteen and having a pistol,

This was what Meyer remembered,

In the woods about dark, laughing and shooting,

Hitting or not hitting, just a game.

There was the guard's cry of "Soldiers!"

The sudden scattering,

Meyer with his finger nails full of dirt and snow

Digging against a tree trunk to hide his gun,
 Crying like a five-year-old for the pistol
 He had to put like a dead thing in the ground.

He could go back now, said Meyer, go back this
lifetime later

And show this tree, this spot in the woods
 Where he dug the hole and hid the gun.
 The old men felt the hand on the collar
 When the soldiers took him. They heard the heart go
easier

When the soldiers thought he was only a kid
 And let him go with slaps across the face.
 The old men on the bench in Minsk said "Ai!" in
chorus,
 Knowing the kind of slaps the soldiers gave in the
1905 revolution.

Then things got good for Meyer
 All in a day, like the river thawing:
 His cousin Lyra had the papers—
 Papers and money and steerage passage —
 For herself and her brother to go to America.
 But this brother got a better job in Minsk
 And Lyra offered his place to Meyer,
 Papers and passage and entrance money —
 A quick escape from what it was to be a Jew in
Russia:

The curfew, the bribes, the running and hiding,
 The sour bad taste of fear.

But what a fool was Meyer
 To go a second swaggering time

On the final night before he left his home
Out with his pistol, out with the men to the woods.
So Meyer got himself arrested,
Got nicely jailed for a Jew and a revolutionist
Likely to stay behind the bars some bitter winters
While Lyra went on to America
Taking the papers and the money and the promises.
Meyer had things to think about in jail in Minsk.

Then there was this woman who came each day
To sell sweet cakes and bagles.
The guard unlocked the prison door for her
And Meyer was little for fifteen.
He chose his day and waited.
The bagle woman came and the door opened
To let her basket and her wide skirts in.
Bent low as a dog went Meyer
Past skirts, past a guard's legs interested in bagles,
Past the people on the streets, the railway platform,
into the train.

And there he was in Riga, watching boats at a dock-
side,

Watching people boarding, having papers,
Having their forty rubles to pay their passage,
Having food and bedding and money
To get on a ship and sail to America —
Meyer with eight rubles in his pocket
And no papers and no bundles,
With the police looking for him —
A Jew who took part in revolutions that failed,
A little Jew that dreamed of America.

Well, there was this big Russian family:
Mother, father, thirteen children lots of bundles,

And papers for the whole of them.
 (You have to see those docks at night
 With the wind and the water and the voices,
 The soldiers looking at papers by one small lantern,
 The steaming breaths, the frost on eyelashes,
 The cloaked people moving.)

And there was Meyer with his chin up
 Making fourteen in that row of thirteen children,
 Bringing up the rear like an eldest brother
 Carrying a youngest child.
 The wharfboards moved beneath his feet.
 He passed the lantern, the steep plank,
 The pat, pat, pat of water,
 Meyer in the night carrying a child
 As if it was his baby brother.

You could not think how good the people were to
Meyer
 Giving him food and space and bedding,
 Lending him money long enough to show to get off
the boat
 Into America — twenty-five borrowed dollars
 To give back in ten minutes down the street.

Meyer at seventy-four shouting, crying,
 Wanting to know who had his pistol,
 Talking about his grandchildren,
 About his son that was a psychiatrist,
 About his boat in California,
 About his gentile daughter-in-law,
 Meyer with his hands spread wide
 Giving away his American clothes down to his final
shirt,
 Boasting, describing, boasting, in Yiddish, in English,
in Russian.

They had the photographer in; they took the
pictures—
Sara at the left in the front row, Meyer at the right—
Pictures to be shown in the villages near Minsk,
Pictures to be shown to the folks in California.

Oh, what a thousand dollars' worth Sara and Meyer
had
Talking about how life was for them in Petaluma,
Explaining in Yiddish, in English, in Russian
About the way it is in Sonoma County,
About how a man makes good in America.

Oh, what a thousand dollars' worth they would have
Back home again in Petaluma
Telling how things were in Russia,
Telling how a man who has made good
Goes back to the Old Country to see his people.

Frances Hall

BEING BORN AND A FEW CONSEQUENCES

I am born. Apple trees ache
and stagger through the meadow shaking
blossoms in the long cool grass
waking shadows on meadow grass
ancient and newborn and blossoming full.

The apple springs from the sudden flower,
an hour of sunlight shattering bloom
scattering petals sucking at the roots
beginning the hard and sour knot.
Sunlight chastens the bitter core, water
awakens seed with new life, love
is everywhere. I am born.
A matter of small moment.

Chaos quartered in apple blooms
crushed to a flower symmetrically unfolding
a matter of small moment;

and chaos pulsing a rational shoot,
the mind's root the heart's flowering,
is matter of small moment, but more.
For spirit comes plundering poor seed,
perfecting, seaming the good flesh and soul,
making whole, all one: souled, fleshed, living.

In our unsubtle summer, time
woke on the window as the sun awoke
slept on the wall with sleeping shadows,
every day being nine years old.

Life simple:

the dirt road bordering shore of the sea
bordered blackberries, careless paths
through fields of eel grass berries water
dodged like a child escaping caresses,
and all ways home.

Sometimes waves by magic crossed the path
and lily ponds grew, lilies everywhere.
Nine years truth had taught us that
to pick the best ones, white and smooth
and cool as cream, you had to wade
through reeds and shallows
where tangled weeds would cling your legs
and tickle and scratch. Only eel grass cut.

Pulling them up by long green stems
was half the fun: all frogs would jump
and croak like uncles, tadpoles squidged,
crickets rubbed their music in the hot salt sun.
Then run with bare feet all the way home

shouting lilies and mother and lilies.

Nine is the year we crowned our kings
for pushing subjects from a boulder
days alone were leapt from rock to rock
explorers raided lobster pots
and starfish crinkled underneath our feet.

The spiral shells with pink and yellow
coiling into the sound of sea,
sharp salt air, smell of fish and seaweed,
crystal rocks and clamshells big as ashtrays,
locusts singing in August heat,
seagulls low flying low on the water, and water
caressing
the shore and retracting.

Some places come to mean so much:
never go back.

Discovering God is waking one morning
sun beaming an east wind blowing
bees humming on Queen Anne's lace
lace tilting bowing in wind
and knowing there is more than this.

Now everything is different, better. The morning
sun laughing at shadows, east wind blowing
smiles from the sea, and Queen Anne bowing
greeting in the meadow, my whole world singing
a hymn, awaking.

Has whirlwind shuddered in the crescent twig,

fireflies

flashing in the dark

flowering the April vision.

Has whirlwind shuddered in the crescent twig,
green leaves golded and burned to no purpose?
Wind and November stripped the earth,
stripped the tree to a threatening gibbet,
and to no purpose?

November leads its trees to gallows
staggering meadows and the shaken blossoms
hallows ripe with a death of flame
hallows innocent

with death by sin

death by burning

death on the tree,

permitting orchards this brief communion:

from chaos, flower.

John L'Heureux

THE WATERMAN: SANTORIN

When Athens built the reservoir between parched
hills,
He swore a great oath on the bones of Chrysostom
(powder
In a silver box), sold his donkey in the main square,
Tossed drachmas on the cafe bar, ordered litres of
raki.
It didn't rain much on the heights, but below it
poured
Gallons of raki, ouzo, English gin. The one-eyed man,
His friend, began to see double. The hideous cripple
Threw away his crutches and danced the whole night.
Even priests, stroking their beards, witnessed
miracles.
But that June the earth cracked open. The dam
emptied,
And the waterman, quickly sober, bought back his
donkey.
He moves through the cobbled streets without
lurching,
Singing nasally, his leather bottles once more full.
His eyes are clear. He never speaks to the one-eyed
man.
He drinks only the pure water from his secret spring.

Lawrence P. Spingarn

AN EYE FOR AN EYE**A poem about John Brown in Kansas**

In the early evening shadows of May 24, 1856 John Brown with seven followers, including four of his own sons, all with drawn swords, crossed the Pottawatomie Creek in northern Kansas to carry out a mission of revenge. A few days before, the free soil town of Lawrence, Kansas had been attacked by a small army of ruffians supposedly acting in behalf of pro-slavery elements in the state, and according to a rumor which reached Brown, five free soilers were killed. Brown and his followers had arrived in Kansas from Ohio too late to assist in the defense of Lawrence. Now he vowed vengeance, which meant that five pro-slavery men must pay with their lives for the five free soilers massacred during the sacking of Lawrence.

“An eye for an eye, a life for a life; if five had been killed, five more must die; the logic that would kill an abstraction by striking at the living men is direct, unthinking, and grisly.”

Bruce Catton

How many fingers on one hand?

A child could count.

The number of promised deaths

Rose against a bone-bare sky

Like a winter tree whose five branched prongs

Were forked reminders of his uneven score.

Riding the tide of his lunar blood,
A touch of storm
Had spilled through his skin.
Too late to unsack rubbled Lawrence,
He built such sights into his eyes as could
Enrage like dark flesh flayed by Legree's great lash.

A creek now drew the line between
Eden and Gomorrah.
The progress of the night
Was marked by the movement of the moon
And its seven obedient stars. The water waded,
Now every man they met was enemy.

No hymns, only the preacher owls
Could define their sins
From the silhouette pulpits
Of towering trees. They were traders
Seeking a marketplace for blood. One
Cabin would do to start their feud upon.

Spelled in the moonlight's illumination
The long arm
Of rumor had reached beyond
Their march to warn this loneliness
Of crudest logs. A rifle clicked. A muzzle
Like an eyeball stared through the socket of a chink.

Not cowardly, but seeking no
Balanced fight, their feet,
Like a congregation of tongues,
Whispered through the grass toward
An oak retreat. The road, thinner than
A swan's neck, bent with a burden

Of many recent hearths fired
 Above the mercury
 Of the moon to warm
Those uncomforted by
The laboring slave in country deeper south.
The Doyles were poor and from Tennessee had fled.

Slavers by race but not
 Participants,
 Themselves at stake, in the Promised
 Land they planned to work at will though it
Lay flatter than any land they'd seen. The soil
Would not reject the sudden blood they'd bleed.

One hand, an iron fisted fate,
 Battered the door
 As though with urgency
 Demanding it yield, welcome
The knocker like a dooming plague.
Who's there? A friend with troubles to amend.

Unaccustomed to visitors
 At star time,
 The door crept back like fear
 Until a lunging foot made
Permanent the crack of shivering
Light. And a drumming voice boomed

Out of the black-throated night:
 Outside, you rogues!
 The Doyles were four: mother
 was grey and middle-aged knitting
By the hearth; father skillful with
The axe was sharpening his favorite tool;

Two strapping boys stood up and flanked
 Their father's journey
 Towards the rattling door. All three
 Entered the carnivorous night. Held
Prisoners by drawn swords, they were themselves
Unweaponed for the ensuing fight.

One hundred yards from the house their hands
 Had built they stopped,
 Inquiring why *they*
 Had been picked to die. Swift blades spoke
Into their curious flesh a red reply.
One son caught his father's severed head

 In begging arms, then watched a frantic
 Surgery drop
 His gesturing limbs. The other bared
 His teeth and roared defiantly
Until blue steel had cropt his sex and broken
The range of his voice to a whimpering child.

 If the mother must die, they said,
 It would be from grief,
 Not our Grand Eagle swords.

 Eight singers sang: Two more to go, and raised
Their eyes toward a distant light, a candled window
Or the moon. Their swords bled down into the dark-
toothed grass.

 By surprise, bootless, ready
 For bed when the storm
 Of the rumbling door
 Broke the silence in his head,
Wilkinson could not have guessed the zigzag
Flash that singed the eyes of his mysterious guest.

Why shouldn't Kansas have slaves?
He preached and kept
A Bible by his bed,
Gathered votes to enlarge
The Slavocracy's scope, and urged Georgia friends by
mail
To add their numbers to the Kansas polls.

Was it prophet or criminal
Who shouted
Such blunt imperative
Petitions into his startled
Conscience, which not even his wife, armored
With measles, could divert? His ramparts crumbled.

A grass roots law serving no
Warrant now
Perfected its entrance,
As if commanded by a burning bush
Or writing on the charred wall of
A lately arsoned house, whose owner

Was willing to burn in the light
Of theoretical
Sympathy for bonded abstractions.
Cassandra standing by the Aegean
Shore bewailing a king's gory descent
Was not more pitiful or less effective

Than Wilkinson's bedridden spouse
Who plunged down depths
Of her own sea of tears
To hide in a coral cellar from love's
Mangled reality. No quarry
Was ever more sliced, nor the human form.

More disjointed than his
Anatomy.

Was this a man, or victim
Of man's deed? many would
Ponder in the dawn's unleashing flame.
Brown would say God's will had moved his hand.

Now chosen to bleed was one more guilty
Than the rest,
The final meteor
Pulled down from the vivid slavers' sky,
One with whiskey on his breath, a rough
Who scourged New Englanders with curse and club.

Dutch Bill could menace with his fierce
Unsobered smile;
Could neither read nor write;
And by both sides was vigorously
Despised. Alone and stupored when the knock
Rammed through the oak of his bolted hours

Like splashing water on his face,
The megaphoned
Voice demanded from the dark
He enter the metallic night
Of moon ignited swords. His
Alcoholic blood now deluged through

The anger of his bulging veins
And out he came
With fists and kicking boots
To turn the inevitable tide
Of drowning froth and foam. No match for eight
Steel tongues speaking the flawless language

Of his pouring wounds, his bold
 Vitality
 Leaped down from the tall bones
 That girdered his familiar shape.
They watched him shrivel towards the tainted ground.
He died brave and saved his brimstoned soul.

The stream that washed Dutch Bill's partitioned
 Flesh cleansed the oozing
 Swords which Brown had brought
 From an Ohio town to prove
Men fiends. Four sons had come with him to learn
The manic key for every slaver's pen.

Students in their father's school,
 They also prayed
 While volcanic Kansas
 Boiled a brew Jeb Stuart's
Cavalry was helpless to unflame.
But dealers in swords, they swallow their own steel.

Jack Lindeman