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IMAGE #41

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AN OLD TRUCK

AN OLD TRUCK

AN OLD TRUCK

THE ROAD

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L.L. Dickson

THE MATING REFLEX

On his way out the branch
the young man says to himself,
I know better than this. This is certain death.
He leaves a slime trail, where his hands are
praying sweat on the bark.
His nose wiggles. He is moving so slow
nothing seems to be happening.

On the tip of the branch a 1,000 facet-eyed green bug
is sleeping. It has eaten the last ten men who edged out
to touch it, and now is
digesting.
God, life is hard, it dreams.
God, men are mostly the same, it dreams.
God, men are less than bugs, it dreams.

The man is only a foot from the bug now.
He is bowing forward toward it, clutching a sprig,
worshipping.
I've given up my scholarly studies for this, the man says.
I've left a nest full of eggs. I've lost
my retirement fund. Forced my wife to shout.
But look at that bug, look at how it is perched,
how it could burst into bloom or flight,
if I made an awkward move.

Men, dreams the bug. I could snip off a battalion of men's heads, and be half starved.

God, men are pitiful, the way they stream out this branch like bugs.

The man feels the branch bend, arching like his wife before she wheezes and hugs him each time.

He is an inch from the green tightly wound bug.

It has taken me a semester to get this far. This will be worth it, he says. This one will be worth the lost fellowship, the summer grant money returned.

This one is as green as the footprint of an ivy vine.

This is my secret questions answered.

Here comes another one, dreams the green bug. Here comes another drooling feeb. Given up a pretty bug wife and a teeming larva to have a chance at me.

The man waits a weekend before reaching out.

He takes a school week to move his hand above the green bug's back. He waits for some response: an antenna flick of recognition, acceptance.

I'm prepared to be very slow, he says. I'm ready to be as restrained as the best lover could be, under these circumstances.

God, she dreams, Here we go again.

Decapitation, so the naturalist says. Decapitation even seems to stimulate the male's mating reflex.

Jim Hall

THREE POEMS**I Went Back**

I went back
to my old home
and the furrow
of each year
plowed like
surf across
the place had
not washed
memory away.

Immortality

The double lanceolate
needlelike
hemlock leaf

will, falling, catch on
a twitch of old
worm-silk

and, like a fall worm,
dingledangle breezy
all day in the noose

Warming Trend

Lee of wind-skinned rises
long drifts of
fallout snow soak in the thaw:
the brook, the sky bright
for days, hardly steps
down its ledge steps:
anything, black enough
to be furrow soil, will turn
out to be old snow bank,
trickling:
this soundless (no rain or
thunder) upstirring of
the brook!
snowplows plowed snow
into shrubrows that give
reservoir humped mesh:
thickets that paused a lot
out of the air
streak it with chilling shade,
cold huddling, keep
flood from falling,
give away a little at a
time longer than
roofs and slanty, beam-turned banks do:
the mediations and mixtures,
flows and pauses are too
complex for the poetry of
attention: one sees on the bank
of a cleared ditch
swatches of ground moss so green
one thinks with relief
spring won't have to improve any on that.

A.R. Ammons

TWO POEMS

A Letter to William Morris

Your books came
today in the mail: three
volumes of *The Earthly Paradise*
and *Jason*, the
pages still uncut: for
eighty years they've sat on some-
one's shelf—
a Boston lady's, maybe,
dead at ninety-eight, who fed pigeons
on the Common
and salt-water taffy to
the dirty Charlestown children,
went to the
symphony every Friday,
and dusted all her bookcases once
a week, dreaming
of Sunday afternoons
in Swampscott, girls with parasols,
walking in the
sun, the sand, in 1890,
and never opened these brittle

grey pages.
But you know how
to wait, if we forget you for
a while.
You want to teach
us the pleasures of remembering,
how to open
a long-locked door and
find a sunlit room, where the golden
peacock screams
from the wall, where
the chink of wineglasses and the
soft chime
of couplets still
echo in the dusty air. You made
poems and
chairs and wallpaper,
wallpaper that winds around us a
labyrinth of
vines and white flowers,
chairs for people to lounge in, on
summer days,
and poems that are
content to wait in bookcases,
and I thank
you, as I cut the
pages at last and begin to read
of Pelias and
Chiron, Medea, and Jason,
his dreams, his losses, his journeys.

March*—for Barbara***1.**

I wanted to build a house
with you: white, with green
shutters, and red maples
around, in our New England.
I would cut the joists, nail
the shingles. You would
paste the wallpaper, sew the
curtains, paint the red door.

And we would live there, and
grow old, like two wild
New England apples, ripening
side by side, through the mild
October nights, that draw the
last sweetness to the skin—
then shrivel and melt away
in the chill November rains.

2.

And here we are. Yet why
is it always March in our
New England? On the lawn,
the last patches of grey
snow melt in the first rains.
Why do the bare apple boughs
writhe in the wind? Why
does the broken door bang?

At dawn the wasps buzz against
the window-panes. Why are
these walls so crooked? What
is this brown stain, that
oozes across our ceiling?
Whose foot, at 3 A. M., creaks
on the stair? What is this
sound of weeping in the night?

Burton Hatlen

INDECISION

Someday, beyond 3000,
My dessicated form
Will doubtless be discovered
Still crouching on this ledge.

Freedom or the fall
Only inches away.
Surely either is better,
Therefore, leap! Leap!

But the cliffs are lined
With cowards.

Artelle G. Sklorenko

THE POTATO EATERS

*. . . those people, eating their potatoes
in the lamplight, have dug the earth with
those very hands they put in the dish . . .*

van Gogh

Prologue

Contrary to popular belief, the potato (also called the common potato, white potato, and Irish potato), is unrelated to the sweet-potato and yam, but is distant kin to the tomato, red pepper, tobacco plant, and eggplant. The potato (derived from the Spanish *patata*, itself stolen from *batata*, the American Indian name for the unrelated yam), although of the top eight food-crops of the world, differs from the others in that the edible portion of the plant is a tuber, that is, the swollen end of an underground stem, anchored to its task of nutrition. The earth, then, is in some sense a straitjacket, and the potato, like the agitated catatonic patient, is bound indefinitely to its quarters. Already the pity begins.

The potato has a corky skin pierced by lenticles through which occurs gaseous exchange. The stems, usually angular in section, vary in posture, thickness, color (ranging from green to deep purple), pubescence, and other characteristics. The corolla of the flower is wheel-shaped, five-lobed, 2-3 centimeters in diameter, and varies in color from white or pale yellow to deep reddish or bluish purple, often tipped or striped with white. The peasant woman, Gordina de Groot, has breasts the color of a dark soft soap, full-blown

lips, a dirty cap, and a heart which, despite its lifeblood, is a melanotic cave filled with candles. The tubers bear spirally arranged "eyes" in the axils of aborted leaves, of which scars in the flesh remain.

Potatoes, lovers of armor, can be thought of as underground reservoirs of light, or water mixed with light, the way sometimes a full moon falls into a pond, and the two blues mingle their hues. But the potato, above all is a laboratory, a conservatory dedicated to the study of silence, to the conversion of sound into a starchy pulp, it is a chamber fermenting bass cellos and drums, rehearsing for opening night.

And the earth, by nature, prefers this silence, the same drab hush of *solanum tuberosum*, the same mime, the same earth-pockets of pity. And it is not for the tongue caked with au gratin that the potato persists with its profound silence, its crippled, but not fully immobile glow, like that of a candle in blubber. It is for the root-haired hand shoved down in the earth, and the ear in sand, and the tongue that sucks the heart from each stonecrumb, each potato-steamed molecule floating from the pot, each moment in the potato-lit cottage.

1.

Sundays
the palms came down
from the cross.

No, not really,
but today a bougainvillea
dangled its bracts, while in the sun
a dead wren
and the earth attached,
a claw,
bloodstiff, held an unseen
perch, blossomed
in the shape

of grapes. Sometimes
 resting
 in the dusk-red fields
 I would
 raise the enduring gulch
 of my hand, and imagine
 a glove-white
 flesh
 on the palm, a nail-hole gnawed
 the way a moth
 chews worsted, "Life
 is no palindrome,"
 the painter said
 the Lord
 said, but with a backhanded stroke
 I rubbed the breast
 of the wren, and closed the misguided
 claw
 with my hand, as though wrapping a mesquite twig
 in leather.

2.

I might have dried
 the breast
 in the sun, or boiled the claw for bouillon
 or broth, or cupped
 the corpse
 in these root-fond hands, hurled it
 to the air
 for flight. But with a stone
 I dug
 beneath the stump of an oak, and buried
 the wren
 in the loam-lined earth, and walked, while
 the dead moon
 wobbled alone, with the Christ-hole bored

in my hand. And evenings
I would hold the wound
to my eye, like a lens, as though a nail
really pierced
my fusiform palm, and a world-
heart
pulsed beyond the unbroken
hand: a reed
fence girdling a lilac plowland, and meat,
and a fog descending
on the fleece of lamb . . . my
breasts
might weave against the sky
in blossom
but in the cottage on earth,
potatoes.

3.

Unsuited
for the dream-life beyond
the hand, the rosebush, the beehives
dripping from their seams
with honey, unsuited
I buried
the hole in my palm, and sealed the lid
on my fuscous eye, and arched
my fingers
in the shape of stone,
and dug into the side
of morning. I wanted to praise
the hair
on my arms, the languid sun
manuring
the horizon, the fenestral yoke
of this virgin's
egg, root-rotted for lack of fondling.

I wanted
to suck the earth with my face, and cool
my lips with a bluish
mud, and displace
the earth's thinning glaze
of sperm, and retrieve and cradle
a tuber. And hold it
in praise
like an angel's flesh, and pull it
inside the nest
of the heart, and wrap my yoke
around its crust
of light, and bleed on the nightshade
in mourning.

4.

And evenings gathered
around the rot-
wood table
we would rootle our toad-
colored hands in the dish, like otters
into a pond, or clumps of earth uprooted
also, returning to define
their crop. And with respect
for the uniform shape
of water
we would hold each potato
like the breast
of a dove, and chew, forever, each mouthful
of pulp, and look only at the air,
forever. I must have closed
my eyes to the dusk, and laid my unambergrised heart
to the earth, and wrapped, in love,
the rector
of the church, and arched each nipple
toward his tongue. And evenings gathered
around the rot-

wood table I would stare past the steaming
disciples
of the moon, and past the unending
gray
in the oil-lamp's light
which, to the untrained eye,
seems white.

5.

Dear Theo,

The hands, especially, have greatly changed. I have found them in lamplight. Brown and green. I shall lend my brush to the air of this earth. And the potatoes. And two cottages, half-moldered beneath the same thatched roof, were an odd couple, worn with age, who have grown like praying hands into one being, and are seen leaning into each other.

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Vincent

Frank Graziano

COQUETTE

You become the lover of all women.
With so much hair on your face
There's no place to kiss
Except features usually saved for intimacy.
When we meet we advance
Arms open, smiles wide, eyes bright,
But the grace of our approach is contradicted
By the awkwardness of our embrace.
Where is your cheek?
A forehead would suffice
For a friendly brush of lips
But curly locks overlap your eyebrows.
We can't even hug properly
Because your beard sticks out too far.
I'm forced to choose
The least compromising position.
All you do is spread your arms and wait
For me to slip into them,
For me to kiss your lips, your eyes, your nose
And the delicate area just under your eye
And above the timber line of beard.
You want all women
To love your passivity
So you've devised a mask of hair
To focus attention on your soft spots.
But I won't be coerced
Into seducing you.
I hold you at a negotiable distance
Grazing my mouth
On your inhospitable beard
In revenge.

Deborah Pease

BREAKFAST IN THE DINING ROOM

Bird, dog, squirrel, turtle, frog
on a glass shelf bridging the window bay.
The jay, glazed blue, dwarfs the Scotch terrier,
porcelain, with a red collar and a cocked head.
If it weren't for the paintbrush glued on his rump
the squirrel would be a rat. Sensitive as
an encephalograph, the turtle's wired-on neck
and tail tremble from the least vibration.
The frog, measled green and gray, is about
to leap.

Long gone the children— one into
the ground, two into marriage. A setter,
who fetched the mail in her mouth and slept
in her master's bedroom, and a three-generation dynasty
of parakeets lie in marked, oft-visited graves.

The window sill is my mother's greenhouse:
pitcher plant, philodendron, bromelia,
cactus in a terrarium, maidenhair fern.
Life's at low ebb here, except for the horn
of the amaryllis I brought yesterday;
swelled lewdly overnight
it threatens to explode into a bloom.

The only opened flowers in the room are six artificial roses in a cut-glass vase on the table— my fingers know those facets without a touch. There are rose buds on the china, Great Grandmother Stewart's service, from which I sip a refill of coffee. Some fifty years ago, while I was being born upstairs in another house, my father drank *his* second cup of coffee in *that* dining room. It's a family story. Before he'd finished I was out, bloody and squalling. The odds are one in twelve he drained this very cup. With serrated spoon my mother, who rarely breaks a dish, toys with half a grapefruit, sugarless.

The table at which we sit together, waiting, fully extended used to accommodate the Board of Deacons in the parsonage dining room. In this apartment it preys above the floor like a mantis el over an ant-run avenue. It's solid walnut, deep Victorian.

Above the sideboard, whose brass handles are upside down hearts, hangs a pair of oils, epigonic Constable. Enclosed by a stone wall cows are munching, on the right. On the left, sheep graze a hillside. Eating my way through childhood, I watched these gentle creatures feed. Massive filigree frames make the perspective to the horizon centuries deep. Above the server Jesus, kneeling on the mountaintop, tilting a Nordic profile, robed in gold and purple, seems to be warming His hands over the world below, while His eye tranfixes a hole in the clouds through which a shaft of light illumines Him.

The pendulum of the cuckoo clock behind me hangs arrested, so I on the Castro sofa in the living room last night wouldn't get the bird each badly slept o'clock and half o'clock.

In bed two rooms away my father writhes, praying for a knock-out from the temporarily doubled dose of Elavil the doctor's ordered, while listening for the ring of the telephone that will tell us someone is undepressed enough to vacate a room and bed for him in "the oldest hospital for the mentally ill in the United States," his home away from home. He describes his dreams in imagery from the Apocalypse. When you look him in the face you see a man who feels his hand locked in the scarlet hand of Satan while, Love suspended, God referees this Roman sport. So many times my father has lived his death, dying will surely fizzle.

Thirty-three years of on-again, off-again terror. Anguish is the side-effect upon my mother. Hell for me will be this moment without end in their dining room, unable to solace her or him on the other side of the gulf.

John Wheatcroft

TWO POEMS

I Say THE SOUL &

I say *the Soul* & I don't know what to say:
rather the bee I watched this afternoon
clamber roundabout in the center sweet of the poppy
blossom, or the shag of the rosemary's bush,
nothing delicate about it but its fragrance,
its tendrils trying to flood the rock garden,
spilling leafrunlets into the basin of the Livingston
daisies; or the slug I took in the other day
up in the hemlocks, its body gelatinous,
aworm from the blackplotchy sheath, an animate
aspic, ugly as a geoduck's neck, its extended
snailhorns feeling a path over
a scab of bark, limberly
testing the universe under the understory —
rather the morning glory tufting its choke-hold on
a salmonberry stem — any
established loveliness working close to the earth:
not *the Soul* — that boundlessness, that illocality.

Gathering

How does one get the sphere of the unifying?
I asked myself that one not too long ago,
thirty-year-old screamer from the ledgy
rimrocks of ambition — I must've felt nigh
ready to leave this orbiting nest for good;
I must've felt fine-feathered enough to get up
there with the angels, the old men-angels
copperheadnecked, liverspeckled on cheek & neck
passing the offering plate as if for the First
Baptist Church of Ironton, Missouri; and
the old women-angels in goldthreaded finery,
Sunday go to meetin, over to one side in
walnut shade, their wings thrown back
so as not to be a hindrance to eternal work;
I must've seen them planting the maters
and taters that shall never grow old,
tying up the beanvines to the pearly stakes;
I must've seen my mother's mother waddling
up the dusty path from the chickenyard,
dinner swinging by the feet in one hand,
gawking last looks at the plum trees & sunflowers;
I must've heard them singing there in the walnut shade,
mopping the radiance of their clawfaces in the cool,
one of them gathering walnuts in a gunny sack

Jerald Bullis

ON THE EVE OF FORTY-FOUR

My heart fluttered
as it has done before
for a beautiful woman
or under great stress.

But last night I sat back,
feet up, mind vacant, breath slack,
and there was a brief tickle,
a shortness of breath,

like that which follows surprise
or a careful telling of lies,
until a solid beat restored me,
brought me back from rest.

What if that thump hadn't come?
What if the pause were prolonged?
Would I wait in a deep, new silence?
For what? What if . . .

Armand E. Falk

FROM GARVEY'S FARM: SENECA, WISCONSIN

for Anna Marie

1.

While the sun is finishing off the sky,
wood mice trap daylight beneath the snow,
braiding shreds of warm air into highways;
evening takes its cane to the cattle
and turns them toward the spine of earth
which leads to the open barn.

Past the lines of toothed wire
to the sound of running water
and the smell of sleeping corn.

Casually, the wind picks up its hammer
and pounds the trees into streams of black foil:
framed by the kitchen window,
branches etch the figure of a woman
against the porous air. Lazy dogs
crawl out of the cordwood
and go howling up the patched chimney
after the flowering smoke.
Soon, nightfall takes the lady down.

2.

The greens and blues which dreams need
have gone south; sleep must be spread
over the cool, white flannel sheets
and even then, will not come easily.
On clear nights the moon goes skating

past the northern lights
which flicker like the sword outside Eden;
when it's cloudy the stars drop
their pocketwatches: snow comes ticking down.

Dawn, and the grey fire sounds
like an old man walking up stairs.
The sparrows that roost in the pin oak
wind up their hearts: they tilt
against the remaining leaves
which have tucked their burned colors inwards,
like seashells. The leaves whisper
about the tide that comes and goes
around the wings of the great owls.
The sparrows stop waking, entranced.

3.

A clear day and the barn is full.
There are chores to be done. A fresh sun
stirs thunder beneath the pond
and lightning runs across the ice,
kicking at the sky. All night long
the barn rocked, the white foal galloping
through the meadow inside her:
she seems tired, anxious for space;
her green breath must be turned to the wind.

The paper is late, comes in a pickup.
Spread on the kitchen table, it says
that the boy who usually delivers
has dropped from an iceboat
into the moving water below the dam.
The weather promises to hold:
another clear night, another moon
skating into the garden—the foal's brown eyes
opening to take the cold.

Ed Hoepfner

TWO POEMS

Snow Camp

Rivers of stars

February's skeleton
glowing white above us
with its bones of solid ice.

Stars
pockets of heat
turning in frigid space.

Out there
too cold for life
or far too hot.

And here
flames rise and fall against our faces
against the small white tent
and the walls of snow surrounding us.

We sit by the campfire
planets around a dying sun
bodies half in day
and half in night.

Here
there is no middle ground.
The air freezes
right up to the flames themselves
and you have pulled your knees
tight to your chest
bundled against the cold.

I think of what it would be
to speak one word too few
or too many,
to reach over and touch
for one moment too long
the bones of your cheek.

In front of us the stones glow red.
The stones behind us would freeze to the skin
and in such narrow spaces
we learn to have our lives
we learn
to touch everything lightly
and I know
if I press too hard
against your fiery skin
I will feel the cold rise
from the ice-coated bones below.

Thin Air Camp, the La Sal Range

Mountains blending with the clouds,
steam from the coffee
blending with the mist around it.

The second orange tent
fifty meters through the fog
is passing in and out of sight

and you are still asleep,
one bare shoulder out of the sleeping bag
strands of your pale hair
lacing through the ground frost.

Nearly awake, I am staring off downstream
where the cluster of bristlecone pines
drifts back and forth out of the fog

and at first there are just the trees
but then there are the trees and
a single doe beneath them
floating in grey air
 grazing noiselessly
 not looking up.

Her coat has gone nearly white
for the winter;
its borders blend into the air,
the air into the trees;

in time
its black eyes would seem
only pine cones against the snow

and I think
she couldn't possibly be alive:

legs so thin they disappear
before reaching the ground,
the motionless ears, the still eyes,
the enormous red hole in the side of her neck.

But in the time it takes to wake you
she's gone,

as though she had stepped through a curtain
back into the other world

and left us here in the fog
with our hands around our coffee

so half awake
 so half alive

passing in and out of our life.

A. G. Sobin

STONEHENGE

Somewhere beneath this New England soil
Ephraim Cabot rolls over in his bones
stones shiver in the walls he built.
Poor old Puritan Ozymandias
he thinks his walls still stand
his land still sprouts corn out of rock.
That gray pyramid in the north pasture
that's what's left of his empire.
He rolls like ocean mist in his grave
his dreams bent on the morning chores
his snores break the quiet, sharp steady waves.
In small New England towns
we learn young how to build walls.

I love a man with a stone for a head
a stone for a heart, a wall of a man
a walking tombstone, a regular monolith.
Vines grow hair-like on his chest.
I desire him under elms, oaks, birches
in the backseats of cars, churches, motels.
I don't know where he came from
who built him
he's turned New England into Stonehenge
happy farm girls into humpity dumpities.
They run berserk, murder their children for him.
Every crib in every home
holds an infant blue as stone
smothered with love.
I'm afraid of that stone age man.
Even birds won't light on him
their keen eyes catch the bones,
the cracked shells at his feet.
When the two of us meet
I'm a speeding car with no brakes.

Cathie Pelletier

THREE POEMS

Minus Tide

The sea draws back, her nervous doors
slide open for five thousand miles,
and we walk out ten extra feet
into the secret places—

vulnerable tidepools, cool
clefts pulsing with anemones,
maternal ponds where dim
cells crawl or scuttle,

all a fleshy pinkish gray, intestinal
and functional: the color of biology,
undecorative, nonmetaphoric,
unselfconscious, *busy*.

Prurient interlopers, we skid across
seaweeded rocks, splash through ocean mud
that's more alive than blood.

My hand clings to my daughter's, my mind

reaches for poems. But
there's no moralizing such an endless body.
Smiling, a Japanese woman passes
with an armful of seaweed-and-water.

She's going to eat these tangled salt ideas,
before they eat her.

Eurydice

She has awakened from the sleep of the cave,
the leaf-strewn cave where the roots of silence
writhe among fallen branches.

There

she was alone as a worm is alone,
herself embracing herself, her own
silence the only speech. Now
she's awake, blurred eyes, no smile,
smudges of hair like smoke around her ears,
but standing, walking, step and step,
out from between the thick gray thighs
that held her fast....

Someone has built a cooking fire
in a clearing: she sees it now, hears
the rapid muttering of the flames,
more potent than any lyre:
now, if we asked her, who was Orpheus?
she might say, "Someone I used to know."

If we ask her tomorrow,
she'll say, "Who was *who*?"

The next day

she'll begin to write:
her pen bleeding, she'll write about
that long dream, or was it
a dream: *what was it*,
she'll ask, *what was the point*
of that parable of the cave?

Still Life: Man with Fur "Cossack" Hat

This hat, then—you think it's foolish?
And yet I love it: it's
another face above my face,
a beard on my head, the beard
of that totemic animal
I hunt in lobbies and alleys,
the one who guides me
through the icefloes of the afternoon,
the one whose blood pours from my faucet
like sun on the tundra, guarding
my hands from the stain of acquaintances.
At evening in the long streets,
in a darkness vaguer than widows,
I feel his paws close around my skull:
the helmet of his breath is soft, it weaves itself
like fine new hair over my scalp, my ears.
I enter hotels with his strong tread,
I order wine for my wife and daughter, avoiding their eyes.
His claws are piercing tiny holes in my mind,
shredding my smile, scratching the edge of that delicate
goblet he'd like to shatter.
My wife and daughter teeter on the same rim,
their voices thin as twigs, drifting away.
Soon they'll drown in their iced chablis,

and then . . .

He moves invisibly toward them,
and I know someday I'll see him,

someday I'll take off
this hot black hat
and remember his name.

Sandra M. Gilbert

PHOTOGRAPHS OF GREECE & IMAGES OF WAR

This is where they lived
when the German soldiers came
demanding food,
so polite they later said,
smiling, knowing only the word
for eggs, *avga, avga*,
and flapping their arms like birds.

Those years.
My krushka smiles, remembering.
Blessings on the one
who wept at a child's terror.

Later, when the word went out
about the village men,
they hid in the mountains.
That's Kitheron,
may it endure,
where the shepherd saved a king
and where they slept.
On the other side
the Gulf of Corinth lies
where my wife was born.
You can see these waters are as pure
as the eyes of our daughter.

But the best story is the one
of the great fish that floundered offshore,
no photographs to prove it,
but larger than a man.
Someone killed it with a board.
They ate for days and sang
of the marvelous fish that came
to end their hunger.
Then the Allies were there.
They remember the Aussies
who paid them gold for goods
and the strange one in skirts
who played pipes at the campfire
and knew Greek words for friend and good.
May his blue-eyed children prosper.

But the fish!
They remember the troops landing
in the same spot
where the fish came in.
Even the children took it as a sign
that war was all but over
and gathered things
and prepared for going home.

DeWayne Rail

LAO TZU'S SISTER'S DREAM**I.**

Shih-Ch'eng Chi was married
and living in the provinces.
One day, though the road was long,
she set out on a visit.

It was spring
mandarin, plum, cherry —
and she filled her basket
with offerings. So she walked
one hundred stages of the journey,
until her heels blistered.
As the crow needs no inking to stay black,
blisters on a journey are no omen.

In the middle of night,
late in the season,
Lao-Tzu heard footsteps
on the path to his reed hut.

2.

She stayed with him for days,
rising early each morning
to walk with him by the river.
Surely, you know the river.

One day, tossing a stick
into the water,
ripples dancing on the surface,
she recalled a dream.

“There was an uncarved block
and beside it a piece of raw silk.
My fingers went over them with ease.
I thought of a field, and saw

a plum tree. Leaning against it
a woman gave birth to a child.
She placed him in a wooden cart
led away by two white horses.

The road ran along side a stream
until they reached the top of a hill.
From there, I could see the water
downstream, passing by boulders and smaller rocks.”

3.

Now one story goes, “Old Boy”
or the “Old Fellow” or “the Grand Old Master”
at the end of days,
saddened and disappointed

in the ways of men,
climbed on a water buffalo
and rode westward toward Tibet.
At the Hankao Pass, a gatekeeper

an observer of sorts, thought
“Here’s a queer fellow . . .”
and asked him to leave behind
a record of his thoughts.

We all know the book’s name,
though I will not name it here.
If you look inside it
there are 5,000 characters

an uncarved block of wood,
a piece of raw silk,
water running everywhere,
round rocks, and down valleys.

Steven Schneider

FRANKLIN DISCOVERS THE HARMONICA

on the first dark green day
the irises yellow & purple on the colonial lawns

if you had been there
if you had looked up at the day

suddenly darker
honeysuckled & shaded under thick fronds

you would’ve seen Franklin
staring down at his teeth in a pond
discovering the harmonica.

Joseph Somoza

SOW'S EAR

*Here comes a lusty Wooer,
My a Dildin my A Daldin,
Here comes a lusty Wooer,
Lilly bright and shine, A.*

Fifty sows dozing in the hard-packed yard,
fifty sows, all sizes, from purple majesty
to pink ninny,
fifty, sluttish, given to untidy houses,
the open robe of morning, flea in the ear,
snorting, swilling the hay-strewn water;
some indifferent as the Sierra Madre steaming over deserts,
features lost in foothills and ridges of fat;
others petulant, bristling,
practicing the small clean bite.

The lean young boar, thick-necked,
walks a plank from the truckbed,
razor-backed, tufted, tusks rounded to ball-bearings,
lord of the mountains, the hills of flesh, the little valleys
spread before him.

He is small, but the muscles of his neck
can break a hound, or a man's leg.

First one, sullen, whitish-purple in the heat,
stands off, pegs the dirt—mean hussy—
grunts, *Come show me, Bastard!* Grunts, and grunts again.

Though he doesn't turn toward her, he sees her.
Still, he waits for her waddling run,
her little yellow teeth bared for the swipe at his haunch,
blood pudding, sack of fat!
Terror curdling from her throat, she
scrapes to her feet, telegraphs herself to a far corner,
peg peg peg peg peg.

The second, caught off guard, lies where she falls,
croaking.

But the third, Mama She-Hog, jungle mistress,
mother of clouds and mountains, 400 pounds of mauve-
and-pink
repose, feels their cries stoke a fire in her bowels,
a vein of lava creep through an underground fault
toward her heart. The fire moves from marble hams
through vesuvial lungs to the flexing crab of her brain.
Uncertainly, on one leg, then two, she jacks herself from
the primal pool
where gnats nidder and dance a dance of black dots.
The mud swings crusted from her teats, falls in patches
from her belly:

*What are these that tickle the brain—love's tiny cries?
the yammering mouths? squeals that hang like sausages?
No, not those tender attentions.* Dimly she remembers
something unlocked from her, a trembling, a quake, an
eruption, when once she opened and free from her hulk
the delicate she of a dream
danced like rain on a corrugated roof,
pooled in cool wallows,
sprouted under tender thistle,
rolled in goldenrod and clover,
frisked with the cat and suckling.

Turning toward him like a locomotive
on its turntable, the steam of her memories
creasing all her jowls to one truculent smile,
she charges:

*Oh to be the blue fly, the bee, golden,
jigging above the ticklish purple!*

BANG

*Aye, this is the rub,
the tickle of love!* she snorts, enamored.

BANG

*O honey bee, sweetling
hungry for my attentions!*

Again she turns where the boar, dizzy
and sore in the neck, stands baffled.
Having assaulted with his head the Himalayas,
having not gotten over the foothills—he staggers
in disbelief as Everest trundles toward him.

This is the one! Husband! she croons,
full and resonant as a bullfrog,
Sweet chop, my porker, my honey cob!

O what a squall of pipers,
what a regiment of bloodcurdling love
dooms over the highlands of her corpus
resounding from glen and hillside
as she advances on him in a corner,
stale and snuffed as Macbeth,
head slung low as all the world marches on him,
to meet the fate, perilous, magnificent,
of fathering five-hundred friskers.

Robert Siegel