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- Cover:* Felix Braquemonde, "L'Hiver," (etching), from
the Beloit College Permanent Collection,
Theodore Lyman Fine Arts Center.

MOBILE OIL

Eh, Roscoe... When he yelled out we had to start the Olds Eight by priming it, I shook. I'd known backfires, yet, like a damned fool, just to keep the paper partnership alive, I primed. He at the ignition key and me spraying and pouring until it had its fill and it kicked back. Broke open the whole hood that night and spewed my hands and forearms while I stood dazed, lifting gloves of elbow-length flame over my head, holding the priming can high as a grail. His face through that windshield knew my tongue without it talking curse or bless, and with an eye cocked to the dark sky and my heart wanting to run for home, my legs took me *there*. God knows how, except they must have known from some age of dinosaur bone and fern, that what would burn as used oil from their old selves could drown the flame that it engendered. So I ran, arms stretched out before, to light my way to that old shed where I ripped the tops off vats of crankcase oil and plunged my arms to the shoulders with a poof. In that darkness, all alone again, I took the first step back to myself, out of a contract with a mobile world.

John Judson

**SISTER MARY APPASSIONATA'S LECTURE
TO THE EIGHTH GRADE BOYS AND GIRLS
ON THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD,
THE THINGS OF THE OTHER**

1.

God's at the bottom of the Sea of Japan,
a giant catfish old as darkness, slumbering
in fecund ooze, compost of creation, slimy as
liver. He dreams the world. Each twitch

of his whiskers, fins and tail means
another city leveled, another ten thousand
in over their heads. Civilizations
go to sleep each night praying God won't stir
or flop, make waves; won't, raging, rise.

2.

In every sudden winter river, God's what
hardens, that beast and man might stiffly
walk or glide across, a miracle,
each exhalation an aura, holy one's halo.

God's what sizzles the frying egg from clear
to white, garlic's spinning hiss, blight
that hastens falling fruit, dark as
a bruise, awful hardness that seizes
every lover and corpse; his sticky seed the dew.

3.

The Pharoah's personal physician was called
Shepherd of the Royal Anus, which goes
to show that sometimes gods move in
the commonest ways, word made flesh. Jesus
spat at blind men just to make them see.

4.

Rue cures the horniest witch's curse,
shrivels the lecher's stiff, massive passion.
Weasels and priests feast on its leaves
before going out to charm the snake.

Exorcists steep a leaf in blessed water

to tempt young girls from toadstools, scald
the throat of one possessed, sealing the demon's
blaspheming lips. In times of dread,
smoldering dead, place it in church,

the baby's bed, near every mirror or fire,

it clears the head. Girls, put it where
your latest lover was, to draw out the ache
of generation. Life's a loss. Spend each day
adding, subtracting, regretting your expulsion

from the garden. Brew a cup of tears. And rue.

5.

The eyes shoot rays that photograph the world, no matter
how bad the composition, the light. Pius IX, good and
well-meaning as they come, had the evil eye. He once
looked a baby out of its mother's arms high above Rome's
cobblestones and watched it plummet to earth, a fat,
ripe melon. When he blessed, walls went out of plumb,
mortar ran back to water and sand, scaffolding collapsed
like houses of cards, laborers fell screaming from
heaven. Ships and virgins went down like tons of bricks.
Only a greater gift can guard against the evil eye.
Mussolini kept his hands in his pants pocket when
Alphonso of Spain came to see him. He knew a handful
of one's own jewels can soothe the wound of sight,
overcome the most glittering malice. If in the last
six months you've shed no tear, God will fill your eyes

with cataracts. Still today we veil widows and brides,
spend our hard-earned coins on the eyes of the dead.
My own father died of a broken heart because his mother
stared at a picture of the Sacred Heart on the bedroom
wall as her husband labored above her to plant the seed,
her cries of love a prayer. Because of the eyes everything
connects.

6.

Love equals gravity. A net. Handful of ocean
your mother carried in her belly, and with
your father warmed over love's glowing coals
to brew you. You kicked, swam, grew fins and
tail, feet, face and soul: love's phylogeny.

Mother's fingers, woven behind your skull
fragile as an egg, held you as she sang you awake.
Each word caught you. Your lovers' hands
will unravel the web, spin you new. It all
gives way as you fall alone all the way to age.

David Citino

TAKING THE 1939 JONATHAN CREEK ROAD

The Jonathan Creek Road was oiled thickly each year
in Summer. Every gooey, gummed inch
shone blue/black, and oozed under the lick
of the sun.
Even the small gravel, spread over it, didn't
prevent the bottoms
of cars from being oil-caked and scummed.
It sucked at your soles when you stepped up
and down
from the running-board; and often my calves
got tarry smears
across them from some too-quick, forgetful contact
with car or shoe.
Jonathan Creek wound next to the road.
Past underwear fields of Queen Anne's Lace,
alongside copulating barbedwire
fences, between green venetianblind cornfields we
wound, too, when we went
there by day: the tiny gravel flailing against the
metal fenders,
and the hot, oiled-road making crackling, snapping
sounds.
But now it was night;
and the slanted eyes of old V8 Fords and the
rounded hips of Chevys
passed each other, tilting dangerously off the
dropped shoulders of the

road, so there'd be room. The corn came up close
 to the windows, then,
 and whispered silk stocking comments about
 our destination.
 I straightened my black seams for the tenth time;
 and separated my knees
 so my thighs would stop sticking together.
 It was still 90 degrees
 outside. On the horizon ahead I could see a small
 electric glow,
 lonely in the enormous expanse of darkened star
 moon sky
 that stretched over road and countryside.
 Black, warm, close, full, live, night-sky:
 cover of this car; this viscous road; my house;
 my land; my world;
 incubator of my erotic dreams.
 The white fingers of the headlights probed
 the lubricated road ahead, finding a rabbit darting
 left and right to escape
 first from the car, then from the oily surface that
 snatched at his fur.
 The radio spoke of Chicago feet
 flirting across the beautiful Aragon Ballroom
 (High Atop The Windy City).
 While bugs smacked on the windshield,
 an open-mouthed warmth
 sighed clover up and over the car's half-windowpanes.
 Benny Goodman's vocalist sang "We Kiss And
 The Angels Sing", and I
 unbuttoned 2 buttons at the scratchy neck of my
 dotted Swiss dress. We
 passed the shadowed shapes of corncribs and silos
 and sleeping farmhouses
 full of unlucky girls who were not yet 16 years old
 and not allowed to go

to the County Fair where Jan Savitt and
Jimmy Dorsey would stand
and play .. up close.. right in front of our circle
of vampire eyes; and
in no time at all, the electric glow in the distance
had become a fairground
with a throbbing tent. My pulse accelerated me
over the bent running-board.
Stocking seams were straightened for the
eleventh time (make sure
there is no black road-oil on the backs
of your calves).
The man at the gate stamped my wrist with a
rubber ink-stamp:
a snouted pig-print that permitted me to leave
Jan or Jimmy briefly
for a Coke or the stinking restroom, and return
to the dance without
paying my quarter again.
Moist-lipped saxophones wrapped me in curves;
and dreams were at last complete
under my rounded ruffles. Under the flapping
canvas, under the lights,
under the spell of Big Bands I moved forever
to drumbeat
and passionate tune. It was definitely
the Aragon Ballroom, right here (Flat On
The Windy Prairie)
full of damp dotted Swiss armpits, and
flushed cheeks,
and rhythmic 3-inch sandal-heels.
And the same me never returned
down the oiled-road shining blue gummy black under
that time has passed moon.

Charlotte A. Raines

THE MISSING PERSON

1.

An imagined footfall
like a sudden memory
shocks the starlings into flight.

But, no danger, their wings whisper,
it was really nothing,
and they settle again, like one bird,
onto the turned black earth
of the city dump, empty at dusk.

Each time they rise there are more
as if the startled beer bottles and legless dolls,
the mashed fruit and shredded clothing
had grown wings.

They move to trees, lawns,
telephone wires lining the streets,
and when the telephone brings strange messages
at three a.m. it is jumbled with laughter
like bird chatter: she's missing,
lost, raped, pregnant, suicide,
panic, emergency emergency.
No one is ever there.

As a child my younger sister would grind her teeth
when she slept. Tonight she has been gone
three days, and I watch my lover beside me
grind his teeth; his eyes move
beneath his eyelids scanning dreams,
like starlings in flight.

2.—After reading the *I Ching*: Ming I, Wounding of
the Light

On the way to the party, the moon
I saw was low and heavy
and red with dust. The night
smothered me in its folds. I had thrown
three coins. The hexagram had said: the earth
once had two moons, one
silently dogging the other,
shaping itself
in quarters or halves
after the other.

The second moon had its own light,
and like a younger sister,
orbited strangely, and tipped its crescent
to a different degree. Centuries ago we had
given them names, like Mary and Theodora,
They used to fight jealously in our stories
and keep us awake at night with their screams,
but they are forgotten now.

Over our first drink my friend Sandy shows
me her wound; her husband has left her cruelly.
And as she talks she stares at her own blood
speckling my skin with each throbbing of her heart.
She says she leaves her fingerprint in red
on everything she touches.

Sandy believes she is the only one. The others
who don't speak, who only drink and bleed,
believe too that they are the only ones. I look
into my friend's eyes and see they are like two
full, fighting moons
and it is a night when the earth drinks blood.

3.

Many nights I wake standing in the living room
caressing her shadow. My fingers
drop off into the darkness and forget themselves.

I know it will be like this when I die—
my body amputated
and speaking
soft peripheral pain. I will walk
these rooms
reaching for my body's soft embrace.

Is she alive?

Now if I am in the shower I hear the phone ring
constantly. It is the phone of darkness
that I try to answer again and again
to hear her gurgling voice. On my floors
I see her shoes, and her cat
walks in my periphery. I turn
to catch them, constantly turning,
until my circles
cut my life from me,
papery moons of old light.

4.

I am drawing a portrait of my sister, a head
in charcoal, from the one photograph I have of her.
From birth her tongue was thick like moss. It
frightened her when she looked in the mirror,
and when she spoke her words were like guillotined heads
still praying as they fall from the body,
orphic words, moon-shaped, full of light
on moving water and glimpses of the future.

And in the photograph her hair is between corn silk
and light. The color is almost in the drawing
as if scraped from my flesh. Charcoal on my hands.

Where has she gone? Her nose is too long,
her skin too yellow. I erase and draw,
erase and draw. I can't stop. A tongue
moves in my head, like moonlight, like a dream.

These words fall like severed heads: my sister
and I stand arm in arm in front of a house
in the desert, our house. Next door the trees are perfect,
the grass is thick as moss; as we watch,
that house grows tall, like the woody
cells of newly sprouted corn.

As a black and white cat climbs over the fence
my sister turns to look at me, her eyes pleading.
I want to ask her where she is
but my words are thick in my mouth. It begins to snow,
corn snow, granular and clean, onto the sand.

5.

Sister, for whatever reason you may have felt like this
every morning when the fear
stuck on your skin like humid air
beading larger and larger
until the beads were boils; they seemed to think
and hesitate, then they crawled
like flies, spontaneously generated,
down your fleshy arm. You were as tired
as you get at the end of day,
but it was a wet dawn
and you had things to do.
Someone's footprints, cleanly shaped,
like keys, had been tracked in the muddy driveway,
leading away.

You closed your eyes. You felt as if you were driving
down an icy hill, your headlights
cutting the fog into circles of diffuse light.
Beyond them a tree you couldn't see

had fallen across the road,
and to your left and right were thousand-foot drops.

You opened your eyes, as I do now,
and see it is snowing. My lungs
are airless. I wish I was cloud.

For you it worked. You have fallen away. Since then
there have been only cloudless days in Kansas
except here, in my room, where clouds breed. Are those
your footprints in the yard? I want to place my feet in them
just to see, just for size.

**6.—“In the Chronic Stress Syndrome short term
memory is the first to go.”**

Imagine you have a job interview in ten minutes,
and you are on the freeway,
driving too fast. The day is bright,
the signs blurring. All you can think about

is your mother across from you. You
are five years old, helping her make the bed,
and together you toss the sheets up,
sheets that are crisp and clean; as they settle
a long cool breath frees itself
from underneath and lifts your hair.
It smells like lilac, and you smile.

But that was long ago, now she's dead,
and all of the family is gone. Underneath your skin,
thinner than a sheet,
ghosts rise and walk your taut nerves.
Suddenly, you realize you missed your exit
ten miles back. Tired, you want only
a freshly made bed to sleep in.
Instead there are miles to drive
before you dare turn around.

7.

Dear Mary, it is unseasonably warm
for February, like April really. The snow
is melting, the river cracking. We will be able to see
what has been sleeping under the snow all winter,
and bodies may swim downstream with the ice.

When it warms like this my body
feels blindfolded and turned
and abandoned by mischievous friends
who hide and cackle like starlings,
who watch me grope air
reaching for them, dizzy with change.

But nothing has really changed. What was sleeping
under the snow was only the usual spring flu.
I turn my face away from my friends
because tiny burrs like old secrets
swell in my lungs. This misery is contagious
like the trees and fungi
and the crocus feverishly bursting seed
like sweat. Someday it will snow again
and I wonder how many more times
it will fall on our empty house.

8.

There is no rain in Kansas
and each year we lose a tenth of our trees;
so we go out with a borrowed chainsaw
to cut down the dead, and trim
the living. The branches
are dragged into a field to feed
the sucking white tongues of fungus.

And now, in another year, the chainsaw
screams again. First a father,
then a mother, now my sister

have fallen from my life.
The dull thud of wood hitting earth
vibrates in my pelvis
and I feel ill. The green fingertips
of the trees around me in the yard
stretch slowly out through hard layers
of air, mirroring the paths that the roots
follow beneath them in the fragrant earth.

They seem to reach with one hand
deep into the molten earth,
and with the other hand into icy space
where glowing things wobble
and careen randomly
through the atmosphere. Those hands
seem to mock me; I feel armless and legless.

Tonight the rain is falling hard.
I drift into half-sleep
listening to it as I did when I was a child
in Oregon, like it is my mother's rocking
heart. Dreams glow and wobble.

During the night the winds swell
and take a large branch off a cottonwood.
In the morning the branch lies green
and bleeding in the driveway. I wander
in the yard contemplating the wet earth.
Agaricus grow in the grass. A tree stump
has sprouted a branch.

Theodora Todd

ALL FLESH IS GRASS

Crabs turn stalked eyes from us
black rushes flower our shoulders
loam clings to the steep marsh edge
where starfish spring from eelgrass

We lean over the last of the sure ground
as the prow is offered and the sun
drops from the middle of the mast
centerboard slammed through reeling water

*

Salt water sinks to its hands and knees
holding fresh water on its back
and the fresh water treads water
keeping us afloat as we
twist for the thumb of land
which crosses itself, opening
to the open sea

*

We're riding into the place where 50,000
glass eels flood the creeks
one body swimming for the marsh
a pale film on dark water
darkening as we go

This is where herring gulls
cruise for moon snails
where the tide going out
faces the tide coming in
when the earth and the sun and the moon
hold a chalk line between them

It is here the terns have always come
to bury their broken eggs

A small girl was lost here last summer
nobody knows how she walked this far
they found her at dusk crouched
still with her bucket and pail
and the gulls surrendered
their perches as she watched
over her father's shoulder

The bar closes off behind us just
as starfish lower their open stomachs
into the mussels' brine

*

The ocean runs on moon tides —
the longest waves we think we know, but
there's something we can't follow here
fresh sounds pull at the sea
things caught in our hair
Unable to count these on our fingertips
we shrink from them
The sky dips, then bends
Falling, we shout only what has always been true:
This crest has nothing to do with us
as it touches bottom, rises
Enough, we cry, let's leave it
but we are sifting
and the scallop waits, eyes zooming
sun slips through the half-moon
of our fingers as a Moon-Jelly shimmers
across our wrists, shaking us loose
from her four mouths, and we hold out
our hands to her but she drifts
for the shallow we can't touch here
where bottom fish feed

*

Before the starfish can swallow
before the eel can dart, naked and blind
to the sinking meadow
in time to remember the name of each purple blossom
we are raked to shore, like sandlings
who wriggle, silvery, against the safety of your arms.

Deirdre G. Callanan

A MISSIONARY COMES TO OAKDALE COUNTRY CHURCH

He weeps envelopes. He blows up
starving native dolls and sets them in aisles.
They roll; they beg, as members bow heads,
but the dolls grow inside their eyelids and
try on their brains. Soon, members think,
the dolls will beg their best Sunday clothes,
then come to their farms, talk them out
of tractors, plows, and nights on the town.

Wives take hatpins and pop the dolls.
Men strip the missionary, paint him black,
and shrink him in a chicken crate—starve him
till his ribs reach out like little hands.
Then calling him The African Doll,
they pass him around as the offering of guilt
they'll never expel. And nights where there
once were family prayers, parents unfold
their children's hands, and whisper
into tender ears: "You are going to Hell."

Rodney Torreson

PARTIAL CORRESPONDENCE

I

Thank you for your note.
Yes, I recall those summers well,
although being twenty-one is sometimes hard
to distinguish from nineteen or twenty.
There was a fire once on Colvin's ridge.
I helped to put it out,
still have a small scar on my arm
where a flaming limb fell.
I'm glad you found my book.
Of course, she isn't really you.

II

I did not mean to evade.
Your questions are pointed
but memory is weak.
What do those words mean to me?
Ladyslipper, feldspar, northern lights?
I can only repeat them. Yes,
at least I should remember words.
Be more specific. Tell me.
Riddles only annoy.
Perhaps this note should not be mailed.
And the scar I spoke of
was no metaphor.

III

Yours arrived as I was writing this.
I had to start again. No, I will not
call it quits. Last night I woke
knowing you had entered a dream
persistent and evoking
only as a living person, or one who has lived,
can. All day long I've walked distracted,
trying to penetrate that film
of detail I invented. My words are:
tattoo, old boots, zinfandel.

IV

How dark it was that night.
Not even the flashlight seemed enough
before it yellowed, died.
You were afraid. I almost dropped the wine
stumbling on roots. We had vengeance on our minds,
I against Sally, you for someone else.
I'm on the right path now?
Let's be plain. Since you were puzzled
by my words, I'll tell.
Tattoo for the heart I traced
across the bare skin of your breast,
threatening to leave it by a magic touch.
Old boots for the phrase that made you laugh
when I explained how Sally made me feel,
and laugh again on other nights when I would say it.
Zinfandel was what we drank.
You thought it was a place in fairyland.

V

You're right. The northern lights flared up
so full we thought the woods on fire.
Feldspar still evades me
and if I picked wild orchids

I don't feel guilty now.
Passing notes like this seems childish.
Next weekend? Just a chat.
To see your face in sunlight.
The moments I remember best
were night, the clearings where I waited,
the time we found our way to a rented bed.
I don't mean to recapture anything.
But memory now won't leave me alone.

VI

How can we limit what you have begun?
You pricked me on,
would not let me forget.
I don't mean to come swooning at your door
or think that we can clamber into woods.
Yes, it might be sad
for two of us our age to sit
in a Holiday Inn awash in nostalgia.
But isn't it worse
to think we touched, brought back
those lives from the grave
then had no use for them?

VII

Hell. How do you mean self-justifying?
People in books aren't ourselves.
Your memory is still intact.
What difference does it make
who left or where we went?
Such sentimental scars. I only used
a place and half-remembered time.
The book transforms all persons
to its purpose. Don't look
so narrowly at art.

VIII

All my life regret
has followed anger.
Your silence is what I merit.
But that was what we had two months ago.
You make me feel as if I tattled
and betrayal is not a thing of present tense
now that I'm old enough to raise the past
and twist it once again.
But long ago I hardened to complaints
of uncles, aunts, my parents. I have no memory
for facts, and even real names seem invented.
Call it a life-long lapse of taste, or lying
that only those who know me can find out.
Again, everything I thought was separate
is ligatured to all I touched or love.
But I remember how the book began with this:
clear light rising out of earth,
trees gathering to our eyes
as we woke in another part of the forest.

T. Alan Broughton

ONE MORE DAVID

The eighth race made it all untrue.
Up, like a print on better paper, from last ass in the gate,
he ran the stretch, took that far turn solid,
and made for home and history never touching ground:

One More David.

Twenty-two to one.

As of that last half length, I have no longer lost
on every David
I ever strapped a hope to.

But, this one was no David
who, kneeling tit to tit with me
in the backseat of his Daddy's late-teen Olds,
found the inside of my thigh hot as a pancake
one mid-December
and, later, kicked clear through the rear side steel door.

This time, this was no David
home from the Prom or to his wife
weeping fine-grained tears or big ones
about his mother, father, all his aunts,
his children, wife, or collie who'd be so
oh, so disappointed in him. If they knew.
Dead laboratory rabbits or boyfriend at his side,
I wouldn't tell them, would I?

This, of all the overstuffed caged birds and empty
barns of Davids,
the wound and scab of them, the sweet, swift streak of one,
the pop cap, summer sky, wet nose, fruit basket,
dug-up corpse, milky eye, and pork chop,
dimwiddy, knuckle-sandwich, fish bait, dropped stitch,
herniated angel, limp fish, quart of ooze,
manna-mouthed, ripped page from Kant,
gnat-ass, carbuncle, salmon steak,

mosquito bite, singed hair of them —
This one, this one,
the one longshot of all the Davids
I bet right.

This time, a thoroughbred,
back broad as a stream and twice as fast,
this one,
a forty seven forty pay off for my last two scraggly bucks,
ran for, not at me,
and not away.

Linnea Johnson

LATE AFTERNOON

for Ruby Zagoren

Food in the pan, milk in the jug,
everything is all set for him
who thought he asked himself to dinner.
And he is a young one and doesn't know how to be
at twelve, and the girl on the kitchen-chair
is twenty, and he is a boy, which can only mean one thing.
But the house is curtained and full of strange things:
wood heavy as stone from Australia,
oils on the wall public with nudes,
books with gilt letters and shining.
Still he says, where are your parents?
Maine she says.

He can hardly wait
to tell his friends where he's been.
Are you sure? she says.

Zona Teti

NIGHTDROWNING

The air grew stiff you say
the sudden squall and how
my boy held on
into the sedated night
Five of you lying light
as fishbones
unaccountable as liniment jars
on mild Mexican seas.
The dark slosh
of dream
the steep swollen wakefulness
blue
and irresistible as sleep.
You could have drifted
forever the raft
the circle of white
fingers remembering
older darkneses
other waters
rushing you
new
into the dispassion of air.

You say the sky
was a luminous marble
and under your ribs
the sea breathed
gently gently rocked
(He was like a Mesabi barge
in my belly
stopped in the shallows
of spine Oh!
I should have carried him
in a softer place.)

One more time
I am listening to your gestures
tell the silence
the stillness
the peace of worlds
too large for fear.
I hold the empty shovel
of your hand
against my ear and wait
hearing again what I never
let you speak...
it came when the cloud slid away
the wave crashing down like a curtain
My boy stunned by the sudden
the cold bright hammer
of the full moon
gave his mouth to the sealong pour
his eyes round and yellow as moons.

Sharon Stark

BREAD

Bread: warm, calm loaves.
For twenty years I've been baking it
to buffer my zigzags.

Bread: playwork for my hands when my mind
is a fractured blankness or a frozen frenzy.

Bread: whole wheat, oatmeal, sourdough, rye—
banana bread, carrot bread, apple bread, date—
I must bake some now for Aran.

He phoned yesterday. "Mom? Hay! You sound like something that lives in a hollow tree."

Then he mentioned that he's dropped out of college. Last summer the clothes hamper reeked of his Salvation Army outfits. I didn't complain. Anything was easier than the assaulting sweetness of his Hare Krishna phase.

"It's true about your voice," my husband admonishes me. "'If you don't use it, you lose it.'"

—whole wheat with rye: It will speak for me.

The dough isn't always supple.

Some days my despair gets kneaded into it,
and it will slump.

Some days I over-flour the board, and the dough
will crêpe like the powdered flab of a hag.

Do I seem to be lampooning the mother's lot?

Maybe the son's is harder.

Suddenly, in junior high, that boyish symmetry's
sprung. Gaucheries bumble through gaps.

Vocal cords trumpet hoarse explosions.

"Help Aran!" I begged his father...

who shrank behind the newspaper.

In high school, those Picassoed parts melded
into a second Errol Flynn, so torqued by testosterone
...that my insomnia bristled: Had some girl's
father shot him?

Tiddies my husband calls muffins with jelly centers
and those talcumed with sugar.

"Baking is so *creative*!" he used to cajole
before I banned that word.

Baking bread is *safe*, like knitting, or tears.

As young as age two, Aran was enchanted with
tools.... At six, his touch was transmuting

balsa, glue, paint into marvels.

"How on earth do you motivate that boy?" his teacher asked. Crisp from London, I boasted, "For one thing, we don't have television—"

Aran would stay hours in his room, spellbound in an invention.... Bearing a tray of carrot bread, apple, milk, I'd tiptoe to his door.

Sometimes I pinch off a wad of dough for an extra. On the table, a wrapped bun is absolution for the boy who sneaks in late. Or he can pop it into his pocket if he needs to run away.

There was a period when Tad was ailing. Maybe it was his frailness; maybe it was my solicitude; maybe the alliance of these that brought out the bully in Aran. He'd taunt nibbling, slow-swallowing Tad, then gobble everything in sight. Thinking: *I should have had—at most—one child... But which one?* I'd say: "It's time for Tad's nap." On his pillow I'd have placed a tin of buns, pat of butter in pill bottle, dab of jelly in another, tongue depressor spreader.

What do other mothers do?

The busy yeast turns the dough faintly sour, like the body's odor. In the warm bowl, it breathes, grows... nudges up the towel, like the fetus under the apron.

There was that reprieve between infancy and puberty when the brothers were not continually at odds.

Days when they dug contentedly in the sandbox, or, ardent archeologists, gouged the yard for dinosaur bones and arrowheads.

I was always packing little picnics for their improvised tent or treehouse. "Wow! Thanks!"

they'd whoop, pleased as puppies with peanut
butter sandwiches... and with my offering of
bucket, clothesline, shoebox, brick, quilt,
torn sheet—

Before being divided into loaves, the dough is allowed
to rest on the floured board under the towel.

“When are you going to cork-line young Proust’s
room?” Malcolm sniped.

“You dormant dad!” I snapped. “Help him!”

Our Armageddon was awful.

Malcolm won.

Every morning at five, newspaper pouch slung
like an albatross from his thin neck, Tad
departs into the dangerous darkness.

With hot scones and honey I lave his return.

The breath from the oven is fragrant now.

I'd even call it friendly, but I've forgotten what,
exactly, *friendly* is.

Are you approaching, Aran, like Hansel to the
witch's house?

Or hitch-hiking—the vagabond to this hermitage?

I'll be in the hollow tree when you arrive, but
the bread will be on the table.

This is my body Take Eat

Karen Snow

TWO POEMS

January in Woodstock, Maryland: Coming Home

I. Can this be right? I felt
my left hand Tuesday night, held
against the skin of your cheek.
I want it back. Left hand
be alone for a change—
write something.

OK. The woodstove in my basement
heats the whole house. I've just walked
out in the snow to look at the chimney
at the smoke building its own house.
That dark pile under the tree
is the wood stock I split last summer

Inside again, the basement is safe. Only
an old pile of potatoes staring into the dark.
"Welcome home," they whisper.
This is home, right? Flurries past the door
answer "Yes." But January snow
always lies, especially at night.

Inside. The stove is a promise
of brown bread and beefstew tomorrow,
but for now I only want to keep warm, keep out
some ancestral fear of frostbite—
I need all my fingers in working order.
So I'll open that ironblack stove door
chunk in another log. Call it *Tuesday*.

II. Orange coals remind me of
Halloween pumpkins. October—
I can write that in Russian.
Of Siberia, maybe. The cold there
can split your teeth

III. I need what's buried under the ashes.
When the wood runs out, I'll burn the chairs
the doors, the walls. I'll tear down the house and
go live with the smoke. "Welcome home"
chant the potatoes. Bastards—
I'll burn you too. I'd burn my own hands
to keep warm tonight. Left hand first.

the Winter Kite

(for v.f.)

from this hill I can see
everything—the bay of frozen boats
the kite suspended above the snowfield.
It would be evening
to walk through the winter trees
down to the snowbound town
hear the bells ring their far words
my oldest tongue

I am nowhere near this town
where people never lived. The kite
is waiting to be called home
but only the bells are there to say
“no one, no one is home for you”

The trees are their own shadows
in this twilight. And I
am breathing with the fallen frost
walking so quietly
the snow does not believe me.
I am looking for a place to plant:
a field dark and smelling
of last year's rain

Come, come and look at the town.
It will never be spring.
From this hill I can laugh with the bells
watch the porchlights go out one by one
until only the kite is left.
I have put them all away.
Put them all, all away.

Lisa J. McCullough

OF THIS GOLD

“Yes, wonderful things”

—Howard Carter, on his first look

Harry Burton's darkroom was a tomb.
 To get the shots he'd relay
 light sometimes 100 feet belowground,
 using mirrors, catching sun in mirrors
 and tossing it on, around corners, backwards
 through time, and reaching bottom
 undiminished: this was Egyptian sun.
 It burned in your spoon. It burned in your own
 closed eyes. All into November nothing
 was brighter—and then, on the 26th, after
several thousand tons of debris without success,
 Carter lugged Tut into the light *...its weight*
as much as eight strong men could lift...
of solid gold!... gold coffin... gold mask...
 and nothing was brighter,
 ever. Sun was just another ornament,
 two dots to the cheeks of that face *...at which*
Lady Allenby, the wife of Britain's High Commissioner
to Egypt, and a number of Egyptian notables... noting
 that remarkable eighteen-year-old's
 four thousand year old face *...no fewer*
than 20,000 people visited... placid in feature
 but necessarily radiant
 in material *...already had influenced*
women's fashion and jewelry... the golden boy,
Colossal In Size!, his eyes
 of quartz and obsidian *...Dazzle!* / but
 I prefer the gold and the boy

*

of this manuscript page, both boy and gold
by definition as thin as the page,
from the fifteenth century.

First,

an old man covered—almost tented—in a prayershawl
faces an opened tome of Scripture. Gold
picks out a hanging oil lamp, the trimwork
of the lectern, and a deep blue brocade wall-cloth's
fleur-de-lys—but the man himself
is ungilded, and all of the bordering bright bits only focus
our attention on the greater glory that's his
standing still and plain in this devotional air.
It's *Rosh ha-Shanah*, the New Year; he intones,
“Remember us unto life, O Lord who delightest in life.
Inscribe us in the Book of Life.”

And

then, beside that sober room, larger
and aswirl with violets, bounding hares,
exotic blush-bellied songbirds: the boy,
on a pet fawn lightly reined by a woven braid.
The old man's opening word, *zakhrenu*,
“remember us,” floats in sveltely-lettered gold above the boy,
the size of the boy, and is his floreted, filigreed
springtime's only show of linkage with
the synagogue. The rest forgets
the man, though the man makes it possible, the man
who calls for Life. The boy is Life. He is
a boy: sweetcheeked, dampnosed, belligerent, wholly
uncaring about the allover small
gold knobules—their job is to make the world
behind him luxurious
and flat. As for him, there's not one
gold hair, not a thread.

—Or

on the fawn, who is an attitude,
 who's foursquare in that same extravagant rain
 from a sky conceived of as a government mint,
 kopecks and florins and shekels, yet
 who bends the full impress of his attention
 to a little lace of moss, or is it
 a mussel, or is it the brilliant italicized
 slime-path of a worm
 through the heart of a chard...!

It could be this
 last spasm of fish-milt as it flails in the pan, or
 this insouciant beret-tilt to a mushroom, or this
 wood button's inch of grain that's a sienna map
 to the delicate bones of the herring... It
 needn't be gold—though it's gold

*

of a kind, in the fifteenth century manuscript
 "Canon of Medicine of Avicenna, Book 1"—above
 its sinuous Hebrew script, a group of what
 could be state vassals carrying ingots
 in tribute to what could be a despot,
 staring, stern... But
 no, they're patients. The physician
 studies the jars they're bringing, in this illustration
 to Avicenna's thirteen sections on "Urine."
 Deep jars, amber and full
 of answers. If this bent-browed man is Avicenna
 himself, the stare,
 the fascinated, clarifying
 stare, is apt—who knew it down to "colour,
 turbidity, density, transparency, sediment, quantity,
 odour and froth." Of color: "straw colour,
 citron, orange, flame red, saffron, champagne or olive."
 Its bubbles are "large, coarse, fine or small." Not only
 the men but the very perspective in the room

attends his wisdom. "The cloud in the urine
of pregnant women is somewhat like
a piece of ginned cotton floating in the middle." He
looked, a cloud, a scrap of cotton, he looked...
Or not even that. A stone. say. Just a stone

*

"of an oriental horseflesh-colour," "a flint
of liver colour"—John Aubrey. It's 1656, and
"roving and magotie-headed" Aubrey is eye
to eye with an "excellent trout" where close rocks
lanyard water, is collecting
"petrified Sea-Mushroomes, which Nature has workt on
the outside like the ventricles of the Braine," is
in an empathetic trance above the "perfect
litle leaves of an Oake"—then later visits his friend
Hans Sloane, maybe to watch the vipers' fat
for Sloane's invented sore eye ointment
thicken over heat; to sketch the slippery lobes
emerging from an elephant
Sloane's ordered dumped in his garden for dissection; surely
to say in conversation something like
this, "It were an incomparable pleasure to know
what is in the middle of a mountaine
or great hill." I think he danced, he must have danced,
at finding "a Fern of prodigious bignes."

Sloane

was also friend to Christopher Wren,
Pepys, Handel, Halley the astronomer—*Sir*
Hans, of the Royal Society, physician to the Queen.
He traded minerals with Alexander Pope, then Pope
compiled onward: "a hogshead of scallop shells,
petrified moss, a hummingbird's nest..." Of course
Sloane owned a folio of Dürer drawings!—Dürer,
of course, whose own avidity knew the wild
orangutang's "mummified member," the walrus's
spiny snout,

who died en route to see his first whale,
 “stranded in Zeeland.” It could be just
 the wind, Sloane’s friend Sir Isaac Newton
 “jumping against the wind in order to measure its force,”
 you see him? there? leaping at it once and again
 as if leading all of them, doing the little *hi-do-dee*,
dee-hi-do-dee, of Aubrey’s crazy spin-and-cackle
 click-heels dance of discovery. Ah, the British

*

Museum!—stately and inclusive,
 as we know it today, began with Sir Hans’s
 willing the Empire seventy-nine thousand
 five hundred seventy-five of his “very
 copious rarities.” Voltaire came, Linnaeus.
 As we know it today, one and a half million visitors came
 in 1972, for pomp,
 avoirdupois value, politics and privilege, came
 with guide-cassettes and Kodaks, past
 the armed-guarded room of his being on loan
 from Cairo, long and lustrous: Tut.

But

I prefer to think of it then, with “all the books
 and the crocodiles”—someone’s
 spent the morning in an ardor
 at her carriage-house, over the crumbly
 organpipe-nests of its mud-dauber wasps, then
 after a crag of cheddar, with sherry, off
 in the gig to see “such curiosities
 as one of the horns that had sprouted from the maidenly
 forehead of a Miss Mary Davies.” It could be
 a horn, even a spurious horn. It could be—oh,
 a green pea; Mendel attended the dumb green pea
 until it told him everything. It could be...
 next to nothing, really. —Bones, a pile of bones

*

or just a chunk of one, in air that's picked you
out for an antenna: Goethe
"experienced a swift flowering of knowledge..."—what
my book says, though I think it must have been hard
and absolute, more stone than flower, with the vivid
stars of a stone's sharp hitting—"...just as he noticed
the whitened skull of a sheep on a hillside."

Bones,

to dream of bones, to make your brain a reliquary around
the thought of a Neolithic femur. Or,
for Monet, his water lilies, like cream-hipped harem women
in gauze, on green, and these he gave his sight
to depletion. Von Frisch also painted: dots,
on the bellies of bees, *bees*, thousands of bees and
thousands of hand-done dots, one per, he wanted
to know: their waggle-dance, to know:
their partite homing-in toward sugar water, often at night
his head hummed in wanting to know and I believe
in sleep his hand continued dotting and made a
partner for the equally fanatic
hand of Seurat.

"You

think about it all the time"—Maeve Leakey, on
splinters of bones, "most the size of a
fingernail or smaller." To sift them out
of African sand, to sift three hundred chips that
improbable size from out of the Kenyan sand,
"exhilarated. You dream about it... you have to..."
Edgar Allan Poe is looking at bones

*

arranged by size, in a curve, like obdurate
harpstrings.

Ribs

of an ancestor-horse. The Philadelphia
Academy of Natural Sciences, close to 1840.
He's a black frock coat and blacker stovepipe hat

in which a round white ball of looking
 through time is set—and I must look at him with
 similar rigor: the photo blurs
 specifics (its caption questionmarks whether that figure
 needing
 to finger these hard horse sides like a harpist
is Poe) and so delineating white
 and black from its gradings of gray is
 like the climb down a dig, and then the days of diligent
 camelshair brushwork, finicky over slivers.

Some

of it's clear enough: a man
 in observation, so taken
 he's tilted, slightly, out of himself,
 into an earlier body. His eyes are shining with this
 diligence, shining out of shadow
 —as if some of the dark, some of the geologic dark
 and pressure, holds these eyes and turns them
 harder than eyes, and brighter. And,
 too, there's the moustache. Surely it's Poe.

Perhaps

he looks because he'll use this understructure
 of a beast in a story. Maybe I've looked at him the
 same-way here he is, in this poem, all my
 weeks of concentration and outlining
 bearing down—no wonder he's tilted! But
 no: a last lean glance at how his vision
 redefines the elemental
 relationship of objects and light in this room,
 and I'm sure: his is a fascination beyond

*

use. Little else is, and
 rarely. Even sickness's thinning us
 down to a sweat and a broth: "...at least you'll
 get a poem out of it." So, we "get things,"

“for poems.” We get our poems for things.

A marquee: WELCOME POETS. Talk of grants,
of groupies. Plumly's salary. Publish me. Talk
of grants committees, of committees' grants.

A pool and people around it. A Chivas Regal and
people around it. Publish me. Plastic glasses
plastic glasses plastic glasses plastic glasses.

At midnight POETS turns to SANITARY ENGINEERS
—a little like Cinderella's problem—and somebody
squeals like crazy in 403. Somebody's getting some,
and somebody's getting published.

You do it,

I do it, there's a seed from Sloane's collection that sprouted
extravagantly in World War II when
firemen fighting to douse a blitz hosed
down the British Museum; it sprouted true,
voluminous beauty—but that was a
long 200 years. Talk of fellowships.

Dustjackets. Agents. A mafia.

Talk of who's who and whose who. These
are the moments we live. The light deepens down like red
on an artist's chart, then it's purple, the moon
shmoozes on, then it's black. And there are the moments
we live

*

for. Half a dozen, maybe, less...

Say you're writing. Last you looked, noon sun was a fierce
lucidity: the lone liveoak tree pressing,
with its shadow, against the earth. It's one knobby
muscle by now, from doing that isometric. Last
you looked... You look. It's night. You've been lost
in a doffed scarf's cranberry paisley, in
a knot of plank-cut pine, in a moth,
and it's night now, irreversibly and straight up
past the star-patch where your eyes begin to fail.

It clouds over, now—so not even stars. Just night in its purest degree, and you set down the pen and go walking, out in it, night in the lowest pit of your lungs, in the place where a tissue between the night and the blood doesn't know what it's doing. Night wants you. Night's making everything nothing, and it wants you. Didn't there used to be a woods here, to the left and right... There isn't a single needle of fir to play a single groove of night music with. There isn't music. There isn't one sour curd of a moon. And you're a drug inside night's system, its rush, and soon there won't be you. What happens now is so simple I'm almost ashamed to say it. There's a light.

There are moments we live for, and so there's a light now. Maybe you've lit a match. Maybe, even probably, you haven't, though it's that kind of flame: contained, the size of a knuckle, just the center of a small ball of light, at arm's length from you, wavering. You think, from illustration, this flame is the shape of a mosque. It isn't quite. But this is your light, in the darkness, and some of the reverent lull and nimbus-touch of a mosque, of a man on his knees, of the glow and great quiet in which the animals speak and the planets come down in obeisance, is in this leaping light, and is released by the leaping. Of course a moth would want it. Of course a moth would want to beat against that light like announcement against a gong. The moth from earlier in your day, the moth of your afternoon study. What *wouldn't*, from earlier in your

day, want to beat its way into this light, and let light declare it as separate from the darkness! The Indian tapestry, it lapis-threaded antler dancer, wants to be in the flicker, and keep warding evil off with a shake of its red-striped gourd. It wants the light, it wants to be in this wind-whipped leaf of light. The lattice's

multicruciform shadow needs light, the ivy already
writhes in a deep green spiritual tropism for this light,
the knives of gang wars want to flash like fish
in a huge trembling dangerous shoal, which is their badass
version of majesty, this thirteenth-century ivory face
of Christ
and the face of this lettuce, both with so many
interior shadows, the sugary compote-glide
of testes in their sac, the taste of iron on the tongue
of a convict
licking the bars out of grief, the blue galvanic bolt
through a lab frog's leg, the hemstitch and the humidior,
a terracotta griffin, a box of corn starch for washing
the diaphragm clean and the even gleaming kernels
of perfect
advertising on front and back, the one pearl of a
man left on the diaphragm, the sand of hurt at its middle
and then she holds the diaphragm under the sudsing rinse,
she needs more light, he's driving home at 4 a.m.
and is drawn like a living exemplum of laws of physics
toward ever larger light, the eye of the Norway rat and
the lash of the
manta ray want in, the livery lush carnelian
of the afterbirth wants in and so does its smell as thick
as a mansion door with grillwork, the filament
rippling the bead on the microscope stage, the locket
you made
of a walnut with your mother's unyielding smile inside
and the counselor at camp gave you four silver stars, and
the stars in their inscrutable travel, the flesh, the webs,
the gene-jellies, everything, comet and apple core,
bubble of spit, the whole nerve-skein's lithe sparkage,
everything: wanting to know it, be held, and to hold
the singular hush and holiness, the mesmerism, the quick
of this gold.

Albert Goldbarth

TWO POEMS**Taboos**

Pulled and pulling, the snake ascended
in its dazedly spiritual way.
A diamond mind led its blood sunward.
Some vibration had touched stone
to direct the silent head into the gourd
of small sparrows.

Gorged, the snake slid entirely inside
the swinging darkness, a stack of black circles.
The gourd full of snake
weighed more than my hands could balance.
I shot the sleeping snake.
Pulsing out above sky-darkened blood,
it struggled to fly with those folded wings.

Like a line of black water
it slipped off my hoe,
the handle taking life in my grip.
I touched the temperature of the day
in a shallow grave between young corn.
Shedding earth, its tail fingered to me.

At supper bread broke open its cotton mouth.
Shaken, I stared hard into the dark
behind my daughter's laughing lips, comforting me.

Shortly in a bedtime vision I saw my sleeping child
entered by snake,
that same grave tail pointed at me.

Storm Pit

As a child I went down into earth
when the west turned black with clouds.
I was jealous when Mama held Daddy's head
in her lap, and scared like him, praying.
Root hair coming white from the pit walls
I took to be ghosts' waiting in soil for night.
I didn't want to see a Holy One.
The older boys howled at Blacks, baptized
in the creek, whose heads tangled in roots.
No laughter from me, knowing lightning
licked through cracks in a pit door.
The biscuits Mama carried into the ground
for the long dog day storms —
eating them in the damp, the lamp smell,
I worried about floods, whether ferry existed
to carry my soul unburied in that gloomy hole.
The sky raging, I worried if I had a soul.
As a child I went down into earth,
the west turned black.

Ken McLaurin