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COVER

Dan DeKoch, graphite pencil drawing, 1976, "Kasaya,
Flier of the Skies." Prints are available from the artist:
1401 Sullivan Ave., Kaukauna, WI 54130; (920)766-2202.
Design by **Mary Greene**



An arrow at the bottom of a page
means no stanza break.

JOEL FRIEDERICH
Deep in the Western Suburbs

Autumnal moths rose
from tall grass along tracks,
around restless commuters
on platforms, into burning
sodium lamps, and farther,
into tungsten stars, flying
away like used up loves.

Some stuck in a rich man's
wool coat, burying heads
in Italian nap while he read
the news, ten, then a hundred
thirsting for new sweetness,
fastening mouths, pumping
splintered, powdery wings,
raising satisfied abdomens.

His train arrived (I was there)
and he stepped on without
glancing up from his reading,
his suit trembling alive, doors
enclosing us all like a sentence.

Sliding out of the station
we watched him absorbed
in his words, no one daring
to speak, a sentient language
cloaking him in need.

The scattering would come,
oh yes, but for just then, pause—
we were all a brief assemblage
of sense upon the skin,
a collection of raw thirsts.

JOEL FRIEDERICH

Three Views of the Yokohama Line

1

Dwelling in corners, in the ashes
of the visible, he's forgotten
his stop and where he got on.
Seen so many terminals streak by
he assumes an indeterminate age—
now he belongs to no history
but his own. His mind strains
with the word for love: *aijyoh*,
the impossibility of writing it
so it will be real, his right
index finger, a blunt brush dripping
with intent, jabbing and coiling
the air before his eyes. Five slashes,
quick, he stumbles on the heart,
kokoro, a word buried in the flesh
of what remains: fallen towers
he hesitates before, passageways
like caves, a forest of arms
that won't descend to him. He tries
to snatch back what's already been
written, pull apart the heart's
heavy strokes, jam them in
his pockets, ears, mouth, then grins
before sinking on his knees.

2

In this old lady's face, the city
destroyed, not once, but so many times
it's acquired the transparency
of glass, the spilled quintessence of
brick, napalm sucking oxygen
from alleys. In her eyelids' quick
fissures, canals turned to torsos, limbs,
hair entangled in a drowned mass
flowing with the nation's bile
while she remains still in her skin,
waiting until the origami of her
body unfolds and she flies separate
from the careful attachments of light.

→

Fold over fold she works pale green
papers the size of gum wrappers,
seven turns between thumb
and moon-shaped fingernails.
First, they are water birds returning
with gifts from the dead; then
abstractions, suffering's geometry;
finally, tiny cups from which
the unborn could sip the tea of life.
She fits one inside another,
a chain of restored minutes
she slips in a pocket for later.

3

This girl cannot die. Every minute
death is unmade by a pencil tip
stroking lips. Everywhere the threat
of dissolving, of becoming transparent—
fish markets, bicyclists, towers,
the city is a mirror we fly through
rushing toward erasure, gaps in matter
gape like the astonished eyes
of comic book heroines. She glues
clouds of socks to furrows
beneath knees, hikes her skirt up
another inch closer to the fact
of her. Her own solidity is the job
she's been assigned, so she spreads
the bright goo on her face, dips
her eyelids in silver, fashions
a surface for the body, a replica
of the world's unattainable contours.

JOEL FRIEDERICH
Sidewalk Chalk Figures

Sophie and *Olivia* scrawled in abundant
curlicue script beneath their bodies'
outlines—explosions of maroon
around torsos and limbs, golden

auras, fiery nebulae, tangerine haloes
laid down in accreted layers, summer's
green secretions, cloaks of midnight,
turquoise embellishments, bubble-gum

pink sheaths, purple robes, diadems
of moon blue and fountains of corn-
yellow beehive hair-dos not seen since
the sixties erupting from their heads,

but in the impoverished center where
each had lain, pressed against concrete,
still as death while the drawing was
made, nothing's traced, no eyes, buttons

or mouths, so that we may lie carefully
in the deserted shape of *Olivia* or *Sophie*
to feel the sidewalk's cool transcription
of textures into our own backs' frail

flesh, see phone lines cross above
the street (carrying what translations?)
watch a flight of arctic geese vanish
in thin upper air, feel a tracing hand

slide over turns of our ankles and knees,
around the ribs' arch, underfolds of arms,
and when the enclosing is accomplished
we'll rise to a new vision and look back

wondering at the eclipse of our first body,
a person-sized hole cut from the center
of illuminated margins, the brilliance
we're drawn from, this awaited birth taking

the shapeliness of an abandoned world's
borders, adorned but never crossed, that
neither we nor *Sophie* nor *Olivia* may
reach back through to complete a face.

JOEL FRIEDERICH
The Sour Taste of Old Men

I think of them as a roux
from *le grande cuisine*, conflicting tones
married temporarily, a sweetness undermined
by bitter, that dark monologue, Death rehearsing
alone in a corner while the beautiful harmonize,
a bright, lemony trumpet blaring in the sad
cathedral of butter; cayenne, cumin, and cloves
yelping orgasms, their coital arias shattering
the funeral of salt and flour, a fragile unity
held only by the potency of their failures.

And those inner marriages outlived
like the green gone from trees: what do you think
makes the fire of their golds and garish reds
but the elements wandering away from each other?
The parts going separately into the woods
where they were made, to sit down and contemplate
their undoing. A curdling in the breath while
they still can sing.

I've heard the sticky hormones
shift with age, that the heat in testicles gives
way to another river that was always moving
beneath our urgencies—I shall grow breasts then,
become round and sour in my conceiving,
the loosened selves pouring out of me like milk.

ANNIE BOUTELLE

Marriage Bed

Celia Thaxter, Appledore Island, September 1851

We leave them,
Mother's face wine-flushed
and Father bending low
to Jonas's whispered jokes.

We close the door on their noise,
their light, and step into coldness,
the first frost of September,
stars sharp as blades.

Muskrats rustle under roots
as we walk single-file down
the path to my husband's
house, its marriage bed
shipped from Watertown
by grudging Thaxters.

It has rocked its way
to Appledore and lies
now, placid, counterpane
drawn tight, beside
nightstand and
watery mirror.

He talks of Roman
marriage, the bride's hair
parted with the point of a spear.
He whispers of sacred bread, wolf
fat spread near the door, and crocus
petals falling on silk sheets.

Beneath the counterpane, coarse
wool, and linen dense with starch.



Later, I will know
that he called my name.

But, at the time,
at his first crisis,
“Seal,” he cries,
and then again,
“my seal.”

And I wonder
is he the letter, smooth,
unopened, the surface
polished white, and the firm
folds hiding the contents;
and I the warmed wax
yielding to the imprint?

Or does he mean the seal
whose sea-dark head breaks
sleek through the white
of blown-back spray,
and is he the rock I spiral
round, this island with its hard
and shining crevices, its cliffs,
its graveled coves?

■

Leaving him flopped and pale,
she slips from the marriage bed
with its carved leaves
and stubborn orbs of fruit.

She sets the basin on the floor,
pours water from the ewer,
and crouches, close to the stand,
to wash. On the island

of Marathonisi, Helen
crouched like this, near
a chipped basin, the cloth harsh
and cold between her legs;

and he who had dared pass
judgment on Aphrodite,
he lay there, like a flounder,
hooked, hauled, gutted,

flung down on the slab—
all that was essential
filleted from him—nothing
left but flesh.

K. I. PRESS

Born in the Parliament Buildings

I learned acting from the gallery. As Speaker, Father seldom spoke. Sometimes he wore me under his robes, and smuggled me into the chamber. At first, when I was tiny, under his wig. Tickling through filibusters. Before, he brought my mother there, at night. The MPs had retired to their wings with torches, bending, reading, all that paper, the building practically afire. The green room in its expensive wood and verdant velvet. They danced. They made love in the Prime Minister's chair, inside the same enormous robe. Daytimes, she sat curled up under his desk, and kept him warm as he reviewed procedures. Her water broke and out I fell, fit neatly in the filing drawer, and grew up in the wig, the robe, disguised in the gallery, the secretary, the secret floorboard compartments, the antechamber full of waiting dignitaries. The Grits took over. I went to a convent and then to New York. A dream recurs. I am Roxane. A man speaks to me with my father's voice.

And I am Roxane, six nights a week, hearing the eloquence of men and swordplay, never knowing the truth. I make believe. The walls are red, the ground is red, the swords are falling all over me.

JOSEPH WOOD

Prisons of Grace: So Much for Novelty

On the court, the great leapers are applauded.
Popcorn like rose petals is tossed at their feet.

In the court, the great leapers are examined.
For hours, a flaxen pubic hair, or the denial of it,

Is whipped upon their narratives: Xerxes & the shore:
Each apology a sand grain: try to count the stutters

As the flashbulbs sail to new, round rumps of land
With infinite forests of rape kits, marshes of syphilis,

Where the golden dusk dies the same each night.
So why, my little Columbus, shall we speak of it?

ANDREA HENY
My Father's Camera

1

Last spring, he visited to steal the purple
from the opening gentian mouths—the patterns
of their fringed frog-lips—and the green of sphagnum moss.

Now he comes for December's
japonaiserie. The well-balanced line of the birch branch.
Mouse tracks, like a dropped necklace.

From the studio, months later, he sends one proof.
In a scribble of willow-boughs, among bearded sedges,
I spot myself: a knotted croucher on pond-ice.

Or the husk of that private croucher,
looking away. No sign of the calm, white eye
outside the frame. No sign of the observer.

2

My Abenaki mother names him soul-stealer
who has been paring hers away by slow degrees . . . but I believe
I am finally beginning to understand.

My father has a fast-closing shutter-heart
that can admit light, but nothing denser,
and cannot bear too much light, or else

there will be nothing. Not even these dark beetling
images of the thing itself—printed with rigid control,
then sent six hundred miles.

Awake, asleep,

I look down to find my own hands tight-clenched
on something like a camera. Like my father's: dense,
black and lensed. This has never been a choice.

ANDREA HENY
At the Intersection

At seven, the all-night Greyhound reaches the city
where rush-hour traffic slows it, wakes you: here comes
the sole pedestrian through this lazily whitening
light that fills the deep alleys like morning milk.

Here she marches, through a rabble of hard-winged starlings
sporting from window-lip to overhang—tough little beetle-birds,
their backs bright as carapaces—the light spit-shines
their blue-black feathers; they glint like the shoes of tycoons.

She's striding through Chinatown, keeping pace with us: a filthy
and dramatically underfed Philadelphia Goth.
The forked tail of her trenchcoat, baroque as livery,
flares out and flaps as urban crosswinds buffet her.

Attended by that flock, she strikes you as a crippled starling.
In this light, her blacks don't spring to snarling life
as they must at night, against neon. Instead, she fades
to a bundle of unwashed laundry. She must resent

this oatmeal dawn, how it dims her, as if she were a match
held against the sky: how it sets her guttering.
Or maybe not. See that tilt to her rough chin?
Would it surprise you if she broke out laughing?

JEFF CRANDALL

Molester

The dark guilt in all men, unreckoned and without a name.
—*The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*

1

Like gathering flowers.

2

The voice of command:
God's gift to Man.
Dominion over every living thing.

Eat this peach.
Drink of the carbonated spring.
The world is your oyster.
Here—a pearl.

3

Each day's cup of pain
washed down with a few good things.
A rare steak, fat potato, sour cream.
Cold mist in the lungs
of the evening jog.
Trees' dark arms. And later—
the amber gleam of whiskey in a tumbler.
Gleam of the gilded book-edge.

4

Man, who saw that it was *very good*.

5

He has known hunger
and risen above it.
He has known love
in the lick and cut of the belt of wrath.
He has lived to watch his parents rot.
He is owed the wealth of the earth.
He will gather flowers wild from the field.
He will know joy in his share.
He will take what is his.

6

Dream is puppy, polka dot lovely. The sticky
melt of vanilla ice cream. Carnival
candied. A little squeal, a little
girl. Puckered, pink
toes. Pouty
mouth.

7

He resolves the lesson of Eden:
Apples gleaming red in the sun,
red in their beds of leaves, pulsing,
weighted in the sugars of their ripening,
ready to drop. Dropping. And on the ground,
the sin of waste encircling
a torqued and aching trunk.

ELIZABETH KUHLMAN

In a Word

1. *n.* *The male domestic fowl.*

Even in Rincon, even in your arms,
I wake up in the violent hours
dreaming of Aunt Addie's hens.
They fret and gurgle,
shifting in the swamp pines
as the crowing starts.
All around the pond
rivals call and answer.
On the screen porch
cousins dream of each other
and dawn is always hours coming.

2. *n.* *A spout or short pipe serving as a channel for passing liquid through, having an appliance for regulating or stopping the flow.*

He leans against the plate glass window of the post office
shirtless, smoking, dungarees hanging off his hip bones,
a lane of fur leading down his belly,
one dust-caked foot on top the other,
toes curled against the heat.
It is me he signals to come with him.
Past the dam and marsh marigolds,
up the dirt road to a steel drum set into the hillside.
The pipe has a wooden valve worn to fit the thumb.
It turns hard, releasing the sluice of the spring into my hands.

3. *n.* *A pronounced upward turn; an upward bend of the nose; a significant turn of the eye.*

Him starving, lost.
Me the prime cut.

4. *tr. v.* *To put a loaded firearm to readiness for firing by raising the hammer.*

If only I hadn't kept trying, kept talking, kept hoping I could help.
If only the man I married for protection hadn't told him the night before
never to call again.
If only the bus hadn't run that day from his town to mine.
If only I hadn't answered the phone when he called from the station.

→

If only I had had something soothing to say.
If only I had left the house right then.
If only the baby hadn't cried when he pounded on the door.
If only the door had been stronger, the stairs longer, the phone closer. . . .
If only I had had a gun.

5. *tr. v. To stick or turn up in an assertive or defiant way.*

He came at me for years,
shrieking down the rafters of my dreams.
For years I ran for cover.
Until that night I turned on him,
with a rumble in my craw, stopped him dead. Drove him out,
crestfallen step by backward step,
and took back my life.

6. *n.*

Dawn comes quickly in Rincon.
I lie in the hollow of your shoulder
watching through the open louvers
as darkness fades from the flame trees.
Soon the miracle happens again:
the Rose Comb Black Bantam of Migdalia Luz
raises his crowned head.

JANICE N. HARRINGTON

The Line Is Slack

I know tonight what I've always known
and think of my mother, remembering
when she walked beside her daddy,
beside his long swing of legs
before dawn, before the cast iron clatter
or the rooster's stuttered roll, the two of them
together in the darkness,

and how she told it—
muslin mists rising from the cotton rows,
the moon a lye-washed sheet,
and from the boughs of pine and pin oak
the owl's lonely mourn, wu whu, wu whu.
The two of them, these best beloved,
father and daughter, walking hand in hand,

her daddy a tall, yella man
gleaming in the moonlight, with weathered
hat and tar-trimmed fingers,
wearing overalls and good strong boots,
carrying bucket and lantern, waking her
to go with him down to the bottom
to check the lines and lift the nets.

In the chilling dark through barnyard,
under barbed wire, past the huge pasture gate
and the lullaby of cows, over a log bridge,
they walk together, lantern held high,
beside the river bank, musky damp
and the night's psalm: bullfrogs, mosquitoes,
water giggled by the fins of fish, and bump,
bump, bump against a log the breathless
heaving of catfish trying to escape.

She watches her daddy's big hands
pull and pulling, raising the poles, reeling
the line and the night's bounty, maybe lamp
eels writhing like snakes, maybe luminous
bellied catfish, perch, turtle or frogs dead
and dangled. Afterwards, beside the bank,
her father's silence, the two of them sitting

→

in the blue-black quiet, waiting. Dawn
flares at last like the end of a cigarette.

Maybe she looks at him, her daddy, and knows
that she loves him, that what he raises
from dark water is not fish or eel but some
heavy part of the future, when he is not there.
At the end of a long line, her heart beats
and hangs like dangled bait, held out to the eternal,
to the darkness, to these heavy waters, knowing
that something will reach for her, that she'll be consumed.

Tonight, grief reels in its heavy line, and I am cast out.
Whatever is there, in the past, in the future, whatever
is waiting has taken the bait, the best that I have.
The line is slack, and the dark waters ripple over.

JANICE N. HARRINGTON

Benham's Disk

has only black and white markings, but it appears to have colored rings when it spins.

—Ralph M. Evans

1. Mutation

Beside a rolling tire, a child skips,
striking its side, a-tap, a-tap, with a green switch.

Over 90 percent of the matter
in the universe is invisible.

On the phone, her niece exclaims,
“Yesterday I was white but now I’m black.”

Purple flowers are symbols of mourning
in Ixmiquilpan.

In the next moment, a chromatophore’s
mutation may alter everything.

Evolution: mottled moths on a grey chimney.

In China, white is the color of mourning.
The moonlight weeps.

Six blind men cannot see an elephant.

Roll a pomegranate against a hard surface.
Perforate the skin: suck.
Garnets of juice roll down your chin. Let them.

Mulatto: *of mixed breed, from the Spanish for mule.*
Anything that cannot reproduce itself.

Vision is born of violence. All your memories
are mulattos.

In Mammoth Cave, a woman opens her hand.
Inside her palm—more darkness.

Evolution: a child born the color of mourning.

2. About Light

(Italicized words express early Renaissance ideas, adapted from Alison Cole.)

To make a purple dye, crush *Purpura patula* snails in a black cauldron.

Maggots floating in yellow broth.

For brown paint, seventeenth-century artists
ground Egyptian mummies to powder.
Tomorrow, grind a memory to dust.
Compare its color to an old lampshade's.

Wear a white rose if your mother is dead.

In sixth grade, Sister Amata said
that without light, there is no color;
everything is black.

*Bright and clear colors reflect
the beauty of God's creation.*

Her father never let her wear red.

*Mixed colors, being corrupted,
are inappropriate for expressions of divinity.*

Light: what we each absorb, what we reflect.

In Pippin's *Man on a Bench*,
a man rests easy on a red bench,
his arm angled and draped against red slats,
his foot stretched out and crooked,
just a man restin' easy on a red bench.
No one sits beside him.

Her father said, only niggers wear red.

3. Chromatophore

A pigment cell, esp. one capable of changes of form or concentration of pigment, causing changes of color in the skin.

Beside an abandoned mine,
rhubarb stalks push through black dust.

With slaked lime and vinegar,
 I could paint your skin.
With burnt bone and chimney soot,
 I could paint a woman weeping.

Open
your eyes! Open
your eyes! Open both eyes!

My hand rests against the ridge of my husband's hip.
A brown hand, dark knuckled, it lies there exposed.

I love you. Why camouflage tenderness?

My niece calls and exclaims, "Guess what.
Yesterday I was white but now I'm black."

Let a red bench stand for a man's life.
Sit him upon it, throw his arm back against its red slats,
sprawl his legs outward. Squint a little and look.
See? A body caught in barbed wire. A body on the edge
of no man's land and the wire is red, red, red.

Salt, tenderness, heat, and insubstantial light:
the skin's vocabulary.

4. Color Blinded

Hydrangea require acidic soil to change color.

In Urbana, a woman throws her wardrobe away.
The chart says her season is winter;
pastels are inappropriate.

A jump rope with green handles and a long-legged girl.
Say, a jumpin' rope and a long-legged gal.

Bumblebees see hues and patterns
invisible to the human eye.

Chromatic: *1. Of or pertaining to color or colors.*
2. In music, utilizing freely the half-step
interpolations in the diatonic scale.

In a Jewish cemetery, a man tosses a trowel of sand.
A scale of notes slides from each grain, grief's descant:
yellow sand falling into an open grave. The man weeps.

Tomorrow, without race,
we will go like blind men searching for elephants.

Say we're all jumpin' rope with that long-legged gal.
Say we're all twirling a green-handled rope, waitin' a turn
with that long-legged gal.

The insufficiency of vision: what haven't you seen?

A blind man holds an elephant's trunk, crying aloud
"We have reached paradise. O Eden's black serpent!"

EVIE SHOCKLEY

notes for the early journey

somewhere along the way you will need to lean
over a bluff's edge drop your shoes and keep moving use
the feel of greening grass under your feet as a guide if a
rainbow confuses you which end go the third
way on the mountain you'll remember climb on
up to where the aspens tremble you will be alone these
high winds can knife some lungs to gasping rags but for you

there's nothing to worry about breathe sniff the air like
a bloodhound and head the opposite way find the
place where the land dissolves into sand keep walking when
that sand becomes sea speak a bridge into being
i know you can do it your father's son ain't
heard of can't follow the song don't stop until you're south
of sorrow and all you can smell is jasmine i never
once stumbled on such a place hard to say if a brown child
in the last four hundred years has had such
a luscious dream day or night but this is your mother's
lullaby i know she meant you to sleep sweet

—for j.

MARTHA CARLSON-BRADLEY

Young Mother

When you have only the grave
you take a picture of the gravestone.

When you have only the name
you photograph it chiseled there,

the letters, dates.

Film records without comment
the state of the plot, how trimmed
or overgrown the grass,

what perennials thrive here—
violets, rose—or the wild one

no one plants, bluet so pale
it's almost white:

four petals like compass points,
each smaller than a baby's tooth.

KEN VICTOR

Portrait of the Family Without a Father

in memory of Leah Shapiro

At the sea's edge, the seaweed slips forward on thin
fingers of sea water, nearly beaches before sliding

back into the sea's palm, neither staying nor going, but
adrift on the tide's loosening grip. A prisoner on parole.

Where the father went, no one says. One morning
he was nowhere to be found. Leah made eggs anyway.

Eggs and some toast she spread with marmalade jam before
the children awoke. Admitted, years later, she always knew.

At the seaside those summers, my father taught me
how to head out in the surf, his big belly leading the way.

The prow of a ship never returning to port. Catch
the waves, my young son. I'm either staying or going.

Never just here, fathers. But in the middle of deciding.
Let the women practice constancy. We're always visitors.

JULIANNA BAGGOTT

Marie Laurent Pasteur Watches Louis Walk to the Kennels After His Stroke

Once I wished his brain would remain unhitched,
and the world would go on ignorantly without him.

I asked him questions—

How old are you, Louis?

I'm a boy.

Aren't you a great man of science?

A great man of science?

Have you had a lapse, have the doctors come?

The doctors won't come. They're afraid.

And what are they afraid of?

The others. Hear them?

Sick with mad-wolf disease.

They scream through the streets.

Are you a little boy living in Arbois?

Yes, of course.

But dutiful logic returned, good dog with a stick,
and Louis is not crazy or dead, only scarred,

left hand pinned to his chest.

From the window by the sink

where I scrub my hands,

I watch him drag his gimp leg
across the yard like a weighty hoe.

His brain, once again, folds and unfolds

like a hand cupped with silkworms,

oh, the fine threads of thought.

He will light the alcohol lamps,

flame the syringes

and tend to his rabid dogs.

EMÖKE PULAY
Rooms in Budapest

Rozsa in the Parlor

The pedal of the sewing machine
is making her seasick.
She sews the baby's sleeves shut
to keep his fists out of his mouth;
she nods like a thirsty bird, a needle,
to the monologue from the next room
while her foot is toothed by that rocking cradle.
She has always thought of sewing
as a slow climb
up a stairway of tilting and rolling steps.

The Bathroom Holds Its Breath

although there is never an end
to the old woman's wanting to come in.
She pants, toothless lion,
breathing, tasting the crack of the door,
the creak that lets her know
she's not wanted.
She feigns deafness,
is sure Rozsa is using her powder.
Rozsa hasn't washed Karl's towel in weeks.

The Parlor Is Public

And the old woman comes in,
making a point of sweeping up;
the tin of her dustpan tinkles
with their cast-off fingernails
and the pins Rozsa drops one by one.
Rozsa is swallowing the doilies,
like snowflakes, like cream.
It is good to keep your throat busy,
to open the window to the soot
and blacken your tastebuds.

In the Kitchen

The bare pipes are listening,
like bones buried in the fattest ears;
the kitchen is gurgling,
idly blowing bubbles in oil,
like the old woman cooling her soup.
Shutting out the voice, Rozsa listens
to the pounding of the squat potatoes
on the other side of the kettle's lid,
sees faces in the ever-rising steam,
unlaces the stripping, shrinking onion.
She is the one who slips those bowlfuls of salt,
or sand, into the corners of the house.

The Hall

is where she first hears him.
The hall is dripping with the dirtiest snow;
it stains the linoleum
like the tears of onions stain our cheeks.
Karl brings into the house
rivulets of oil and paprika,
the heart's blood of the snow,
snow that has been around,
snow that has seen a thing or two.
Most of the secrets the snow has seen
have to do with birds,
the jeweled rings ripped from our fingers
and tucked inside their gizzards.

The Old Woman's Room

is empty again; she's always a-bustle.
Just now she is preparing
the warm loaves of bread
and the bars of chocolate
to lay on the cutting board
for her grand-nephew,
whose face she is always trying to touch
with her yellow fingernails.
She leaves her room like a three-legged dog

→

and always returns with a flanneled bill
twisting between her fingers;
it crawls between the pages of her books,
which have long ceased to purr,
into the envelopes where spiders are gorging
themselves on the thick ink
of her uniformed sons,
or into the sugar bowl,
chipped and clipped shut
with tortoiseshell and her army of bobby pins.

The Parlor Window

is agape—old, toothless mouth.
The sound outside is wet traffic,
pairs upon pairs of windshield wipers
slapping themselves.
Rozsa and Karl shine out
like people covered with diamonds or Vaseline.
They touch their throats
and their sloping bellies
to make sure the nuts of their buttons
are fastened. They refuse to remove their socks.
They stroke the upholstery
with long fingers,
like picking cotton,
and pat their hair into place.
The portraits on the wall
never lose the interest
in their long, crooked eyes.

The Pantry

is the boy's hideaway,
the pocket into which he slips
like a heavy, crouching key.
His hands are crawling starfish,
his bare feet curled into pink mice
in the cornmeal dust that snows
his long lashes.
The bulbous heads of peppers

→

eye his cheeks
from the brine where they have blanched
their warped, wooden countenances.
He sharpens his teeth
on the spiced shelves
and extends each paw
inside a ragged winter boot.
Bedtime nightly drags him out.

In the Bedroom

the sheets are linen
and monogrammed with the initials
of the dead. The boy's head,
cowled by an afghan,
lies beneath a pillow
in which the feathers are whispering.
Karl and Rozsa step out of their socks.
Patches of darkness fall on their bodies,
and in these patches their fingers grow long
and their hair crawls into their mouths
which, though filled with soot,
they have thankfully not yet sewn shut,
and in which they find
such pretty snowflakes
and seeds that taste of spice,
though they hardly need full mouths to listen
to the creaking on either side of the door.

DANEEN WARDROP

[Across the finger's breadth of]

Across the finger's breadth of sheet between my knee and yours
I am forever chasing you, direction a lie—

Always silent about the prison in Genoa (not prison bars but house
arrest,

shut up in a parlor with Rustichello)—
but you told much else, from here to Hangzhou.

In a velvet parlor with parchment and quills:

the gryphon-bird who could hoist elephants in its talons—
the Sciopod, swift runner on only one leg—
the country of men with tails—
the country of only women—

It was Rustichello who wanted these;
you, the fitful step
of cobblestones, sand, and silk riffling—
spices mortared—

Direction I see as a slatch between the roughest silences—

when late at night, the girls are asleep in their beds,
us in ours,

you, gleaming, hyphenate us.

DANEEN WARDROP

[City of 12,000 bridges, Suzhou]

City of 12,000 bridges, Suzhou doesn't need to haggle
for its sunbeams, city of silk
and as legend has it, of the most beautiful girls—

Our littlest daughter can clutch at everything,
let drop even more,
has the crown of your eyebrows
already, can assess her fistful rice as you assess a ruby.

Sometimes when I retell your gleaming stories to myself
I think a moment I'm Chinese,
but only when you're gone.

When you return, I stop missing my Suzhou sisters upon sisters,
gem-dazzle mistaken for smiles,

whom I never thought to write letters,
who never thought to write to me—

DANEEN WARDROP
[When I try to translate]

When I try to translate water lappings in the bay
they turn bland with shyness,
turn canal,

prow-first, the long massage, for the boats entering.

Promise: the translation that loops, rips, laps.

Promise: where *could* stitches itself to the rise of a bridge

a road curves over, committing
to little but the dust around its prints.

In our promises I find untranslatable surf, you remember arcing road:

a camel took you to the Taklimakan Desert,
to the custom of the Taklimakan husband giving up his wife
for the night, to the traveler's whim—

the hours, Marco, when you're traveler and stranger to me—

what whim then
might be wished to blow our skins together?—

DANEEN WARDROP

[Venice's wine sea feeds wine]

Venice's wine sea feeds wine fish
wine gulls dive for,
regardless of us—

You're restless, as you leave me again today,

and I look for healing that can take hold in the wound,
directly in the waves of blood nodding,

need constant dressing for promise-rips
as when a girl I looked for the nod of Mary
to reassure—

Every route carries its far to farther—

What you found finally to the east of the desert, in China:
Venice's twinned city,

the city of Suzhou, *Venice of the East*,
built of silk and jade-belt bridges

where water mirrors a stone arch bridge,

cinches a circle,

circle circle circle—through the town—

and there are many—

CONRAD HILBERRY

Cherry Pie

We're all acquainted with the airy
crowd—a stalk of celery dipped
in cottage cheese, a thimble

of soy milk, a few green grapes.
I invite them over here: between
two butter crusts, my sour

flesh so deeply sugared it
astounds the mouth.
To coax it all to bed, a downy

pillow of whipped cream.
Try me, you organics.
Light the oven.

Let me show you how
the juice can leap, when nature
shares the sheets with art.

CONRAD HILBERRY

Comb

I know, the rooster tosses back
his comb to tell the hens
he's coming on.

That's my brother, not me.
I'm secretive, hiding
the bees' sweet pillage

in my six-sided box. I'm the dark
caverns where frightened
Christians say their prayers.

I scratch the hide of the packhorse,
shoulder to rump, and watch
the deep flesh shiver. It's true

I ride in your hip pocket
as though I might be nuzzling
tens and twenties. That's not

what draws me. The bills
are tucked in leather,
but I slide loose,

bending a little when
your muscle tightens, ready
if your hand should move

along my spine. I run
my fingers through your hair,
and when we part, we part.

CONRAD HILBERRY

Waning Moon

I rise at midnight when the first
sleep staggers into dream.
Later and lesser. In a week

I become the dark.
My music knows its way
to a Nash rusting by a shed,

the slow mating of snakes
in the creek bed. My half-moon
blues, my strum on the two

lanes of an empty road—
the road you're following
beside some dusty milkweed

and the fence. I draw my bow
across the telephone wires,
a thin dirge

for your country, for the end
of something wild,
broad backed, generous.

Listen for me. With help
from the wind, I can pour
my six pale notes

through the night's sieve,
lend you the crickets' cadence
to walk home by.

CONRAD HILBERRY

Deaf Ear

I watch a motorcycle smoking
on the street, tree tops wrestling,
some soprano hollowing

her arms and breasts and lips
around a body on the stage—
and, with them, no sound,

whatever that may be,
nothing to ratchet or perfume
or blur the sight. Mostly,

I'm content. Seeing is enough.
But now I'm walking
a Nebraska road, at dawn,

before the cars have found it.
Over there, a square white house,
two pines, a shed and silo.

Four cows sleep in an endless
field. A full moon settles
west beyond a stand of timber,

and along a disappearing
line of fence, a dogwood
eases into bloom.

I see and breathe. No single
smell drifts in, but still
I take the scent of prairie

absences. Now I believe:
another door could open
on this emptiness. I long for it,

your huge countryside of silence.

JASON LABBE
In Defense of Graffiti

You don't see them glide cool nights across a sidewalk, along a stretch of tracks, beneath the busiest highway underpass. Each crisp line, nimble arc, and bright shadow begins in the black books, the schematics, passed back and forth within this crew who don't care—yet—to name each species of flower in Prospect Park. There a kid's idea may bubble on the brink of bursting an entire afternoon. Confess that a park bench means little without crude etchings. Admit that a pigeon is no better than a rat, only that you prefer the metallic purple feathers of its neck. Blame our love of color. This is not about more pieces commissioned by businesses. This is not a request for permission. Any measly pay would help fund the arsenal, anyway, and without giving the paint ten minutes to dry, rivals would reface the riot gate. Increase patrols, *crack down*, and watch the tags come cleaner and brighter, precise and practiced as the crocus opening this morning in the park's garden. Pretend not to notice any exposed brickface ablaze. Brooklyn burns, as does Kalamazoo, and Paris, for true fame: a self-given name popping out of the backdrop.

ELIZABETH CONRAD VANBUSKIRK

Dry September

Weld, Maine, 2002

It has been not raining
all day; drought refuses forecast.
Maples by the road rattle paper leaves
and ferns fade my memory of green,
turning to skeleton
gauze undercover.

We live by a tide-out lake.
When at dawn the moose come to drink,
spots of land arise
like raised footprints of ancients.
When the wind blows,
waves move toward shore
not like water,
breaking in glory,
but sand-sifted, sand,
thirsty for sand.

I drink a cup of water
from a still-giving well,
weep dry
for the tallest pines and old white birch.
Our leaders tell us
we must pour out the water
from our shoes. We must buy
gasoline; we must brush our teeth.
We must understand
that we do not understand.
We must go to war.

ROBERT M. CHUTE

Grave Details

As raw recruits we quickly learned
the facts of death.

“Bury ‘em,” the sergeant said. “Be sure
the graves don’t show.”

There was always a little dirt left over.

“Bury it,” the sergeant said.

So we moved on into the enemy’s land
one pile of dirt at a time.